The submersion and adaptation of routines in the Somerset Levels and Moors

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ABSTRACT

The Somerset Levels and Moors comprise low-lying farmland in south-west England, prone to seasonal flooding. The area suffered uncommonly severe floods in 2012 and 2013/2014, triggering high-profile debates about the area's long-term future. The article focuses on the experiences of the floods in one village, Muchelney. Drawing on mixed methods, this interdisciplinary study examines physical and social routines, and how these were disrupted, adapted or reinforced. Indications of adaptability, resourcefulness and hierarchy emerge. The examination of routines draws on modest material representations sought out after the events took place, to illustrate how the floods submerged the landscape's physical geometry and disrupted mobility, but also presented new conduits. Within the trauma of isolation and inundation, prolonged media scrutiny revealed a range of gendered, hierarchical and uncomfortable social experiences that complement evidence of a resilient community pulling together and learning to cope among the upending of normal life.

KEYWORDS Somerset Levels and Moors; flooding; routines; interdisciplinary research; material representations

1. Introduction

The Somerset Levels and Moors comprise a low-lying landscape in Somerset, in England's south-west, covering 250 square miles (about 650 km2), managed as farmland. With elevations close to sea-level and crossed by several rivers draining into the Bristol Channel, the area would be flooded for much of the winter, were it not for pumps and sluices operated by the Environment Agency. The area around the abbey town of Glastonbury, whose monks dug drainage ditches centuries ago, was known as the Isle of Avalon, referring to its Tor (hill), rising above the flooded land like an island. Another 'island' is Muchelney, one of many local settlements with an -ey or -y suffix denoting island in Old English (Brown, 2016:13), revealing routine seasonal flooding.

While the area's topography is described elsewhere (e.g. Hawkins, 1973; Williams, 1970), a notable feature are the rhynes, which are 'ruler straight' ditches that 'carve up the wetland into a dense chequerboard of small, rectangular fields of about five to ten acres (two to four hectares), providing wet fences and drinking water for grazing cattle' (Clifford & King, 2006:350). The coastal Levels, where irregular field patterns follow water courses, contrast with the inland Moors. These, including around Mucheleny, were open and uncultivated 'waste' areas until drained from the mid-seventeenth century and despite which, 'water remains an ever-present element' (Natural England, 2013, :3). Local author Michael Brown, a victim of the floods described, highlights the 'bloody-minded' rivers of the Levels:

> 'Despite centuries of efforts at banking them up, fastening them in, they have a tendency to unbutton, go walk about, outwards, sideways – in often devastating fashion.' (Brown, 2016:11)

Perspectives of local geometry are represented in Figures 1 and 2. The Ordnance Survey map recalls the chequerboard description above; the photograph (Figure 2, below) shows a rhyne bounded by pollarded willows.

In November 2012, and again December 2013/January 2014—two consecutive winters—major flooding inundated Muchelney and other local villages including Thorney and Moorlands for several weeks. Aerial news footage showed vast areas under water, with intermittent evidence of the tops of hedges and trees, or roads appearing out of the water leading part-way to cut-off settlements.

The intention here is to capture details of how the floods affected and upended routines. Analysis complements literature on how people who have learnt, over long periods, to live in close company with water, nevertheless find that climate change is making life more difficult, more often. Edward Platt, who canoed through (or over) Thorney in 2014 with floating apples bobbing against the side of

