



**University of Brighton**

**JOHN BECK AND  
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**THE ART SCHOOLS OF  
NORTH WEST ENGLAND**

The historic and contemporary values  
surrounding specialist art schools

# RESEARCH OUTPUT



**Warrington Stained Glass**

*The Art Schools of North West England*  
November 2018 – March 2019, Bluecoat, Liverpool

*The Art Schools of North West England* was a curated exhibition of photographs and texts, held at the Bluecoat, Liverpool and toured to Bury Art Museum.

It formed the public access point for a body of research that sought to investigate attitudes to and the ethos of the art school, using imagery alongside short textual statements derived from an extensively researched history of the schools.

The exhibition opened on 17 November 2018 and ran until the 31 March 2019. Research for the exhibition built on Cornford's article 'The Art School in Ruins', co-authored with Professor John Beck (REF2014), which explored the fate of Britain's regional art schools. The exhibition represented 32 art schools identified as the total of those in operation in the North West of England during the latter half of the twentieth century.

Beck and Cornford tested the historic and contemporary value of the North West art schools by locating all the school buildings or the sites upon which they formerly stood. They explored them physically and through photography, conducting background library and archive research along with local oral, written and visual histories, including those of former art students, who were invited to share their knowledge and memories through recorded interviews and photographs.

The exhibition placed a visual history of civic architecture against one of the trajectory of educational change in the arts. The brief textual detail was selected and edited to complement and counterpoint the imagery, while ephemera and video materials associated with North West English art schools were sourced as supporting materials. An exhibition brochure was designed and produced to accompany the exhibition, and a symposium on the history and legacy of North West art schools was held at Bluecoat during the exhibition, on the 19 January 2019.

The research methods developed by Beck and Cornford for this North West focus will facilitate investigations of the national landscape of other former and extant schools.



# The Art Schools of North West England



***The Art Schools of North West England***  
Installation view, Bluecoat, Liverpool

(top) Liverpool College of Art;  
Northwich School of Art and frieze

(bottom) Lancaster School of Art and gate;  
Wigan School of Art

# The Art Schools of North West England



## **Accrington School of Arts and Crafts**

Part of the Grammar School on Blackburn Road was occupied by the School of Arts and Crafts, which operated as a distinct institution with its own Principal from 1920. The art school used two separate buildings for some time. The Blackburn Road building housed the Principal's office, a student common room, library, three studios, pottery workshop and painting and decorating workshop. A converted chapel on Portland Street provided space for cookery, dressmaking and crafts. The Grammar School left Blackburn Road in 1968. The building was demolished in 1998.

Blackburn Road, Accrington

53°45'10.7"N 2°22'35.8"W

12 August 2017

Photograph and text for  
**Accrington School of Arts and Crafts**  
Existing building on site of former school  
*The Art Schools of North West England*

# The Art Schools of North West England



## **Blackburn School of Art**

For architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner, the Blackburn Technical College and School of Art, also known as the College of Technology and Design, by Manchester architects Smith, Woodhouse and Willoughby and completed toward the end of 1894, defied stylistic classification. It is, wrote Pevsner, 'a kind of free French Renaissance; or what else is it?' Nonetheless, a 1935 Board of Education report on the College acknowledged that Blackburn could 'rightly claim to have been among the pioneers of technical education in this country'. A frieze below the top storey of the building depicts the arts and crafts.

Blakey Moor, Blackburn

53°44'56.0"N 2°29'14.6"W

13 August 2017

Photograph and text for  
**Blackburn School of Art**  
Original building still in educational use  
*The Art Schools of North West England*

# The Art Schools of North West England



Photograph and text for  
**Bootle School of Art**  
Existing building on site  
of former school  
*The Art Schools of  
North West England*

## **Bootle School of Art**

Among Bootle's listed buildings are a former swimming baths, a former police station, a former fire station, a former post office, a former library and museum, and a former school board office. The former art school operating on Stanley Road from around 1900 was not listed and is no longer standing. This, however, is not the full story. According to Historic England, the former Bootle School Board, built in 1888, became the home of the Municipal School of Art in 1914. In September 1968, Bootle Technical School and Bootle Municipal School of Art merged to become Bootle College of Further Education.

Balliol Road, Bootle

53°26'42.4"N 2°59'21.5"W

18 October 2018

# The Art Schools of North West England



## **Burnley School of Art**

Burnley Technical Institute on Ormerod Road opened in 1909, offering instruction in textiles, mining, engineering, science and commerce. The building also housed the School of Art and Burnley Girls' High School. The building is currently empty.

