

THE
winter
EDITION



EDITION is a quarterly newsletter produced by Editional Studio, architects based in Manchester, UK.

THE WINTER EDITION's theme is 'play'. We bring you positive, proactive news of playful projects stretching along the A6 from Longsight to Stockport.

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Front Cover :

Play Full Parade, part of the Play Full project led by artists Mimi Dearing (Get It Done) and Emma Martin (Building the Bridge) in partnership with Save the Children UK.



SPOTLIGHT

PLAY FULL : The Power of Play

Words and photographs by Mimi Dearing

What if play wasn't just something that happens at break time, but a way of thinking? What if it could make our homes feel happier, our schools more creative, and our streets more welcoming?

PLAY FULL is a creative project led by artists Mimi Dearing (Get It Done) and Emma Martin (Building the Bridge) in partnership with Save the Children UK.

In this extremely rich creative project, we have been working with Year 5 pupils from three primary schools in Longsight, Manchester, finding out how play can make life better for children at home, at school, and in their communities.

The PLAY FULL project had five aims:

To champion artistic co-creation; where pupils led their own ideas and shaped how play could come to life in their schools.

To support youth-led research, giving children the tools to explore the benefits of play in their worlds.

To build community connection through cross-generational and cross-cultural play activities.

To activate local public spaces through play, transforming them into safe, lively hubs that inspire pride.

To ensure a lasting legacy by documenting our learning and ideas in a book – a resource for other schools, artists and communities to use across the UK.

Our 'Creative Crews' from three primary schools were transformed into PLAY FULL experts; becoming artists, researchers and campaigners. They went into markets, parks, libraries, playgrounds to gather insights on how play happens in their homes, schools and neighbourhoods, and what's stopping it. Following this, they took time to imagine practical and creative solutions that could make their worlds more playful, proving that children can redesign their environments when given the tools and trust.

After gathering their research, the children went on to co-design creative projects for their whole schools, leading large-scale making days where every pupil contributed to the artworks for the PLAY FULL Parade.

In July, these creations filled Crowcroft Park as hundreds of children and families took part in a joyful, noisy, colourful takeover. The parade temporarily transformed a park that many felt wary of using into a lively, welcoming place for play and community connection.

PLAY FULL has shown what's possible when children are trusted as researchers, makers and decision-shapers. With the help of Editorial Studio these ideas are now being directly incorporated into the community plan for Longsight.

The children's creativity has not only influenced themselves and surroundings, it now forms part of Save the Children UK's wider vision for a PLAY FULL World, where all children have the freedom and support to play, learn and thrive.





DEEP DIVE

Longsight has just as much community spirit as Withington. So why does it look so neglected?

Words by Sophie Atkinson, photographs by Solomon Hughes

Has Withington ever witnessed such a radical glow up? Only a few years ago, Copson Street was besieged by heavy traffic, and had cramped, crowded pavements. Now, partial pedestrianisation and new seating, trees and lighting give it a continental air – squint, and it could be a minor boulevard in Barcelona. The neighbourhood hasn't been visited by a good fairy, but a more potent force: a good community project.

Cycle a quarter of an hour east, and you'll find just as much engagement from Longsight residents. The list of community groups feels endless: gardening group BeLongsight, social club Better We and Longsight

Community Art Space are just three. But the South Mancunian neighbourhoods couldn't look more different. Instead of trees and colourful murals, Longsight has swathes of tarmac and a park with a recurring rat problem. Instead of a pretty half-pedestrianised street, there is a road in such poor condition that it often floods, forcing children to regularly have to sport wellies alongside their uniform on their way to school. All of which begs a question: if Longsight has similar levels of resident engagement as Withington, why does so much of the area look worn out and neglected?

As is so often the case in Britain, this is a story about insufficient

investment. Fifteen years of austerity has meant councils funds were limited and often those shouting the loudest seemed get the goods. The Withington Village Framework – a wishlist of public realm projects – was funded by Manchester City Council off the back of an active community group operating in the area. While locals engaging with their neighbourhood is great, it does create an imbalance. Councils rely on active community groups to kick-start regeneration and investment, and, as such, more affluent areas where residents have more free time and professional experience to navigate local bureaucracy are naturally at an advantage.