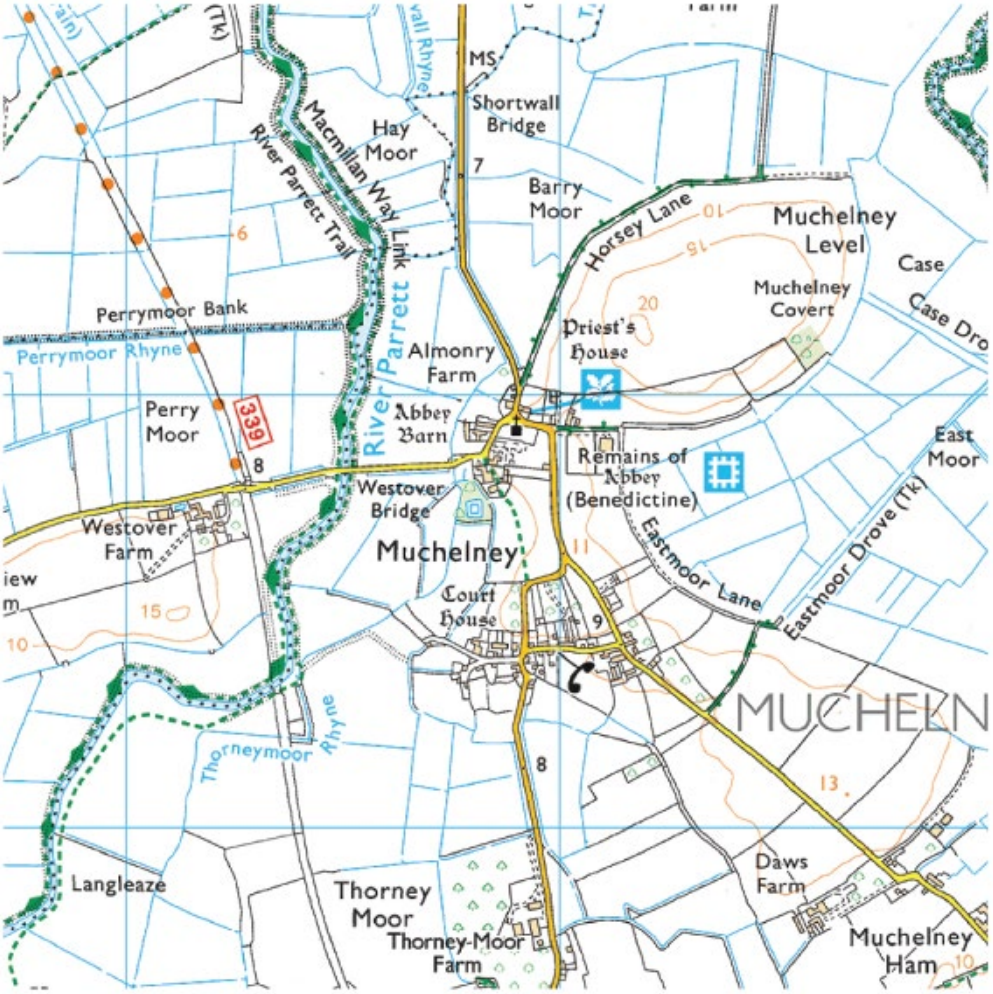

Figure 1 Drainage channels, Muchelney. © Crown Copyright and database rights (2019). Scale 1:25,000. OS Explorer 129: Yeovil and Sherborne.

his boat, imagined the area's '*future, and the future of the other places that will one day find themselves submerged by the grey tide that had engulfed Thorney' (*Platt, 2019:3).

The upending of the day-to-day following inundation is approached in two ways. Firstly, attention is paid to the physical impact of the invasion of water. Flooding characterises this part of Somerset, yet these consecutive floods presented a major shock to local residents. Secondly, in dealing with floods, local people adjusted routines, complicated in the case of Muchelney by the duration (over three months) of isolation. Villagers found ways to cope and subsequently worked with the authorities to install future protection measures. New routines came under extraordinary scrutiny due to the close focus on their experiences by a media encampment which recorded events in minute detail, causing a flow of sympathy and support from the 'outside' world, while creating internal social pressures.

Figure 2 Rhyne near Godney. Image: Ricketts, 2018.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 offers a review of literature in relation to these floods. A concentration emerges on community resilience or technical remediation as normative responses. In section 3, interdisciplinary methods are described that combine collections of research material from mixed sources, leading to varied representations of flood experiences. The methods reveal, in section 4, the effect of the water on physical mobility and property, and on social behaviours. The conclusion comments on the on-going and heightened challenges of living with water, linking them with the need for experiential and place-specific research, in the light of the universality of flood risk.

2. Holding back the waters?

Floods during the winter of 2013/2014 affected large parts of the UK and stimulated a range of reports and associated scholarship, including vol. 180, iss. 4[1] of *The Geographical Journal*. In that issue, Stephens and Cloke (2014) recall the anger expressed by locals who felt that a lack of regular drainage of the waterways had been a major factor in the severity of the flood damage, especially painful after they had just recovered from one flood to be swamped again so soon. Other contributions advocate complementary land management to convert high-risk agricultural areas to wetland rather than continuing to drain them at great expense (Clout, 2014), along with detailed engagement with local residents thereby unlocking collective memory using arts and humanities (McEwen et al., 2014).

A selection of arts-based, creative initiatives linked to regional floods include *Exe—Conversations Between Floods*[2] by Tania Kovats, who collected archival photographs, official flood records and historical media stories to develop a curated conversation about floods in Exeter, involving

engineers, ecologists and artists. In *Between the Tides*[3], Bristol-based Antony Lyons collaborated in an AHRC-NWO[4] project of 'creative assemblages', exploring how artists can help local people to develop new narratives about flood risk in the intertidal landscapes of the Severn Estuary and the Dutch Wadden Sea. James Crowden's poetry *In Time of Flood* (Crowden & Wright, 1996), complemented by George Wright's photography, records the annual restlessness of the River Parrett, which flows past Muchelney, and people who live alongside it, including eel fishers and withy weavers. Such community engagements explore social identities and result in strengthening future resilience through collective action (Ntontis et al., 2018).

In Somerset, calls to make better use of local knowledge to increase communities' preparedness (Gerrard, 2018) followed a number of responses to flooding, including restoring and expanding plantations of water-storing willows (Reimagining the Levels Group, 2016) or introducing Sustainable Drainage Systems and natural flood management techniques, by slowing seasonal flows with watercourse barriers made of natural materials (DEFRA, 2015). Acreman et al. (2011) indicate the difficult balance between the ecological services offered by keeping the area wet, including carbon sequestration, biodiversity and greenhouse gas absorption, and the advantages of drainage. Such eco-technical discourses erupted after the Somerset floods and were accompanied by reports about the associated human suffering (Gurner et al., 2014), recommending regular monitoring walks to check flood protections, and the organisation of pastoral care in rural parishes lacking clergy. Smith et al. (2017) review subsequent policy commitments to safeguard the area from future inundation, following then Prime Minister Cameron's pronouncement that *'we cannot let this happen again'*, an ambitious assertion given local history and climate dynamics.

