

ABTT Stephen Joseph Lifetime Commendation: 2021 WINNER

Mike Pearson:

Mike Pearson is a living individual whose work or body of work has created an exemplary and adventurous relationship between performance and audience.

NOMINATION STATEMENT:

"Mike is a writer, performer, researcher, director, academic. Mike's body of work is a continued experimentation with theatre forms and relationships.

For National Theatre Wales with Mike Brookes he staged a show in a mock German Village used by the MOD for training, in an empty aircraft hanger, in the annex of a church and even once in a theatre which we boarded from the stage into the auditorium and kept the audience moving throughout the show, their chairs variously serving as seats, missiles, tree branches and obstacles.

Mike is Emeritus Professor at Aberystwyth University's Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies, https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/tfts/staff-profiles/listing/profile/mip/ and Honorary Professor at Exeter University's Drama department. His publications include "Site-Specific Performance" (Palgrave MacMillan 2010).

In the 70's he aimed to "relax the tension between performer and spectator" moving on to form Brith Gof creating performances "within the context of local cultural, social, or even religious gathering, " leading to the firming up of the concept of site-specific performance. As the performances became larger, the relationship between performance and audience became less immediate so Mike moved on to make smaller autobiographical pieces.

Pearson/Brookes saw a move away from "enclosure and modelling within bound spaces, to performance as place-making.... from taking audiences to unusual sites to bringing unusual sites to them "

Mike works as a solo and collaborative artist, in 2020 he researched and performed in "Cardiff 1919" a piece of theatre created by Kyle Legal that used composition, voice and animated drawings to guide the audience through the sites in Cardiff where the riot took place."

David Evans, Head of Production National Theatre Wales (NTW)

SUPPORTING STATEMENT 1:

"Mike Pearson's work has re-defined the relationship between audiences and performance in thrilling ways. From his early collaborations with Cardiff Lab, and his hugely influential body of work with Brith Gof, to more recent classic productions for National Theatre Wales, Mike's work engages deeply with the land in which it takes place, and in doing so transforms audiences' relationships to their environment.

Rooted in radical European theatre traditions, Mike has happily operated largely outside the UK conventions of playwriting and repertory theatre, choosing instead to take body and place as his starting points, and collaborating in an open and unconventional way with other artists such as Mike Brookes

and Simon Banham.

My own history with Mike began on The Persians, his staging of the first ever European play during the first year of National Theatre Wales's existence, in the midst of a high-security army range in the Brecon Beacons. The decision to place this epic story of military defeat within the resonant but contested ground of a functioning military base was typical of Mike's drive to ensure that the space and circumstances of a theatrical work are as resonant at the text and performances.

Starting with a coach ride through the extraordinary Brecon landscape, to the accompaniment of John Hardy's resonant score, and ending seated on bleacher seats watching the unravelling of Sian Thomas's mighty queen as the sun set on the hills behind the concrete army-built structure on which the action unfolded, The Persians brought the audience to a far more primal and resonant place than most productions within theatres can conjure.

NTW produced two more epic productions by Mike Pearson and Mike Brookes during my time there – Coriolan/us, a highlight of the 2012 Olympic Festival, and The Iliad, described by The Guardian as 'certainly the theatrical event of the year. It may be the theatrical event of the decade.' Mike Pearson, is without doubt, one of the key theatre makers of our times, and perhaps the one who most helps us re-imagine the relationship of performance to audience."

John McGrath – Artistic Director and CEO of Manchester International Festival and former Artistic Director of National Theatre Wales (NTW))

SUPPORTING STATEMENT 2:

<u>Reflections on certain aspects of the performative lives of Prof. Mike Pearson,</u> co-founder RATT Theatre, founder Cardiff Laboratory Theatre, founder Brith Gof, founder Pearson Brookes Thomas, founder Pearson Brookes, founder Pearson Thomas Hardy, etc etc.

"Mike Pearson's career has been so long, and with such varied elements of style, scale, tradition, topic and structural frame, that it is extremely hard to sum up the many and profound achievements Mike has led, participated in and mentored, through so many fields of performance.

Mike has cheerfully been all of the following:

Conceptual dramaturg; doctoral academic, inspirer of generations of students, and for many years Professor of Performance at Aberystwyth University; sober-suited and sometimes naked physical performer, sometimes with text, often without; forensically detailed and precise archaeologist of specific texts and historical documents; collaborator with strong fellow-artists, often because they specialise in different disciplines - visual design, architectural stagecraft, poets, playwrights, composers, experimental jazz musicians, dancers, disability specialists, comics, community art conveners, museum curators, traditional Japanese theatre performers, Patagonian farmers, Welsh folk historians and wild creatures and their bones.