But we're on the cusp of an enormous opportunity. A new three-year government deal is giving certain local councils a funding boost and Manchester council is among the

anointed. Neighbourhoods that have their ducks in a row stand to benefit most from this. This puts Longsight in a particularly strong position. After seeing how effective the community plan was in Withington, Longsight residents met up with Withington councillors in November 2024 to hear how they'd pulled it together and were inspired to set up a community forum to brainstorm ideas of their own.

As a consequence, at the end of 2024, Longsight Community Art Space (LCAS) partnered with architects Editional Studio to develop a long-term strategy for Longsight that would incorporate local makers and artists to design and undertake the proposals. Instead of change being imposed miles out of Longsight by council officials who rarely visited the neighbourhood, they wanted to achieve bottom-up change led by the community.

Residents have been pioneering this transformation for several years. Since 2015, the community group BeLongsight has spearheaded efforts to combat fly-tipping and littering by greening local alleyways. Similarly, LCAS revitalised a disused bowling green in Crowcroft Park into a pear orchard and established the annual Our Longsight Festival, which has already doubled in size. These initiatives have been achieved with minimal funding, relying instead on the dedication of volunteers determined to take the community's future into their own hands.

Despite the success of these initiatives, conversations with the volunteers reveal a persistent sense that resident-led action can only go so far. Claire Biggs, the lead volunteer for the orchard project



notes that coordinating it was far more demanding than initially anticipated:

"And so it isn't just, 'right, I'm there for the four hours that we work on a Wednesday morning.' It's all the rest of the stuff that goes around it, and that applies to all of the community groups and the activities they do, doesn't it?"

Community groups move mountains (and orchards), but even they have limits. While planting trees in a park is something volunteers can carry out, it's beyond your average community group's abilities to re-landscape an entire high street, install flood prevention measures and play equipment while achieving necessary approvals from the planning and highways committee.

It's clear that after a certain point, if volunteer burn out is to be avoided, paid professionals need to step in to act as a channel for their ideas. This would be a person who could speak to the different groups and use these conversations and their own expertise to pull together a clear community vision to attract funding - which is where the architecture practice Editorial Studio stepped in.

Working with the practice, residents flagged the different challenges the area is facing. For example, places like Slade Lane Community Garden that could be a pleasant interval of green between Stockport Road and Slade Lane, were it not for an unfortunate pairing: a supermarket just across from the park and the pigeons that call the park home.

"People will buy lentils or something and they will just literally rip the bag open," Rizwana tells me. The



food doesn't only attract birds. *"I have actually seen it during broad daylight, rats and pigeons sat right next to each other. It was a terrifying sight, actually."*

Then there's Brook Terrace, a critical pedestrian artery, particularly for students at Stanley Grove Primary School. However, the road's poor condition makes it nearly impassable during wet weather. The area has earned the nickname 'Longsight Lido' due to the deep standing water that collects there which, combined with a lack of lighting in the tunnel, creates a treacherous environment for the community.

There are other, broader concerns: insufficient street lighting, making certain areas feel unwelcoming and unsafe at night; huge expanses of hard tarmac with limited planting, and a severe lack of play equipment

for children, making the area feel devoid of joy and life.

All this is set to change. Editional Studio and the local community are half way through co-creating 'Our Longsight Community Plan' that builds these conversations into a cohesive 10 year vision for the area - ticking off 'easy wins' in the immediate years and proposing strategic, large-scale changes in the longer term. Their approach has been to ease the strain by tying in to existing events such as hosting drawing workshops at Our Longsight Festival and co-designing with local school children as part of the 'PLAY FULL' project. This has meant minimising the 'time-tax' that feels built into so many neighbourhood improvement projects.

Inspired by the hyper-local 'Preston Model', the projects have been

broken down into bite-sized chunks, creating paid commissions for resident artists and makers (rather than a large, remote contractor), ensuring that investment is retained and this infectious community spirit creates a ripple effect.

