



The Power of Worcester

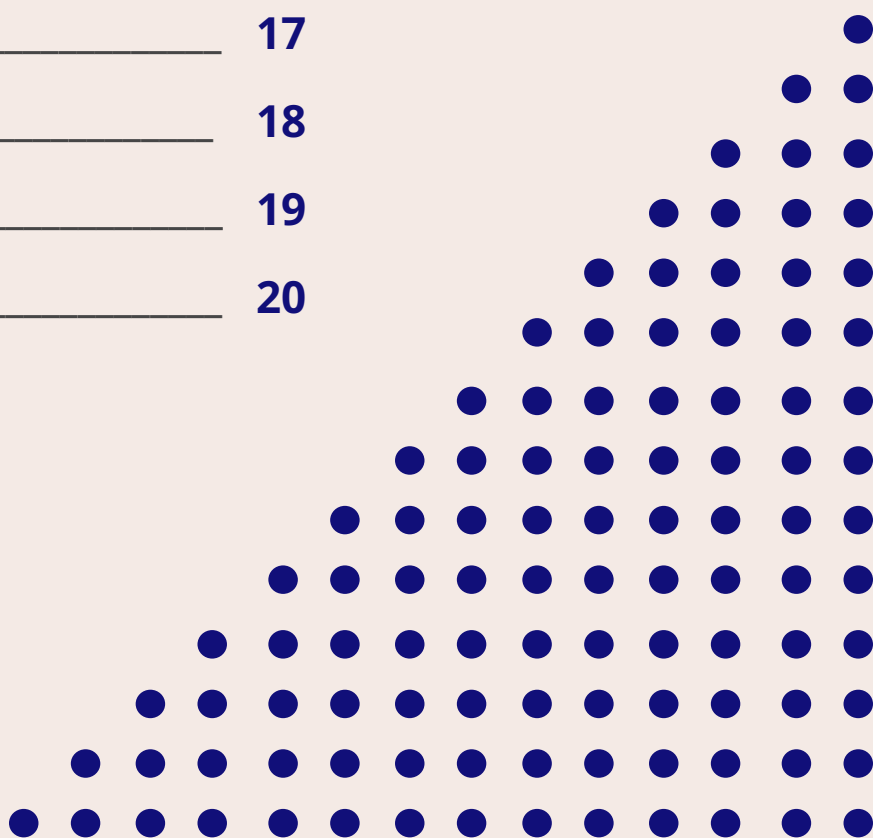
Project Evaluation Report

November 2025



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Project by: Crave Arts

Crave Arts is an arts and cultural not for profit organisation based in Worcester. They deliver arts and performance-based projects, activities and initiatives to their local communities, as well as providing support and guidance for those working in the cultural/heritage industries. Their charitable values centre around collaboration, well-being, and inclusivity.

The 'Power of Worcester' project, aimed to bring Worcester's electrical history to life. Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the project strived to protect a piece of Worcester's heritage, and through educating the community about these industrial histories, aimed to empower those individuals who currently feel stripped of power themselves.

Evaluated by: Social Research Builders

Social Research Builders (SRB) is a specialist research and evaluation agency based in Tewkesbury. The company was hired by Crave Arts in the summer of 2025 to conduct evaluation of 'The Power of Worcester'. Its evaluation has focused on collating the project data already gathered by Crave Arts, collecting feedback from 'The Power of Worcester: The Play', and hosting interviews with the project's partners. This report brings all this data together in an assessment of Crave Arts' delivery of the project.



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About the Project

The Power of Worcester project was developed by Crave Arts to rediscover and celebrate Worcester's hidden history of electricity. Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Elmley Foundation, the project set out to bring to life the city's pioneering role in power generation and the stories of the people who made it happen.

Worcester was home to Britain's first municipal hydroelectric power station at Powick Mills in 1894, followed by the impressive Worcester Generating Station on Hylton Road, which dominated the skyline until the 1970s. Though the physical site is long gone, many features including sub-stations, ironwork and memories, remain scattered across the city, at risk of being forgotten.

The project aimed to:

- Uncover and preserve local stories, photographs and documents about the city's electrical heritage
- Connect people to this past through creative workshops, reminiscence sessions and public performances
- Engage communities who may feel disconnected from heritage and encourage pride in Worcester's industrial history
- Link lessons from the past with current conversations about renewable energy and environmental responsibility.

Through research, storytelling and performance, Crave Arts wanted local residents to explore both the literal power of electricity and the metaphorical idea of personal and community power.