I first came across Mike in 1973 - I attended [as an impressionable teenager] a Sherman Arena performance of Mariner, a hugely impressive dumb show depiction, in vigorous physical performative style with a team of fit costumed colleagues, of the Coleridge poem. The only use of words was in two solo songs. Everything else was vividly acted out in silence. Soon afterwards I was able to see Gorboduc and Gilgamesh, all exuding rough male energy, though there were powerful roles for women too, and all using wordless physical movement as the chief theatrical language.

Soon after these works, performed under the guise of Cardiff Laboratory Theatre, I found myself drawn into the next series of performances for a decade, now bringing the silent world of no text and no music to life with songs, instrumental music and collaborations with a variety of brass bands, string ensembles, choirs, percussion, harmoniums and grand pianos. In Moths In Amber [1978] pre-recorded music started to make an appearance, and by the time we arrived at The Disasters Of War series and Gododdin, ten years later, now under the Brith Gof brand, loud and powerful pre-recorded soundtracks were added to with live musical performance, while the 'acting' or 'physical performance' group achieved bigger and more impressive feats of leaps, pole vaulting, crashing into walls and siege nets, lifting each other into impressive human pyramids, repeatedly falling into cold water which made their kilted bodies steam like industrial machines or battle horses, and lying defeated among ruined cars and a forest of indoor fir trees, while audiences stared on in shock and sympathy.

Always connected with fellow practitioners in other countries, Mike was being invited to conferences and festivals in places like Zagreb, then behind the iron curtain, when still in his mid twenties. In 1977 He was invited to star in a new show [while at The Mickery Amsterdam], by the Pip Simmonds Theatre Company, then one of the most respected experimental theatre/performance companies in Europe - which he declined. Instead of becoming a performer for hire, Mike came back to Wales, gave up smoking, learned Welsh and learned to drive, and devoted several years to building a theatrical and cultural presence among the small communities and villages and farms of Ceredigion and Carmarthen.

There was a journey round the region of Argentina that was settled by Welsh speaking pilgrims from 1865 - Patagonia - which was a powerful influence on the work of Brith Gof. Later, in 1992, Mike's application to the Barclays New Stages Award received funding to create a stunningly original show, in Welsh and English mixed together, telling the story of the Welsh settlers with action, monologues, choral speaking, much singing, and a pre-recorded soundtrack that culminated in the appalling murder of Llwyd ap Iwan at a village stores at Nant Y Pysgod, a tree-sheltered and well-watered spot in the wilderness, in 1909. Almost certainly by Butch Cassidy and the 'Sundance Kid'.

This shocking and community-destroying event became a running feature of many of Mike's subsequent solo performances, one of which took place among the farm buildings preserved at St Fagan, the Museum Of Welsh Life. 'From Memory', a long, complex, beautifully constructed text, which took the form of a guided tour around the extraordinary buildings in 1992, was so much more than a feat of memory. It established a new version of Mike's way of entertaining his audience - by mixing historical and archaeological facts with details of Mike's own family, origins, experiences and reflections. And this aspect of Mike's own creative writing, though less-known and under-appreciated, continues to unfold into his seventies. Mike has written copiously about Cardiff and dreamier locations during lockdown, under the aegis of a creative conversation with Ed Thomas and myself, and he continues to release filmed dialogues with younger colleagues and friends, and senior USA academics, among other activities.

While this more intimate and expressive work continued, Mike was also collaborating with other colleagues to create huge works which performed to mass audiences. Gododdin was seen in 1988 and 1989 across Western Europe by at least 12,000, possibly many more. Pax, in Bangor Cathedral, St David's Hall, Glasgow Harland & Wolf Ship Works, and Aberystwyth Railway Station [1990 and 1991] was also seen and heard by over 12,000. Each of these projects also released CDs, so the musical audience was extended, and a 60 minute documentary about the making of Gododdin was broadcast on ITV in 1992, and remains in archive.

Another massively ambitious large-scale show, commissioned as part of Valleys Live [1992] was also seen by large audiences from the Valleys and across South Wales. Haearn [Iron] was performed in the vast historic iron foundry, now demolished, in Tredegar, dealing with the ideas of the industrial revolution in the area, and the myth of Prometheus bringing fire to human society, with the help of many physical performers, narrators, plus solo operatic Soprano, three choirs from the area, the Tredegar Youth Brass Band, and as usual and enormous PA sound system.

