

HIDDEN RIVERS OF LONDON

As the audience arrives, they take in the space. On display are photographs of the River Fleet's course above ground, handmade objects relating to our Voices Of The Water explorations, and in the middle of the space an empty jar, around which a few papers (the Fellows' letters) are scattered.

Lucy is painting her Water Memories on a canvas. We hear music and/or the sound of water.

And when the audience is settled...

1. The Jar of Water Memories

One of our Generators walks into the space, kneels down next to the jar and writes on a piece of paper, speaking aloud the words:

**Dear River Fleet,
I think of you as a great, great, great, great Grandparent. Old and wise.
You must carry so many memories.
What memories will you share tonight?**

She posts the letter into the empty jar.

Ellie walks into the space, picks up her letter from the floor, and reads aloud. When she has finished, she posts it into the jar.

Each of the fellows does the same: collects their letter from the floor, reads aloud, and posts the words into the jar...

Cassie

Maroua

Samira

Nathan

Christabelle

Sapphy

2. The History of the River Fleet

The lights are turned out. Just one or two torch beams light the space.

ALL:

Did you know...?

Housed in this museum are all sorts of freshwater species that we imagine might have existed in the River Fleet.

Our generators hold up papers, calling out the names of different species:

Perch!

Pike!

Salmon!

Carp!

The papers turn into fish and swim in the space.

There were frogs too, and beavers, otters, kingfishers, swans, ducks and dragonflies.

Later, when you are exploring the museum, you can find the specimens of these species. We have put markers to help.

ALL:

And did you know...?

The River Fleet originally existed above ground. Gradually, from the 1730s to the 1870s it was covered up.

The paper fish disappear. The lights switch on.

The river seems to have lived many lives at once. In the part that ran through St Pancras, people would bathe. But less than a mile downstream, near Smithfield Market, the water ran red with animal waste.

ALL:

NO!!!

And did you know...?

The River Fleet sprang up in North London, flowing down to the Thames via some familiar landmarks:

Our performers line up as they each call out a name:

Hampstead Ponds

Highgate Ponds

Kentish Town

St Pancras Old Church

St Pancras Wells

Kings Cross

St Chad's Well

Lamb's Conduit

Coldbath Fields

Clerkenwell

Holborn Viaduct

Fleet Prison

Bridwell

Blackfriars

We went on a walk from Hampstead Heath all the way down to the Story Garden in Kings Cross, charting the course of the River Fleet above ground.

Displayed here tonight, you can see photographs we took along the way. (*Point to the display*).

When we follow the waterways of London, it's a beautiful reminder of the green, rural oasis that London was before it became so built-up.

ALL:

And did you know...?

There's even a spot where you can hear the River Fleet passing underground.

It's in a cycle lane just near St Pancras Hospital. Next time you're passing, look for the circular grate in the tarmac and listen for the sound.

The water noises you heard as you came in this evening were our recording of the actual River Fleet!

ALL:

Play it again now!

The recording of the River Fleet is played throughout the rest of this section of the piece.

ALL:

So remind us, how did the River Fleet begin?

Well... London is in fact full of hidden rivers.

Drumming begins (Kevin drums with drum sticks against the museum floor)

The course of these hidden rivers was probably set by the effects of the last Ice Age, when retreating and melting glaciers altered the shape of land and water in London.

You could say that Kings Cross Station was designed 12,000 years ago. The ancient Pancras Road was built to follow along the banks of the River Fleet. The Great Northern Hotel and the new concourse behind both follow the curve of the river.

ALL:

And where did the River Fleet end up?

Drumming increases.

Our sacred river, once full of healing wells, eventually became clogged with the excrement of London's expansion, and it degraded into a stinking ditch and then a sewer.

To contain it, and to allow buildings to arrive, it was encased in piping.

Drumming softens.

But it runs still beneath our feet.

Everybody perform a short movement sequence(following Kevin input) to illustrate the demise of the River Fleet from thriving waterway to encased pipe.

At the end of the sequence, the drumming now stop.

3. Taniwha (during which we gradually create a dragon with the plaits...)

There's a legend about a dragon who thrived in the waters of the River Fleet. Her name was Taniwha. She lived in the river before buildings were constructed from the clay of the river's banks.

Taniwha lives today and also FOUR THOUSAND years ago, older than the medieval dragons, older than the roads we stand on, but not older than the Fleet.

Though not yet named, this river springs from Hampstead Heath, and carries lifeblood to the settlement we now know as inner city London.

So here is Taniwha on her way to find a meal, perhaps gobble up some salmon as they jump the stream, passing their knowledge through the world.

Taniwha would every day follow the rivers, for she knew that water made the quickest channel somewhere. When she bathed, she created great crashing waves that would wash down to the mighty Thames, who would thank her for refreshing it with different sacred waters. Then Taniwha would fly down to the banks and would talk with the Thames, telling stories of the land and of giants and gods.

This continued for millennia. People arrived and worshipped the River Fleet, worshipped the forests around. But now and then the great dragon, with eyes so wise and comprehension like the trees (who witness everything and formulate answers composed of aeons), she noticed that silent shapes of clay were appearing on the banks of her beloved river.

New ideas had come into the world, and as new ideas came in the old ones were given little space. The fish were gradually emptying. The salmon - with their knowledge of life and death and its cycles - were scattering.

One day Taniwha awoke and could no longer find the fish. In despair, she roamed up and down the land, carving great flat tracks with her feet, making the hills around the city of London, making the bowl we know today.

Despairing and greatly tired, Taniwha fell asleep, and her back became part of the Heath. Her tears gently mingled with the Fleet, so that when we see the exposed river today we know we are seeing the same tears that Taniwha shed hundreds of years ago.

When we walk the Heath, we walk along her back, and if we touch the trees we can feel pathways to the roots that gently sing to her, calming her in her sadness.

There is of course a great legend - that one day the dragon will rise and set her sights on the city once more. In this legend, as in this new world, she will lift up from the Heath. Trees and clods of earth will fly, and her great claw will sweep along the streets, pulling up the buried River Fleet, bursting it from its piped imprisonment. And the salmon will return, jumping and leaping to their spawning place, bringing back the old knowledge of the world.

This is a sincere hope, for we all know that a river cannot be contained for long, especially if imbued with the tears of a dragon.

Our First Generator kneels down next to the jar once more and writes:

Dear Taniwha

Today you taught me to be more mindful and notice more of what is around me.

You taught me to be silent and peaceful every once in a while.

You taught me that Nature always finds a way to make things happen.

You reminded me to respect Nature and cherish it.

Fellows now invite the audience to use paper (already has a starting line “dear Taniwha,” on it) and pencils (under their chairs) to freefall a letter to the dragon about “what they wish for the planet or for the river”

After a few minutes Fellows invite the audience in sharing some of the writings

At the end, hand over two jars to collect the letters

Silvia Speech to frame the work as part of the festival, tell the story of GG and what is activism.

Invite everyone to enjoy the food in the breakup room guided by fellows

Breakup room will have food and different props of the VoW project (tapestry, tree of lost voices)