



Once Every Preston Guild

2012 saw the last Preston Guild, a huge celebration which comes around every twenty years. The first was in 1179, after King Henry II awarded Preston its first royal charter and the right to have a Guild Merchant. With creative director Stella Hall at the helm, the 2012 Guild included celebratory parades, exhibitions, and new commissions.

Drawing on the history of the Guild, when traders came in from distant parts to trade and celebrate, Spot On collaborated with Dutch location theatre company, PeerGroup, to produce *From Stephen to Avenham*.

Artists Sjoerd Wagenaar and Marin De Boer, together with Mike Bettison from Blaize and a team of UK and Dutch creatives, worked with young people from the Hodder Valley and Preston. They created two human-scale theatrical maps linked by the Hodder and Ribble rivers, with performances that showed their lives through images, food, music, and storytelling. Putting young people's lives from rural and urban Lancashire firmly on the map.

Together they explored the history of the Slaidburn archives and found the beautiful and true story of Joseph Hogson, a musician who wrote love songs for Violet and hid them in tobacco tins around Slaidburn. *Stephen to Avenham* was a love story, a tale of migration from remote landscape to urban centre, a visual feast and a celebration of community creativity. Two site-specific shows connected by water from a barn in Stephen Park up in Gisburn Forest, to Avenham Park in the heart of Preston.

We produced a huge archive of images, film and a book documenting the process.

We are so delighted to have kept in touch with Dutch theatre maker, [Sjoerd, who has sent us a video message:](#)

The next Guild will be in 2032. What will we do next?

[You can see a short video documentary here:](#)

This project was delivered with support from Arts Council England, Preston Guild, Forest of Bowland National Landscapes, Ribble Valley Borough Council and the Forestry Commission.

