



Residents invited to see Blackpool differently as free, ground-breaking UK-wide series of storytelling events launch

[StoryTrails](#), the UK's largest immersive storytelling experience, invites Blackpool residents and visitors to explore untold stories of the town through ground-breaking multimedia technologies, from an augmented reality trail revealing the history of Blackpool's LGBTQ+ communities to an immersive map transforming the town's iconic buildings, such as Blackpool Tower and the Regents Cinema, and a trip back to Blackpool's 1950s heyday through the power of virtual reality.

StoryTrails, part of UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK, begins in Blackpool with two days of free events on 16 and 17 July, as part of a UK-wide tour to 15 towns and cities. Centred around Blackpool Library and on the streets of Blackpool itself, it features digital experiences that allow people to experience the town in a completely new way through the magic of augmented reality, virtual reality and immersive cinema.

An augmented reality trail, specific to Blackpool and accessed through mobile devices, invites visitors to explore the town's LGBTQ+ history. From the 1930s and the notorious Colonel Barker's under-the-pier 'freak show' to the dark days of the 1980s and 1990s. It features characters such as drag queen, Divine, and owner of legendary Blackpool nightclub Funny Girls, Basil Newby MBE, who was honoured in 2014 for services to business and Blackpool's LGBTQ+ community. The trail is voiced by Funny Girls' longest standing compere and uses cine film, video home movies and photography from the BBC, British Film Institute and local archives to present past and present in a completely new way.

Time travel continues inside the library across 16 and 17 July when visitors are invited to enter digitally created worlds using a virtual reality (VR) headset. Among 7 VR stories available at every stop on the StoryTrails UK tour, are that of one-time Blackpool resident, Mike Hatjoulis, a second-generation Greek-Cypriot immigrant whose parents arrived in the UK in the 1930s. The story focuses on Blackpool in its 1950s heyday when Mike's father ran a well-known seafront restaurant, Tomlinson's Cafe. Having studied at the Royal College of Art alongside the likes of David Hockney and Ridley Scott, Mike became an influential textile designer and master printmaker and his contemporary large-scale lino-cut depictions of Blackpool are animated within the VR experience, created by ShroomStudio.

Visitors can also expect to find themselves in the shoes of a rebellious teenager as she discovers her mother's punk past; take part in one of the many South Asian daytime raves that took place across the UK in the 1980s and 1990s; and hear what earlier generations thought life would be like today.

And, inside the library, an immersive virtual map of the town has been created using local stories and 3D scans of Blackpool's iconic buildings and places, such as Blackpool Tower, the famous seafront, Stanley Park and the resurrected Regent Cinema. The map is viewed on a cycloramic cinema screen and the 15-minute experience plays on a loop throughout the day. An expanded version of the map is also available on iPads inside the library.

Blackpool-based creative talent Joseph Doubtfire, Kezi Gardom, Lara Kob and Leo Mercer were among

50 emerging creatives around the UK selected to take part in the development of StoryTrails and benefit from expert training and mentoring opportunities, each contributing to the Blackpool StoryTrails experience.

Leo Mercer, said: "It's taken months of work to get to this point and we can't believe we finally get to share it with everyone. It's truly been a project by Blackpool, for Blackpool, created in Blackpool. We've unearthed incredible stories of powerful local characters that deserve to be told. We've worked closely with BFI and BBC archives to help tell those stories and we're using new technologies like AR to bring them to life in a way that makes them accessible to all. If you don't have a smart phone you can borrow one on the day – come along to the library on the 16 and 17 July and you'll be able to give it all a go, for free."

Historian and television presenter David Olusoga, familiar to viewers of the BBC's *A House Through Time*, narrates a further AR experience that invites visitors to turn a dial on a virtual giant radio and travel back in time. From Beatlemania and the flares and haircuts of the swinging sixties, to dancing to the end of the millennium in crop-tops and trainers, audiences will experience a potted history of the UK through the decades.

This innovative project is led by StoryFutures Academy, the National Centre for Immersive Storytelling. It was developed by teams of leading technologists and creatives, brought together for UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK, a UK-wide celebration of creativity taking place in 2022, including immersive animation pioneers, ISO Design and Nexus Studios, and the company behind Pokémon GO, Niantic. It is brought to life in The Reading Agency's national network of libraries and by event-making specialists ProduceUK.