In tracing such responses, two particular narratives are evident. Firstly, although Somerset is a wet place, an urgent job remains for the authorities in safeguarding the livelihoods and properties of residents. This requires a hybrid portfolio of 'hard' hydro-engineering and 'softer' nature-based solutions with local governance (Short, 2015). Secondly, while regulatory bodies work to safeguard the area, local people continue to rely on their own resourcefulness in the light of an uncertain future. This includes recreating collective bonds, nurturing adaptability, sharing tacit understandings of the character of the place, and appreciating—even celebrating—the important local agency of water. In short, these are the taken-for-granted means of everyday social functioning via small acts of community life.

How did such small acts appear and support physical and social functioning in Muchelney? The question resonates in research on environmental change in relation to conventional islands. The residents of the low-lying Maldives face existential challenges due to climate-change related sea-

level rises, while local councils try to modernise island infrastructure to support 'sustainable' tourism. Kothari and Arnall (2019) highlight how development affects daily human-nature relations as residents adapt their routines to accommodate tourist expectations. The authors suggest climate research has overlooked socio-cultural insights into everyday life which, they note, unfolds 'unreflexively', in the terminology of Middleton (2011). Scientific knowledge has not yet proved adequate to change practices that most affect people living with flood risk (McMichael et al., 2021).

The circumstances differ in Mucheleny, yet enforced isolation and the need to adapt new daily rounds for extended periods caused stress and insecurity as 'the basic mechanics of daily life' were disrupted (Sibley et al., 2020). In the following section, a research method is presented that helped investigate intentional actions, such as improvised mobility, alongside unreflexive social improvisations and ingrained social hierarchies stimulated by prolonged upending of the everyday.

3. Research methods

The research objective is to uncover how the floods affected everyday routines, firstly through the changes required in relation to the physical, invasive presence of the water which impeded mobility, caused isolation and demanded adjustments of habitual practices such as shopping or commuting; and secondly by examining social dimensions of such adaptations. In particular, the duration of the floods imposed uninvited (often supportive, but occasionally unwanted) contact with the 'outside' world.

Research was pursued as time allowed. Both authors live near to the research location. The mixed methods employed reflect different disciplinary and institutional approaches to research documentation. In gathering representations of adaptations and new social practices, a broadly ethnographic approach to gathering material included face-to-face, unstructured interviews with four local people, which took place in November 2016 and May 2017. Two are residents of Muchelney who lived through these floods. Two others live nearby but were not flooded, and are active in local networks seeking to mitigate future flood impacts. All four were known through previously unrelated work to one of the authors and agreed to be interviewed. Unstructured questioning was preferred, once the idea of routines was introduced, as no comparative analysis was proposed for these individuals' responses to be judged against set criteria.

Initial contact with interviewees encouraged an extended telling of flood experiences. The authors expressed interest at seeing any photographs, material traces or representations of the time. It was anticipated these would be subjective and varied. A loose, extended and conversational approach was intended and preferred, although prompts were occasionally offered to steer conversations.

These included inquiries about the history of the water in the area and interviewees' broader experiences of it; personal experiences of the Muchelney events in 2012 and 2013/14 and their impacts of daily life; unusual or unexpected turns of events; descriptions of different people involved in the relief effort; reflections on post-flood developments. We sought views on how people adjusted their behaviours both in the village and outside, and looked for material and visual residues of the floods. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by one of the authors.

In addition to interviews, national media and policy reports of the time, on-line blogs and film footage were accessed. Published or exhibited photographic impressions complemented on-line local news searches. Three visits were undertaken to the area to take photos, make drawings and gather visual, aural and material representations.

The gathering and creation of representations departs from local research concerned with non-representational concepts of affect and the landscape's agency (e.g. Jones, 2011; Wylie, 2002). Because research presented here comes at a time well after events have taken place, representations of the floods and their impacts have had to be sought out. Reaching into the recent past is an important way to reflect contrasting attitudes to the floods grounded in history or envisioning, including that they are normal, the fault of policy neglect, a qualification of local character, or a predominantly technical challenge. Attention to easily-overlooked objects used for making physical adaptations and interventions, and new routines, events and solutions, enables a focus on 'small' moves and practices, which reveal specific instances and minutiae of moves-under-pressure.

In seeking representations, rural landscape *imagery* (of views) has been avoided—the countryside being examined was under muddy water for weeks. Interest has emerged from the villagers' own representations—photos, narrations, pottery are all important markers of that time. In this way, seeking representations has been a way to discover physical fragments of that time. The corralling of visual evidence (including annotated drawings and photographs) in this research, adds to the material marking or recounting of the disordering of life and the reconfiguration of routines in the prolonged flood experiences. Representation as a 'circulation of meanings among social groups' (Duncan, 2000:705) revealed a diversity of flood-induced socio-cultural routines, reflecting disruption and adaptation, but also social hierarchy and gendered perspectives. This emphasis contrasts to the eco-technical solutions being discussed by policy-makers and environmentalists.

Finally, we have been guided by art historian Miwon Kwon's 'site-oriented' practice (Kwon, 2002), which advocates a process of spatial enquiry, over time, allowing the specificity of spaces and situations to inspire the development of new works. She advocates engaging with, and making

manifest, contrasting spatial practices. Pursuing multiple lines of enquiry and methods at once, gives rise to eclectic mixes of voices and forms of evidence. These can be drawn together in 'site-oriented' works, to present a contrasting range of socio-spatial accounts and experiences. Given the multiple impressions presented, including the individualisation of routines, as well as the regrouping of people and actions around conventional social forms, networks, stereotypes and hierarchies, it is important to avoid a single dominating account.