Ormerod Road, Burnley

53°47'35.7"N 2°14'15.9"W

12 August 2017

Photograph and text for  
**Burnley School of Art**  
Original school building now empty  
*The Art Schools of North West England*



# The Art Schools of North West England



## Carlisle School of Art

A relatively stable institution belied by many changes of name. The Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts was founded in 1822, became the Academy of Arts and then, in 1854, Carlisle School of Art. The school became Carlisle College of Art in 1950, Cumbria College of Art and Design in 1974, and Cumbria Institute of the Arts in 2001. Merging with St Martin's College, the Institute formed the Faculty of Arts of the University of Cumbria in 2007.

Brampton Road, Carlisle

54°54'21.8"N 2°55'53.7"W

10 July 2018

Photograph and text for  
**Carlisle School of Art**  
Original building still in educational use  
*The Art Schools of North West England*

# The Art Schools of North West England



## **The Harris Institute School of Art**

The Preston Institute for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge was founded in 1828. This became the Avenham Institute in 1853, leading to the formation of Preston School of Art in 1859. Diversifying into science and language classes, the institution became the Harris Institute in 1882 after receiving financial support from the estate of the late Edmund Robert Harris. A new Technical School was added in 1897 and extended in 1928. The institution became Harris College in 1956 and achieved polytechnic status in 1973. Preston Polytechnic is now the University of Central Lancashire, which sold off the School of Art building on Avenham Lane in 2007. It is currently on the market again.

Avenham Lane, Preston

53°45'16.6"N 2°41'56.3"W

17 July 2018

Photograph and text for  
**The Harris Institute School of Art**  
Original school building awaiting sale and reuse  
*The Art Schools of North West England*

# The Art Schools of North West England



## Morecambe School of Art

Completed in 1912, Morecambe Art and Technical School on Poulton Road was commandeered by the military during the First World War. In contrast to the more hard-headed art schools located in the industrial towns of the region, a 1921 inspection report explained that Morecambe, in addition to providing technical training, aimed to provide instruction for those 'who seek to develop their artistic perception and ability for cultural or practical reasons'. The building was temporary home for a grammar school until 1938, when it reverted to providing further education. It is now converted into flats.

Poulton Road, Morecambe

54°04'22.0"N 2°51'41.0"W

13 August 2017

Photograph and text for  
**Morecambe School of Art**  
Residential properties using former school building  
*The Art Schools of North West England*

# The Art Schools of North West England



## Wallasey School of Art

Liscard Hall was built by merchant and former slave trader Sir John Tobin in 1832 and was originally called Moors Hey House. The Hall and grounds were purchased by the Wallasey Local Board and opened to the public, the grounds becoming Central Park and the Hall converted into an art school. Wallasey School of Art became part of Wirral Metropolitan College in 1982, when all the further education colleges in the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral were amalgamated. Liscard Hall stood vacant and became a target for vandalism. In 2008 a fire led to its demolition.

Central Park, Wallasey, Wirral

53°24'58.2"N 3°02'12.2"W

14 September 2018

Photograph and text for  
**Wallasey School of Art**  
Original building in Liscard Park demolished  
*The Art Schools of North West England*

# The Art Schools of North West England



## Rochdale School of Art

The Technical School opened in 1893. In 1906 it was extended to include a School of Art. The building closed in 1989 and was subsequently demolished. The terracotta frieze from the frontage of the Technical School depicting spinning and metal working has been preserved and is displayed at the site where the building stood, which is now a car park.

Nelson Street, Rochdale

53°36'56.9"N 2°09'23.9"W

8 August 2017



Photographs and text for  
**Rochdale School of Art**  
Original building demolished;  
terracotta frieze retained in situ  
*The Art Schools of North West England*

# The Art Schools of North West England



***The Art Schools of North West England***  
Installation view, Bluecoat, Liverpool

(top) Liverpool College of Art

(left) Exhibition visitors discussing archive material in vitrines

# The Art Schools of North West England



*The Art Schools of North West England*  
Installation view, Bluecoat, Liverpool

# The Art Schools of North West England



*The Art Schools of North West England*  
Bluecoat, Liverpool  
Installation view of vitrines of archive material



# The Art Schools of North West England



*...what becomes immediately apparent to the visitor is the scale of the task. Placed immediately next to the introductory panel is a large Ordnance Survey map of the North West, dotted with miniature red flags, each indicating the location of a former art school.*

Montana-Williams (2019)

**Mapping at the entrance of the exhibition**  
*The Art Schools of North West England*  
Bluecoat, Liverpool

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS



**Detail, Warrington School of Art**  
*The Art Schools of  
North West England*  
November 2018 - March 2019  
Bluecoat, Liverpool

