Community collaboration is helping keep Hastings’



Welcoming people aboard the Hastings fishing fleet. Credit: Euan Baker.

Hastings Fishermen’s Protection Society and Hastings Contemporary art gallery have teamed up to preserve and celebrate local stories, skills and practices.

Hastings Contemporary and Hastings fishing fleet sit side by side on the town’s seafront. You can see the boats from the gallery’s windows. Its carpark is shared with the fishmarket where the fleet’s fishermen sell their catches.

“We're delivering fish and art in the same place,” says Yasmin Ornsby from Hastings Fishermen's Protection Society. “So the project seemed a really good way to start working together more productively.”

Time and Tide, which we awarded £249,972 in 2024, collected and curated oral histories of the fleet and shared them in an immersive sound installation created through a collaboration with local artists, including sound artist Mary Hooper.

The project also introduced fishing heritage to a new generation through Hastings Contemporary’s schools programme and an endangered crafts event where the fishermen demonstrated netmaking and knot-tying.

Hastings’ heritage

While the gallery first opened in 2012, fishing boats have been launched from the adjacent Stade beach for over 1,000 years.

“The fl h the place t



The fleet and Hastings Contemporary’s exterior. Credit: Euan Baker.

But that heritage is under threat. An ageing workforce and changes to the ecosystem caused by climate change mean the fleet is at risk of disappearing along with the fishermen’s skills and stories.

Yasmin and Leah don’t just want to raise awareness of the fishermen’s history. They hope the project will also start conversations about the future of small-scale sustainable fishing fleets in Hastings and beyond.

Working in partnership

For Leah, co-creation has been key to the project’s success: “It’s been very much an equal partnership. We’ve consulted all the way through to make sure that it’s been born out of the fishermen themselves and that it’s an honest representation.

“Our role has been not just to use our resources to record the voices of the fishermen, but to provide the space to exhibit and preserve them.”



The fishermen previewing their exhibition. Credit: Clare Hughes.

In turn, the fishermen didn't just share their stories, but constructed the displays for the gallery to house the recordings.

Yasmin says: “It’s really important that the voices are protected, not just used. To come into the gallery, to be part of building the exhibition and to have that sense of ‘we did this’ was a gift.”

Connecting communities

“Art galleries can seem quite hostile if you’re unfamiliar with them,” Leah thinks. “So finding this way to welcome new people into the space has been really valuable.”

At the same time, the project has helped regular gallery-goers connect with the fishing community.



A ‘Mariners’ Tales’ event. Credit: Euan Baker.

“People see the fleet and the beach every day, but they don't really know what goes on. The project has encouraged people to learn more.

“Seeing so many people take part and come along to the opening has signified a real turning point in the relationship between Hastings Contemporary and the fishing community. It’s so much stronger.”

“And so much more central to the town,” adds Yasmin. “Because people can see that the gallery is trying to look at its community space which is so important to all of us. I think it's important that you look seaward sometimes.”

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