

Wye Valley River Festival

WVRF 2016 Evaluation and Reflection Report



“Landscapes are living realities in continuous transformation ... a source of creativity and change.” International Scientific Committee on Cultural Landscapes ICOMOS-IFLA 2009

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Festival Overview

The Wye Valley River Festival (WVRF) is an ambitious arts & environment festival that aims to celebrate, unite and excite the communities of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and enthuse and entice those beyond it.

The Wye Valley River Festival is a biennial festival inspired by the landscape and led by arts professionals collaborating with the people who live and work in the Wye Valley AONB. It is a festival with intentions to inspire and challenge, changing the way we look at ourselves and how we see things, how we relate to our environment, neighbourhoods and to each other. A stimulating and enthralling programme of shows, performances, spectacle installations and public debate that happen in exciting and unusual places - a combination of wonderful events, large and small interventions and sometimes international exchanges, with something new and exciting to move and stimulate us all. WVRF brings local people, environmentalists and talented artists together in an internationally important landscape, in a creative exploration of what is possible.

“It is a very inspiring and imaginative combination that makes you see the world in a different way.”
Sue Parkinson - education co-ordinator WVRF2016

The Wye Valley River Festival 2016 was a Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership initiative with funding from the Sustainable Development Fund, a Welsh Government Initiative in the Wye Valley AONB, The Arts Council England, Arts Council of Wales, supported by the Welsh Government and the Heritage Lottery Fund, Big Lottery, Environment Agency, Ernest Cook Trust, Forestry Commission England, New Grove Trust, Ross Town Council and in-kind support from Hereford River Carnival, The Shire Hall, Monmouth, Mon Teas, National Museum of Wales, Chepstow Racecourse, numerous volunteers and local communities; main business sponsor Eat Sleep Live Herefordshire, who also sponsored the Festival’s promotion at The British Travel and Tourism Show; media sponsors Sunshine Radio and Live 24-Seven; Forest of Dean and Wye Valley Tourism Association and Old Station, Tintern. The Caravan of Myths and Legends was sponsored by Puzzlewood and the Caravan of Curiosities and Hydrosities was sponsored by Monnow Voice. Special thanks to land owners at Herefordshire Council, Ross Town Council, The Tump Lydbrook, the Slaughters Biblins, Vauxhall Fields Monmouth, Redbrook Bridge, Llandogo Riverside, Old Station Tintern and Chepstow Racecourse who granted access to make these events possible.



The Vision “Landscape defines history and history defines culture”

Landscape is about the relationship between people and place, the interaction between nature and culture. The Wye Valley River Festival (WVRF) aims to create an arts & environment festival with landscape at its heart. By staging magnificent outdoor arts events that captivate and engage, we will celebrate and interpret the river, the countryside and its communities, using the arts to develop thinking, imagination and understanding, building new audiences and strengthening the vital role that culture will play in the future development and ‘place making’ of this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Our strategy is to create three biennial arts festivals in 2014, 2016 & 2018, and potentially beyond, that will challenge, inspire, amaze, and engage new audiences, whilst promoting positive change and environmental awareness. It will not be curated in the traditional way - buying in existing shows - but will develop and devise bespoke work with artists well versed in creative community engagement, consolidating these relationships and energising the wider partnerships, networks and connections. This is an ambitious and forward thinking long term project, which has quality, place and engagement at its heart. We believe that a quality arts and environment program will bring communities together to be inspired and learn about themselves and the world around them.

“Art is a great and inclusive way to deliver environmental messages” Audience Member

“The festival helped deliver some of the Environment Agency's aims and objectives to promote the River Wye for recreation and raise environmental awareness. The River Wye was the heart and soul of the festival and this was very much reflected in the events that took part.

Lynn Bulbeck - Environment Agency

“What is outstanding about the festival – the seriousness with which the integrity of the artistic quality is paralleled by the importance given to conveying environmental messages and engaging people with the environment”

Annie Grundy - Articulture WVRF2016

Wye Valley River Festival 2014

The inaugural Wye Valley River Festival (WVRF) was held in May 2014, launching in Hereford on May 3rd and finishing in Chepstow on May 18th. The first Festival celebrated nature, culture, landscape and life along the River Wye by presenting high quality and affecting arts events and activities and exploring the contemporary issues facing the river and its communities today. The main artistic programme reflected, enhanced and supported the parallel and integrated community arts and heritage based activities, and a wider community programme of smaller, local new and existing events that came under the WVRF brand. The Festival aimed to develop the capacity of communities, to progress the event in a meaningful way, develop partnerships for the future, test out ideas, concepts and possibilities, and this all succeeded in extraordinary ways. The issues around ‘invasive species’ drove a central narrative.

The WVRF2014 was a great success, it achieved its goals and many valuable lessons were learnt along the way which were taken into the second Wye Valley River Festival in 2016

WVRF2014 attracted audiences of nearly **20,000** and engaged over **1,500** artists and participants, plus over **150** people attended training or workshop sessions.

With a budget of £125,000 the estimated net contribution to the local economy was at least **£275,000**. The ‘Overall quality of the event’ was rated as Good or Excellent by 98% of respondents to feedback surveys. 65% learned something more about the area because of the event. 16% were inspired to ‘Attend other arts events’ and 99% thought the River Festival was a good idea.

‘The best interpretive event EVER’

Andrew Nixon – AONB Development Officer (2014)

“I think this Festival will develop within a few years to be a well-known ‘destination’ festival that visitors will look forward to, and that will inspire a lot of loyalty in participants and spectators alike”.

Jo Henshaw – Hereford River Carnival (2014)

The WVRF2014 evaluation produced invaluable base-line data and recommendations which we took forward into the second phase.