The expected outcomes were

- 1 • stronger local awareness and pride in Worcester's power heritage
- 2 • improved access and inclusion in heritage activity for under-represented groups
- 3 • a lasting digital record of memories and images hosted by Worcestershire Archives
- 4 • creative outputs, including a play and a film, that share the city's history in engaging and accessible ways
- 5 • closer partnership working across local organisations, strengthening future heritage collaboration.

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation of The Power of Worcester was designed to measure how effectively the project met its aims and the wider outcomes agreed with the National Lottery Heritage Fund and The Elmley Foundation.

The process followed the POWER evaluation framework developed by Social Research Builders (SRB), which looks at five key areas: Participation, Outreach, Work with Partners, Expression, and Reflection & Legacy.

Evaluation combined internal monitoring carried out by Crave Arts during delivery with independent assessment and further primary data collection undertaken by SRB between August and November 2025. Together, these methods provided a balanced picture of both activity and impact.

Data sources

- Participant feedback from Reminiscence and Creative Workshops
- Audience surveys from the three public performances
- Interviews with project partners, collaborators and volunteers
- Social media and marketing analytics showing audience reach
- Observational notes and internal reflections recorded by the Crave Arts team.

Sections to follow evaluate progress against each part of the POWER evaluation framework:



P - Participation

Objective: Measure reach and engagement across target groups (e.g. residents, students, visually impaired).



O - Outreach

Objective: Assess the effectiveness of communications and community connection.



W - Work with partners

Objective: Evaluate the depth and quality of collaborations.



E - Expression

Objective: Understand the impact of creative outputs (film, play, workshops).



R - Reflection & Legacy

Objective: Capture learning, sustainability, and archival contribution.

P - Participation

The project aimed to engage people across Worcester in rediscovering the city's power heritage - particularly those who may not normally take part in heritage or arts activities. This included residents of local social housing, young people from Heart of Worcestershire College, clients of Sight Concern, and older people connected through reminiscence sessions. Although the vast majority of participants who disclosed their demographic information were White British, at least 10% did identify as having a disability and the project was successful in connecting with both young people and the older population through the workshops.

Participation was assessed through surveys, observations, and feedback gathered from both reminiscence and creative workshops held throughout 2025.

Reminiscence Workshop

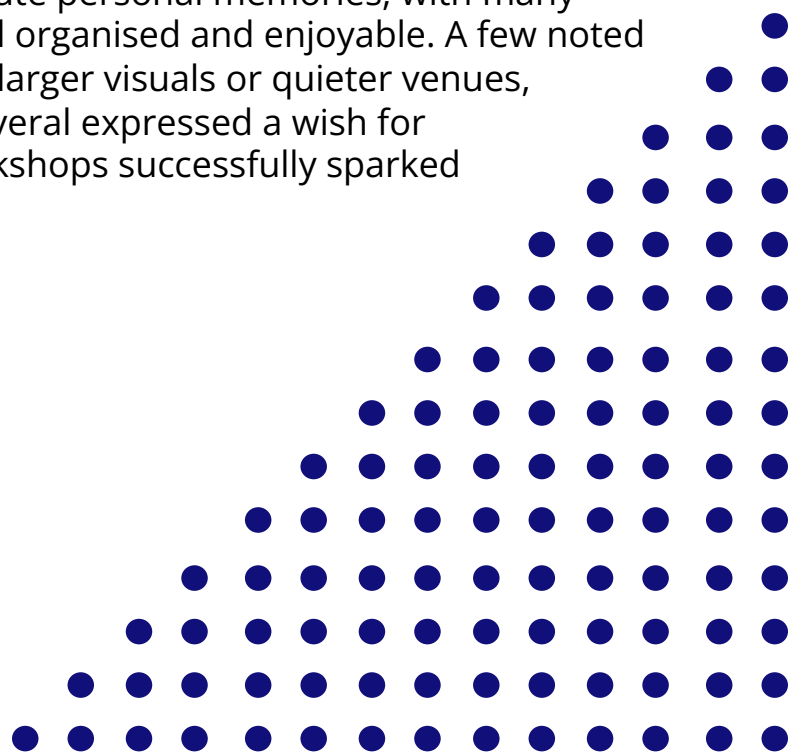
Six reminiscence workshops were held with a total of **80 participants**, most of whom were aged over 50 and living locally. These sessions invited people to share memories of working at or living near the former Worcester Generating Station.