**The research asked very practical questions as to the number and location of the art schools within the scope of the investigation. Alongside this were questions concerning the cultural value of the historic art schools and the research methodologies required to investigate the subject.**

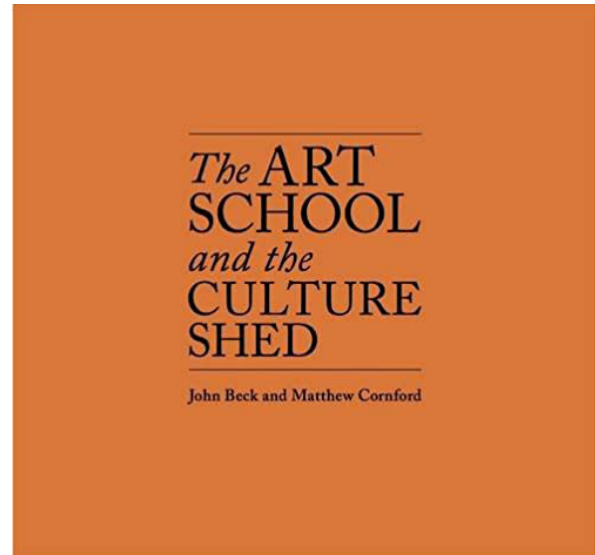
1. How can an architectural photographic survey and archival research be used to uncover and represent the shifting presence of art schools in North West England in the latter half of the twentieth century?
2. What does the changing geography and history of art schools in these locations reveal about cultural changes in art education and civic priorities?
3. How does a photographic exhibition that features the sites of former art schools, and elicits viewers' engagement and reflections on the changing physical and cultural landscape, contribute to overlooked histories of art education?

# RESEARCH CONTEXT

**The research extends and builds new perspective on the work of Beck and Cornford published as 'The Art School in Ruins' (Beck and Cornford 2012), investigating the cultural and civic role of the art school and the impact of twentieth-century educational reform. It brings a comprehensive review of the specific region, and develops research methods that give insight into the cultural and historic value of these institutions.**

In the 1960s, there were over 150 art schools in the United Kingdom. With origins in the expansion of technical and industrial training during the nineteenth century, these establishments had become the incubators of nationally successful creative industries. However, moves to modernise art education at that point marked the beginning of decades of art school amalgamations and closures. Many of the original art school buildings have been repurposed, abandoned or demolished and, prior to this research, there was no single source of information that detailed the locations, history and significance of the schools that had thrived in the mid-twentieth century.

Although the contribution art schools have made to British culture is well known, most have disappeared and the teaching of art has relocated to the university sector. Recent projects, such as Tate Britain's 'Art School Educated: Curriculum Development and Institutional Change in UK Art Schools 1960-2000', have begun to tell the story of British art schools, although, with notable exceptions such as James Charnley's work on art education in Leeds (Charnley, 2015), the focus is on elite London art schools and famous alumni (Tickner, 2008; Llewellyn, 2015). The majority of art schools, especially those that served as feeder institutions for the major metropolitan art schools, have been largely forgotten. This research sought in particular to understand the role art schools played in towns and cities outside London, drawing on recent scholarship in the history of national art education (Wood, 2008; Williamson, 2013) and creative documentary of the art school space (Winstanley, 2013) to create a visual and emotionally responsive commentary upon the evolution of art education in provincial Britain.



*The Art School and the Culture Shed*  
Beck, J. and Cornford M. (2014)

# RESEARCH PROCESS



***The Art Schools of North West England* was undertaken through a set of research methods that allowed for interplay among archival sources, local history, and photographic documentation, with each aspect of the research informing the others.**

***The Art Schools of North West England***  
Installation view,  
Bluecoat, Liverpool

There were six principal elements in the process:

## **Archive research**

To ascertain the numbers and locations of the regional art schools, Beck and Cornford conducted research at the National Archive at Kew, taking evidence from historical documents on art schools in the North West including prospectuses and government reports.

## **Location**

Each physical site was then visited and its geo-positioning coordinates recorded. These visits were at the core of Cornford's innovative methodology, in which discovering and photographically documenting what is there and the visceral experience of being in a place were paramount.

There were inherent difficulties in making photographs to represent the buildings in ways that related and contributed to the wider research insight. In the photographic process itself, experiment led to decisions that avoided any stylistic nostalgia. Cornford adopted a systematic approach and a deliberate stylistic uniformity in order to establish the works as a photographic series.

His research at this stage considered the implications of what might be included in the composed photographs, for example how much of the contemporary environment should be included and how might standpoint and perspectival distortion affect the understanding of the building, its original purpose and history, and the significance of its current state.

