

Sense-ing
legacies
of
slave-
ownership
in Bath
and along
the River
Avon

Soundings

October 2017



Soundings... *An installation of sounds and images ... 'sense-ing' legacies of slave-ownership. Responses and resonances gathered during the Sweet Waters walks.*

Documentation and new work in sound and film wayfaring through interconnected cycles of Water and Trade

Work developed from materials gathered on the walks, installed alongside existing displays at Saltford Brass Mill....*what went down the river and what returned at this nexus of the 'Triangular' trade.*

In the late 1830's, as Government 'compensation' for the release of their slaves, former slaveowners in Bath and Bristol shared part of a total payout of £20million.

Formerly enslaved people received nothing.

Sugar, tobacco and cotton continued to be harvested. Industrialists and financiers continued to enjoy wealth derived from slave-ownership.

Slavery continues.

Global warming gathers pace

Sweet Waters: Soundings

When the warm winds blow from the West and it rains in Bath or Bristol or when the river swells with the tide and as the water turns the Saltford millwheel we sense legacies of slave-ownership.

Saturday October 21.

13.00 - 16.00. Free entry

Saltford Brass Mill

The Shallows, Saltford. BS31 3EY

More info and more walks

www.walknowtracks.co.uk

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Sweet Waters: Soundings. Saturday 21 October from 13.00-16.00

A pop-up installation in sound and images at Saltford Brass Mill

Live performance: 15.00

Jeff Boehm: Trumpet

Richard White: spoken word

Sweet Waters is about legacies of British slave-ownership as revealed through a cycle of participatory performative walks and creative dialogues in Bath and along the River Avon. Resonating from the cycle of walks and repatriating sounds of the manufacture of goods destined for the West Coast of Africa, **Soundings** responds to a watery sonic environment.

When the warm winds blow from the West and it rains in Bath or Bristol or when the river swells with the tide and as the water turns the Saltford millwheel we sense legacies of slave-ownership. As we recognise the interconnectedness of things, we become mindful of our heritage. We are connected. Sweet Waters.

Working with field recordings, background research and other materials gathered on the walks this installation begins a new phase for the Sweet Waters project. The Mill is a relic of an industry that once produced brass goods to be traded for enslaved people. One last water wheel still turns at Saltford.

Sweet Water Cycles: Richard White

Video: projected on loop with sound using media gathered on the walks

Seawater 3'59"

Cloudwater 9'59"

Riverwater 4'56"

Foulwater 8'17"

Audio only

Looped playlist includes composite sound narratives from Day 2, Day 4 and Day 5 of the walks and half heard readings of letters to the commanders of Bristol slave ships from their investors, lists of cargo on their ships and a reading of the first stanza of Derek Walcott's poem, The Sea is History

Water runs through it: Jeff Boehm

This piece seeks to allow the listener to reflect upon the cycles of water, humans and commerce through the story of a brass mill once used to manufacture goods for commerce in the slave trade. Sounds of a working mill hammer and water are some of the relics evident in the piece.

Sweet Waters Context:

Brass

Saltford Brass Mill was one of many water powered enterprises along the River Avon producing goods used in the trade for enslaved people. Fine cloth, gunpowder, guns, brass pots and copper were valuable commodities in West Africa. This sophisticated commercial enterprise, initiated by royal assent, continued from the late 1600's until the British slave trade was abolished in 1807.

Enslaved people

For those enslaved, the crossing from West Africa to the Caribbean was terrifying and often deadly, many were killed or drowned, women and girls were raped, even the smallest acts of resistance suppressed with the utmost brutality. Those who survived were sold to plantation owners and most were put to work producing sugar, cotton and tobacco. Enslaved people, any children they produced and, in turn, their children, were the 'property' of the slave-owner. Some escaped and some rebelled. All found ways of resisting.

Sugar

Slave produced goods and the wealth this generated came back to England. In Bristol and up the River Avon, sugar houses, cotton mills, tobacco and pipe factories flourished. In the 1700's sugar went from being a luxury for the rich to a staple part of the English diet: tea, coffee and chocolate owe their popularity to the cheap and plentiful supply of slave produced sugar.

Wealth

Vast fortunes were made by merchants, speculators, government officials and absentee slave-owners in England as well as the slave owners in the Caribbean. Many came to Bath, for the season to socialise, to do business and fund speculative building projects. Slave generated wealth was invested in the city and in great country houses and landscaped gardens. Slave-owners came to Bath as a relief from the tropical climate and to recover from diseases, many eventually retired to the city and on their deaths memorialised themselves in stone in the Abbey.

Compensation

After years of slave uprisings and poor sugar harvests, the status of slavery was abolished in the British Empire in the 1830's. The government set up a £20 million compensation scheme, several hundred thousand pounds of that money came to slave-owners based in Bath. The 'released' slaves received nothing.

The Walks:

For the past two years Richard White has been hosting a series of participatory, performative walks exploring themes and developing ideas around the legacies of slave-ownership in Bath. Each walk involved curated interventions and generated a social media trail. In 2016 this manifested as a set of walks entitled Bath's Last Legal Slave-owners. The Sweet Waters cycle continued down the river sense-ing legacies of slave-ownership. A final walk returned up the River Avon on Midsummer's day 2017 from sunrise at high tide on the Avonmouth Bridge to Pulteney Bridge, Bath, watching the sun set from Bathwick fields.