Feedback showed strong enthusiasm and a genuine sense of pride in rediscovering forgotten stories. Every respondent reported an increase in awareness and understanding of Worcester's power history, with average rating of 7 on a 10-point scale after taking part. An average improvement of 4 points across the participants. Comments such as "didn't know Worcester was so pioneering" and "this is a really exciting project – about time!" reflected both surprise and delight at learning more about the city's achievements.

Participants valued the chance to contribute personal memories, with many describing the workshops as friendly, well organised and enjoyable. A few noted that accessibility could be improved with larger visuals or quieter venues, but the overall tone was very positive. Several expressed a wish for further sessions, suggesting that the workshops successfully sparked interest and ownership.

“ this is a really
exciting project
– about time! ”

“ I didn't know
Worcester was
so pioneering! ”



P - Participation continued

Creative Workshop

The creative workshops brought together 32 participants across two strands: drama workshops with nine students at Heart of Worcestershire College, and poetry workshops with clients from Sight Concern, most of whom were older adults. Across both strands, participants explored Worcester's power heritage and the idea of electrical and personal power through creative expression. Material created in these sessions, including poems written by Sight Concern participants, informed the development of the final play script.

Participants reported gaining a better understanding of Worcester's industrial history and feeling more confident in creative collaboration. Feedback highlighted enjoyment, teamwork and improved communication skills. Typical comments included "I've developed a good sense of communication and teamwork" and "the workshops were creative, fun, factual and interesting".

Overall Participation Outcomes

Across all activities, the project achieved its core aim of increasing engagement with Worcester's power heritage. Participants reported:

- greater knowledge and pride in the city's industrial history
- a stronger personal connection to local heritage
- increased confidence and willingness to share stories and ideas

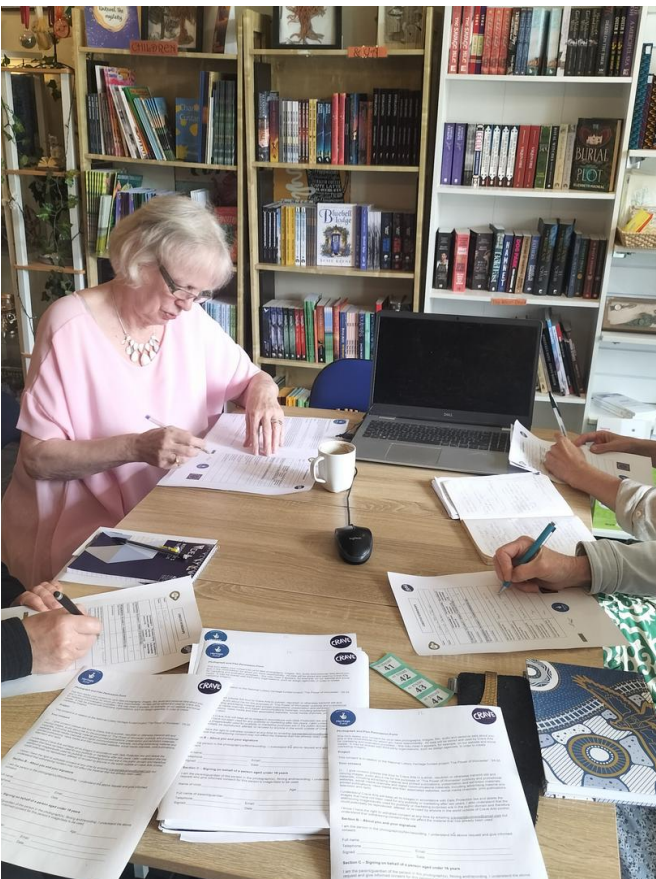
What words were used to sum up the workshops:

We asked the participants to choose up to three words to sum up their experience. Below are some of the most common words used:

“ Intense; Interesting; inspirational; Imaginative, Learning; Sharing ”



P - Participation in Pictures



O - Outreach

Outreach focused on how effectively the project connected with local audiences and communities to share the city's electrical heritage. The evaluation drew on social media analytics, performance attendance data, and feedback from partners to assess reach and visibility.

Digital engagement

Crave Arts used Facebook as the main tool for public communication and audience development.

Posts promoting ticket sales for *The Power of Worcester: The Play* achieved the highest engagement levels, with views ranging from **43 to nearly 2,000 per post**. The posts that reached the most people were those announcing performances and casting calls for local actors.

This pattern indicates that online engagement translated into some real-world participation - all three performances sold out or came close to capacity. The strong response to the actor recruitment post (with over 1,600 views) also suggests that Crave Arts successfully reached Worcester's creative community and generated genuine interest in local arts participation.

