

Andrew Crummy's new tapestry project tells the most personal story

The name Andrew Crummy goes together with The Great Tapestry of Scotland like bread and jam. The result of a massive community arts project, the major work is now housed in a new bespoke building in Galashiels.

And the name Crummy and Edinburgh – particularly Craigmillar – also run together as Andrew's late mother Dr Helen Crummy, MBE, was instrumental in starting the Craigmillar Art Festival which was a famed community event. There is a statue in Dr Crummy's memory outside the Craigmillar Library, and the Craigmillar Tapestry, also created by Andrew, was officially launched on [World Community Arts Day](#) in 2017. It is in the spirit of community art that Andrew has produced much of his work.



Andrew Crummy PHOTO Jon Gill

As with many great creatives, the urge to turn something bad in life into something good overtook Andrew when he was diagnosed and treated for throat cancer in 2017. It remains a work in progress, although he has completed some of the drawings which it will be based upon and a few of the tapestry panels are works in progress. He continues to talk to people with cancer, and is using these chats to interpret their very personal stories about cancer with his talent while leaving them to contribute their personal messages. This huge co-design process has the potential to go far beyond Scotland, and there are already people in Brazil and South Africa who are contributing.



The Great Tapestry of Scotland comprises 164 panels so Andrew is far from shy about making big tapestries, and The Cancer Tapestry is likely to be as big if not even bigger. He does not regard the new work as something which belongs to him, rather believing that it belongs to everybody and that he just started it.

At least one of the tapestry panels is nearly complete. Andrew's wife has done most of the stitching on that one, and there are about seven or eight which are in various stages of completeness.

Now award-winning filmmaker, Jon Gill, is planning to produce a documentary series about the making of the tapestry by one of Edinburgh's most famed community artists. Jon explained to The Edinburgh Reporter how he came to meet Andrew and the story so far – which is also encapsulated in this trailer.

Jon explained: "I first heard of the story from my friend Rodney Mountain who is an ENT surgeon at Ninewells Hospital in Dundee. Rod is a consultant who gave me the potted version of the story in his office. I instantly thought, this is a documentary, this is something that people should know about,

be aware of, so that they can know it exists or contribute to it if they want to.

“And at this stage, I didn’t know Andrew, but I’ve since met him on Zoom, first of all, because of Covid and then went across to his studio about a year later.

“it’s just an amazing story. And I’m constantly on the lookout for great stories that otherwise wouldn’t be told.

“To do the story justice I need to put a lot of time into it and I would like to cover some of that time with sponsorship. Just like any film each episode will need funding. I have a musician who is scoring it for me. Documentaries can be difficult to make unless you have a big platform, but I think it is an uplifting story because Andrew is so deeply knitted in with the project. He is part of it in that way and it is a hopeful story.

“Rather than this just being a film which is nice to have and will have a home on the internet, this will be created with a view to entering it in festivals. So there is a benefit for Andrew as it will raise awareness. And at this point I have a track record over the last three years as I have always had something being screened in festivals.”



Jon has a background in healthcare and also in graphic design, whereas the surgeon, Rod was interested in design. They met at Rod's office and he had a picture on his wall. He said to Jon: 'I have to tell you about this. This is somebody I know who I was put in touch with to boost their morale. They've been diagnosed with cancer, and they were feeling very bad about it, understandably.'

Jon continued: "But with his experience as a neck cancer specialist he knew the prognosis for this particular type of cancer was good – and in the course of some conversations on the phone that he had with the patient, he realised who he was. He had seen some of Andrew's drawings in hospital that he done very early on in his treatment, and they were really visceral drawings. They were not at all like the Great Tapestry drawings, which are very traditional, inspired by the style of things like the Bayeux Tapestry."

Rod suggested to Andrew that when he got better he should design a tapestry. By that stage Andrew had designed more than 20 tapestries in Scotland and beyond.

Andrew Crummy said: "The response to the idea to create a

Cancer Tapestry has been fantastic. With many wishing to tell their story of care and compassion. The first panel has been completed and involves over 100 people. With the many we have already involved from those in healthcare to patients, family and friends they all wish to add a stitch and to share a story.

“At present we have 10 panels up and running. An important part of this growing tapestry is a documentary series being made by Jon Gill. It will attempt to tell the many stories in a series of short documentaries, as it is really important to share these stories.

“Cancer touches every family and community and to create a large scale tapestry that contains many, many stories we need support.”

Jon said: “Two things happened. Andrew thought ‘this bloke thinks I’m going to survive’, which obviously he really liked. And, of course, whereas anybody else might sort of see it as an opportunity to just create a new piece of work, Andrew with his background in community arts and the influence that his Mum had on him. So for him it was an opportunity to involve people – and that the cancer tapestry would be the people’s story of cancer.