Wye Valley River Festival 2016



The second Wye Valley River Festival again grew out of the collaboration between the Wye Valley AONB Partnership and the Artistic Directors, Desperate Men Theatre Company- Jon Beedell and Richard Headon and Festival Director, Phillippa Haynes. The objective of the 2016 Festival was to build upon our solid foundation and to grow at a reasonable and realistic pace. Water and the River as a Global Artery was investigated as the theme that was developed through the Research and Development (R&D) process. This brought together a number of artists with eminent local environmentalists and water specialists to debate issues, exchange watery experiences and explore opportunities. These were then proposed and refined with local community movers and shakers.

95% of the world's water is salt water in the oceans, the remaining 5% fresh water-most of which is locked in ice or deep underground. Life on earth relies on 0.03% of the world's fresh water to survive.

This fact inspired the artistic response from the core team; The Water Ones, the Wye Serai caravans and the magical tea making Samovar were born.

The artistic and environmental programme was extended to include expanded outreach and more installations. We aimed to increase audience engagement to 25,000 and encourage repeat visits throughout the Festival and also to strengthen the Festival identity.



"I am inspired by creating theatre in unusual settings that engages ordinary people in extraordinary ways. I believe at its best, it can connect, inform and inspire"

Richard Headon - Desperate Men

"There is an intimacy with outdoor audiences in sharing a space and time where many things are beyond our control. This is what makes it exciting"

Jon Beedell - Desperate Men

The Festival launched in Hereford on Friday 29th April 2016 and closed on Chepstow on Sunday 15th May. There was activity on all 17 days of the Festival. The Festival was a glorious creative series of outdoor events embracing innovative artistic work that inspired and challenged, with 23 core artists driving the content.

WVRF2016 encompassed **28** events, at 28 venues on sites from Hereford to Chepstow. We exceeded all our targets: Achieving **29,800+** people attending events. **1,200** school children were involved in our workshop programme.

In addition **1,098** children had Wye Serai school visits with the Ensemble for half a day each. **539** young people worked with artists to create the flags which decorated the Festival sites. A further **300+** people participated in community training/workshops. **1000** origami birds were made by over **200** local people from a variety of community groups which were used in one of the installations. A whole community, young and old contributed to the other installation. **328** people took part in the walking/story project.

220+ local singers, musicians and performers were involved in the performances

250+ torchbearers were involved in the Llandogo procession with a further **50** volunteer torchbearers involved throughout the Festival.

In all **18** local youth theatre groups, choirs and bands took part in the performances.

20 students from University of South Wales were involved with the project **15** of which went on to produce performances for the Festival as part of their degree assessments.

4 young Festival apprentices, including one Erasmus student from Portugal, were engaged in all aspects of the Festival delivery and arts development and with the 1000 Birds project **9** emerging Welsh artists created **3** new outdoor dance commissions showcased/trailed in Monmouth (and later performed at the National Eisteddfod at Abergavenny).

12 major Welsh landowning organisations participated in Articulture's 'Landowners & Landscape Outdoor Arts' conference, which was the first of its kind and a landmark event.

This all equated to around **21,600** workshop hours delivered pre-Festival, **3,234** hours of workshop engagement in schools. **18,300** hours of engagement in community training/workshops and 728 hours of workshop contact pre walk for the walking/story project.

The overall feedback from audience and participants was very positive. Of those interviewed, the location, organisation and entertainment of the events was rated between **91% - 93%** as excellent or good.

"The fact that extraordinary, high quality arts/performances were taking place in, what are usually, quiet, rural locations is a hugely successful aspect of the River Festival. The events generated a sense of community cohesion - people could not quite believe what was happening on their doorstep!"

Hannah Elton-Wall - Artspace Cinderford

"To strive for artistic quality, alongside an excellent process, that engages the widest possible audience, challenging where appropriate, filling a need where necessary but always looking for the wonderful."

Phillippa Haynes – Festival Director



The diversity of the audience, the quality of the engagement and participation, the opportunity of developing creativity and skills for children and young people all improved, compared to 2014. The range of places and ways in which people were able to engage with the arts activity was strengthened and was reflected in our increased audience numbers. The amount of amazing professional artist involvement in the Festival also grew, which enhanced quality and impact. It was a great success but the capacity of the Festival team was pushed and stretched.

The Festival marketing was better co-ordinated than in 2014. We improved much of the information dissemination, with enhanced digital and printed materials, both in terms of output and quality. But marketing was still perceived as the weakest aspect of the Festival. The complexity of the marketing needs, the diverse and dispersed nature of rural communities and the offer itself are all challenges which we are looking to address for WVRF2018. We also wish to improve our bilingual offer and include better signage for some performances.

The attendance and engagement for WVRF2016 of **29,800+** people would indicate that overall it was a success, outstripping targets. From the audience feedback surveys, **68%** of the respondents came to enjoy outdoor performances first and foremost, with **50%** saying that being entertained in a beautiful environment was a big draw and **44%** said they wanted to support their community.

“It brings all the community alive as it comes down the River, everyone is so proud and excited to be able to be part of it”

Rowena Barr, Lydbrook Tump Committee

“The Llandogo site encapsulated the spirit of the Festival the best” Audience Member

“The events I saw were highly imaginative and eye catching. I felt the artistic work really caught my attention and made me see places that I am familiar with in a totally different light. I loved the fact that the crowds were made up with all sorts of people – young and old. “

Lynn Bulbeck - Environment Agency

“I loved everything about the Festival, it’s amazing, brilliant”

Audience member

WVRF2016 Core Arts Concept



The performances were centred around the ensemble of Water Ones: A collection of singing diviners, magicians, jesters, river people, dancers and storytellers, exploring the everlasting journeys of water, rivers and the people it connects. They both entertained and on occasion bemused the audiences throughout the Festival. The feedback we got from people was positive and the performances and characters developed as they went down stream.

