

## **To The River: Community Engagement**

**A number of initiatives to connect with the Cambridge community were instigated at the outset of the project. Through these, local knowledge and views about the river were gained alongside research into the history and place of the Cam today.**

***FLOW*** was a community performance involving as many forms of transport as possible along the river Cam to transport a container of river water upstream after which it was returned to the flow of the river. FLOW was part of In Your Way Festival in September 2018.

***Knit for the River*** built on the tradition of laundry washing (at Laundress Green) and a short textile industry that existed in Cambridge in the 17th Century, notably with Hobson's Spinning House. Throughout 2019, in collaboration with local artist Cathy Dunbar, Knit for the River invited the public to knit small squares from undyed organic wool. The squares were then sewn together to form several larger knitted 'blankets' that were used to wrap coir rolls inserted with native plants and installed as natural supports for the eroding riverbank edge. Knit for the River was developed with the support of the City Council's biodiversity officer and the Cam Conservators river manager. Knit for the River was realised through indoor and riverside Knit for the River events, meeting and knitting with local community groups, at Cambridge special events such as Strawberry Fair, and through distributed knitting packs for interested members of the public. During the course of Knit for the River, over 400 squares were knitted, by over 100 people from ten Cambridge wards, with events held in nine wards. Over ten metres of cable knitted pane were also created to embellish the blankets.

***What Colour is the River?*** was an instagram/social media initiative exploring the colour of the river through photographs of the river Cam water. What Colour is the River? was prompted in part by the publication, Werner's Nomenclature of Colours, containing descriptions of colours using references from nature, and used by Charles Darwin on his voyage on HMS Beagle. The question 'What colour is the river?' was posed as a response to the common use of smartphones to capture a photographic

record of place. Cambridge is a popular tourist destination, and the river Cam attracts large numbers of tourists. Snapping a selfie with the river featuring as backdrop can be witnessed regularly at the most picturesque parts of the river, which moves from central character to background stage set. The ease, speed, mobility and disposability of taking photographs with a smartphone alongside the rise of the selfie has changed the way we perceive and record landscape.

***The River Cam, according to Gwen Raverat*** explored the life and work of the artist Gwen Raverat (1885-1957). She was an English wood engraver and a leading figure in the revival of the art form in the 20th Century, as well as being granddaughter of Charles Darwin, one of Virginia Woolf's Bloomsbury group, and a student at the Slade School of Art. Raverat's best-selling memoir, *Period Piece* is still in print 68 years after its first publication. Her work is held in galleries, museums and private collections worldwide, including the New Hall Art Collection and The Fitzwilliam Museum, both in Cambridge.

Raverat approached her compositions with a deep understanding of perspective and carefully constructed her images to direct the viewer's gaze. By creating an entry point into her works, through controlling direction and path through her use of linear and aerial perspective, Raverat's compositional technique presents a three-dimensional understanding of a two-dimensional image. Moreover, she used foreshortening and some artistic license to direct the viewer in particular ways or to areas of her work where she wanted emphasis. Her consideration of how we see and look is borne out in her attention to detail which entices us to see things with fresh eyes. ***The River Cam, according to Gwen Raverat*** took a number of Raverat's prints and paintings of the river Cam and sought to locate and map the viewpoints from which she worked. This research is collated in a printed booklet and simultaneously, in a live digital interactive PDF that offers visitors to Cambridge the opportunity to discover and stand in the places where Raverat's works were created and see the scenes she depicted as they are today. This information was the starting point for postgraduate students from Anglia Ruskin University, who have created their own portfolios of work in print and paint in response.

To The River also connected with the first ever Cambridge Pride event by planning an event held on the river Cam. Visitors were invited onto the river where punts were used as stages for different live art works by local artists.

Throughout the community engagement period, there have been many people who have connected with the project and Caroline offers her thanks for everyone's time and generosity.

**[totheriver.info](http://totheriver.info)**

Image below: Caroline Wright, Flows, 2021, monoprint on paper, 12cm x 27cm