Although follower numbers did not increase significantly during the project, posts' reach consistently exceeded the size of the follower base. This implies that content was being shared and viewed beyond Crave Arts' existing audience - a positive sign of community-level visibility. Facebook analytics also show that the most engaged age group on that platform were those between 45-64 year olds (54%), predominantly from Worcester (51%) and the surrounding areas of Malvern (15%), Birmingham (5%), and Kidderminster (5%). Although the age demographic would indicate that the younger population lacked engagement (18-35 year olds made up just 12% of all visitors), this is possibly more reflective of the Facebook platform rather than interest.

Community connection

Beyond digital channels, outreach relied heavily on partner organisations to connect with target audiences. Heart of Worcestershire College, Platform Housing and Sight Concern all played key roles in promoting workshops and performances to their networks. Their existing relationships with local residents, students and service users helped to ensure that the project reached some people who may not usually attend heritage activities.

Feedback from partners confirmed that Crave Arts communicated clearly and were approachable and responsive throughout. One partner described the collaboration as "a win-win - it brought people to our venue and gave our community something new to engage with."

W - Work with Partners

The project was built on collaboration from the start. Crave Arts worked with a range of partners, including Worcester City Council's Historic Environment Record Office, Heart of Worcestershire College, Platform Housing, Sight Concern, Explore the Past, the Canal and River Trust and members of the Worcestershire Industrial Archaeology and Local History Society. Each brought specialist expertise, local knowledge or access to communities that might otherwise be hard to reach.

Quality of collaboration

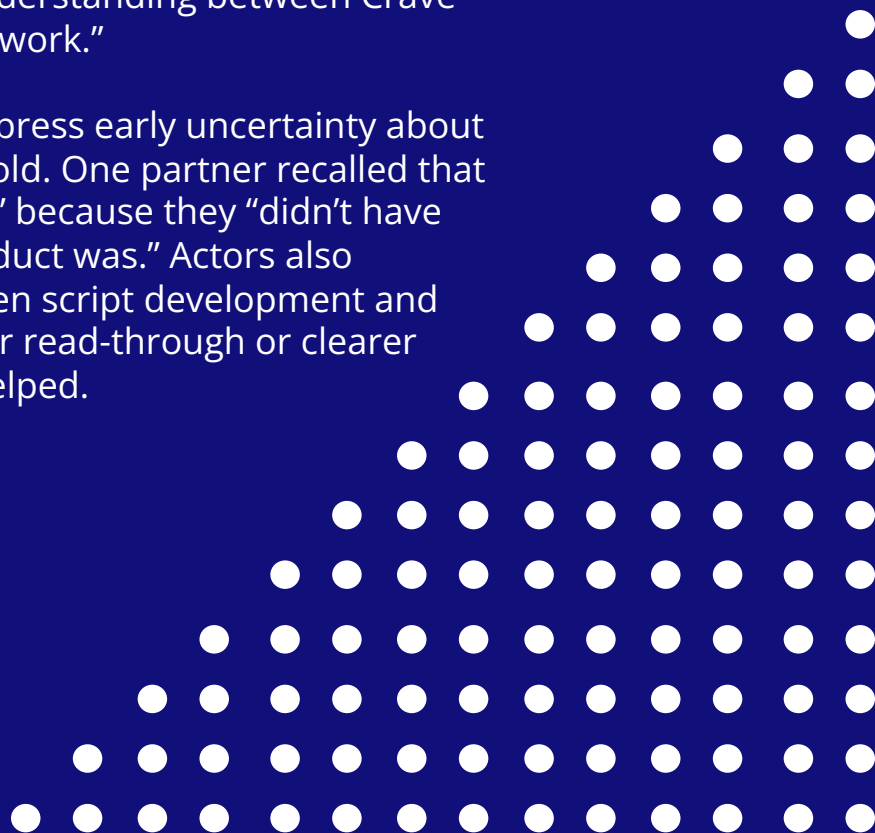
Interviews with partners and volunteers show strong satisfaction with how Crave Arts managed and delivered the project. Partners consistently described the team as organised, professional and enjoyable to work with. One collaborator commented that delivery was "very good... very clear instructions, very clear planning." Another described the experience as "a really enjoyable process from start to finish."

Steve Wilson and Debbie Birch's approach was repeatedly praised for being open, flexible and encouraging. One actor reflected that Steve was "humorous, light and encouraging... the way he dealt with us was really great." This positive working atmosphere helped sustain enthusiasm and commitment across all stages of the project.