The characters lived in and hosted the Wye Serai, which was a travelling experiential site where you could explore both the arts and the science. At its heart were three artist curated and designed Caravans which the audience were invited into for intermittent interaction / performances. Action spilt out of them on a regular basis whilst also serving as a stage set for bigger performances throughout the day, all with the commissioned Samovar at the centre. Each Caravan had its own theme and characters which explored different aspects of water, culture and peoples relationship to environment. One was a partnership with the National Museum of Wales, Natural History department, which is a new partnership and a possible future collaborator for WVRF2018.

A vital element of the Festival is to employ an ensemble of actors who can work in a variety of settings, understand the outdoors and the nature of working with the general public directly. This they did brilliantly. Some of the performers were new to the Festival and working with the team, others were a part of WVRF2014. The skills they all brought as individuals were diverse and strong, which allowed for a rich devising process. By having an array of nationalities and languages spoken by the cast it enhanced the cultural aspect of the Festival and brought the Global elements to the forefront. As in WVRF2014 characters developed a fan base who followed them down stream to various different locations which was a real honour and joy.

We invested more in live music for 2016 and the collaborations with local artists and experienced outdoor arts street band practitioners brought the depth, vibrancy and quality to performance that we aspired to. This was a great success as the music lifted and drove elements of the action and ceremony. The innovative Festival choir idea – inviting singers from existing choirs - was reasonably successful, but would have benefited from more rehearsal time to realise the ambition of a closer integration with instrumental players and performers throughout.



Were our aspirations fulfilled?

Yes. There were people that followed the Festival down the river. I think that is testament to the ease that people felt with the process and where it is located. The passport seemed popular and I think encouraged continued participation. It did evolve into a travelling roadshow about water and of course rivers. I don't know if the term global artery was used a lot however there were clear connections made between rivers like the Wye and the Nile for example..

Mr and Mrs Clark -ensemble

Yes, I totally agree, from the educational side re the environment which is so crucial to children and communities, but to have the artistic side too which makes it fun and quirky and brings it alive. I think definitely works well. It brings all the community alive as it comes down the River, everyone is so proud and excited to be able to be part of it! Everyone said how much they enjoyed the Samovar tea making, the interaction between the public and actors, the storytelling etc it was an amazing atmosphere.

Rowena Barr – Lydbrook Tump Committee

The two locations with the best mix of stunning location and audience were Lydbrook and Llandogo. Hereford was overwhelmed by the carnival, and I think the River Festival suffered a little because of it.

William Wilding - ensemble

I found this Festival's artistic performances repeated at each site whereas 2 years ago the story 'progressed' as the Festival moved along to the different locations.

Bridget Vine - volunteer



It helped us to refine processes, learn and notice possibilities. We developed new equipment, the Samovar to be specific. (Commissioned by WVRF2016). We were disappointed that the idea of making tea from the river water in the samovar was not achieved, allowing an activity and learning about processes involved in cleaning, then drinking it.

Mandy Dyke And Now - ensemble

From an environmental perspective, using artistic collaboration provides the opportunity to convey our message to an audience we are otherwise unable to access, and to a larger number of people than is usually possible. Using multiple sites brings the Festival to communities who would otherwise miss out, but makes telling a story as in 2014 difficult as people miss aspects of it.

Nick Critchley - AONB Development Officer

“The overall theme of the Festival was clear from the start, and the educational elements brought this from the abstract idea to something that was clear to grasp. The educational elements were very successfully brought to realisation with several linked opportunities for schools to be involved in an art/science programme, which was exciting to be involved with.”

Sue Parkinson - education co-ordinator

“The Festival is incredibly ambitious given its mobility and diversity of audiences - and the energy and momentum of the journey is extremely impressive and must be a challenge”

Annie Grundy - Articulture

Lessons learnt

- You can't please all the people all the time! The Evaluation revealed some mixed reviews on the form that the Water Ones performance took. Some loved it, others found it harder to grasp and more challenging than the narrative form used in 2014.
- For 2018 we will need to examine the style and form for the main performances, continuing to create work that both challenges audiences and creates a space for them to experience new art. But they still need to feel 'safe'. Consider a story narrative that travels again.
- The Festival crew need to be adequately resourced, particularly if using a Wye Serai type logistically complex travelling caravan / multi-site circus form again in WVRF2018.
- Being in control of our own site as opposed to working with existing or community 'day' events is easier, but is it on message? Need to scrutinise the pros and cons of each site and partner expectations.
- The value of performers who can really relate to people is crucial, not new, but worth remembering if we intend to do workshops programmes again.
- It is vital that all core artists are committed to the R&D and have time to do so.
- Look for new partners who bring a stimulating dynamic and innovation to the Festival.
- Live musicians and musical collaborations need to be invested in and allowed more time in the lead up and within the rehearsal schedule.
- Flexibility and complex juggling within the R&D and main budgets, along with robust contingencies and tight management, repeatedly deliver on time and on budget.

Artistic and Delivery Partners



The success of a festival such as this is dependent on a complex raft of partners and organisations on both a local and regional level. WVRF2016 worked with in excess of 40 organisations to achieve its outcomes, all of whom play an important role, with some contributing vital skills and additions to the programme. In total there were 85+ professional artists involved in delivering the Festival programme. Each main event incorporated music, performance, circus, dance, singing, making storytelling and a variety of craft activities. Example feedback below has been compiled from evaluation forms, including some example questions.

Arts Space- Cinderford



Has the evolution of the Festival from Research & Development (R&D) to performance achieved the aims and objectives of the 'Global Artery' theme? “The initial discussions and ideas formulated during the R&D phase were followed through and came into fruition spectacularly! The River Festival was a great opportunity for Engage - our youth circus project. They developed their performance expertise, working for the first time with live musicians. The event was certainly a platform for our youth circus to promote and develop their skills and for us to promote ourselves as a local arts organisation. We met and networked with

artists that are new to Artspace. We were able to promote our projects. As a small arts charity, it is great to be part of a high profile event. We do not have much of a budget for marketing/promotion. Promoting events to small rural communities can be challenging, and I imagine the Festival finds this also.