Gradually Mike was beginning to focus his attention on writing and directing the shows, but not necessarily performing on the stage. In fact increasingly the whole idea of a stage was disappearing, as performers, audiences, technicians, technical stage hands and camera operators and the directors, would be together in the heart of where the action was taking place.

The first show where we collaborated with the very new National Theatre Wales [2010], The Persians, won various awards, including for the text - Kaite O'Reilly's stunning adaptation of the world's oldest surviving play, which describes the destruction of the Persian fleet by the Greeks at Salamis. As well as selecting the topic and the source text, Mike also brought to the table the fruit of his extraordinary research into the location where this unique project was performed, surrounded by moorland, sheep, soldiers and wild birds. FIBUA is a model military village high up in the firing ranges of Epynt. Some of the performances were heard through the patter of rain. Others were miraculously illuminated by bright September evening sun and accompanied by distant sheep calls. Every performance was sold out in advance, and nobody who experienced the show, and its unique location will ever forget it.

Another hugely ambitious collaboration with NTW, The Cultural Olympiad, and the Shakespeare Festival, Cariolan/us, took place in an enormous 1939 aircraft hangar near St Athan and the South Glamorgan Heritage Coast. A full promenade performance of Shakespeare's Coriolanus, augmented by fragments of Brecht, was played out in an acoustic so reverberant that the audience listened to closemiked performers on 'silent disco' style headphones, like a living radio play, with precorded music and soundtrack mixed in, in real time, combined with 9 live cameras capturing closeup views, wides, and fast moving travelling shots, just like in live TV coverage of a major sporting event, all shown on huge screens by two teams of vision mixers.

A very strong UK cast brought audiences from far and wide, and, again, those who were there will never forget it.

I could go on - to cover more recent projects such as Iliad with NTW in Llanelli Fwrnes, and various actions and interactions Mike has initiated or supported, in the past five years, perhaps most notably his beautifully written English language account of the death of Phaeton, son of Apollo, for NTW Storms 1 [2018]; or the incredible feat of forensic urban archaeology, historical research and hunting down of photos of criminals which Mike achieved over two years of investigation to create the first ever historically accurate, blow by blow account of the Cardiff Race Riots 1919, initially performed as NTW Storms 2 [2018-19].

But I'd like to leave the reader with an image of the way Mike works.

Two weeks before the first rehearsals of Coriolanus/us began, after over a year of regular meetings with Mike to discuss aesthetics, textual structure, music and sound, and other aspects of planning, I visited Mike one Sunday afternoon at home.

By this point, the beautiful scale model of the venue had been made by Ruth Stringer, then a design student at RWCMD.

All the cast, caravans, vehicles and obstacles were depicted and were present in detailed figures and objects on the floor of the model. Mike sat me down, and talked me through the structure of the entire five-act play, scene by scene, moving every character and vehicle according to a precise itinerary, entirely from memory, from

beginning to end, without a break.

On the first day of rehearsal, the actors, to their surprise, found that all details of their performance had been

considered in advance - all they needed to do was learn their lines and find the energy to keep the rapidly

moving crowd scenes and more intimate moments moving back and fore across the vast territory of the venue,

according to the microscopically devised plan, drawn up by Mike, and his co-director on Coriolanus/us, Mike

Brookes."

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE:

Brith Gof – founded 1981. https://archives.library.wales/index.php/brith-gof-theatrecompany

1988 Documentary about Gododdin https://vimeo.com/80218855

1992 Haearn https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8cavt3qMSBo

1994 - PAX TV. https://vimeo.com/444116670

Publications

Mike is the author of 5 books:

Marking Time: Performance, archaeology and the city (Exeter UP 2012);

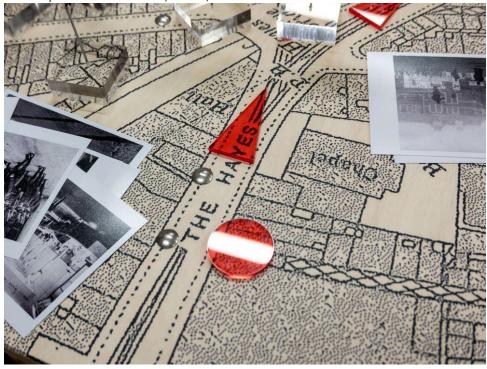
Mickery Theater: An Imperfect Archaeology (Amsterdam UP 2011);