“The thing that the cancer tapestry has become beyond those two things, is therapy, because everybody who gets involved with it whether for their own sake, or for the sake of somebody that they know, who has been affected by cancer, it means something to them.

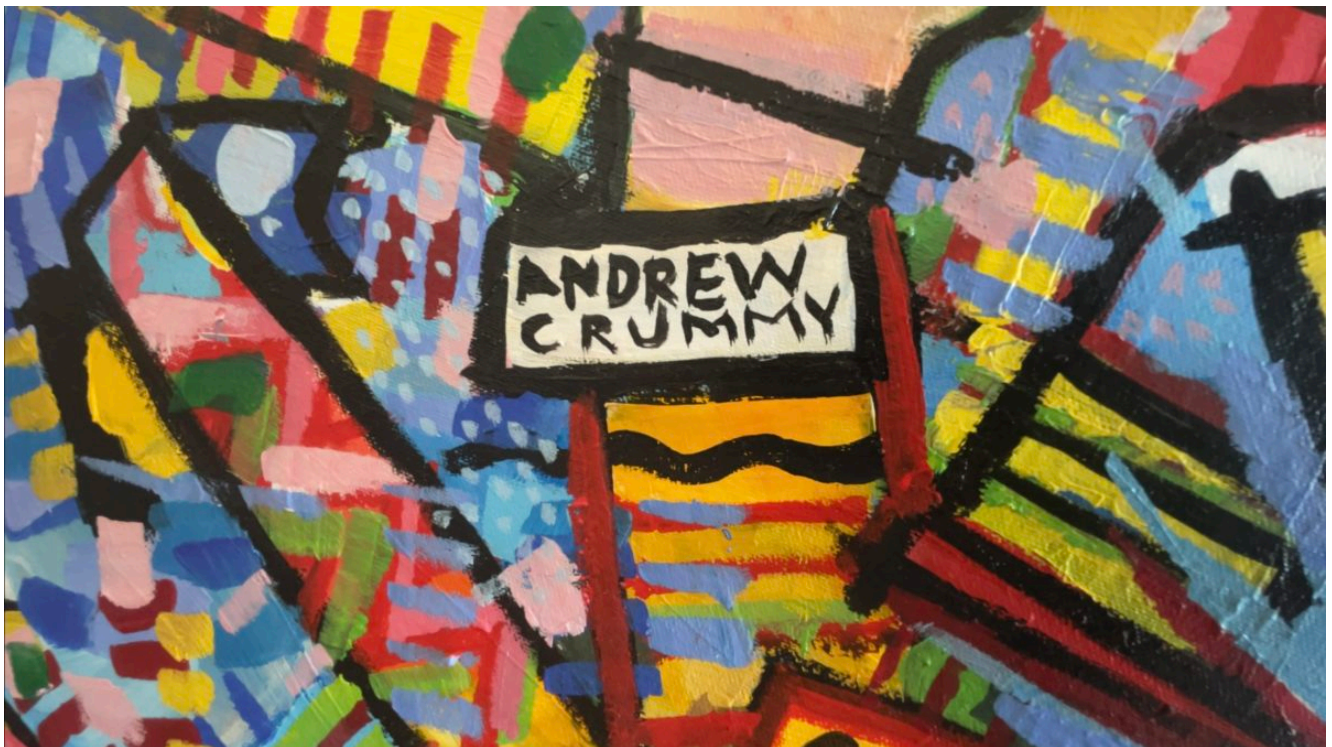
“His work is such that they can you know, there are spaces for them to put something of their own story into it, whether it’s literally designing something in a space that means something to them, or they’re simply stitching a section of the tapestry.”

Jon Gill won the FilmicFest competition run by FilmicPro in

2019 when he made a film about the projectionist at the independent cinema DCA in Dundee. He also won the Dublin Smartphone Film Festival in 2020 with the same documentary. He has also submitted a new film called Lockdown part of which he made in his pyjamas in the city centre in Dundee. He said: "Much to my wife and daughter's embarrassment I went to Dundee with them one day. And they went one way and I went another and I filmed myself for myself in the middle of Dundee in my pyjamas which actually was quite liberating." This film has been shown in Sydney and in San Diego where it won the best ultimate mobile prize. Jon said: "It was a personal thing. It was completely different to making a film about somebody else. Yeah. It was just an extended joke over two minutes."

These have not been long films – generally he makes films of shorter than five minutes, but the Andrew Crummy story will be much bigger with several episodes in a series – and of course that will require financial backing.

If that interests you then email Jon at jon@playfulcommunications.co.uk.





This is a montage of photos of the statue of Helen Crummy MBE in CriagmillarPHOTOS © Martin P McAdam