“A favourite moment for me personally was the appearance of the Festival site/s with the Samovar and Caravans, the costumes of the actors/artists, the backdrop of the river - absolutely magical !!!

“The planning and effectiveness of the Festival was excellent. We would want to be involved again in all aspects of the Festival in future, yes!”

Hannah Elton-Wall

Articulture Wales



How did the Festival help develop you or your organisation's skills or activities? “The Festival provided a public rehearsal space for our 3, 2016 commissioned pieces; Richard of Desperate Men mentored one of the commissionees, which was amazingly valuable to their professional development.

Professionally I learnt about offering critical feedback to artists with works in progress; also made some new connections.

“I think a very effective aspect of WVRF2016 is its integration and community engagement. Our Landowners conference which we collaborated on as part of the Festival was a huge success and something I had wanted to achieve professionally for many years. The support from the team and the effectiveness of the Festival is excellent.

“A moving multi-sited festival is an incredible challenge but ensures that a number of different communities can participate at an intimate level.

“The Festival is incredibly ambitious given its mobility and diversity of audiences - and the energy and momentum of the journey is extremely impressive and must be a challenge. This is what is outstanding about the Festival – the seriousness with which the integrity of the artistic quality is paralleled by the importance given to conveying environmental messages and engaging people with the environment.”

Annie Grundy

Lydbrook Brass Band



We have collaborated with this world famous award winning 20 piece silver band since the Festival’s conception. This year their 10 piece ‘small band’ stepped well out of their comfort zone to work with Tim Hill from Tongues of Fire (our Musical Director) and three of his young protégés, and together became our Festival Band.

Do you think the model of the Festival as an environmental and artistic collaboration works well?

“Yes. Anything that encourages music, artistic development and collaboration always works well. The Festival team and the people with the vision to arrange such an event must be congratulated. Arts and music are dying out in some sections of the community and they must be encouraged otherwise we will lose part of our heritage very, very quickly. We had a number of meetings with Jon from Desperate Men before meeting Tim, so we were very happy and relaxed with the roles we had to play. We had the opportunity to perform with Tim Hill, the Festival musical director and his team to create and perform a type of music that we would not normally play and performed as the full Festival band at Monmouth, Llandogo and Chepstow.

“To work with others on a huge project and to be able to contribute to the overall musical effect that needed to be created for the audiences was a good professional challenge, and we gained new knowledge about community development work and collaboration.

I would like us to reach into the schools of the Wye Valley and to be able to give young people the opportunity to play brass instruments; the Festival may be an opportunity to do this in future. To see so many people young and old enjoying the different type of entertainment by Desperate Men and their team was a highlight for me. Everything was such good fun and seemed to be enjoyed by everyone. A personal highlight for me was playing in the mist at Monmouth during the fireworks and torch parade - a very strange and quirky 30 minutes or so. Some of the best moments in life are never planned!! Coping with the extremely cold weather towards the end of each event provided the biggest challenge for us as brass performers. I didn't see anything that was unsuccessful.”

Do you think the model of the Festival as a multi-sited event works well? “Yes. I do but I think that the length of each event meant that some people left the sites before the magnificent firework displays. The cold weather didn't help either and with the finale being on a Sunday evening it meant that many children had to leave to be ready for school the next day.”
Robert Morgan: Leader Lydbrook Band

Lydbrook Tump community committee



This was one of our smaller but still significant weekend venues for a day time Wye Serai.

Do you feel your role(s) and responsibilities were clearly defined?

“Yes. As a small village community committee we so wanted to join in with the Festival celebrations, by bringing together the local community plus outside visitors to our annual riverbank fete, alongside the Festival organisation which was so successful. Everyone said how much they enjoyed the Samovar tea making, the interaction between the public and actors, the storytelling etc; it was an amazing atmosphere. I had meetings with the Festival team who are delightful and so enthusiastic plus the next village committee up the river, (Bishopswood), which brought our two fetes together. It was very exciting to see our plans develop together and meet a new group of enthusiastic volunteers. I think it definitely works well. It brings all the community alive as it comes down the River, everyone is so proud and excited to be able to be part of it!”

Rowena Barr

Forestry Commission



The Forestry Commission were part of the R&D process and played many roles during the Festival including providing storage and work space for the Wye Serai caravans pre-festival and the event day at The Slaughters was delivered with them as the lead partner.

Do you think the model of the Festival as a multi-sited event works well? “Yes, I do think it was although it is not easy to keep the level of communication across all the various event managers/organisers. Logistics were a challenge for us, sometimes the communication of what we were responsible for and what the River Festival team were responsible for was confused, although we managed in the end. We gained insight into working with artists and although our event did not gain the numbers we had wanted, the atmosphere of the day was chilled and relaxed.”
Hayley Clayton

Environment Agency



How did the Festival help develop you or your organisation's skills or activities? “The Festival helped deliver some of the Environment Agency's aims and objectives to promote the River Wye for recreation and raise environmental awareness. From a professional point of view the Festival helped with building networks and partnership working. From a personal viewpoint, it

helped develop my understanding and knowledge of the local area and the communities within it.”

What do you think was the most successful aspect of the Wye Valley River Festival ?

“Raising awareness of locals and visitors to the extreme beauty and special environmental qualities of the Wye and all that it has to offer. The River Wye was the heart and soul of the Festival and this was very much reflected in the events that took place.

“I think it is important that the events are throughout the Wye as each location has something unique to offer. It also enables the local communities to get involved and to raise appreciation of their local river.”