Site-Specific Performance (Palgrave MacMillan 2010);

In Comes I: Performance, Memory and Landscape (Exeter UP 2006)

co-author with Michael Shanks of *Theatre/Archaeology* (Routledge 2001).

storm.2 [things come apart]: https://www.nationaltheatrewales.org/ntw_shows/storm-2-things-come-apart/ an informal 'autopsy' and narration of the events of four days and nights of vicious rioting in Cardiff in June 1919, within a city centre site still standing at the heart of the effected area – using only the unfolding newspaper reports, court records, personal statement, photographic images and street maps from the period. The second work in the exploratory 'Storm Cycle' series. Mike Brookes, Mike Pearson, National Theatre Wales: commissioned and performed in Cardiff, Wales, 2018.

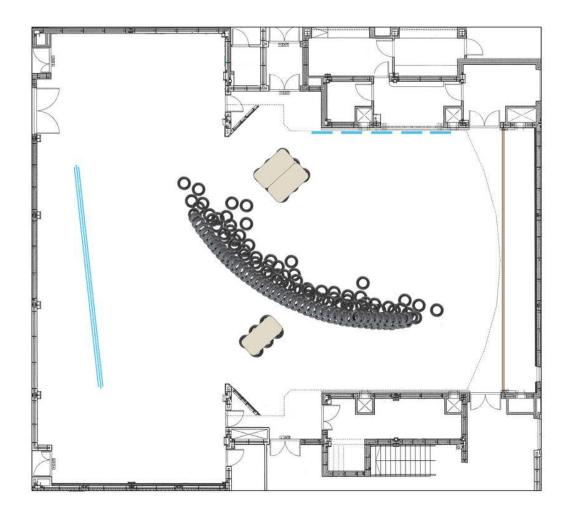


storm.1 [nothing remains the same]: https://www.nationaltheatrewales.org/ntw shows/storm-1-nothing-remains/ a duet of performed acts, juxtaposing intimately narrated reimaginings of the texts of the first two books of Ovid's 'Metamorphoses' with fully-realised theatrical actions – the first set against a complex spatially and physically immersive evocation of a storm created entirely through sound within complete darkness, the second set against the sustained live spectacle of an actively burning 8m high dead oak tree. The first work in the exploratory 'Storm Cycle' series."

Mike Brookes, Mike Pearson, National Theatre Wales: commissioned and performed in Pontrhydfendigaid, Wales, 2018



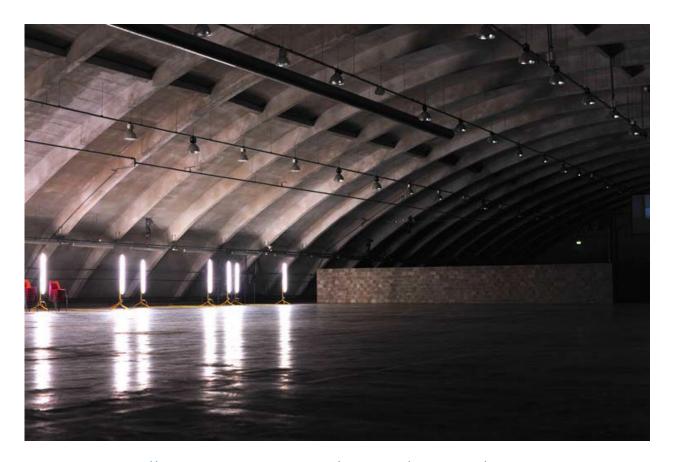
<u>iliad</u>: https://www.nationaltheatrewales.org/ntw_shows/iliad/ a marathon eleven-hour located theatre work, delivering a verbatim intermedial staging of the entirety of Christopher Logue's epic poem 'War Music', derived from Homer's account of the last weeks of the Trojan War. The voiced text was spoken into a network of handheld microphones – mixed live with additional audio elements to produce a spatially and aurally shifting durational sound work – within an evolving physical environment, constantly refigured thought the movements and progressive arrangements of the gathered crowd, 400 white plastic garden chairs, 250 used car tyres, assorted timbers, ropes and tape... "...This theatremaking is steely and severe, but it is also bracingly alive. Iliad is certainly the theatrical event of the year. It may be the theatrical event of the decade" [The Guardian ******].