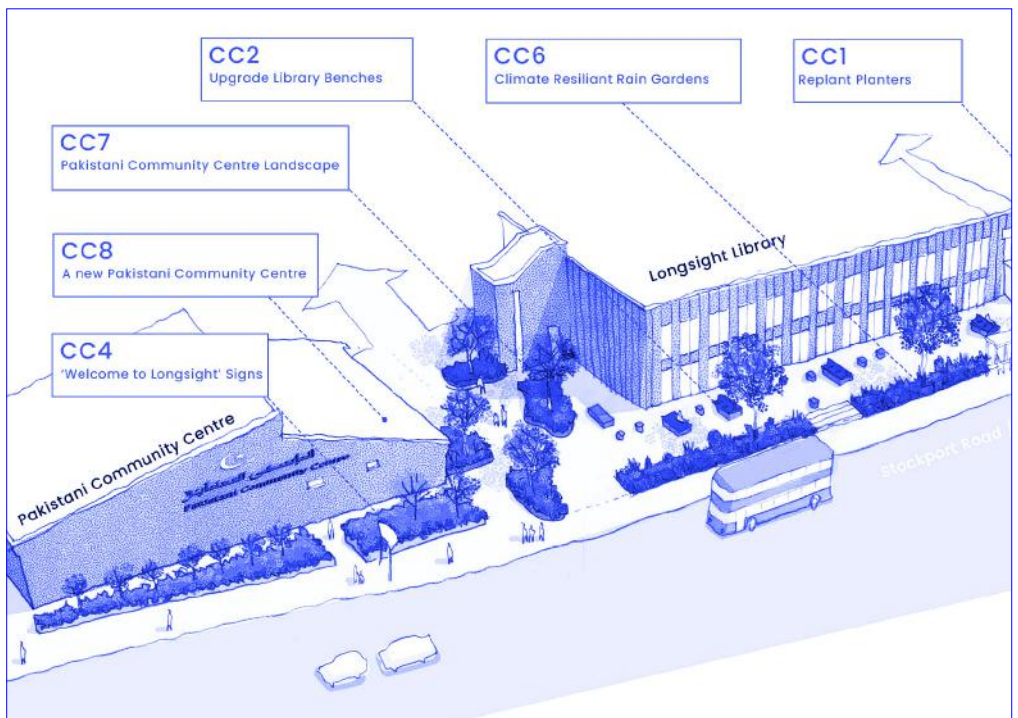
The alterations vary wildly in scale and location, but the red thread running through the proposals is an attempt to reawaken pride in the area and a hope that these changes might make people want to commit to Longsight for the long haul. This is an attempt to counter the transience that Saman highlighted:

"When I talk to other people, I get the sense Longsight is a middle ground, like a temporary place, and people hope to move to all the bougie places, like Chorlton and Didsbury."

Editorial Studio hopes to shift perceptions with their 'oven-ready', community-backed improvements to be undertaken as funding becomes available, the first batch of which are to be installed this spring.

First stop: the library. Rather than removing the library's benches and bringing in new ones, the practice plans to adapt what's there. The existing concrete slabs will have timber seats, orange arm and back-rests added; making them more comfortable and accessible to use as well as brightening up the space. To encourage play, board games will be added to encourage people to stay and activate the space. It's a small step, but one that specifically responds to residents' requests. This approach of reworking what's there serves a dual purpose: it reduces the project's environmental footprint as well as allowing the funding to stretch further.





The longer-term strategy involves planting wide and luscious ‘rain gardens’ along the whole strip of pavement that will act as a buffer from the road, as well as a climate resilience tactic to reduce flooding. Pocket parks and playable landscapes designed in collaboration with school children will reinforce a crucial lesson: play is an essential part of everyday life. The hope is that seeing their ideas implemented will give young people a sense of empowerment and belonging in their neighbourhood

Slade Lane Community Garden poses more of a puzzle. In order to discourage feeding the pigeons, Editorial Studio are designing bold, playable floor graphics in collaboration with local artist Nadia Sultana. These will go on the tarmac where lentils and bread are often left. The approach is more carrot,

less stick: a way of nudging people to use the space for play, rather than feeding birds. This sense of invitation is anchored by large ‘Welcome to Longsight’ signage at the A6 Gateway, marking a clear point of pride for the area. To complete the transformation, a whimsical slide is proposed be installed down the railway embankment, delivering residents directly to the bus stop and turning a once-overlooked corner into a joyful, welcoming landmark.