### Editing

The site visits resulted in many hundreds of photographs being taken of each building. These images were edited down to a final selection, in most cases leading to one overall image of the building, or, where the building had been demolished, an image of what remained or had taken its place. The exploratory photographic process continued with cropping, framing, re-touching and colour balancing in order to evolve an image that would represent each building in the series and take account for the context of the research.

As a series, the photographs facilitate new interpretations of the art school as a cultural entity, and will eventually form part of an England-wide series, so consistencies over size, composition, lighting and sky colour were vital to the overall work's integrity.

### Text captions

Working with John Beck, each final image was accompanied by a caption. These were devised so as to maximise the meaning conveyed by the image itself and provided anchorage by grounding the image in a particular place, providing a brief representation of the history of the institution taken from the archival research, along with the geo-locational coordinates and the date on which the photography took place.

### Quality and materiality

The photographs were produced to a scale and quality to be exhibited within public galleries and museums. The photographs were printed digitally onto archive quality C-type photographic paper, then professionally mounted and framed behind low reflective glass.

### Curation

Cornford worked with the Bluecoat curator Bryan Biggs on arranging the images across three galleries. Archival material relating to the North West region's art schools - postcards, posters, old prospectuses - were displayed in vitrines to accompany the framed photographs.



(top) Selection and editing images before colour printing

(bottom) Full-size colour prints being inspected at Spectrum photographic printers, Brighton

# RESEARCH INSIGHTS



**Beck and Cornford's research was focused on eliciting the idea of what art school education signified and testing how that idea rippled through the culture. They sought to generate and, to some extent, capture the sense of what the art school experience had meant to people and how it might have shaped their lives. The inclusion of interviews as a podcast that was also broadcast in the Bluecoat during the show for a symposium audience underlined the community aspect of the project.**

**Visitors examine a vitrine of archive material**  
*The Art Schools of North West England, Bluecoat, Liverpool*

While the work used rather than foregrounded the minutiae of curricula and policy, Beck and Cornford established factual information on the art school buildings in the North West region, their histories and their current state of use or disuse. Research also provided insight into the historic culture of the art schools, attesting to the civic importance evident in the architecture and the process of repurposing, reuse or neglect. The researchers discovered that there had been 32 art schools in the North West of England and that all of them had been either closed down altogether or amalgamated into larger institutions. All of the art schools and art school buildings were shown to have evolved and declined through a process of near constant change since they were first opened, for example, every art school went through multiple name changes, shifts in purpose and some form of amalgamation and/or closure. Where the original buildings did remain, only a small number were still being used for the purpose for which they were originally built.



The photographic investigation built understanding of the cultural shifts around educational priorities and reform in art. As an exhibition, it visually connected the architecture with the original purpose of the institution, and rendered an understanding of the building's physical presence in the context of its history. From this the researchers discerned the cultural inflection from different audience groups. Older exhibition visitors contributed an awareness of the changing status of public buildings and of public space in town centres, highlighting the importance of commemorating change that they had witnessed in their lifetimes. While this sector read the exhibition as local history, there also emerged an audience of art education and art world specialists, who foregrounded aspects through which art education had moved from an industry-driven training programme to a university-based model and shared their understanding of these implications. Beck and Cornford observed how the younger audience of arts students and recent graduates received the project far less as a history project and more as the staging site for a critique of current economic and education policies related to the arts. For them, the photographs of the buildings seemed to stand for an abandoned commitment to affordable education, highlighting their suspicion of any nostalgia for institutions that had harboured social privilege based, for example, on gender, sexuality or race. What became increasingly clear is that a range of issues and responses could be generated through the exhibition style the researchers had chosen and that this relatively 'straight' presentation of photographs of art school buildings would allow unanticipated considerations to emerge.

(top)

**Detail, Lancaster College of Art**  
*The Art Schools of  
 North West England*  
 Bluecoat, Liverpool

By hosting a symposium alongside the exhibition (Bluecoat, 19 January 2019) Beck and Cornford were able to bring first-hand testimony into conversation with the historical record. Through the exhibition format they developed a methodology on which a national art school survey project can be based, and have received an invitation from the New Art Gallery in Walsall to host an art school survey of the West Midlands.