What was your favourite moment in the Festival ? “Drinking the 'tea' at Tintern station while listening to the singers and watching the dancers /performers and people watching, a great setting”
Lynn Bulbeck

University of South Wales: Prifysgol De Cymru Faculty of Creative Industries:

This new partnership allows the Festival to enrich the programme with students from the performing arts course making new work together as part of their course assessment. It is a great opportunity for skills development and showcasing young people’s work. They all wrote blogs and these are direct quotes from them:-



“Working outside has been one of the single most interesting experiences that I have had the pleasure of experiencing. I found it really motivating having to use the different activities to help benefit my ability to perform and adapt to the situation.”

“This weekend was by far the best way to not only be assessed, but also relax and really appreciate nature and learn”

“I was experiencing professionalism in creating outdoor arts, which I had never experienced before. We were all excited and extremely privileged to be part of the Festival “

“I felt so appreciative to have been part of such a special and unique outdoor event. Although we only contributed a small amount to the Festival, I was proud of our professionalism as university students.”



“This experience made me realise the importance of flexibility when doing improvisation and street art. You can never fully know how the audience will react until you’re in that moment. I would like to use this way of improvising with a more conventional audience.”

“We carried torches across a bridge and through the field. It was a massive honour for me personally as I was helping the Festival create a special moment for all the general public to see. As we

walked to the old oak tree I could not anticipate what I saw next, the firework display took me completely by surprise and made the event even better in terms of the aesthetics of the performance.”



“I honestly feel that I stepped up this weekend, not just in terms of acting quality but also in terms of attitude in the Festival itself and working in a team. At first, I found it extremely difficult to approach people. As a drama student, this was unexpected, however I learnt that hosting in character was completely different to performing on a stage in front of an audience. As time went on, I began to feel much more comfortable”

“It helped build my confidence and boost my mood, making it a happy memorable experience that taught me huge amount about how to work closely together. I honestly loved the time I was at the Festival and I would take any opportunity to do something like this again. This discovery is something that I will carry with me into my professional practise”



“It was interesting to see how a professional theatre company direct their actors - in comparison to how I have been directed previously”

“This weekend was one of the biggest learning curves for me in my life”

“Working with professionals: This project enabled students to really get to grips with realities of professional arts practices: organising, devising, rehearsing and performing art works, engaging with the public. The WVRF more than anything else has helped students to understand and locate their own ideas and practices not only within the field of performance but also within the world at large and with some of its most urgent issues; having to take the initiative, from finding bus times to taking charge of creating a performance”.

Hilary Ramsden, PhD Senior Lecturer, Drama & Performance

Mrs and Mrs Clark - Ensemble Members



Do you think the model of the Festival as an environmental and artistic collaboration works well?

“Yes, it is a rare opportunity for us artists to work with environmental experts. In both 2014 and 2016 I felt this was a crucial collaboration and perhaps something that still needs to be developed. One of the highlights of 2014 was the trial and the direct inclusion of experts into the performance. This was lacking a little this year and

perhaps finding the right performance vehicle for this to happen should be an ongoing discussion. “

Please elaborate on how the Festival helped develop you or your organisation's skills or activities. “Working in primary schools challenged us to be engaging and informative. This was an interesting challenge as we wanted the children to have fun whilst exploring some facts about water and rivers. I think this level of engagement with primary school students was our first experience with this age range and we both enjoyed the interaction and possibilities of doing more work like this.”

Rosalind Haf Brooks - Ensemble Member



What did you personally or professionally gain by being involved with the Wye Valley River Festival? “I have learnt new ways of creating and developing work having worked with new people from different artistic approaches. I also learnt more about the River Wye and the animals that live there and the activities you can do along the Wye. Working with more text and song than I usually do was great in developing those skills. The workshops with the children in schools were fantastic. The Fact and Wonder Caravan was a wonderful place to share and talk about the wonderful area we live in. More of that would be great.”

Dan Fox Artist – Sound Installation and member of the Festival band.



Has the evolution of the Festival from Research & Development (R&D) to performance achieved the aims and objectives of the 'Global Artery' theme? “Yes. As is often the case, the blue sky thinking had to be translated into a product. I think some of the wilder ideas were lost along the way but it was still good to have the process.”

Please elaborate on how the Festival helped develop you or your organisation's skills or activities. “WVRF2016 gave me the opportunity to create a new piece of work in a beautiful location. To design a new installation for a bridge and realise it, which worked very well. For me, creating a piece of work in the heart of a small village and have it embraced by the locals, is a success. I received fantastic feedback. It was also ace to be able to include local children's voices during the week. I think it's a tough gig for the artists who had to move locations each day. I think the longer residencies may be more effective than the smaller one-day pop-up events. I think perhaps a slow journey by boat down the river would connect the locations in a more tangible way.”

And Now - Pyrotechnics, Samovar Installation and ensemble members



Do you feel your role(s) and responsibilities were clearly defined? “We worked very hard in the lead up and throughout the Festival at defining and communicating what we thought we were doing and what we expected to be facilitated in, this was hard work at times as the overall

moving element of the Serai was slightly under crewed. There was some lack of clarity around artistic intent at the beginning and how the rehearsed stories/actions were to happen. The idea of multi sited works appeals, but maybe not a travelling story. We think maybe multi sited installations with the audience travelling and discovering the sites over the period of the Festival, each installation having a long duration and being more off of the beaten track, sometimes with a punctuation event/transformation, not just working in places that are easy for people to park near.”

William Wilding - AKA Mr Cherry



Please elaborate on how the Festival helped develop you or your organisation's skills or activities “It gave me the chance to invent and then develop a new character and new ideas. I was able to create a whole area of work which I will be able to use in the future the bringing together of various communities along the river, and provided them with the opportunity to create various works together, for instance the choirs were a great

success of the Festival. But publicity was an issue - I do not think enough resources were employed.”