Clarity and communication

Several partners noted that communication throughout the project was clear and consistent, with one saying, "from the start, Steve was very clear that he was formulating this plan." Another remarked that "there was a clear understanding between Crave and me as to how that was going to work."

However, a few collaborators did express early uncertainty about how the creative process would unfold. One partner recalled that at first they were "a little bit reticent" because they "didn't have any experience of what the end product was." Actors also mentioned feeling "a bit lost" between script development and rehearsals, suggesting that an earlier read-through or clearer pre-rehearsal briefing might have helped.



W - Work with Partners continued

Mutual benefit and legacy

Partners emphasised the value of collaboration and the project's role in strengthening Worcester's cultural and heritage networks. One participant described it as "a branch that has grown out of the trunk of the project," referring to new professional connections formed through the work. Another said, "it opened my eyes to what we could potentially do here," noting that Crave Arts' approach to storytelling had inspired fresh ideas for future heritage engagement in their own organisation.

Every partner interviewed stated they would be keen to work with Crave Arts again. This willingness demonstrates trust and confidence in the organisation's collaborative methods and its ability to deliver meaningful, creative community projects.

Overall outcomes for partnership working

The evidence shows that The Power of Worcester succeeded in building and strengthening local partnerships. The project:

- fostered strong, professional and enjoyable working relationships
- created opportunities for shared learning and creative exchange
- inspired other organisations to explore new ways of presenting heritage
- laid the groundwork for future collaborations within Worcester's cultural sector.



W - Work with Partners - Quotes

“Thanks for having me along for the ride!
It was a pleasure to play a role in this part of the project. I got so much out of it, and it was a fantastic journey working with you, Rebecca and Corrine to bring the script to life. The community and heritage aspect enriched it all, and I enjoyed learning about Worcester's power history through the rehearsal process [...]

Ben Calvert, Actor

“Some of our members attended on Friday, and I believe some today. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive noting the creativity applied around such an unusual topic.

Adam Sapic, WIALHS

“From the start, Steve was very clear that he was formulating this plan, There was a clear understanding between Crave and me as to how that was going to work.

Delivery partner

“Thank you so much for involving us in your interesting, and relevant, project. It was such a positive experience for everyone involved.
I have really enjoyed seeing the students take part, and gain in confidence as each workshop has progressed. Having a series of three consecutive workshops worked well as it gave the students continuity of theme, facilitator and activities all linked to Worcester's locale and the importance of heritage. [...] Being involved in The Power of Worcester project has enriched our curriculum offer in Performing Arts and exposed the students to an external practising artist and his own creative way of working [...].

Kate Hutchings, Heart of Worcestershire



E - Expression

Expression within The Power of Worcester project related to how the project translated research and community stories into creative outcomes. At its core, the play (and the accompanying film) were designed to share Worcester's power heritage in an engaging, inclusive way while sparking pride and curiosity among audiences. With two sell out shows and one almost full house, and a **total audience of 134 across the three performances**, it proved to be a great success.

The Power of Worcester: The Play

The play itself was developed from material gathered through the reminiscence and creative workshops. It was performed three times in October with one Friday evening performance and two Sunday performances at the Hive Studio in Worcester. The performances brought together the local community, combining historical facts, humour and local voices to retell Worcester's pioneering story of electricity.

Audience feedback, collected through post-show surveys, and informal interviews shows that the production was very well received.

- 97.5% of respondents found the play engaging and enjoyable
- 90% agreed it was easy to follow
- 71% said they learned something new about Worcester's electrical history
- 90% said the project made them more interested in Worcester's heritage

“brought history to life in a way that was both educational and entertaining”



E - Expression continued

Efforts were made to ensure accessibility, including the provision of audio description for visually impaired audience members. While one participant commented that communication was “poor,” others praised the effort to make the performance inclusive, with one noting, “well done for the audio description.”

Crave Arts took practical steps to keep accessibility at the forefront of delivery. They worked closely with Sight Concern and the appointed audio describer, seeking advice on access needs, print sizes, colour contrasts, and the structure of the audio descriptions themselves. Although the audience member who raised concerns did not provide enough detail to determine specific improvements, maintaining ongoing collaboration with these partners will help Crave Arts continue to strengthen accessibility in future projects.

Creative legacy

The play's educational impact was evident, with several respondents expressing interest in learning more or developing their own creative heritage work. One audience member noted that seeing the show had inspired them to “create a presentation of the wider history of electricity distribution in Worcestershire.”

The play also formed the foundation for a short film documenting the project's journey, preserving the process and impact for future audiences. Together, these creative outcomes reinforced the project's purpose - to make heritage engaging, relevant and accessible through performance and storytelling.