In summary, research has drawn from a variety of sources to gather a broad range of flood impressions captured in representations. The combination of consecutive appearance and prolonged duration is unique in recent times, heralding climate change, and returned Muchelney to an historically familiar island status. Observations of the floods are made in relation to the collection of material representations that indicate how routines were disrupted, renewed or initiated. With this approach, the pressing challenge of living with floods now, and how to try to work through changes at the level of experience in the future is called into focus.

In the next section, the impact of the floods on village routines are discussed by unfolding the research material in greater detail.

4.Flood representations

4.1.Inundation

Aerial news footage of the floods, gloomily framed by low clouds that supressed reflected light, showed a vast area of inundation. From this, intermittent evidence of the tops of trees joined more linear fragments of hedges and roads appearing out of brown water, leading to cut-off buildings. The photographer's position above the water presented a scene of obscured detail. The characteristic field patterns were gone and the configuration of settlements disrupted. The severity of the floods and the resulting isolation or displacement of many people created a high degree of outside interest in the area, despite, and because of, the loss of landscape detail the waters caused. Muchelney potter, John Leach, explained that: '*People flocked here to see nothing*', the 'view' being transformed and eroded by the water.

In contrast to the aerial broadcasts, a different and materially permanent representation of the floods at Muchelney is displayed in the church, shown in Figure 3.

While the centre-ground vista recalls aerial pictures, on the left-hand side, a farmer is seen trudging, hands in pockets, perhaps with feelings of resignation, through his flooded yard. In the bottom right corner, is a submerged car marked with a traffic cone; in the top left, local people apparently are being escorted from their waterlogged homes by rescuers equipped with dinghies and land rovers.

Figure 3 Painting in bell tower of the church of ST Peter and ST Paul, Muchelney. Image: Ricketts, 2018.

These vignettes of detailed performances within a larger scene seem to echo some early Renaissance paintings, or, for example, works by Brueghel. Outside help offered not just emergency rescue, but also mobility. During the second flood, in 2014:

> ‘ . . . we got declared a disaster, suddenly the emergency services stepped in, and they would send vehicles to transport people around the village. [. . .] it could be a fire engine. Then they got this really amazing . . . group of volunteers who have big 4x4 vehicles, and they would run a similar service. You’d ring them up on their mobiles and arrange to meet them, and they’d turn up in their 4x4 and you’d get in and get lifts . . . There was a range of vehicles that helped people from boats, to fire engines, to these massive Red Cross Unimog vehicles that had six wheels . . . at one point we had soldiers! It was overkill . . . .’

This account is interesting in light of the church painting’s celebration, using stylised scrolls, of people’s virtues: community spirit, courage, patience and resilience. It is notable also that the scrolling marks the painting not as a commemoration but a ‘celebration’. Such virtues may have helped local people make the best of the situation, shifting focus away from suffering, solely as victims, an extreme situation beyond their control—an act of God, to coin a phrase employed by insurance companies.

A third set of visual representations of the floods brings the focus to the domestic scale with a grimly functional purpose. John Leach shared photos he was asked to send to his insurers. Some pictures show, their browns and yellows somehow echoing the colours of his craft, the awful invasion of the floodwaters right into his home and workplace. The sofa is on bricks, the legs of his office desk are

substantially out of view below the water and buckets of clay and slip are surrounded by muddy liquid (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Stack of John Leach's insurance claim photographs. Image: Ricketts, 2018.

Heavy buckets of clay doubled as weights to keep the gates of his property closed as a precaution against people wandering in by accident, thereby reinforcing the invisible boundary between the road and the pottery (Figure 5). It must be assumed that voluminous archives of flood images taken by desperate homeowners remain in the offices of insurers from this period. Premiums for insurance in Muchelney went up dramatically after the floods, and the National Farmers' Union has published a 'Flooding Manifesto' (National Famers' Union, 2015) containing flood risk guidance for farmers, policy recommendations and lessons from the Netherlands.

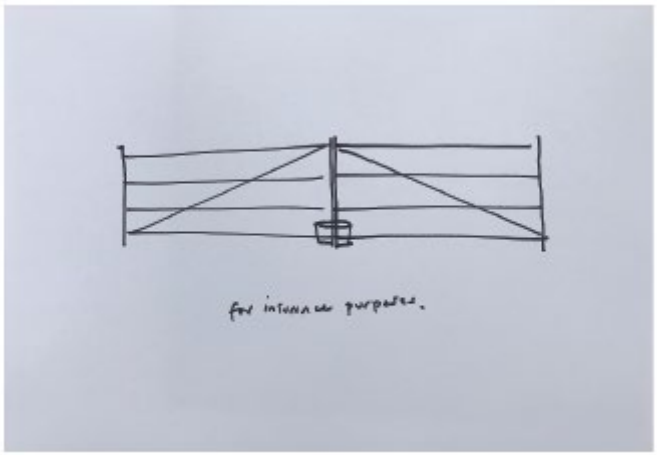

Figure 5 'For insurance purposes'. Image: Ricketts, 2018.

New types of mobility emerged, even while the flood waters isolated the village. The pottery sign became a mooring post for boats, in which villagers had rowed over for 'whisky, biscuits and a natter'. When the rain stopped, the unfamiliar environment created excitement, even enchantment, shared via photos:

> 'This is the best day, this is when we went canoeing. By the time of the second flood, [my son] was around one-and-a-half. We put a pair of armbands on him for health and safety . . . We could canoe right out of our front door and [shows picture of canoe trip] that's way out down in the field . . . It was just so deep and it was so lovely.'