<u>carrying Rubén</u>: on Wednesday May 25th 2016 Mike Brookes, Salut Bueno, Nazario Díaz, Amai Fernández, Axier and Joel carried Rubén Mateos Lima - a local performer with advanced multiple sclerosis – across the centre of the city of Bilbao. Twice. From 8pm, for an audience in Azkuna Zentroa Gallery space, Mike Brookes simultaneously constructed and presented possible versions of both journeys, in real time, from the available documentation. Mixing video and audio recordings from the first Journey with footage from the second couriered to him directly from the street. The intervention reconsidered the multi-site Pearson/Brookes work 'Carrying Lyn', fifteen years after its original performance in Cardiff in 2001, for the contemporary streets of central Bilbao.



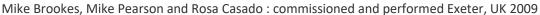
coriolan/us: https://www.nationaltheatrewales.org/ntw_shows/coriolan-us/ large scale located promenade theatre event, delivering the text of Shakespeare's 'Coriolanus', including extracts from Brecht's unfinished adaptation 'Coriolan', within the vast space of a decommissioned 1930's aircraft hanger. Commissioned by National Theatre Wales and the Royal Shakespeare Company, for the 2012 Cultural Olympiad. Mike Brookes, Mike Pearson, National Theatre Wales, Royal Shakespeare Company: commissioned and performed Hangar 858, St Athan, Wales 2012.



the persians: https://www.nationaltheatrewales.org/ntw_shows/the-persians/ large scale located theatre event, delivering a specific new translation of Aeschylus' text - the oldest extant play in western drama - within the replica village of the FIBUA training site (Fighting In Built Up Areas) deep in the MoD range on the Brecon Beacons of Wales. Commissioned for the inaugural season of National Theatre Wales. Mike Brookes, Mike Pearson, National Theatre Wales: commissioned and performed SENTA, Sennybridge, Wales 2010.



<u>something happening nearby</u>: performance event, drawing live video and audio feeds from events happening simultaneously within isolated rooms of the same building, reconstructing and immediate re-presenting the resulting material, in real time, within the meeting place of a developing public event.





<u>welsh landscapes</u>: performance work, readdressing material from the theatre work 'Patagonia' within the meeting place of a located ensemble public reading, including one performer via mobile phone link from the Patagonian site narrated within the text.

Mike Brookes and Mike Pearson [Pearson/Brookes]: commissioned and performed Cardiff, Wales 2009



<u>saints</u>: context specific performance work gathering a crowd of fifteen collaborators, past and present, whose collective professional contribution to performance practice in Wales has spanned thirty years. The work combined performance fragments donated, and performed, by those collaborators - and took the form of an ensemble performance event, performed live and acoustically, without any technical infrastructure, amongst a promenade audience, within a open stripped out studio space..

Mike Brookes and Mike Pearson [Pearson/Brookes] : commissioned and performed Cardiff, Wales 2005



who are you looking at?: performance event, realised over three nights in February 2004, and built on material produced in collaboration with five young female performers - each documenting 3mins within a particular public city centre location, on the same evening - producing footage of each location from three simultaneous and expanding points of view: [1] from a hidden camera on the performer themselves; [2] from a shadowing camera recording their movements; and [3] a wider locating shot taken from within a tracking car. Performed by Brookes, Pearson and Thomas - working around a large central table, arranged with all the necessary equipment and material - the resulting video fragments were layered with live texts and vocal recordings of the performers in conversation, live within the room of the developing public event.

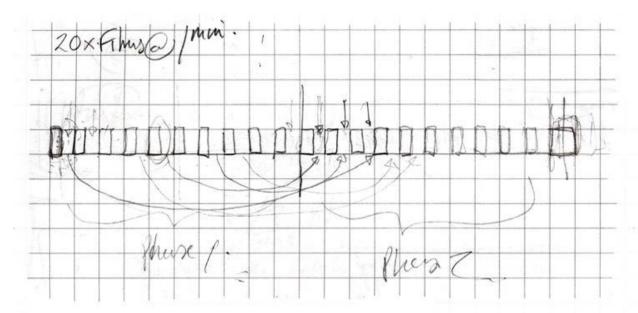
Mike Brookes, Mike Pearson and Ed Thomas: commissioned and performed Cardiff, Wales 2004.

