

Project G – bringing the story of Hiroshima and Nagasaki alive

Genesis of the Hiroshima Seeds Project

In 2014, Manchester City Council accepted a kind offer from the Hiroshima-based Mayors for Peace International Secretariat to receive a number of ginkgo tree seeds originating from a mother tree exposed to the atomic bombing in Hiroshima on August 6th, 1945.

After the bombing, it was feared that nothing would grow again in the city for 75 years, but the following spring, the residents of Hiroshima marvelled that trees and plants had sprung some buds and started to grow again. The original ginkgo tree, exposed 1370 metres from the hypocentre was also badly charred and damaged, but survived and is still living in the historic Shukkeien Garden.

A-bombed trees are seen as living symbols of peace in both Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Hiroshima's seeds project aims to send seeds from these trees around the world to other Mayors for Peace members.

As a Vice President of Mayors for Peace, Manchester was the first UK city to be offered seeds from Hiroshima, and was delighted to receive them.

Development of 'Project G' and its formal launch

The seeds were given to Hulme Community Garden Centre in south Manchester, who agreed to grow and nurture them. On November 5th 2014, the 34th anniversary of Manchester's famous 'nuclear weapons free city' declaration, a formal ceremony was held to announce 'Project G'. Led by the then Lord Mayor of Manchester, Councillor Susan Cooley, the project was explained and a moving reading by the first democratically elected post-war Hiroshima Mayor, Shinso Hamai, of how the trees recovered in 1946, was read out.



Lord Mayor Councillor Susan Cooley with one of the Hiroshima ginkgo trees at Hulme Community Garden Centre



Some of Manchester's ginkgo biloba trees

What is 'Project G'? The partnership with Manchester Museum

'Project G' seeks to bring the story of the Hiroshima ginkgo tree, and of the wider atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, alive to a younger audience. This is being achieved through a school arts and poetry competition. Manchester schoolchildren were asked to think of the disaster in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the important role trees provided in giving hope that the land could recover and grow again, allowing people to live in the city for generations to come.

Following publication in the media of the November 2014 event, the Council was contacted by Manchester Museum, a part of Manchester University, who were interested in developing a partnership to support 'Project G'. The Museum has an important role in delivering the University's social responsibility agenda, and is dedicated to promoting understanding between cultures, and working towards a sustainable world. One of the displays in its 'Living Worlds' gallery tells the story of how nature helped people begin to come to terms with the effects of the Hiroshima atomic bombing, combining origami cranes with a piece of rubble damaged in the Hiroshima bombing and the inspirational story of Sadako Sasaki. It is a perfect fit for 'Project G' and the Council are delighted to work with Manchester Museum in developing it further. The Museum also agreed they would exhibit some of the art and poetry from the schools competition.

The 'Project G' art and poetry schools competition

Six Manchester Primary Schools have taken part in the 'Project G' competition - Birchfield Primary School and St Bernard's Primary School in Rusholme, Heald Place Primary School in Burnage, St Margaret Mary's Primary School in Charlestown, Webster Primary School in Hulme and Manley Park Primary School in Whalley Range. The children who have taken part are between the ages of 7 and 10 years old.

Each school has imagined the project in quite different and imaginative ways and the 140+ entries that were received by the Council were of high quality, well considered and quite inspiring.

A shortlisting process took place to get 3 winning entries from each school, which could be exhibited on 6th August 2015, the 70th anniversary of the Hiroshima atomic bombing.



Shortlisting some of the 140 entries from six Manchester schools taking part in 'Project G'

Hiroshima and Nagasaki 70th anniversary event and 'Project G'

The winning entries from the schools were exhibited as part of a special commemorative event organised by Manchester City Council in partnership with Manchester Museum to remember the 70th anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings.

The winning entries were placed on tables between the exhibition panels of the 'Living Worlds' Gallery in the Museum. One of the ginkgo trees was also brought to the ceremony, as were copies of Manchester's innovative 'Peace Trail' booklets, which highlights some of the landmarks of peace and social justice in the city centre. This is part of a European Lifelong Learning Fund project called 'Discovering Peace in Europe' with six other prominent cities – Vienna, Paris, Berlin, Budapest, The Hague and Turin. Each city has developed similar booklets highlighting some of the people, movements and issues in the city's history relating to issues of peace and social justice in its many forms.

The August 6th ceremony was led by the present Lord Mayor of Manchester, Councillor Paul Murphy. Attending the ceremony were North West England MEPs Julie Ward and Afzal Khan along with Gianni Pitella, a former Vice President of the European Parliament and currently the President of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the Parliament. Several Manchester City Councillors were in attendance, along with leaders of faith groups, community groups, peace groups, students and staff from Manchester University. A number of children, parents and teachers from the schools taking part in 'Project G' also took part in a moving ceremony of readings, silent reflection and poetry.



One of the children from Manley Park School with his winning 'Project G' entry



The Lord Mayor of Manchester with three MEPs, five councillors and the Registrar of Manchester University at Hiroshima Day commemoration ceremony



Gianni Pitella MEP, Julie Ward MEP, the Lord Mayor of Manchester and Afzal Khan MEP in front of the Hiroshima 'Peace' exhibit, Manchester Museum



The winning 'Project G' entries from St Margaret Mary Primary School with some Hiroshima paper cranes and copies of the Manchester Peace Trail

Future plans for 'Project G'

In November 2015 a special event will be held coinciding with Manchester's 35th anniversary of its nuclear weapons free city declaration. The event will be held in Manchester Museum and will include some of the schoolchildren and teachers involved in Project G, along with a number of specially invited guests. Eventually schools will host one of the trees, with others going to city centre locations. The project has been a wonderful, fulfilling partnership bringing the story of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to a young and diverse Manchester audience. It is planned to continue it through 2016 and onwards.