Such small intimacies were transformed into aesthetisised images by Matilda Temperley, locally-raised and internationally known for her fashion photography. Her collection *Under The Surface*[5] (Temperley, 2014) records striking images of young children enjoying the experience of being transported in dinghies. In other photos, people are shown on horseback who seem to be navigating through the waters by tracing flooded roads parallel to lines of willows, while bright sunlight dazzles through the bare branches and reflects off the water's surface, in contrast to the aerial news footage. *Under The Surface* is full of pictures of flooded cars, stunned people standing within or just outside flooded interiors, places where water should not be. Temperley's images are one kind of representation in a range of different images that have functional, aesthetic or documentary purposes and are included in a personal exhibition at the Museum of Rural Life in Glastonbury called *'My Somerset'*. Many of her black-and-white images are formally-composed as portraits and, were it not for the knee-high waters, recall traditionally-framed pictures of people in, or on, their property.

Despite its movement-limiting force, the water created new opportunities for movement around or near the village, on horseback or boat. Farm tractors were the only wheeled vehicles able to travel the submerged roads (before the Unimogs), and soon replaced conventional commuting opportunities:

> 'The local farmers would run tractor-trailer services for the first six weeks of the flood. We weren't having any outside help . . . . We'd get the kids to pre-school on the trailer and they ran it like a bus service. There was an 8am trailer, then a 9am trailer, then there was a gap . . . ' [There was also a 3pm service and a commuter pick up at 6pm.] 'You had to time your commute to get that trailer, otherwise you're wading.'

Although the villagers struggled to get around, solidarity came from outside and from neighbours to overcome isolation and to keep people supplied.

> ‘[In] November 2012, the night-time flood was unexpected. We moved straight into one room upstairs at [neighbour’s house], which became like a commune . . . ’

‘At some point, all of the local supermarkets started having a competition among each other about who could send the best aid packages. Talk about an over-reaction! We had Tesco, there’s a Waitrose in Crewkerne and everyone was fighting over the Waitrose goody bags.’

This discussion about the effects and representations of the inundation of Muchelney reveals a contrast around the water’s physical effects. On one hand, the flood confined people within dry areas and limited conventional mobility practices, as well as covering characteristic landscape features. On the other hand, the function of water as a conduit for boats, horses and specialist vehicles provided unexpected opportunities for movement. There is no romanticising the flood, but neither are experiences wholly bad. Some degree of settling in to new physical contexts imposed by the floodwaters is evident, and was visually recorded.

4.2. Social routines

In this section, the media encampment plays an important backdrop against which social transactions play out in the village. In the preceding section, an examination of visual representations revealed the patterns of new behaviour, especially mobility. We now examine how new social routines were created as people came to terms with being isolated and, in some cases, needing to accommodate neighbours. Some new routines, in the stress and novelty of the situation, led to an almost carnivalesque outcome, in which gender, deference and institutions play a role.

The second flooding isolated Muchelney for three months, during which time the area was declared a disaster zone. A regular output of extraordinary footage had been shown during the first flood, notably films of huge pumps moving vast volumes from the fields into waterways. In the early stages of the second flood, angry confrontations with the then environment secretary Owen Patterson were broadcast. He forgot his wellington boots during a visit and was consequently ridiculed. Months later, scores of wellingtons appeared outside his ministry in London in a Friends of the Earth protest[6]. Even so, three months is a long time to generate news around the same story, two years in a row. A villager recalls that a BBC correspondent:

> ‘stayed down here for a few days at one of the houses in the village . . . They did a special . . . programme . . . called “The Year of Storms in Britain”. They did a live piece coming from the church with some villagers gathered, getting people’s reactions and talking about the situation. He was staying with somebody and was very open with people and said “this is the angle we’ve been told to take”. There was a conscious decision by the media, by the BBC,

> that the story was the village being cut off, that was the story, that was the uniqueness of this situation, which is why there wasn't too much coverage going on down in Thorney where the homes had flooded. They loved this story about 12 weeks cut off. [. . .] we became "the villagers". So, there was a little bit of media manipulation I think.'

Two media events, linked to forms of social transaction, offer contrasting insights into accepted and acceptable social behaviours and highlight the carnivalesque atmosphere the media attention brought. These were the visits of a female model working for *The Sun*, a tabloid newspaper, and of the Prince of Wales, heir to the British throne. An interviewee opines that there are two sides to the village, one of which is the 'posh end'. An account was shared about how a reporter from *The Sun*, infamous for its depiction of female models, agreed with a farmer from the not-so-posh end of the village, to bring a model as an inducement for an interview and photoshoot:

> ' . . . originally [*The Sun*] wanted to come and interview some people . . . they ended up speaking to one of the farmers at this end of the village who said "yes, I'll give you an interview as long as you bring a nice young lady and a few beers". Then they sent this poor woman, she turned up on a boat, it was on the news, at the other end of the village where they knew nothing about this deal the farmer had done. We call that the posh end of the village, with the Abbey, and where all the parish council people live. Well she rocks up in this boat and they don't know that she's been invited. She's in this boat and she's got loads of packs of Fosters and *The Sun* t-shirts and baseball caps.'