<u>there's someone in the house</u>: performance event, built from video and polaroid documentation of otherwise unseen events unfolding within the same building - 'over there, just now' - the documentation being immediately delivered to, and re-animated, within the closed room of a developing public event.



<u>rain dogs</u>: performance event, marking the first public manifestation of a periodic collaboration between Mike Brookes, Mike Pearson and writer/director Ed Thomas. Drawing on strategies developed across their recent works Brookes and Pearson re-examined their generation and reading of narrative - both off and onto the city - combining specific threads of location video, narrative text, police cctv footage and documentation. Performed by Brookes, Pearson and Thomas - layering live material, including thirty 1min texts delivered live by their authors, against the performed texts and actions of ten male actors present only on film.

Mike Brookes, Mike Pearson and Ed Thomas: commissioned and performed Cardiff, Wales 2002



<u>polis</u>: large scale three hour performance event, incorporating twenty-five performance fragments, realised in five phases of five simultaneous acts, across the centre of a city - and the documentary traces of these acts produced by spectators delivered to the encounter of each isolated fragment by guided taxi.

Realised by a ensemble of twenty - five within the room of the installation [including Brookes and Pearson], five performers journeying across the city, five taxis, and five guides - the event and 'forum' of the work being built through the structured reconstruction and immediate re-presentation of documentation material live within the room of the developing installation.

Mike Brookes and Mike Pearson [Pearson/Brookes]: commissioned and performed Cardiff, Wales 2001.



carrying Lyn: on Saturday June 2nd 2001 - the day of the Wales-Poland soccer international - Mike Brookes, Mike Pearson, John Rowley, Richard Morgan, Paul Jeff carried disabled performer Lyn Levett across the centre of the city of Cardiff. Twice. From 8pm, for an audience in Chapter's studio, Mike Brookes simultaneously constructed and presented possible versions of both journeys, in real time, from the available documentation. Mixing video and audio recordings from the first Journey with footage from the second couriered to him directly from the street.

Mike Brookes and Mike Pearson [Pearson/Brookes]: commissioned and performed Cardiff, Wales 2001.



<u>like a pelican in the wilderness:</u> ensemble performance work, proposing the evocation of a loaded - and absent - artistic act, through structured manipulation of the available documentation. Video and sound recordings of the absent event being layered and mixed with statements of intent and description. Within a small darkened room containing four microphones, two video projections and an array of sound and playback equipment, the informal gathering of spectators and performers attempted to generate and experience both the meaning and intention of an absent incident, through the direct presentation of selected traces, opinions, and personal explanations – of what had, would, and could have happened.

Mike Brookes and Mike Pearson [Pearson/Brookes]: commissioned and performed Aberystwyth, Wales 2000.



works of progress: ensemble performance work, developed live amongst an informally gathered audience, across three consequential attempts to deliver the same material, performed 'back to back,' as a single event. With aural and visual details from each attempt being visibled sampled and recorded, and instantly reintroduced as the foundation and impetus for each subsequent, and increasingly elaborated, attempt - and ultimately engaging an ensemble of eight performers and members of the audience.

#Mike Brookes and Mike Pearson [Pearso/Brookes]: performed UK and Germany 1999.



body of evidence : performance intervention.

At 10.00pm on Friday 2nd October 1998 Mike Brookes and Mike Pearson drove a red 1986 3-series BMW into a vacant car park off James Street in the Butetown area of Cardiff Docks, and stepped out of the car. Wearing a discrete headset microphone Pearson delivered the text of a frank personal examination of the facts and evidence surrounding the brutal murder of Lynette White, a young prostitute, in her James Street flat on Valentine's Day 1988. The case remaining officially unsolved.

The text made specifically audible by Brookes, to the previously gathered audience, as they crowded around the open car, via a short range radio link through the car's powerful hi-fi. The murder scene, police station, and other locations directly relevant to the murder and subsequent investigation, all lay within two hundred yards of the performance site. On completion of the text Brookes and Pearson re-entered the car and drove away, leaving the audience to disperse, and the site physically unchanged.

Mike Brookes and Mike Pearson [Pearson/Brookes]: performed UK 1998.

