



## Working in Freedom

Martians Reunited  
talks to

## Peter Jacobs

Martians Reunited recently talked to Peter Jacobs in our occasional series about individual Martians and their activities.

Peter's Mars career spanned both Petcare and Confectionery and included roles in Manufacturing, Purchasing and Sales, ending up as Sales Director for Mars Confectionery in Slough. After leaving Mars, Peter was successively Chief Executive of the British Sugar Company, Berisford plc and finally BUPA, along with a string of non-executive roles that still continue.

His big retirement project, however, is [Cove Park](#), a residency centre for all the arts - theatre, music, literature, painting, sculpture, ceramics and more - which Peter and his wife Eileen, herself a practising artist, founded.

The inspiration came while Peter and Eileen were in Aspen for a seminar in the mid 90's: they were inspired by an artist centre they saw there and wondered whether something similar might be successful in Britain. Having taken advice - and been egged on from all quarters - Peter and Eileen did their research and set up Cove Park in 1999, running their first programme of residencies in 2000.

"We spent two years looking for a site: we were keen for it to be in Scotland and near the galleries and facilities of Glasgow. We started off by looking for fine buildings but we had no luck finding precisely the right thing. Then finally we came across Cove Park, 50 acres of hillside on the banks of Loch Long, and 20 minutes north of Helensburgh."

The buildings have an unusual pedigree - some of them are the solid oak houses that were used in [Castaway 2000](#), the reality TV programme which was the forerunner of Big Brother. "They were expensive but of wonderful quality",

Peter explained. "Then we added converted shipping containers: containers have been converted into lots of things but had never been used as living accommodation before." All the roofs were covered with turf, so that they all fade into the hillside.

*What was the vision behind Cove Park?*

"Cove Park was initially established for artists at a turning point in their career, to give them the opportunity of reviewing where they had got to and, possibly, setting off in a new direction. Then we also started offering residencies to new graduates from art school with high potential. The two groups are more or less 50-50 now."

*How are artists chosen for residencies?*

"Candidates are not selected just for their stature or potential as artists; it's a small community and we tend to have a mixture of disciplines on site at the same time, so artists also have to be able to fit in with the others who are around the same time.

"In most arts centres artists tend to spend their time only with other people in the same specialism: so, for example, ceramic artists spend time with other ceramic artists and musicians with other musicians. We tend to offer people a broader mix and they often spin off each other. It's always nice when we hear work produced jointly by people who met each other at Cove Park."

*How is the venture funded?*

"We have three sources of funding at the moment, Peter said. "The first, and our main source of funding, is the Scottish Arts Council. The second is a small collection of charitable foundations, of which the Jerwood Foundation is the largest. These charitable trusts give us a bit more flexibility and that enables us to be adventurous with less well-known artists and also with the sorts of residency that we set up: for example recently we set up a residency for museum curators - I don't think that's been done before.

"And finally, we receive private donations of money, equipment and furniture - computers, beds, chairs, musical instruments - in fact, anything which enables us to spend such money as we have on the artists themselves."

*What do you ask in return from the artists who come to Cove Park?*

"We don't ask anything from people - except feedback. Most centres expect artists to have produced a piece of work or a body of work by the end of their residency - but we don't require anything like that. If people are using the time to rethink their direction, then they can't be expected to combine that with producing short term output as well.

"Of course it's rewarding to go to an exhibition and find works made by artists while they were at Cove Park, or to go to the theatre and see a piece that represents a collaboration of two people who met there, but we don't want to

put pressure on people to deliver, that's the whole point: they have to be able to explore and experiment without expectation. And they do work phenomenally hard."

*How can people support Cove Park and get involved?*

"Because this is by its nature a low-key enterprise, designed to give artists time and space, it is more difficult for us to attract big corporate funding, as the corporates need to donate to causes that give them exposure to their target market.

"People can support us in all sorts of ways: money, time or indeed specific items of equipment. Our current big priority is to replace the main building and we hope that people will come forward to help sponsor that - whether it's the whole building or just a brick. And we are always grateful for volunteer help: there is a lot to do and volunteers often find themselves getting involved in all sorts of ways.

"Friends of Cove Park are invited to our monthly dinners and other functions, where we bring artists, sponsors and other interesting people together. And it is possible for people to hire the buildings between November and April: artists' residencies run from May to October of each year and outside that season Cove Park is available for executive meetings, workshops and other special events or even big family reunions."

*So, looking back over the last ten years, what have been the highlights?*

"The greatest highlights have probably been working with such interesting people, for example Margaret Atwood, or Tom Morris, the director of the London National Theatre's extraordinary production, [War Horse](#).

"Also, we can see that these people get a big benefit from being at Cove Park; they value and appreciate the experience and that's of course very rewarding."

*And the downsides?*

"Well, it has the same financial pressures as running a business; it may be on a smaller scale but the pressures are the same.

"But I think by and large it's been successful. And that's very satisfying."

*"Everything that is really great and inspiring is created by the individual who can work in freedom"*      *Albert Einstein*

[www.covepark.org](http://www.covepark.org)