

# One amazing journey

## Lindisfarne Gospels Durham



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Fig. 1 The Lindisfarne Gospels, Palace Green Library, July 2013

From 1 July to 30 September 2013, Durham University's Palace Green Library hosted the most exciting exhibition to be held in the North East of England in a generation. At its heart was the Lindisfarne Gospels, the most historically significant manuscript to have been created in the North East and normally on display at the British Library.

The exhibition and associated programme were developed in partnership between Durham University (as lead partner), Durham County Council, Durham Cathedral and the British Library, with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Arts Council England (ACE) and a number of private sponsors.



Fig. 2 The exhibition design drew heavily on the images and text in the manuscripts displayed.

The exhibition placed this iconic manuscript in its historic and spiritual context and provided a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see the treasures of St Cuthbert reunited with the magnificent book that was created in his honour. The exhibition focused on the creation of the Lindisfarne Gospels and its incredible journey since its creation, and featured prestigious items on loan from national and regional museums and libraries. It was the first and probably the last time these items have been on display together.

The exhibition was developed by Durham University's exhibitions and learning team from a clear interpretation plan which included research by Professors Richard Gameson (History of the Book) and Francis Watson (Theology), thus ensuring that cutting edge academic research was incorporated. An interpretation hierarchy was agreed, utilising a range of approaches to meet different needs and learning styles. This and the exhibition concepts were then tested with a number of internal and external 'critical friends'.

The exhibition itself was designed and built to the highest quality to meet the standards of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport Government Indemnity Scheme. Invaluable advice was provided by ACE with involvement from national security and environmental advisors. Our conservation team worked closely with showcase manufacturers Click Netherfield to improve air exchange within showcases, achieving the company's highest standards to date.

An underlying theme of journeys provided a framework not just for the exhibition but for

an entire engagement programme and regional festival, becoming the focus of a celebration of the North of England's artistic and creative heritage. More than five hundred events took place across the region and along with a wide-ranging learning and engagement programme that sparked a diverse range of creative activity – from the establishment of a 1000-strong community choir which sang specially commissioned pieces based on the exhibition themes, to an Anglo-Saxon inspired graffiti project, to the creation of a carpet page image at Lindisfarne Priory using coloured glass jars. The key message was that everyone was welcome to engage in the return of the Gospels to the North East.

#### LEARNING AND OUTREACH



*Fig. 3 Local children enjoying the learning and outreach programme.*

The schools programme was launched in September 2012, in order to ensure that we were able to work with as many children and young people as possible. It focused on the making and meaning of the Lindisfarne Gospels and its continuing importance. A range of workshops and assemblies were developed, aimed at different Key Stages from Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4. All workshops had clear curriculum links and utilised a number of activities to accommodate different learning styles. A programme of talks was also developed to reach an older audience, as was an exciting programme of simple craft activities, creative practitioner-led workshops, lectures and talks that ran for the duration of the exhibition. Elements of both the learning programme and the scheme to support involvement of the accredited museums in the region were funded by ACE.

It was also deemed critical to have user input, so focus groups were established to assist in the creation of the programme. A group of under-12s was convened to determine the range of activities for children; the group helped in the development of a gallery trail for their peer group. Similarly a group of adults had input into the content of the

lifelong learning programme. Consultation of peers was also critical in implementing the ACE-funded project. A steering group drawn from partner museums was established and they worked with a dedicated project officer to determine the nature of publicity material to be produced, the content of training and resource materials and what themes should be used for the development of loans boxes. This proved a successful model; one organisation commented that it should be adopted for all future major exhibitions taking place in the North East of England.

#### MARKETING



*Fig. 4 Exhibition branding appeared across the city and beyond for the duration of the exhibition.*

Marketing was identified at an early stage as an essential strand of work that could make or break the success of the exhibition. From the outset it played a role in shaping the project so that it would appeal to target audiences, striking a balance between the academic, the spiritual and the popular. It then communicated the exhibition offer and the broader festival to audiences as diverse as religious pilgrims, community groups, tourists, residents of the North East of England and scholars.

The marketing objectives were: to raise the profile of Durham and the North East nationally and internationally; to provide additional visibility for

investing partners; and to generate audiences for the exhibition and the supporting events programme.

The main marketing tool was the project website, which had two sides – consumer-facing and partner-facing. It was visited by over 220,000 people, who spent an average of three minutes each on the site. The e-zine gathered over 4,000 subscribers: over 2,500 from the UK and almost 1,500 from the rest of the world. Our marketing partnerships with East Coast, Ticketmaster, English Heritage and the county's domestic marketing campaign helped us reach a national and global audience of 18 million.

Green, over 20,000 children participated in the associated learning programme and that one in six people in the North East of England engaged with the exhibition via the festival. The formal evaluation of the project has also estimated that it had an economic impact of £8.3 million.

The success of Lindisfarne Gospels Durham is even more significant when it is considered that Palace Green Library is a relatively new venue, which is now established as a location for world-class exhibitions.

## OUTCOMES & EVALUATION



Fig. 5 Wordle created from feedback in our visitors' book

There can be little doubt that the project met its objectives. The exhibition attracted 97,208 paying visitors (well above the projected estimate of 80,000), more than half of whom came from outside the region. Analysis of the visitor comments book and an extensive online survey revealed that visitors came from across the world, from 58 different countries. The same evaluation also found that over 99% of visitors positively rated the exhibition. It has been estimated that over 13,500 people took part in events on or around Palace