Next up is Brook Terrace, the waterlogged route to school. This will be transformed with changes to how the street is used, including blocking off a rat run to Lidl and introducing new drainage making it a pedestrian-first route. Then comes the implementation of a new ‘school street’ designation – closing the route off to traffic for an hour around pick up and drop off times, allowing

kids to use the street to play on their way to school. In the longer term, the route would be re-planted and re-paved, transforming it from a dirty wet alley to somewhere you actually want to walk and enjoy the afternoon sun.

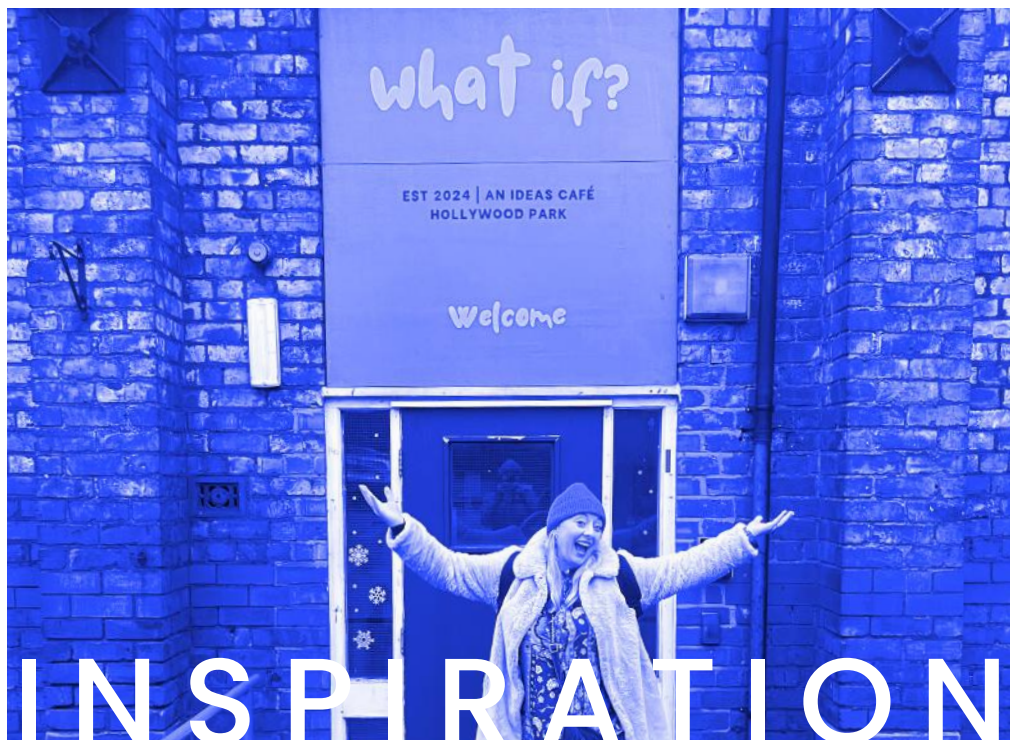
Once these phases have been completed, Editional Studio is looking to work with Longsight Market holders to improve one of the most popular but neglected areas, with visions of a new civic square for events such as Eid and the annual Winter Welcome parade. Beyond this a longer-term vision is emerging: a new Community Centre funded by an integrated housing model providing much needed community homes and community space in a prime, transit-connected location.

During our conversation, Rizwana describes Longsight having an image problem.

"It's common to be looked down upon because of where you live, when you live here,".

But solving this starts with residents first. If new arrivals to the neighbourhood feel lucky to be there, and are able to see Longsight as their forever home – not a stopover – they're more likely to invest their time and energy into making the neighbourhood the best version of itself. If a single pear tree can grow into a flourishing community orchard, a reimagined high street holds the potential to transform not just the landscape, but the spirit of Longsight for generations to come.





Idea > Action

with Pauline Johnstone of Civic & Social by Jack Richards

Pauline sits in a coat and hat in a semi-derelict chapel and sets out the plan for the building :

"This is a demonstrator of what social and climate resilience is. It's about building regenerative green skills. It's about play as a tool for power. It's about having people rested in communities and cared for so that they can be caring to the planet and each other."

It's a rainy December morning and water is trickling down the walls through holes in the ceiling... You'd be forgiven for having doubts but Pauline has an impressive track record for making good things happen; from instigating the incredible cycle cafe Station South, to a tumultuous time introducing

Active Neighbourhoods to Greater Manchester, and bringing her concept for 'On the Way Play' to Stockport.