Grainy footage is available[7] of a BBC report of the arrival of the model, whom some remember as being called Poppy, proffering cans of beer and wearing a t-shirt bearing the newspaper's logo. The YouTube clip is called 'Sun newspaper sends a model to flooded village to cheer them up', presumably on the assumption this will bring relief to people confronted with major disruption. Poppy mistakenly arrived at the wrong end of the village and was met not by a delighted farmer, but by an incensed parish councillor who insisted *'this is not a zoo!'* and rejected Poppy. The episode throws up, firstly, the crass attempts of some parts of the media to generate alternative 'angles' of life with the floods. This is a response to the routine of trying to generate 'new' news from an event that is beginning to last longer than anticipated/credible from a reporting perspective. Secondly, the incident reinforces the mediating role that some members of the community assume on behalf of the whole. It is perhaps to be expected that democratically elected parish councillors speak for the village; the voice of the farmer, however dubiously motivated, was not heard by the literally and figuratively misdirected arrival of Poppy.

A more welcome media story emerged with the visit of the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall. Both came offering not beer or policy promises, but empathy and support. The Prince's status as heir was recognised by a makeshift throne with oak-leaf carvings in the head-rest, upon which he was driven around the village on the back of a farm trailer, in the company of an official party including members of the parish council. The Prince is a major land-owner, organic farmer and a well-known environmentalist. He will have been cognisant of the connections between climate change and the floods and which Secretary Patterson, a climate sceptic, put down to technical reasons, including lack of dredging.

In these performed 'offerings' from the outside world, social routines play a role. In Poppy's case, a boundary of class and taste had been transgressed. Villagers regarded her appearance as a regrettable stunt, no prior arrangements had been planned and no welcome party was waiting. The exchange of beer and Poppy in a tight t-shirt, despite the season and the circumstances, for a photo-shoot, was rejected and she was not allowed into the village from the media encampment. This was a confrontation between *The Sun* and the Parish Council, linked to perceptions of decency, both in terms of the manipulation of Poppy's body and an awareness of the disruptions experienced by residents. The outraged councillor, through his elected office, assumes the representation of the community and reinforces a physical barrier at the entrance to the village. His exclamation contrasts to Leach's *nothing to see* and establishes an ethic about how the outside world should regard this isolated community as it faces its trauma. Through his action, the village is trying to challenge an exterior intervention and interpretation of events. The collection of baseball caps emblazoned with the newspaper's logo were presumably meant for pictures, never taken. The caps were quickly bundled away to a room in the church, where they were rumoured to remain when we first visited in 2018. Poppy's story strengthens ideas of the right and the wrong end of the village.

The royal visit was also an offering from the outside world and clearly a performance, a routine to be followed, linked to protocols, security arrangements, technical briefings and schedules, an entourage. Prince Charles is welcomed, enthroned, regarded and projected as sympathetic, a contrast to unprepared and dithering politicians. He enters the right end of the village successfully and the locals are happy with the representation of them that his visit signifies and which the scrolls on the painting in the church articulate.

While villagers needed ingenuity and help to get in, out and around the village, local people also had the strange experience of watching themselves being interviewed on television, visited by royalty which reinforced social conventions, and being outraged by crass gender stereotyping that oversteps boundaries of accepted behaviours. All this, while they enjoyed their food donations in a makeshift

'commune', an experience which also blurred conventions of ownership and privacy in unexpected ways.

> ' . . . there were a few hilarious trips to the pub. This is one of those social things where a load of people went down to the pub and that night has now gone down in history. They went to the Wyndham Arms in Kingsbury [Episcopi]. They were just letting off steam. A lot of strange things happened that night, a lot of drunkenness going on. Most of the women were at home looking after the babies. [In the morning, the houseowner] came downstairs and there was vomit all over the kitchen table. No-one owned up. . . . It was one of the people that lived around here.'

This vignette of men 'letting off steam' invokes gendered routines. The stresses of the floods exert pressure on people as they adapt (to) new ways of living in less private settings. Going to the pub is a new version of what may have been a social routine for many villagers, yet this recounting indicates another over-the-top response to pressures. 'Most of the women' were not letting off of steam in the pub, but were busy (perhaps communally) with 'the babies'.

4.3. Afterwards

We have been struck by the contrast between different 'volumes' of responses to these floods. Some on-going campaigns by organisations including the Flooding on the Levels Action Group (FLAG)[8] were animated and furious, constituting *'legitimate anger'*[9], given the circumstances. FLAG's three principal aims are to stop the flooding, dredge the rivers and maintain the local waterways, which help to support economic activity and protect property on the Levels. Local anger was taken up by Ian Liddell-Grainger, the MP for Bridgwater, who stirred up violent sentiments about the then head of the Environment Agency, Lord Smith, quoted in an article in *The [London] Evening Standard* on 7 February 2014, headed 'I'd Like to Stick his head down the Loo and Flush: MP's fury at Environment Agency Boss':

> 'I will tell him what I bloody well think of him – he should go, he should walk. I'm livid. This little git has never even been on the telephone to me. When I find out where he is, I will give it to him.'

While such emotions were not uncommon, vocal opposite opinions raised the need to respect the hydrological realities of the area in the light of history and climate change. The campaigner George Monbiot, writing in *The Guardian* newspaper caused controversy in an article called *'Dredging Rivers Won't stop floods. It will make them worse'*[10], suggesting such interventions were a cynical ruse to placate angry farmers. A subsequent, resolute, riposte to Monbiot's view was supplied by the

National Farmers' Union[11]. Given the depth of feeling, the disruption and damage caused, high-octane responses are to be expected and may have been useful in galvanising restorative interventions.