Play feedback

“

My family and I really enjoyed Power of Worcester: The Play last night and I want to congratulate you both on your achievements! The play was lively and very engaging, striking the perfect balance between giving the audience the history of the Worcester power stations and telling an entertaining story. It's a very difficult thing to do, so well done to Steve for getting it so right in the writing!

The cast were excellent and we couldn't believe that they'd only been rehearsing together for a few days. One of our highlights was the off-the-wall segment with 1950s advertisement stars, which my Dad said was exactly what he remembers from his childhood!

A special mention to Corrine as we wouldn't know from her great performance that she's such a recent graduate. It was all beautifully organised and presented. Well done to you both, and to everyone involved in the project and the show!

”

“

'Thank you for the invite. Love seeing Worcester history unearthed.'

”



Play Review by John Philpott

The Power of Worcester: The Play Showtime! stars rating: * * * * *

THE front of the programme for Steve Wilson's thought-provoking new play poses the question - do stories have the power to make a difference?

Well, there can be only one answer to that. **For the chorused reply from capacity audiences attending the weekend's production of this intensely absorbing work by the talented St John's, Worcester playwright most certainly must have been... YES!**

Power of Worcester: The Play explores Worcester's important and pivotal role in the history of electricity, but there is much more to it than that. For this is a multi-layered and metaphorical look, by the writer, at the many facets of power. The clue most certainly lies in the play's title, and one that is examined in all its forms, because Wilson cleverly juxtaposes the energy of human inventions – this being the creation of the gargantuan former electricity generating station in Hylton Road, Worcester – with the smaller, but perhaps no less powerful driving force of human resistance to the potential injustices of arbitrarily imposed change.

The play starts in the future year of 2029, and Amber (Corinne Leigh-Hewitson) is staging a solitary protest after the powers-that-be decide that a children's playground must be dug up after some resource or other is discovered beneath the ground on the site of the long-demolished power station.

Clearly Worcester's answer to Greta Thunberg, Ms Leigh-Hewitson hits us full in the face with a spirited and powerful – yes, it's that 'p' word again – bombast that never lets up for a single, frenetic moment. She assaults the senses with her rhetoric and leaves you in no doubt that no prisoners will be taken in this particular battle. Truly fabulous stuff. This being a sit-in protest, Amber must rest at some stage, and so nods off in her chair. It is not long before she is visited by several characters who can only be ghosts from the past.

The first is that of Alfred Rowe, the architect of the power station, erected in 1902. Ben Calvert excels in the role, and also that of future designer one R Rudd, and finally as Amber's dad. Talk about multi-tasking.

Nevertheless, his most entertaining incarnation is that of a smarmy 1950s advertising executive, oozing enough grease to start a chip shop and then some. Adding no small degree of poignancy to the story is Rebecca Sharp in various roles, the most moving by far portraying the late 1940s poverty-stricken housewife Sarah, grubbing about the power station for bits of coal in the dead of night.

Once again based on a real person, Amber thankfully raises the alarm when, presumably through fatigue, a weary Sarah absentmindedly leaves her baby behind. The shifting time sequences maintain the play's tension throughout, while the central message – that of the relatively powerless individual's destiny being at the mercy of decisions imposed by the powerful – is a timeless theme which Steve Wilson has explored with **great subtlety, panache and style. Truly a masterpiece in poetic observation.**

R - Reflection & Legacy

The Power of Worcester project has been both a creative achievement and a learning journey for Crave Arts.

In conversation, Steve Wilson and Debbie Birch reflected on how the project has improved their understanding of combining the arts and heritage, strengthened their organisational confidence, and reaffirmed their values of authenticity, partnership and inclusion.

They described the project as “a true Crave Arts piece” – collaborative, community-based and creatively ambitious. Both recognised how the project balanced the expectations of heritage professionals and the wider public. Debbie noted that ensuring historical accuracy was new territory, but support from partners such as Sheena Payne-Lunn made this possible. Steve reflected that setting the play in the future was key to “bringing the past into conversation with the present”, helping audiences relate to Worcester’s industrial story in imaginative ways.

The project also prompted personal and organisational growth. Debbie highlighted how marketing support improved their digital confidence, and how accessibility work with Sight Concern had a lasting impact on their practice. Steve spoke about the joy of seeing people respond emotionally to stories that had been forgotten, remarking that audiences often said, “I never knew that about Worcester.” Both agreed that the process had strengthened their partnership and confirmed the distinct identity of Crave Arts as a trusted, relational organisation that delivers high-quality community projects with integrity.