(bottom)

**Detail, Morecambe School of Art**  
*The Art Schools of  
 North West England*  
 Bluecoat, Liverpool

The reviews of the exhibition also served as a litmus test of the research methods and the insight gained:

*The Art Schools of North West England succeeds in charting the socio-historic impact of art schools, while critically questioning the future of arts education.*

(Welsh, 2019)

*This project is not an exercise in wistful nostalgia, we are not assaulted with a sickeningly saccharine sense of 'the good old days'. Rather what is hinted at is far more profound, a catalogue of what was once, but is no longer. This is, therefore, a poignant eulogy of cultural loss.*

(Montana-Williams, 2019)

*This is an exhibition which requires your time to search for its secrets, to stop and reflect not only upon what art schools produce but who they moulded. Viewing the whole concept of student, architecture and outcome is a large undertaking. The show introduces and opens the door to many stories.*

(Orr, 2020)

# DISSEMINATION

## Exhibitions

### ***The Art Schools of North West England***

Solo exhibition, Bluecoat, Liverpool  
17 November 2018 - 31 March 2019.  
<https://www.arrrabbit.com/events/john-beck-and-matthew-cornford-the-art-schools-of-north-west-england>

### ***The North West Art School Record Machine***

Solo exhibition with Bryan Biggs, Bury Art Museum, Greater Manchester  
12 October 2019 - 25 January 2020.  
<https://instituteformodern.co.uk/2019/the-north-west-art-school-record-machine-exhibition> <https://instituteformodern.co.uk/2019/the-north-west-art-school-record-machine-exhibition>

### ***Hippo Campus: Where We Learn***

Group exhibition, Newlyn Art Gallery & The Exchange, Penzance  
8 August - 19 September 2020.  
<https://newlynartgallery.co.uk/activities/hippo-campus/>

## Public symposium

### **What Was Art School?**

Bluecoat, Liverpool  
19 January 2019.

## Radio programme

### **The Art Schools of North West England**

30-minute radio programme broadcast by Resonance 104.4 FM. Produced by Erik Lintunen.  
19 January 2019  
<https://www.mixcloud.com/Resonance/the-art-schools-of-north-west-england-19-january-2019/>

## Public talks, lectures and keynote presentations

Cornford M. and Diab, S. (2016) 'The art school, the art student and the post 1992 university'. *The Hidden Curriculum*, National Association for Fine Art Education (NAFAE), Annual Symposium, London Metropolitan University, 22 January.



### ***The North West Art School Record Machine***

Bury Art Museum  
The exhibition included a wall of LP album sleeves from musicians who had studied in the North West art schools



- Cornford M. (2016) 'Researching the British art school'. Research Symposium, University of Huddersfield, 10 September.
- Cornford M. (2016) 'No future', Be Reasonable Demand the Impossible: A Celebration of Malcolm McLaren on the 40th Anniversary of the First Sex Pistols Gig. Central St Martins School of Art, London, 6 November.
- Beck, J. and Cornford M. (2017) 'From the Local Art School to the Culture Shed'. *Green and Golden Symposium, Exploring the Impact of Location on Art Education and the Art School*. Swansea College of Art, University of Wales, Swansea, 27 June.
- Beck, J. and Cornford M. (2017) 'What was Art School?' *Mediating Cultural Work: Texts, Objects and Politics*. First Research Institute for Cultural and Media Economies (CAMEo) conference, University of Leicester, 6 September.
- Cornford M. and Salaman, N. (2018) 'Teaching Art Students Art History: Radical Pedagogy in British Art Schools'. *Association for Art History, Annual Conference 2018*, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London, 5 April.
- Beck, J. and Cornford M. (2018) 'In Search of the Lost Art School'. *Finding the Art School symposium*, IKON Gallery Birmingham, 16 April.
- Beck, J. and Cornford M. (2018) 'The Idea of Art School'. Freelands Foundation, London.
- Beck, J. and Cornford M. (2019) 'The Art Schools of North West England and Beyond'. *Art Education: Interesting histories and alternative futures*, organized by RADAR, Loughborough University, 13 June.

### Preliminary discussions

- Beck, J. and Cornford M. (2014) 'From the Local Art School to Globalised Bohemia'. *Global Futures Speaker Series*, Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton, 8 May.
- Beck, J. and Cornford M. (2014) 'The Art School and the Culture Shed', *Education Eliminationism and Cultural Colonization: A Higher Education and Theory (HEAT) Symposium*, University of Westminster, London, 7 November.
- Cornford M. (2015) 'The Document in Relation to Art Education'. *Play Sense: Talking Symposium*, Gerald Moore Gallery, Eltham College, London, 23 May.



**Bury School of Arts and Crafts**  
*The Art Schools of North West England*

# REFERENCES

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(overleaf) **Detail, Ashton-under-Lyme  
School of Art**  
*The Art Schools of North West England*  
Bluecoat, Liverpool

# The Art Schools of North West England