Do you think the model of the Festival as an environmental and artistic collaboration works well? “Yes. There is however a danger that the artistic side of the collaboration suffers from taking too many of the environmental concerns on board. Because of that some of the performance was not as strong and hard hitting as it could be. Partly because there was not a large enough budget to create a massive spectacle.”

Outreach Projects

The education outreach programme was the major development from 2014 and has proved to be a great success. There were three strands engaging local schools; Citizen Science, Flag making and Wye Serai visits. There were also workshops on Story collection & telling, Lantern making and the Festival Choir.

Schools Engagement



Initially we held a training day in February 2016 with 12 artists and 25 local environmentalists to scope the outreach projects. We settled on a citizen science approach where the environmentalists visited schools engaging the children in pond dipping and surveying local water quality. These visits were followed by the textile artists, Becky and Faye – Prior Made, who created the Festival flags with the children. During the Festival a Caravan and members of the acting ensemble, as a mini-Serai, also visited each school.

1,200 school children were involved in our workshops, **539** young people worked with artists to create **28** three meter tall flags which decorated the perimeter of all the outdoor Festival sites. Each young person had two sessions with the artists and environmentalists and **1,098** children had half-day Wye Serai school visits. So in all **3,234** workshop hours of professional engagement were delivered through this project.

The bringing together of artists and environmentalists through this process was another way the Festival helped share knowledge and skills ensuring that the science and the art were integrated. This is one of the innovative aspects of the Festival, bringing professionals from different backgrounds and specialisms together to create new pathways and understanding, fostering improved engagement.

“We really enjoyed and found beneficial the training day in Monmouth with wildlife/Wye Valley professionals. It was great to learn from passionate people. We felt that everyone who was involved was enthusiastic in the Festival ethos and appreciated each other’s work”.

Becky Prior – Prior Made

After each session the Artists asked the teachers to evaluate the session, **100%** of teachers rated **very good** and **excellent** for the following:

- * Workshop suitable for the ages,
- * Clear instructions from Artists,
- * Creating a positive learning environment
- * Engaging, educational and fun

"Extremely well organised, the afternoon was informative fun and creative. It will be something the children will remember"

Teacher

"Very hands on, all engaged, the children really enjoyed the scientific aspect of the workshop as well as the freedom to create their own art"

Teacher



100% of teachers circled **very likely** and **definitely** for the following:

- * Young people have gained more knowledge about the River Wye and river life
- * Young people more likely to visit the Festival as a result of workshop
- * Teachers more likely to visit the Festival as a result of the workshop
- * Teachers inspired to run a workshop using similar materials and knowledge without the artists.

"Fabulous. I enjoyed it all! The children had full participation from creating an individual piece and collecting natural resources. The children had to work as a team too"

Teacher

"I would like to thank you for offering us this amazing opportunity. The children really enjoyed the activities and they learned new skills. The staff were professional, highly skilled and very good at relating to primary school aged children. It was even better than we could have imagined! "

Head at Lord Scudamore School

"We really felt that we were supported, the wildlife professional visits and added to the young people's knowledge about the river Wye and surrounding area. After the first few weeks of delivery we become confident and efficient, educating and skill sharing with ease. It was great to have the opportunity to teach a cross-curricular process that linked art and science together."

Becky and Faye – Prior Made

After the Festival schools were involved in the overall evaluation. They were asked whether:

- Students gained greater knowledge and understanding on a range of river wildlife and natural habitats / landscape,
- Students gained a greater knowledge and understanding of the river Wye and rivers around the world
- Students were successfully engaged with issues regarding water and sustainability
- The staff /students felt involved in the Festival by taking part in the workshops
- The school would like the opportunity for more workshops when the Festival is repeated in 2018

To which **100%** replied **yes**

WVRF aims to develop professional artists through good working practice, exposing them to new skills and providing them an opportunity to try new things and experiment

“Personally I gained a greater knowledge about the river life and the communities along the Wye. I really enjoyed being part of the educators meeting because it supported the art workshops to be more informative and impactful”
Faye

“We felt that Phill, Sue, Sarah and us were a fantastic team. All three were organised and were very interested and supportive in our workshops. We felt well managed and also trusted to do a good job – a perfect working environment.”

Becky and Faye – Prior Made

Becky also stated that her business has benefited - “We have gathered contacts for all of the schools as they wished to be sent our list of workshops so we hope to have work with them in the future. This was a great opportunity to gain more experience working with primary school children. Working with scientists and those involved in the environment was both informative and inspiring.”

Babbling Brooks - Soundwork Community Project led by Roger Drury



In all **368** people took part in this project which collected, told and animated peoples stories about water, rivers lakes and life, some were very local and others from far away. **93** people took part in the animated story walks, with **52** people taking part in the pre walk workshops. There were **8** two hour workshops story/walking workshops, therefore **744** contact workshop hours. **40** young people took part as the project visited their school and **175+** experienced the project in the Caravan of Myths and Legends with Roger during the Festival. The legacy of this project is a collection of writings, a diary of events and a series of sketches by those visiting the Caravan of Myths and Legends. There are now **4** new ‘animated’ walks that have been researched and written, with a number of people trained as walking guides to deliver them in future.