“ This project really felt like us – creative, collaborative and rooted in community ”

“ Setting the play in the future let us talk about the past in a way people could relate to now ”



R - Reflection & Legacy continued

The project's legacy is both digital and human.

During November 2025, Crave Arts is creating a Power Heritage digital hub - a permanent 'shop window' hosted on their website. This will include a timeline, photographs, biographies of key figures and links to partner resources such as Explore the Past and the Know Your Place website. The hub will act as a lasting resource for anyone interested in Worcester's electrical heritage, encouraging further contributions and local research.

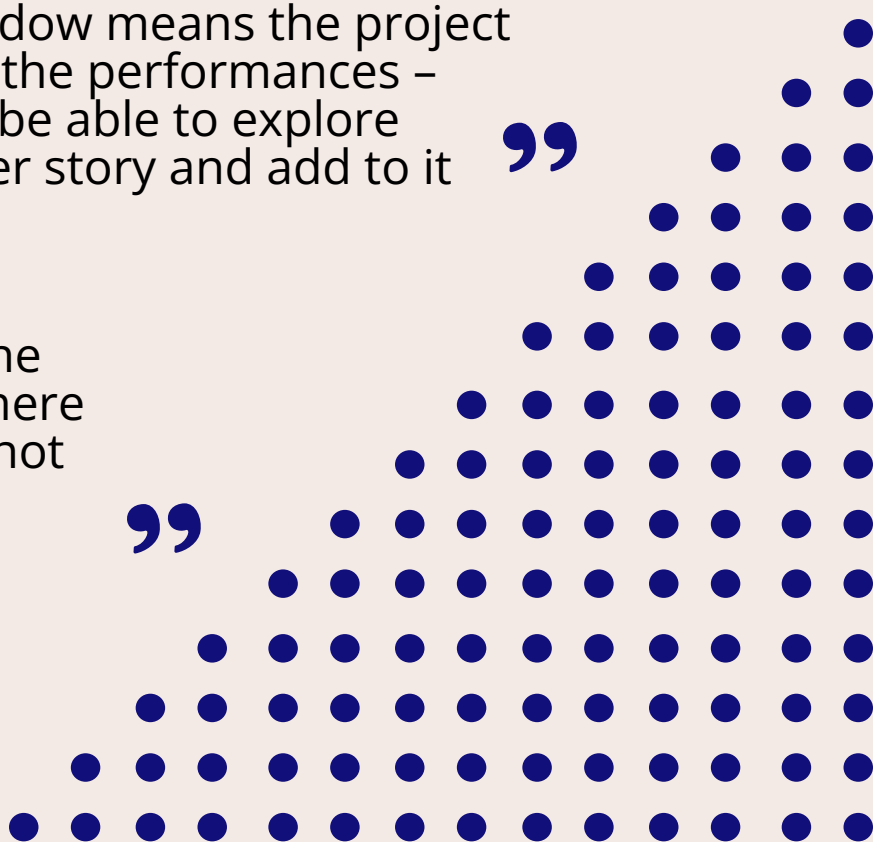
In discussion with the Friends of Cripplegate Park, Crave Arts are also exploring the installation of a heritage plaque with a QR code linking to the digital hub, marking the site of the former power station. If approved, this will provide a visible, public reminder of the city's role in the story of power and innovation. The play has been filmed and uploaded to the Crave Arts website, ensuring the creative work continues to reach audiences beyond the live performances.

Together, these actions represent a sustainable legacy that preserves the learning, creativity and community connections established through the project. Beyond these tangible outcomes, the project has also inspired future ambition.

Both Steve and Debbie expressed interest in developing further heritage-based creative projects, building on the confidence and experience gained. Their reflections suggest that The Power of Worcester has not only celebrated the city's past but also helped shape Crave Arts' future direction — reinforcing their belief that storytelling and heritage together can illuminate what gives a community its true power.

“ The digital shop window means the project doesn't end with the performances – people will still be able to explore Worcester's power story and add to it ”

“ It's nice to know the history is now out there for people to find, not sitting in a box somewhere. ”



Project in Pictures



Lessons Learnt

- **Community enthusiasm grows with involvement.**

Participants responded most positively when they felt they were shaping the work – for example, sharing personal memories or creating scenes that appeared in the play. Early and ongoing participation deepened people's sense of ownership.

- **Clear communication builds confidence.**

Partners valued Crave Arts' open and approachable style but a few collaborators felt uncertain at the early stages about the creative process. This suggests that setting out clear milestones and expectations from the start can strengthen partnerships even further.

