

Lindisfarne Gospels, Durham

Short description of the project

Summer 2013 saw an event which told the story of the Lindisfarne Gospels and their journey so strongly interwoven with the landscape, historic characters and places of the North East. The return of the Lindisfarne Gospels delivered a world class exhibition, bringing together treasures of the Anglo Saxon world and inspired a region-wide festival. The Lindisfarne Gospels were on display at Durham's UNESCO World Heritage Site for three months from 1st July to 30th September 2013, on loan from The British Library.

Engaging and enabling communities, businesses, heritage organisations and volunteers to be involved was a central ethos of the project. Creative responses to the Gospels from communities and artists included:

- A comedy commissioned to celebrate St Cuthbert's life;
- Graffiti art inspired by the calligraphy in the manuscript;
- Dance performances in the shadow of Lindisfarne Priory;
- A community choir which sang at events throughout the festival including the Test match at Durham Riverside;
- Flower festival and 'Cake off' competition; and
- A geocaching adventure hunt.

Over 500 Gospels related events took place across the North of England, from Berwick to York and from South Shields to Carlisle. Buses and banners with the distinctive cat logo take from a section of the illuminated manuscript enhanced the sense of occasion.

The project was led by programme partners Durham University working with Durham County Council, Durham Cathedral and the British Library. It was supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council England and a wider range of business sponsors.

What has the project achieved, or difference has it made?

100,000 people attended the exhibition and 58 countries of origin are represented in the visitor profile, demonstrating that the exhibition had global as well as regional and national appeal.

The economic impact of the exhibition and regional festival has been estimated at £8.3m, with exhibition visitors spending money in the city's restaurants, cafes, in hotels and B&Bs across the county, as well as including trips to regional visitor attractions as part of their visit. It is estimated that 1 in 6 people living in the North East got involved with Lindisfarne Gospels Durham through the regional festival.

Durham City Chamber of Trade has commented, “The passion and enthusiasm for the Gospels enveloped the whole of the City, which is reflected in the extremely positive feedback we have received from many of the businesses who reported a significant upturn in trade over the summer”.

Lindisfarne Gospels Durham also achieved recognition in the tourism awards taking gold in the Best Tourism Event and Best Tourism Experience categories at the North East Tourism Awards, and overall silver for Best Tourism Experience in the country.

What is the future of the project?

Other important findings show that Lindisfarne Gospels Durham has left a legacy for the North East. Over 20,000 school children were engaged in the event, either through a visit to Palace Green or as part of the outreach programme delivered by Durham University’s Learning Team. Loan boxes created for the project will be used in schools to support teaching of the new National Curriculum which includes, for the first time, the importance of Lindisfarne.

The engagement programme developed for the Lindisfarne Gospels exhibition will act as a blueprint for the outreach programme for all Durham University’s heritage collections, museums and libraries. The investment in the historic Palace Green Library leaves exhibition facilities capable of hosting important artefacts from around the world.

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