How did you benefit professionally from this collaboration? It built my confidence to develop story walks and to then build on this working with local people and communities. I will go back to these communities to work more. It was a real Buzz working with Artists and generating something from workshops.
Roger Drury

Lantern Workshops

Pre festival we ran community and school lantern workshops in and around Hereford with Carnival Arts, producing work for both the evening show on the 29th and for the Carnival on the 30th. In addition we ran lantern making workshops with Carnival Arts at the Llandogo event producing large scale work for the torchlight procession. In all around **300** young people took part in these events

Lessons learnt

- Further develop the outreach programme ensuring its integration into the whole Festival securing enough budget to not have to 'skimp' on professional input, including artist time
- Ensure enough time is allowed for pre workshop and during workshop trouble shooting.
- Securing funding for a part time project co-ordinator to work alongside AONB's community and Festival Director to deliver the programme of work.
- Ensure selected artists are part of the R&D process, so selection must be early
- Start delivery earlier - so funding needs securing in the autumn of 2017
- Liaise with schools earlier and try to secure one secondary school, targeting Haberdashers and Monmouth Comprehensive
- Have clear Outcomes and Objectives for the work again, that feed the Festival programme/content

Festival Choirs



We set the ambitious goal to create a mass Festival choir working with various groups throughout the valley, delivering workshops pre festival, run by a single choir leader, singing new and commissioned water related arrangements. We also wanted to encourage other choirs to take part in the Festival singing their own and the commissioned repertoire. We wanted to achieve this through singing networks and digital outreach. We did achieve this in part and learnt a lot along the way about developing and delivering such a project. A regular 35+ strong Festival Choir sang at all of the major evening shows and some of the daytime events and 5 other choirs participated at events throughout the Festival. The process was complicated and challenging and timescales were tight, so the aspiration for WVR2018 would be to build from this experience. We worked with two great choir leaders Ellie Holliday & Helen Vincent who did a good job, creating a strong ensemble not used to

outdoor singing (in the rain!). By the second performance the choirs gained confidence and sounded fantastic. Over **50** people took part in **45** hours of WVRF singing workshops, equating to **2,250** workshop hours of engagement.



Feedback from some members of the choir was mixed but we believe everyone enjoyed their experience. Below is some of the feedback given by choir members.



Do you feel your role(s) and responsibilities were clearly defined?

“Yes, we were provided with written instructions about rehearsals and the arrangements for the performances.”

“I think that a festival of this kind requires longer-term planning, greater local networking, more engagement with local people and better communication and publicity.”

“I realise that I am not really a festival person. I joined

the choir because I enjoy making music with other people, but the music was mundane and the conditions under which we were expected to perform were so adverse that I only stuck with it out of a sense of loyalty. I am sorry to be negative but feel it is better to be honest. The massed choir - it just didn't really work!”



What did you personally or professionally gain by being involved with the Wye Valley River Festival?

“I learnt new songs and got to sing with different people.”

“Performing at a different venue and with different people to the choir I normally sing with”

“Simply, the enjoyment of singing with other people, whether in rehearsal or performance.”

“I enjoyed involvement in singing specifically but I feel that a different model of planning and participation may need to be envisaged.”

“Anything that encourages music, artistic development and collaboration always works well. The Festival team and the people with the vision to arrange such an event must be congratulated. Arts and music is a dying art in some sections of the community and it must be encouraged otherwise we will lose part of our heritage very, very quickly”

Robert Morgan leader Lydbrook Brass Band

Lessons learnt:

- There was a disjoint between the ambition and vision and the ability to make it happen. Consequently we engaged choir leaders and singers too late. We need to capitalise on networks better and sooner.
- We had communications and IT problems between the Festival Team, choir leader and choir members, and our capacity to pick up the shortfall was too limited and got confusing. So clearer roles and responsibilities, and contingencies, required.
- Some established choir leaders are reticent to let their choirs get involved, consequently promoting the workshops proved difficult.
- We need to attract more non-choral society singers, and younger people.
- We did not have enough time or budget to integrate the Festival Band with the Choir which was a missed opportunity.
- The Artistic Directors and Musical Director need to be more involved in the whole endeavour from concept to performance.
- Singers were not used to performing outside, so we need to get choirs to practice in the open air.
- Have two workshop leaders who work together in upper and lower Wye areas.

Installations



WVRF2016 was able to realise the aspiration of having two durational installations as part of the Festival programme. Both involved communities contributing to the work. These installations augmented the artistic reach of Festival ‘set piece’ sites and the pyrotechnics displays at the main week-end events.

Kathy Hind: Luminous Birds and 1000 Birds. This was a reimagining of an existing piece in a rural location, Old Station Tintern. An estimated **7,100** people experienced the installations.



200+ people, ranging from Care Homes to playgroups, made origami birds pre festival. The young boy (pictured left) made over 80 birds and became quite the origami expert. He and Kathy

had long conversations about paper.

Dan Fox: Cymbals of Redbrook. Staying in the local pub, walking the surrounding area, talking to locals and working with **34** children in the local primary school enhanced the recordings used in Cymbals of Redbrook. This installation, on the old railways bridge across the Wye joined two communities and two countries, was experienced by an estimated



4,702 people.

“Redbrook bridge full of families just hanging out at night experiencing Cymbals of Redbrook, was very rewarding”

Dan Fox

Lessons Learnt:

- Fully spec and get permissions for a reserve location in case of adverse weather
- Where possible and appropriate get the artists to be in residence before and during the piece and/or include local involvement with the art in some way
- Keep the installations up for a minimum of a full week / 2 week-ends
- Try to avoid additional stewarding requirements due to cost

WRV Festival 2016 Marketing



Marketing and promotion had been an issue for improvement from WVRF2014, so an enormous effort went into improving this during the R&D and through 2015 and onwards. The original Marketing Plan was updated and amended as required and more energy was put into the design and effective targeting of limited resources. The two most impactful changes were the return from sick leave of the AONB Information Officer, to augment the freelance PR contract, which both enabled better reach into the established media outlets and more capacity to explore less established routes and better quality design. The improvements took effect and paid dividends. But there is always more that can be done, a process of continued learning and improvement. It is a complex Festival both in its explanation and locations. However, the design of the printed material was greatly improved and has started to establish a brand identity and our ability to communicate and build relationships with local media has moved on greatly. We struck many 'contra' deals with various publications equating to around £2,500.



