In December 2019 I was delighted to be commissioned by Wakefield Council to create an installation based on a rhubarb forcing shed for their 2020 Wakefield Rhubarb Festival. I designed a 17m long replica rhubarb forcing shed housing a multi-compartment installation. Each compartment was designed to provide total blackout so the only light was from artificial sources. The 5 compartments contained real growing rhubarb, light installations and a soundscape by composer and sound artist Duncan Chapman, created from recordings of the actual sounds made by growing rhubarb.

I wanted the shed to convey the uniqueness of the growing conditions of forced rhubarb and celebrate its importance to the district and its people. Rhubarb Shed also explores the energies at the heart of our relationship with plants. Plants absorb solar energy from the Sun and transform it into chemical energy. When we eat plants the chemical energy is transformed into mechanical, thermal and electrical energy, enabling us to be active.

Rhubarb Shed was divided into three sections representing these energies. The real rhubarb in section one showed how the stored chemical energy enables the plants to grow in the dark.

In section two the illuminated rhubarb lanterns were a visual representation of the energy in the growing plants.

The thoughts and emotions written on the rhubarb jam jars in section three represented how the energy we get by eating food made from plants makes us active.

The shed was constructed by artist duo Annie Nelson and Chris Woodward (Yoke), the rhubarb lanterns were designed with artist Helen Thomas and made by communities across the Wakefield District.

200 rhubarb lanterns were made for the interior of the shed during workshops in libraries, including Pontefract, Castleford, Horbury, South Elmsall, Featherstone, Airedale and Sandal.

200 illuminated rhubarb jars were created containing words describing activities that people enjoyed in their community, with contributions from Action Mix Asian Women's Group, Kinsley and Fitzwilliam Waking Group, 5 Towns Stroke Supporters Group, Creative Aging (for people living with Dementia) amongst others.

300 rhubarb lanterns were made during the 7 days of the festival to decorate the plinths leading to the Rhubarb Shed adding to the 40 made in advance, bringing the total number of rhubarb lanterns to 540!

The shed opened on Monday 17th February and closed on Sunday 23rd February and attracted 18000 visitors. Best wishes,

Tony Wade