In Muchelney, material solutions were put in place to help prevent future inundations. These included the raising of the main route into the village, the construction of a bund (dyke) around part of the village (Figure 6), and the installation of lockable gates at the entrances of the village to forewarn approaching cars (Figure 7).

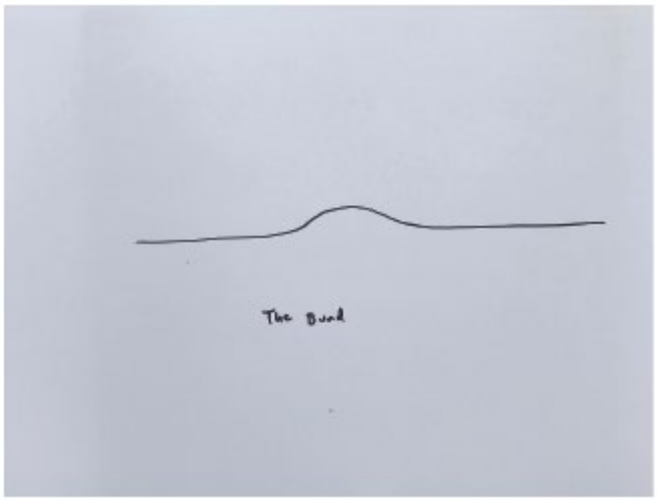

Figure 6 Drawing from memory of Muchelney's new flood defence system, marker pen on paper. Image: Ricketts, 2018.

Figure 7 New gate for closing the road during floods. Image: Ricketts, 2018.

The level of trust in this trio of new solutions led to the disposal of the 'village boat', funded through local donations, within a year of the last flood[12]. These interventions appear modest in relation to the upheaval the floods caused. In being directed towards the bund, we had initial trouble finding it and after insistent reassurances and a short walk, a low, grassy lump was encountered across the path. This was, we were told with a flourish, 'The Great Bund of Muchelney'. It resembles a small, ancient earthwork. More modest still are the gates with their combination padlocks functioning to bar entry to the village after any future flood. Their codes are known to parish councillors.

These physical interventions, designed to help people meet future flood eventualities, seem 'quiet', barely visible and, thankfully, have not yet been tested, although less disruptive floods have since returned. It is tempting now to wonder if trust in these small works is a leap of faith in the light, for example, of Somerset County Council's declaration in 2019 of a climate emergency, and allocation of £25,000 to examine how its activities can reduce climate impact; or in predictions of sea level rises around the Welsh coast (which Somerset faces) of 20 cm by 2050 (Wye Valley AONB, 2016). Concerns about the urgency of climate change are contemporary, scientifically-framed and spatially extended responses of what is an historical reality in the Levels and Moors, namely periodic extreme flooding. The woodcut (Figure 8) appeared in a pamphlet recording a Tsunami in the Bristol channel in 1607, claiming 2,000 lives (Welby, 1607).

Modern communications, accurate flood risk assessments and emergency response capacity continue to limit damage to property and provide reassurance. But the looming threat of climate change remains unsettling and uncanny, in the sense that it disrupts or upends routines and norms. Uncanny is a Freudian concept, '*unheimlich*' (unhomely, unexpected, not habitual). It resonates here not only in the literal sense of residents becoming dispossessed when their homes are flooded and become uninhabitable, it is also a way to perceive the upset and adapted routines we have sought to draw out: 'rehoming' of evacuated residents in the church and among neighbours; unexpected instances of joy linked to the unfamiliarity of the underwater yet transversable landscape; the blurring of the boundary between reporting and generating the news by a media corps hungry for new 'angles'.

5. Conclusion

This article has described interdisciplinary work that reveals reconfigurations of daily routines by the villagers of Muchelney, during two consecutive years of prolonged flooding. Two areas of focus—the physical impacts of the water, and social adaptations linked to prolonged media interest—provided a structure for the study of routines. Some innovative and happy experiences were reported despite