We're meeting at 'What If?', Pauline's latest project, an idea's cafe at the heart of what will become 'Stockport Town Centre West' - the warehouses and mills in the bottom of the valley bounded by Hollywood Park, the River Mersey, the viaduct and the mighty pyramid.

ES: How did 'What If?' come about?

PJ: Stockport Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC) asked me to help identify an approach for how best to improve social infrastructure in the whole of the regeneration area. I was the 'boots on the ground'

- understanding the strengths of Edgeley as it exists already, and identifying some of the social gaps to get a sense of what people love about the place and what needed more love.

Then the MDC asked, "Instead of just doing the approach, do you want to implement it?". We identified the building; it had been a pupil referral unit, a nursery, a place for older people to hang out. Its first use was as the Hollywood Mission; a Methodist chapel. We gave it a lick of paint and opened an idea's cafe for 8 weeks. We put on a mosaic of different events to test what the space could be, who would use it and to ask... What if we had a place to connect? What would it feel like? What would it do? Who would it be for? How would it sustain itself?



ES: What is the role of your consultancy - Civic & Social - in this process?

PJ: Our approach is to focus on resourcing and empowering people to make places better. Start with the place and the people and with help from someone like myself, with a little bit of experience and a lot of drive and passion for social justice, try and marry up what's going to happen with what is already here.

Through my advocacy as a Community Asset Developer, I'm helping to grow the culture of collaboration. It's not a straight line. It's messy, but it's good messy. People say, "how could you justify spending money on this, it's a nice-to-have", but community development requires a steward of an idea; someone who can turn an idea into an action. That is all I ever say to myself when I wake up in the morning; "idea, action...what are the steps to make good stuff happen?"

ES: You first undertook that role of community instigator for Levenshulme Active Neighbourhood, which became pretty divisive. How did that come about and what did you take away from the experience?

PJ: I was a singer in a band, working as a receptionist, and thought "Wouldn't it be good if...?" A group of us managed to get £3.5 million in funding for the project, money that was not on the radar of the council. We booted down the door at highways saying, "Please sign off this funding application that we've written for you!".

I took on the role of Project Coordinator. Changing places needs someone with the will and the power

to make it happen. You can have a great idea and you can find the money – there's an abundance of money out there, it's just about where it gets directed to.

Levenshulme Active Neighbourhood was the first of its kind in Greater Manchester so everybody had eyes on it. It got too big for its boots and because I was 'the face' or the 'risk taker', other consultants could drop away. I had to sell my house. I was getting death threats. It was a life-changing experience, and I can laugh now, but with a brand new baby, it was scary at the time.

It's devastating thinking about the play street and modal filter designs that people will never see but you can see the positive impact on schemes in other places, and how it has fed into Manchester's Active Travel Strategy. It's that little nudge-nudge-nudge. You might not achieve as much as the next person that has the capacity to do it faster or bigger, but you've tested it for them and you need to celebrate that. As a woman of a certain age, I can celebrate when I've been resilient enough to go, "I fucked that up, what's next?"

ES: I have a three year old, so spend a lot of my time at the little cycle track outside Station South – how was play embedded in the vision and how did that feed into the 'On the Way Play' concept?

PJ: I had my baby whilst I was doing Station South and I'm a big kid myself. The co-designed vision included having a small area for play. It cost something like six grand and when the budget was getting tight, they wanted to scrap it. I insisted that it stayed as I knew it would be great for business.



The cycle track inspired 'On the Way Play', which as a concept is dead easy to understand... focusing on the spaces in between and encouraging people to dwell. It's inspired by European approach of centralising play; incorporating small parks into city streets.

It raises a serious point about what is possible for Manchester; we're going to have to deal with climate adaptation, people will be coming out later in the evening, people will be looking for shade, for rest, for dwell, for play outside in the cool. Incidental outdoor play will benefit the economy. There's so much potential when it comes to play, and it's everyone's right to do that in childhood and beyond. But crucially how do we retain playfulness as adults so that you don't lose your mind?



REFLECTION

Reclaiming our creativity

by Jo Sharples

Our involvement with the Play Full project was a truly uplifting experience that stood in high contrast to the global realities of 2025. With encouragement, the young people drew extravagant floor games in chalk requiring us to close our eyes, follow lines, dance, slide down a snake or climb up a ladder...