The Installation:

Richard gathered field recordings, walkers shared social media, sketched and wrote; we gathered materials as we walked. The sound and video presented here is a first attempt to work with this wealth of material and weave it through the research which underpins the project. In developing the installation for Saltford Brass Mill, Richard was joined by Jeff Boehm gathering additional field recordings of the water powered hammer mill at Finch's Foundry in Devon and developing his own response to the themes.

Artists

Richard White

Artist/researcher. Senior Lecturer in Media Practice at Bath Spa University
Richard's creative practice focuses on body and place. He is experimenting with walking practices and digital media, harnessing the participatory potential of social media to reveal intangible cultural heritage.

More info here www.walknowtracks.co.uk

Recent work includes

2015 River Crouch Festival: Lost Walks and Ghost Ferries

2015-17 Forced Walks: Honouring Esther

2016 Find Another Bath and other walks

2017 Workhouse Walks

Jeff Boehm

Jeff Boehm is an eclectic composer, but is most interested in crafting ways for classical musicians to feel comfortable improvising. He specialises in composing pieces for trumpet and backing track, thus allowing for a different sonic experience in recital situations. Boehm combines influences from classical, jazz, and electronic music in his compositions.

His two most recent compositions are historical/sensical explorations centred around the milling industry prolific in the Bath, UK area during the Industrial Revolution. These two trumpet and backing track pieces feature recorded sounds from mills, with the rhythms generated from the mill machinery. The sounds are either used as they were originally recorded, or are transferred into the sounds of modern digital synthesisers.

Jeff is currently teaching music composition, conducting the Wind Band, coaching Chamber Winds and serving as Learning Technologist at Bath Spa University.

Sweet Water Cycles:

Wayfaring in interconnected cycles of Water and Commerce exploring legacies and revealing resonances of slave-ownership:

Water: something like 60% of the human adult body is water. Essential element, hydropower and transport medium, essential for plantation irrigation and country park decoration. The River Avon washed away the sweat of the brass workers, returning slave ships were scrubbed down into it, while the tears of those who lost loved ones to the slavers flowed to the sea in the rivers of West Africa. In the water: blood, vomit, excretia, the dissolved and digested flesh of those who resisted, sea-sick, home-sick, tears of grief, tears of despair, blood of punishment and cold sweat of survival. In the vast Atlantic Ocean generations of lives thrown overboard as damaged goods, food for fish and cowries. From rain to river to sea to sky and back: heritage, memories, stories, languages.

Commerce: products made and transported on the River Avon shipped to West Africa and sold for enslaved people, those who survived the crossing were sold on to work in field and factory; materials produced and wealth generated return on the tide up the River Avon. Sugar. Tobacco. Cotton. Timber. Speculation. Credit. Banking. Insurance. Wealth fuelling industry and embodied in country houses, landscaped gardens and the fine buildings of Bristol and Bath. An incomplete cycle that drains people, talent and resources from West Africa and the Caribbean to accumulate wealth in Britain.

Legacies:

- Global warming begins at the hearth of the slave-owning nations, hurricanes today drawing up the warmed Atlantic waters.
- Colonial assertions of difference and white skinned dominance feed deep and long-lasting racism
- Inherited trauma of enslavement
- Weapons and munitions from England sold in West Africa escalate violence and dislocation.
- Cultures of addiction, sugar, rum, tobacco, tea, coffee, chocolate ...
- Slave-owner wealth embodied in landscape and cityscapes.
- Enslaved people who survived, carried beliefs, skills, stories and embodied memories into the new cultures they fashioned.
- Echoes of enslaved people's resistance and survival in popular culture

Walkers

Gloria Goodsell
Ali Pretty
Viv Meadows
Geoff Dunlop
Anna Kot
Andrew Lawrence
Daniel Chuter
Sophie Macintosh
Vicky Vatcher
Lorna Brunstein
Joanna Wright
Colin Jones
Alison Harper
Tracy Homer
Ceri Morgan

Katie O'Brien
Katherine Reed
Kate O'Malley
Robert Luzar
Carl Ordonez
Michael Jenkins
Jamie Oldham
Roger Holly
Richard Williams
Anne Twyman
Chris Wright
Nick Watson
Shirley Alderton
Les Gower
Francesca Ward

Mike Johnstone
Julie and Paul Fowler
Andy Hunt
Charlie Rawson
Christina Horvath
Wendy Batt
Samantha Walton
Helena Enright
Alicia White
Elena Trincanato
Niki Jewett
Diana Wyatt
Sarah Connolly
Howard Gibson

Thanks:

Bath Spa University
Fringe Arts Bath
Bath Festival Fringe
UCL data base Legacies of British Slave-ownership
Bath Record Office
Bath Abbey Archives
Bristol Archives

Stills from the *Port Books* for the Snows Molly, Africa and Swift can be seen in the film and have been voiced.

National Trust: Finch Foundry
Bath Preservation Trust: Beckford's Tower
The Holburne Museum, Bath
Madge Dresser
Olivette Otele
Richard Stone
Tony Coverdale and all at Saltford Brass Mill for hosting this

in memory of Malcolm Mcintosh