

Case study

PPE Factory at the Chelsea Centre for the Creative Industries



This atmospheric photograph appeared in the [Queen's Christmas Message](#) when Her Majesty spoke of the Parable of the Good Samaritan (image appears at 3m 18s). The image speaks powerfully of how Morley College has sought to serve its local communities during the pandemic.

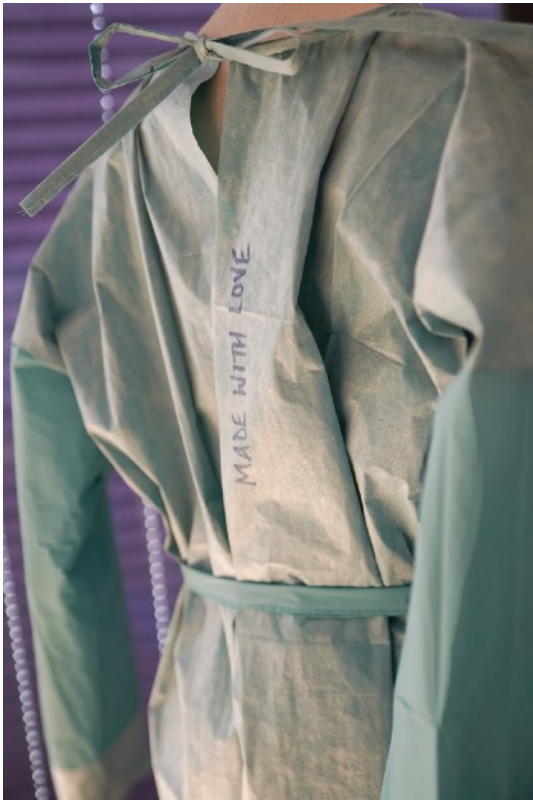
The photograph, called 'PPE Volunteer', was taken by the photojournalist Joe Newman at our Chelsea Centre in Hortensia Road during the first wave of the pandemic. It documents how volunteers and local staff – supported by Director of Estates Nigel Garrigan – responded to a desperate plea for help from the nearby Royal Brompton Hospital when promised supplies of PPE did not arrive.

Classrooms and communal spaces were transformed overnight into a pop-up PPE factory with sewing machines and the expertise of the fashion department put to new uses. Volunteers manufactured gowns to a specified pattern using materials such as theatre drapes.

Amazingly the volunteers went on to produce over 30,000 gowns in a three month period. When their work was drawing to a close, we received a letter of appreciation from the Royal Brompton, an extract of which is reproduced on page 2 of this case study, bringing home just how significant the contribution was.

Joe Newman's 'PPE Volunteer' photograph has taken on its own special significance for Morley. It was one of 100 out of 31,000 entries chosen for the **National Portrait Gallery's** ['Hold Still'](#) exhibition depicting life during lockdown. The selection was made by a panel including HRH The Duchess of Cambridge and the Director of the National Portrait Gallery, and Joe's photograph was one of five singled with a glowing tribute in the Director's Choice:

"This is such a compelling image of the ingenuity and selflessness displayed by so many over the last few months. The side light coming in from the window is also fantastic – like a Vermeer!"



Joe has since been interviewed twice on the Morley Gallery Podcast on **Morley Radio**. In [Episode 4](#), he describes his experience as one of the volunteers at the PPE factory and how he came to document this as a photojournalist. In [Episode 7](#) (from 26m), he gives an update, reflecting on his photograph appearing in the Queen's Christmas Message.

Morley Gallery held a [digital exhibition](#) of a wider series of photographs taken by Joe at the PPE factory and the plan is to mount this as a physical exhibition at the Chelsea Centre as soon as the current lockdown ends, and to use this as a way of thanking everyone involved.

This case study illustrates Morley at its best, serving its local community through the practical artistic endeavours in which the college specialises – fashion, photography, radio, exhibitions – but in ways that could not have been previously imagined.

Dr Stuart Edwards
Chair of Governors
Morley College London

The production facility to which you devoted your valuable skills, was a light at the end of a very dark tunnel. Having enough supplies of the correct personal protective equipment clearly had a direct effect on patient care. You may not be aware that, because of our respiratory and critical care expertise, at Royal Brompton we cared for some of the most seriously ill Covid patients, with a significantly expanded intensive care provision. Teams in three intensive care units and one high dependency area treated well over a hundred patients, some of whom were with us for many weeks. Our PPE requirement for each patient was substantial.

What may be less apparent however, is the effect that your volunteering had on staff wellbeing, on two fronts. Firstly, the knowledge that irrespective of any national issues with PPE supply, we had a guaranteed source of vital gowns, was a source of comfort for staff who were facing challenges and pressures on a scale they had never before experienced. Secondly, the fact that members of the public, many of whom were facing extraordinary personal challenges of their own, were coming together, working long shifts to provide vital PPE, served as a great motivational boost. It did not take long for word to get around about the amazing work going on in Hortensia Road.

We are aware that things are drawing to a close this week and want to express our most sincere gratitude to you for the part you played in our COVID-19 response.

When we come to write our account of the pandemic, the contribution made by our amazing gown volunteers will not be forgotten.

Extract from a letter sent on 29 June 2020 to Dr. Andrew Gower, Principal and CEO of Morley College London by Baroness (Sally) Morgan of Huyton and Robert J Bell, Chair and Chief Executive respectively of the Royal Brompton & Harefield NHS Foundation Trust