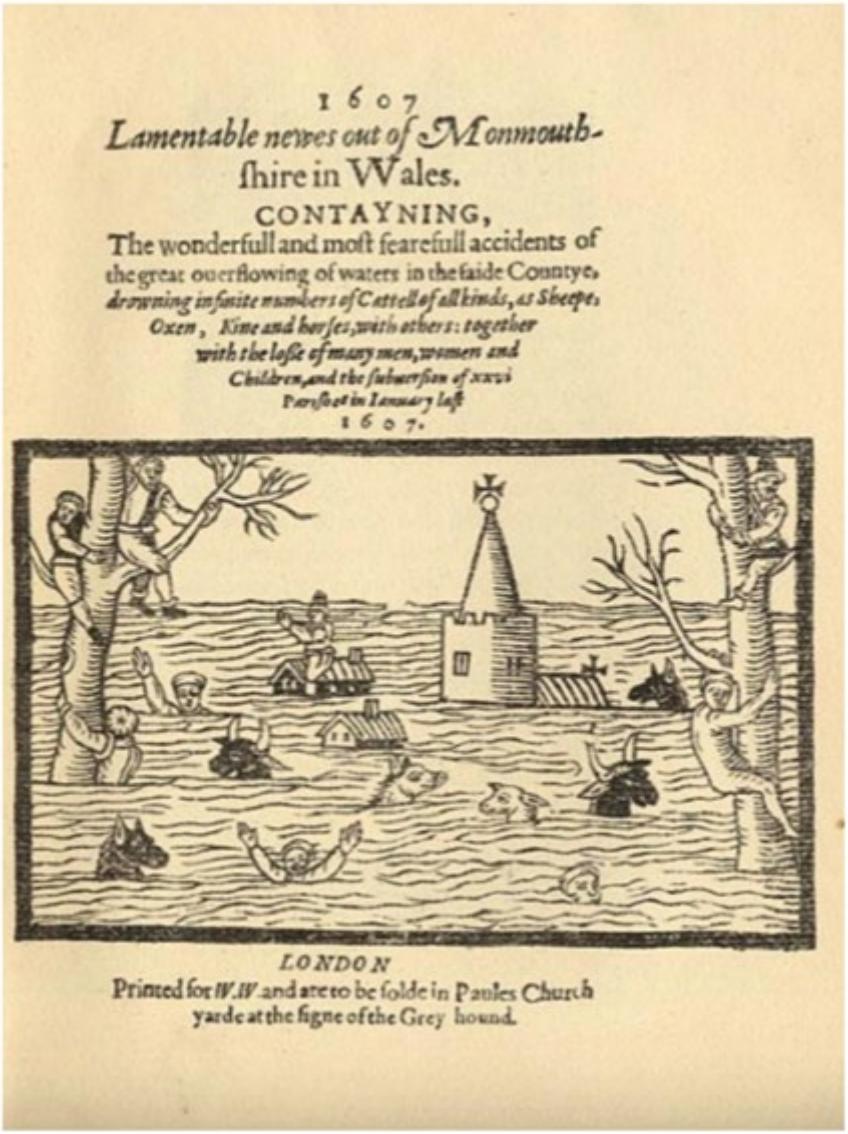
1607
Lamentable newes out of Monmouth-
shire in Wales.
CONTAYNING,
The wonderfull and most fearefull accidents of
the great ouerflowing of waters in the faide Countye,
drowning infinite numbers of Cattell of all kinds, as Sheepe,
Oxen, Kine and horſes, with others: together
with the loſſe of many men, women and
Children, and the ſubuerſion of xxvi
Parſhes in Ianuary laſt
1607.
LONDON
Printed for W.W and are to be ſolde in Paules Church
yarde at the ſigne of the Grey hound.

Figure 8 Representation of flooding in the Bristol Channel, 1607.

impeded mobility and isolation. Altered social interactions revealed solidarity and mutual support, as well as the reinforcement of social hierarchies, representative power and the carnivalesque.

Eco-technical follow-ups attempted to isolate culpability, reduce future risks, consider alternative land uses that signify the desire to get back to 'normal'. The work presented here tries to acknowledge the difficult balance between a landscape defined by water and in which water has, for centuries, been managed for habitation and farming, alongside the real danger of climate change related regular, major flooding. It is important to forge a liveable way forward for the Levels and Moors and other low-lying areas, including the Severn and York vales. This could mean more engineering and more dredging; and the opposite, namely less farming, a return to willow cultivation and the earlier wilderness of the 'waste' Moors through non-intervention. Our intention has been to

resist definite closures, keep questions open and examine the uncertainty of the present—the result of collective human action. Mixed portfolios of local solutions will be needed, and they will need to be 'plastic' (Grosz, 2013) to accommodate the modifications to lived routines required by the changing world around us. By holding onto acts and materials of representation, this research has sought to reveal reconfigurations of routines which change and sometimes reinforce those which have been pursued before. By engaging with micro-turbulences, the blending of scientific and locally experienced knowledge systems can be fruitfully advanced, to negotiate ways of living with change.

Acknowledgments

We thank John Leach for supplying images in Figure 5. John died in August 2021. We feel privileged to have met him and to have benefitted from his insights, which informed this article. Thanks are also due to Rob Berry and Pete Gaskell of CCRI. Special thanks go to the research participants for their on-going help and generosity.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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[1] SI title: Après le deluge: the UK winter storms of 2013–2014, edited by Klaus Dodds.
[2] An on-line version of Kovats' *Exe* can be viewed at: https://issuu.com/ginkgoprojects/docs/exe_print_d_pages accessed 24th August 2021.
[3] http://sabrinadreaming.blogspot.com/2017/04/sabrina-and-long-view.html accessed 27th July 2019.
[4] Arts and Humanities Research Council; Dutch Research Council (Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek).
[5] Photos can be viewed on-line at http://www.matildatemperley.com/the-floods.
[6] https://www.newstatesman.com/staggers/2014/07/why-are-there-200-muddy-wellies-steps-defra-toda Accessed 24th July 2019.
[7] https://youtu.be/SBGrMW2Yc9U accessed 17th June 2019.
[8] www.flagsomerset.org.uk accessed 27th July 2018.

[9] https://www.channel4.com/news/flooding-somerset-weather-aerials-video accessed 6th August 2019.
[10] https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jan/30/dredging-rivers-floods-somerset-levels-david-cameron-farmers accessed 27th July 2019.
[11] https://www.nfuonline.com/cross-sector/environment/water/flooding/setting-things-straight-the-guardian-on-flooding/ accessed 17th August 2021.
[12] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-32926572 accessed 27th July 2019.

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