

Research Project

Asylum Armada - Knowledge, Practice & Community Engagement in Participatory Documentary Practice

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Preliminary research phase of a participatory practice-led research and documentary film project exploring the legacy of Spanish Armada ships and their crew who were shipwrecked around the Scottish coast in 1588.

The documentary is inspired by the journeys and fates of two Armada ships - El Gran Grifon, which ran aground on Fair Isle, and the San Juan de Sicilia, which harboured and was blown up in Tobermory Bay on the Isle of Mull. Although enemies of the English crown, Armada ships and sailors who were shipwrecked in Scotland were granted asylum. As wrecks both ships have been the subject of excavation and plunder, and the fates of their crews variously documented in historical texts. However this research represents the first attempt to bring together Scottish Armada stories and explore their broader impact on local communities, past and present. The film will explore the historical significance and contemporary relevance of the Armada stories as well as the myths and rumours that persist, and which keep the memory of the Spanish Armada in Scotland alive.

The film will be based on a series of local community based projects in areas associated with the Armada - Fair Isle (where the Gran Grifon landed), the Orkney island of Westray (where Armada Spaniards are believed to have married into the local population), the Fife village of Anstruther (the Gran Grifon crew were transported here and accommodated en route to Edinburgh), Mull (where the San Juan de Sicilia landed and was mysteriously blown up in Tobermory Bay) and in Spain (from where the ships departed and some of the crews returned). The film and research will draw on local knowledge and participation to create short documentary projects which will feed into a longer documentary film connecting the communities and the Scottish Spanish Armada histories.

The filmmaking is part of a broader practice-led research project examining the processes and relationships of community engagement and documentary production and which explores the construction and preservation of historical knowledge and identity in Scottish (and Spanish) communities. Drawing on practice-led methodologies, which incorporate the process of collaborative documentary production, the research will also examine the relationship between local histories and national and international narratives.

Funding from a Napier Santander travel grant and from the Centre for Media and Culture enabled me to conduct initial research over the summer of 2016 to develop proposals for funding. This has included creating a dialogue for potential partnerships and collaborations with local groups and organisations such as community history and archaeology group, The Kilrenny and Anstruther Burgh Survey in Anstruther; in Lerwick with the Shetland Museums and Archives; with local people and the curators of the museum on Fair Isle; with the Westray Heritage Centre; and on the Isle of Mull with the Mull Museum. I would also like to include Spain in the scope of the film and research and am looking to work with partners in the Basque Country or Galicia, such as in San Sebastian, Bilbao or La Corunna.

This interdisciplinary research and film project draws on my research and practice in Scottish communities on community-based media as a form of networked knowledge production. I welcome any contacts, advice, theoretical, logistical or funding suggestions any Fellows may have and look forward to updating you further on the project's progress. •