There was a scary moment though, at the beginning, when talking about what the young people might like to see, to invent, to imagine – they got to work and started writing words like ‘PAINTING’ and ‘GAMES’ on the ground. I had a sinking feeling, it was like watching the impact of Michel Gove’s axing of arts from education in real time. Having worked with these children for six months, Mimi (Project

Lead) also had a similar observation, noticing that the young people found it difficult to imagine bigger, wilder ideas – the kind of ‘other world’ one might dream up as child seemed difficult for them to enter into.

Of course, this is not the fault of these young people but this experience does point to a broader trend that many suggest stems from a lack of play. For anyone wanting to explore further, this point is made particularly convincingly by Rob Hopkin’s inspirational book *‘From what is, to what if’*. Yet adults too are far from immune to a dwindling imagination – just look to the highest office, where the PM seems disastrously incapable of creating any inspirational vision.

So where is our creativity going? We don't have to look far, we're chained to them. The constant burden of 'staying up to date' or 'being productive' or simply 'glazing over and scrolling' on screens is having immeasurable impacts. Screens occupy our minds so much that there is no space left to imagine, for the mind to wander, to dream.

You might argue that creativity is the least of our worries in the face of the consequences of big tech but the ability to think outside the box is vital for us. That goes from our day to day designing of buildings to entirely rethinking how we build in the face of the climate emergency. The potential of creative thinking is vastly underestimated. For example, the Mayor of Bogota's idea to place mime artists at road junctions to direct traffic certainly didn't come from a spreadsheet - but the results speak volumes, reducing traffic accidents by 50%.

This response may be in part because our need for creativity is deeply rooted. It is not merely a nicety, but a necessity. The latin phrase for people playing 'homo ludus' - stems from animals, it is a primal need and innate within all of us. The insidious removal of play and creativity from our lives has dire consequences. At the most alarming, psychologist Stuart Brown concluded from studying convicted murderers that 'pathological aggression is often characterised by a childhood blighted with little or no playfulness.'

However futile it may seem, we have started an experiment to counter this trajectory. We have unplugged from social media, removed our work from instagram and committed to not posting throughout 2026.

Instead we want to reclaim this time for creativity, deeper pondering & sharing positive news (like this) and making connections in real-life (see launch party invite overleaf).

We don't know how this idea will play out and if we have to drag our heels back online, so be it. But reassuringly, it seems we're not the only ones - social media useage apparently peaked in 2022 and has been in steadily decline ever since, particularly in younger age groups.

Recently I have often found myself energised by younger people questioning norms and refusing to comply. One such moment was by 9 year old Zahra who instead of being contained by our dull request for sensible solutions to play, responded:

"I'm a rebel, everything should be limitless". Amen.



REAL LIFE EVENTS



THE EDITION LAUNCH PARTY
26th February
6PM @ Editorial Studio

Join us for a drink at the studio to celebrate the launch of our newsletter!



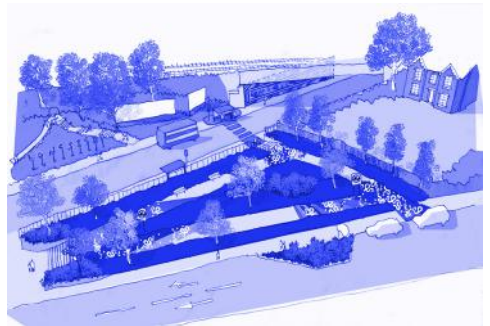
MANCHESTER CERAMICS FAIR
7th & 8th March
10am - 3:30pm @ The Whitworth

Organised by friends of the studio, Sarah and Sarah, the fair features over 70 makers from the north-west.



THE CANOPY GUIDE TO RETROFIT
25th February
3-6PM @ Imagine Leeds

Jack will be at the launch event for Canopy Housing's Retrofit Guide which Editorial Studio co-wrote last year.



OUR LONGSIGHT COMMUNITY PLAN PUBLIC MEETING
24th March 6pm @ Longsight Library

We'll be sharing the next round of proposals for the District Centre focusing on shopfronts, the Market and the Health Centre.

If you've enjoyed reading The Winter Edition, please pass it on to someone else who will find it interesting.

*Pop in to the studio if you're passing!
Jo & Jack.*