Festival Programme:

There were **15,000** AONB Art Map and Guides produced and distributed in early 2016, which promoted the outline of the Festival and other year round arts attractions in the area.

We produced **10,000** a high quality Programmes which were distributed throughout the Festival and were designed as an informative and artistic keepsake.

We generated **£1,580** of paid adverts in publicity, which for a first time for a festival operating in locations like ours is not insignificant.

2,000 original and fun Festival Passports were printed and given out during the Festival as part of the Mr Cherry's performance and digital capture piece. These encouraged repeat visits to receive a 'stamp' at each event.

The full programme was also on the WVRF webpages, along with a huge array of build-up and background information;

<http://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/index.php/wye%20valley%20%20river%20festival%202016/>.

Our digital presence was greatly improved this year, with a lot of traffic on both Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/wyevalleyriverfestival/> and Twitter @wybeauty #wevalleyriverfestival. The website was vastly improved but we still need to do more work on that element of the promotion and identity of the Festival.

Visitor Guides:

Festival adverts were included in

- the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley Visitor Guide 2016 (an A4 publication **40,000** printed and available to download from website).
- Full page advert in Eat Sleep Live Herefordshire (**25,000** printed for distribution, plus electronic download and turn page with hyperlinks). This publication went to The British Travel and Tourism Show.
- Full page ad in Herefordshire & The Wye Valley Explore Guide 2016 (**30,000** guides distributed nationally, regionally and locally)

We had a media partnership with Sunshine Radio (estimated **56,000** listeners per week and website **20,000** monthly page views), which gave us enormous amounts of trailers and coverage.

Other local radio and BBC stations all extensively covered the Festival this year. We even had Wye Valley TV turn up to film at almost every event.

In all there were 21 press releases that got picked up and promoted by various outlets. 70 road side boards, 20 banners, 40 large posters and 800 post cards were distributed throughout the Festival area.



Word of mouth still comes out as a major way people heard about the Festival; 37% of people responding from the evaluation sample.

For a full list of the media coverage please see appendix 1

“It is a confusing event and the publicity was inadequate. The programme did not help because it was not sufficiently specific as to where and when particular events within the overall event would happen”
Choir member.

Lessons learnt:

- No matter how much you do it will never be enough!
- Determine the exact nature and times of events earlier and promote
- Be even clearer on the message and invite
- Improve WVRF website but also make wide use of other social media
- Old fashioned posters work best in most of our target areas, but sufficient times needs to be found to ‘fly-post’
- Improve outreach networks and personal word of mouth promotion
- Investigate a high profile pre-festival promotional event

Conclusions and Recommendations



- More time needs to be allocated if running a six days a week programme for two weeks. WVRF2016 was hard for the actors and even harder on the crew who did not get a day off. Running the last week’s rehearsal straight into the dress run, and on into the opening four day weekend was tough for a small team, especially when we had to move the site daily.
- Ensure there are enough paid crew to deliver main production tasks throughout pre Festival and during and post production.
- The Festival finale should be on a Saturday night, allowing Sunday as crew pack down as well as not being a back to school/work night for audience.
- Scrutinise the success and drawbacks for WVRF2014 structured narrative running down stream versus WVRF2016 more esoteric and evocative non-narrative events.

- Programming of the main events – ensure Festival event day are not so long for performers and crew, off-set by the audience needs and requirements for stalls and quality food outlets to be on site.
- If possible increase durational site specific installations to 3 or 4, and embed artists ‘in residence’ in local community, ideally in build up as well as for duration of installation.
- Review Marketing Plan, engage with local networks earlier and ensure improved Festival website
- Secure good Media partners again. The Radio was fantastic but a supportive newspaper that covers the whole area would also help to better reach those hard to reach communities and far flung rural areas.
- Invest in more ‘word of mouth’ promotion such as posters and banners.
- Maintain communication with existing partners and develop more, both strategic and local.
- Consider the need of an overall Festival Designer, especially if following the ‘Travelling Serai’ type of activity again, and build on the strong Festival Programme design.
- Broaden and deepen the very strong outreach and engagement programme, but start it earlier.
- All core artists and crew need to be involved and committed to the R&D process. Review the creative camp residential model for R&D. Due to time commitments some partners were not able to attend all of the days and this was reflected in the feeling of wanting more clarity of roles and ownership later. Ensure commitments to this are built into expectations at an early stage. Securing funding earlier would help mitigate some of this.
- Re-evaluate all sites, just because we have been there once or twice, we do not have to keep returning. The only exception to this might be Llandogo which is generally agreed to be a spectacular and eminently workable site in many ways.



- Facilitate core Festival team to have an ‘away day’ investigation / inspiration trip after R&D and before production starts.
- Investigate establishing the Festival as a CIC or separate entity for funding and sponsorship purposes post WVRF2018
- More resources are needed to deliver the calibre of festival that we aspire to. The outreach and engagement work which is so vital to the integrity of the Festival, the audience development and the capacity building within communities requires

additional support - and partly due to a lack of local authority arts or development officers the Festival needs to invest more to enable this.

- Continue strategic and logistical communication with Forestry Commission, HLF Foresters Forest Project and the potential new ACE investment program in the area, ensuring joined up thinking, planning and potential programme development as well as community capacity development
- The Festival is gathering a momentum, a following and an identity. It has inspired other spin off events and it is raising aspirations. We will be looking to deliver another Festival in 2018. We are starting the process of doing so earlier so we can implement the lessons learnt and ensure the continuation of quality arts in the landscape is delivered.

The Wye Valley AONB Partnership and Wye Valley River Festival Team are immensely grateful for all the funders, sponsors and supporters who made the Festival such an enjoyable and rewarding event for all those who participated.



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