Salmon Fishing on the Tweed

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This project strengthens the impact of AHRC studentship collaboration with Cittaslow Berwick-upon-Tweed. It delivers a discrete new project of citizen-led story-telling and dissemination for the Berwick 900 Festival, understanding salmon fishing as the embodiment of a slow philosophy towards natural resources, heritage and local livelihoods. This project has been engaging residents of Berwick in a process of recording their untold stories and diverse multi-sensory knowledge of fishing on the Tweed through 'pop-up' engagement events intended to invite public dialogue. Social renewal lies at the heart of a 3-stage process of co-production, focussed on efforts to save the last Berwick fishery.

Two small-scale events were held in traditional fishing communities, in collaboration with local history experts representing Our Families (a Berwick Records Office, Heritage Lottery funded project for Berwick 900). Many of the local residents who participated brought with them news cuttings and documents recording historic family connections to the netting industry. Publicity in the Berwick Advertiser and via posters and social media prompted further stories from further afield. Preliminary themes from these events shaped large-scale public engagement in July; one day at a food festival on the Quayside (c.150 visitors) and three days in Berwick Town Hall (c.900 visitors); followed by an exhibition through August at the Watchtower Gallery. The research team are processing themes from dozens of stories collected so far (and through continuing collaboration with civic organisations) and reflecting on the lessons to be learned from different approaches to community engagement and story-telling. The research has already captured the imagination of a non-academic audience and it continues to feed into and respond to local public debate on the topic.

The initial stages of the research made extensive use of social media and local press and radio outlets to draw attention to the project and our preliminary observations. For instance, short feature articles have been published in the Berwick Advertiser (5th June 2015); The Southern Reporter (5th June 2015); The Chronicle (3rd August 2015) and on BBC Radio Borders (tbc), in addition to images and text posted on the Berwick 900 and Berwick Arts and Crafts web-site and Facebook pages.

The primary output of the project was a 'souvenir' publication intended for a general audience, not least the wide range of civic organisations and fishing family communities and individuals who contributed to the project. Furthermore, findings are emerging that will contribute new knowledge on 'intangible' 'slow' cultural ecologies and the methodology involved will provide useful insights for future community engagement strategies.

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