Professor James Bennett, Director of StoryFutures and StoryTrails, said: "This is about getting people excited about where they live – helping them connect with stories of their town from the past and present through a new lens. New technologies like AR and VR can help build these connections and reignite people's passion for the past. These technologies are for everyone – we want to find ways to engage people from all generations and spark a genuine celebration in each of our incredible locations."

Martin Green CBE, Chief Creative Officer UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK, said: "StoryTrails is one of ten ground-breaking UNBOXED projects taking place in 2022 that demonstrate the power of creative collaboration across science, technology and the arts to create extraordinary and never-seen-before public experiences. StoryTrails uses cutting edge technology to offer people the opportunity to hear about the places they live - the stories of individuals and communities - in a way that has not been done before."

StoryTrails' 15-stop UK tour runs from 1 July to 18 September 2022 and culminates in a new film presented by David Olusoga that will screen in UK cinemas and BBC iPlayer. The StoryTrails app, augmented reality story trails and immersive maps will be available throughout 2022. The Reading Agency's annual Summer Reading Challenge, for children aged 4 to 11, takes a StoryTrails theme.

UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK is funded and supported by the four governments of the UK and is commissioned and delivered in partnership with Belfast City Council, Creative Wales and EventScotland.

StoryTrails Blackpool live events take place on 16 and 17 July 2022

Blackpool Central Library, Queen Street, Blackpool FY1 1PX

Library opening hours: Saturday 10am -6pm, Sunday 11am-5pm

The StoryTrails app will launch on iTunes and Google Play stores to coincide with the event.

The app and immersive trail will be available online throughout 2022.

story-trails.com

Facebook and Instagram @StoryTrailsProject. Twitter @StoryFuturesA

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StoryTrails media enquiries:

Truda Spruyt, Managing Director, Four

storytrails@fourcommunications.com | 07740 725206

Sara Parsons, PR & Media Manager for StoryTrails at Royal Holloway, University of London

sara.parsons@royalholloway.ac.uk | 07467 858672

UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK media enquiries:

Jeanette Ward, Head of Media Relations, UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK

Jeanette.ward@unboxed2022.uk | 07729 930 812

Listings information

StoryTrails: 1 July – 18 September 2022 | story-trails.com

StoryTrails takes place in 15 locations across the UK, with free two-day residencies in each town centred around libraries:

- Omagh, 1 – 2 July: Omagh Library, 1 Spillars Place, Irishtown Road, Omagh BT78 1HL.
- Dundee, 7 – 8 July: Dundee Central Library, Wellgate, Dundee DD1 1DB
- Dumfries, 12 – 13 July: Ewart Library, Catherine Street, Dumfries DG1 1JA
- Blackpool, 16 – 17 July: Blackpool Central Library, Queen Street, Blackpool FY1 1PX
- Bradford, 22 – 23 July: City Library Bradford, Centenary Square, 9 Aldermanbury, Bradford BD1 1SD
- Sheffield, 27 – 28 July: Sheffield Central Library, Surrey Street, Sheffield City Centre, Sheffield S1 1XZ
- Lincoln, 30 – 31 July: Lincoln Central Library, Free School Lane, Lincoln LN2 1EZ
- Wolverhampton, 6 – 7 August: Wolverhampton Central Library, Snow Hill, Wolverhampton WV1 3AX
- Swansea, 10 – 11 August: Swansea Central Library, Oystermouth Road, Maritime Quarter, Swansea SA1 3SN
- Newport, 13 – 14 August: Newport Central Library, John Frost Square, Kingsway Centre, Newport NP20 1PA
- Bristol, 20 – 21 August: Bristol Central Library, College Green, Bristol BS1 5TL
- Swindon, 27 – 28 August: Central Library Swindon, Regent Circus, Swindon SN1 1QG
- Slough, 3 – 4 September: Library @ The Curve, William Street, Slough SL1 1XY
- London Borough of Lambeth, 10 – 11 September: Brixton Library, Brixton Oval, London SW2 1JQ
- London Borough of Lewisham, 17 – 18 September: Catford Library 23-24 Winslade Way, Catford SE6 4JU

UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK | UK-wide, 1 March – 2 October 2022 | Unboxed2022.uk

Notes to Editors

1. **StoryTrails** is a unique immersive storytelling experience, where untold stories from the past are brought to life through the magic of the 3D internet using augmented and virtual reality to reanimate public spaces in towns and cities across the UK. Audiences will time-travel via the wonder of new technologies to experience untold local histories where they happened. StoryTrails is led by StoryFutures Academy which is run by Royal Holloway, University of London and the National Film and Television School (NFTS).