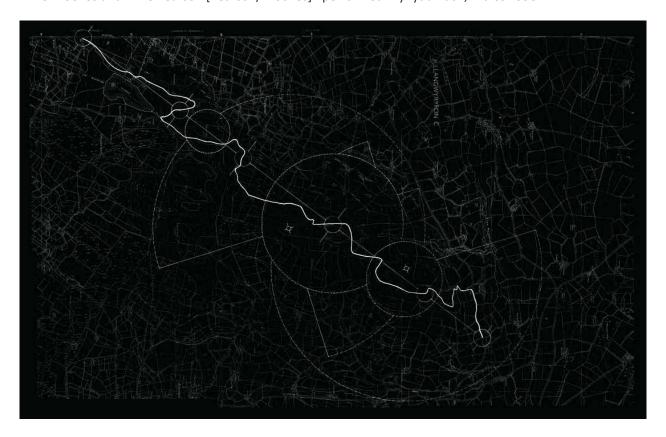


the first five miles: located performance and radio work, realised in collaboration with local inhabitants and land owners, Radio Ceredigion, and BBC Resources. Between 9.00pm and 10.15pm on Sunday 23rd August 1998, Mike Brookes and Mike Pearson walked a specific five mile jouney among peat bog, high pasture and wind-farm turbines of Mynydd Bach above the village of Trefenter in West Wales, carrying portable two way radio equipment.

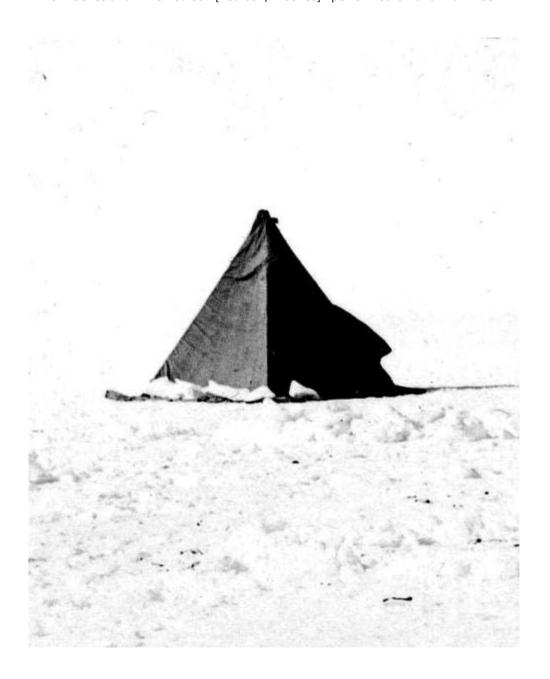
Texts voiced by Pearson were combined, via a live satellite link, with pre-recorded material simultaneously broadcast by Radio Ceredigio over a fifty miles in radius from Mynydd Bach. The bilingual stereo broadcast, subtitled 'Rhyfel y Sais Bach [the war of the little Englishman]', exploring the story of Augustus Brackenbury, his purchase of 850 acres of the areas common moorland from the Enclosure Commissioners in 1820, the subsequent enclosure riots, and the frustration by local inhabitants at his repeated attempts to build houses on the land.

The work attracted a transient community of some two hundred individuals to vantage points along the route - either out in the open with radios pressed to their ears, or gridlocked in cars - and a wider radio audience of over fifteen thousand.

Mike Brookes and Mike Pearson [Pearson/Brookes]: performed Mynydd Bach, Wales 1998.



<u>dead men's shoes</u>: performance and installation work marking the first major collaboration between Mike Brookes and Mike Pearson; The resulting eighty minute work layered two main elements: [1] Mike Pearson's text and delivery of a monologue exploring Robert Falcon Scott's fateful expedition to the South Pole in 1912, through a specific examination of the role and fate of seaman Edgar Evans; and [2] the place and architecture of Mike Brookes' durational slide work, animated through seven computer-controlled slide projectors across a fifty foot screen, detailing original photographic images from Scott's 'Discovery' and 'Terra Nova' Antarctic expeditions, many of which had rarely before been seen in public.



Recent work not with Pearson/Brookes

Cardiff 1919: Riots Redrawn can be explored from home but can also be experienced on location, in places where events took place. Cardiff 1919: Riots Redrawn takes audiences to the spot, as close to the original sites as possible, to tell the story of the people, places and incidents involved in a shocking moment of racial disharmony in a cityscape now completely changed. It can be explored by visiting

https://www.cardiff1919.wales/



In a World of Things

Commissioned work for The Performance Theatre – 'an invitation to reconsider the things around us, our relationship with them and how that relationship may change in the future'

https://theperformancetheatre.com/conversation/world-things

Good News From the Future https://goodnewsfromthefuture.org.uk/

On going project – Physical Theatre for the over 60s.