- **Accessibility requires continuous attention.**

While the project took practical steps to include visually impaired participants, feedback shows that full accessibility planning should be built in from the beginning and tested with users, rather than added during delivery.

- **Digital engagement has potential but needs targeting.**

Facebook reach was strong and helped drive attendance, yet the lack of geographic or demographic data limited understanding of who was being reached. This indicates the need for more detailed digital monitoring to assess inclusion.

- **Arts-based heritage engages people who might otherwise stay away.**

The creative use of performance and storytelling made complex historical content easy to connect with, proving that artistic interpretation can be a powerful route into heritage learning.



Recommendations

1. Plan for co-creation early.

Continue to involve community voices from the outset in shaping content, script and visual materials. This increases authenticity and strengthens community buy-in.

2. Strengthen accessibility planning.

Continue working with groups such as Sight Concern to co-design inclusive communication and performance methods, ensuring access needs are identified and tested early.

3. Refine partnership communication.

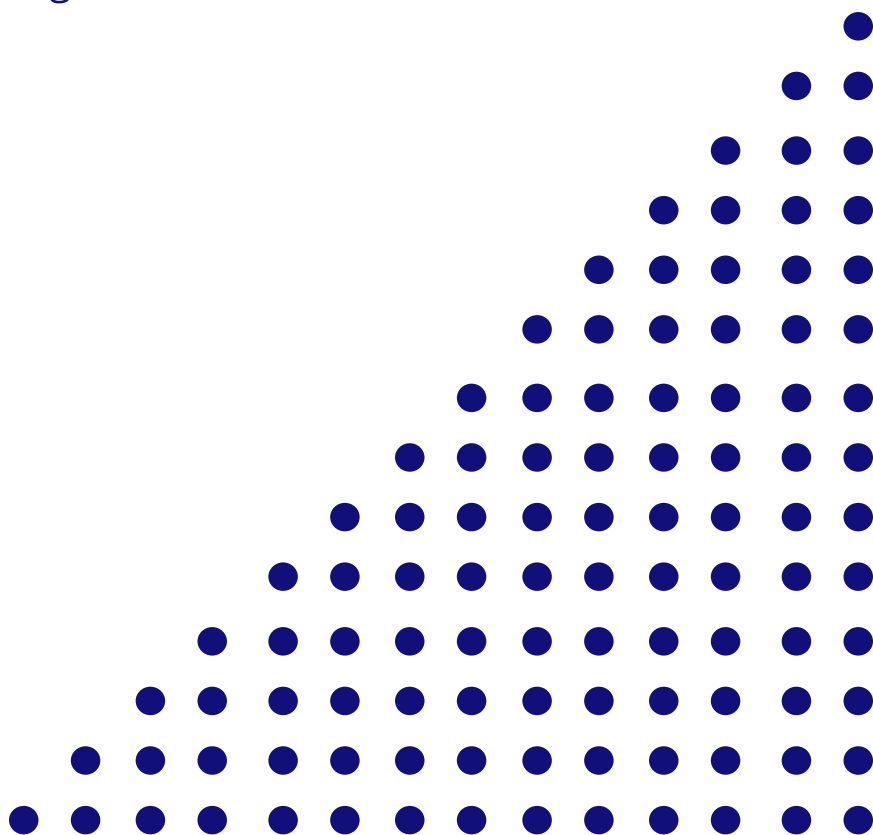
Provide clear schedules, briefing notes and early read-throughs for collaborators to maintain shared understanding and reduce early uncertainty.

4. Develop follow-on engagement.

Build on audience enthusiasm by offering post-show resources, short talks or school sessions that extend learning about Worcester's heritage and green energy themes.

6. Continue using creative storytelling.

The success of The Power of Worcester demonstrates the value of combining history with performance; Crave Arts could use this model to explore other aspects of local heritage in the future.





Thank you

Social Research Builders would like to thank Crave Arts for trusting us to carry out the evaluation of *The Power of Worcester*. Our thanks also go to everyone who participated in the surveys, interviews, and conversations during and after the shows – your insight and generosity shaped this report.

Special thanks to Steve Wilson and Debbie Birch for sharing the data gathered before we joined as evaluators and for their open and supportive collaboration throughout.

We also gratefully acknowledge the support of the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the National Lottery players, whose funding made *The Power of Worcester* possible.

This evaluation was led by Social Research Builders' team of interns: Joe Canning, Grace Detheridge, and Ben Gray.