StoryTrails is one of 10 projects commissioned for **UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK**, a ground-breaking UK-wide celebration of creativity in 2022 that will bring people together and reach millions through free, large-scale immersive installations and globally accessible digital experiences in the UK's most ambitious showcase of creative collaboration. StoryTrails culminates with a specially commissioned film by David Olusoga which will screen in cinemas across the UK and be made available to audiences on BBC iPlayer. Story-trails.com

StoryTrails is delivered in partnership with the British Film Institute (BFI), broadcaster and filmmaker, David Olusoga, the BBC, Uplands Television, and leading immersive specialists ISO Design and Nexus Studios. It will use cutting edge technology from Niantic, makers of Pokémon Go, and it will be brought to life in The Reading Agency's national network of libraries and by event-making specialists ProduceUK.

2. **StoryFutures Academy** is the UK's National Centre for Immersive Storytelling, run by Royal Holloway, University of London and the National Film and Television School (NFTS). Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, part of UK Research and Innovation, the Academy develops cutting-edge creative training and research programmes, to ensure the UK creative workforce is the most skilled in the world in the use of virtual, augmented and real-time production technology for immersive storytelling.

Alumni of StoryFutures Academy labs have so far included Oscar and BAFTA winning Director Asif Kapadia, Oscar winning VFX Supervisor Paul Franklin and Turner Prize winning conceptual artist Gillian Wearing OBE.

With our partners, over £1m has been invested in UK immersive production, across co-productions with BBC3, and Production Booster and Kickstart development funding. The award-winning VR Documentary Common Ground was the first-ever funded co-production, premiering at the Tribeca Film Festival in early 2019. Violence, an artistic collaboration between film director Shola Amoo (The Last Tree) and producer Eleanor Whitley (Marshmallow Laser Feast), had its world premiere at the Tribeca Film Festival, as part of the Cannes XR Virtual at the Marché du film de Cannes, in June 2020. Laika, commissioned by StoryFutures Academy and directed by BAFTA and Academy Award winning Asif Kapadia, made its world premiere in VR at BFI London Film Festival 2021 as part of their Expanded programme.

storyfutures.com/academy

3. **Royal Holloway, University of London**, is ranked in the top 25 universities in the UK. Through world class research that expands minds and changes lives, the dedication of our teachers and the feel of the Royal Holloway experience, ours is a community that inspires individuals to succeed academically, socially and personally. royalholloway.ac.uk

The university was founded by two social reformers who pioneered the ideal of education and knowledge for all who could benefit. Their vision lives on today. As one of the UK's leading research-intensive universities we are home to some of the world's foremost authorities in the sciences, arts, business, economics and law. We are strengthened by diversity, and welcome students and academics who travel from all over the world to study and work here, ensuring an international and multi-cultural perspective within a close knit and historic campus.

4. **UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK** is a celebration of creativity taking place across the UK in 2022, designed to reach millions and bring people together. It features free large-scale events, installations and globally accessible digital experiences in the UK's most ambitious showcase of creative collaboration. Produced by some of the brightest minds in science, technology, engineering, arts and maths, UNBOXED features ten major multi-site and digital creative projects that share new ideas and possibilities for the future. Events and activities take place from 1 March to 2 October 2022 – from the Outer Hebrides to Luton and from Omagh to Swansea, and across traditional and online media. UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK is funded and supported by the four governments of the UK and is commissioned and delivered in partnership with Belfast City Council, Creative Wales and EventScotland. unboxed2022.uk

StoryFutures Academy is a partnership with

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**THE
READING
AGENCY**

produce



UPLANDS
television

BBC Studios



nexus studios



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StoryTrails is commissioned by UNBOXED which is funded by



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