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The people between the Moors: community and continuity in a changing world

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Beaford

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Community and continuity in a changing world

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Background and context

The Beaford Archive, and particularly the Ravilious collection, has always been viewed with great warmth and affection by the people of north Devon and beyond (Beacham & Ravilious, 2000; Wells, 2011; Ravilious, 2017). The full Archive (which can be accessed at: www.beaford.org) consists of three components:

1. The Old Archive – a collection of photographic images of north Devon from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries copied from originals loaned by residents of the area;
2. Photographs from the early 1970s by Roger Deakins (now a world-famous cinematographer);
3. The body of work by James Ravilious, resulting from his time as photographer-in-residence for Beaford Arts 1972–89).

Each of these three elements contains rich information on social, environmental and economic aspects of life in north Devon. In 2016, Beaford Arts was successful in securing a National Lottery Heritage

Fund grant to conserve and digitise the existing photographic archive, and to enrich it by creating an audio counterpoint recording, in their own voices, the knowledge and perspectives of those in the images, and those who remember that time.

The Archive as a whole provides an excellent visual reference of everyday life across more than 150 different locations in the late twentieth century. There are many other important photographic archives across the UK that also focus on life at a particular point in time, or in a specific context or geographic location, as well as thousands of local oral history collections, many of which are publicly accessible through the British Library Sound Archive (Perks & Thomson, 2015; see also Warren et al., this volume). However, rarely has there been an opportunity to enrich a photographic archive of this quality with an explanatory oral history resource on such a large scale. What sets the Beaford Archive apart, then, is the creation of an extensive oral counterpoint to the photographs; bringing the images to life in the words and dialect of the people who knew the places, the stories and the everyday practices that lie behind them. The result is an academic-standard heritage resource of incredible richness, depth and diversity. At the heart of the Archive is a reflection on the persistence of traditions, and yet an acknowledgement that concurrently, significant change has touched the people and landscapes of north Devon.

A key aim of the Hidden Histories project has been to empower the communities that have witnessed this change, to voice their agency and place within it, and to explore the value of the Archive as a means to help them understand this process. In addition to working with local communities, Beaford Arts has also engaged with organisations such as Devon Wildlife Trust and Libraries Unlimited, to explore the potential reach of the Archive into new sectors. Key to this has been the digitisation of 10,000 formerly unseen photographs. These ‘new’ images are the focus of the oral history strand of the Hidden Histories project.

The area of Devon encompassed by the Archive is bounded by the three upland areas of Exmoor, Bodmin and Dartmoor (the ‘land between the moors’) and includes diverse land- and human-scapes. The oral history project worked right across this geographic area, thereby drawing in not only geographical communities to explore memories and reminiscences but, just as importantly, communities

of ‘experts’, defined as individuals with specialist knowledge, skills and/or experience – whether gained formally or informally – in order to explain contexts and practices. The aim of the oral history work was to turn the Beaford Archive into a heritage resource for future generations, promoting understanding of life in rural north Devon by capturing the voices of those photographed and other key informants, while they were still able to offer their testimonies.

Oral history work

The body of photographs in the Archive has long stood as an evocative source of learning and reflection, and continues to act as a profound stimulus for community and academic activity. To bring the full Archive into wider use, it needed a process of knowledge-building and interpretation, to create a rich heritage resource for north Devon communities, and to enable it to act as a comprehensive and accessible knowledge bank for research and education. Creating an audio counterpoint to the photographic record offered an opportunity to deepen and enrich the Archive, and provide a resource for those with an interest in north Devon during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as well as for academics, photographers and arts practitioners interested in the social, cultural and economic development of this predominantly rural and agricultural area. As Freund and Thiessen (2011: 40) note, *‘It is the oral history that allows us to go beyond an external “reading” of the photograph’s subject matter and composition, to unearth a context that is otherwise restricted to the memories of the few people who know the story behind the photograph’*.

Data collection was organised in two strands: individual interviews, focusing on personal knowledge and connections to the Archive content; and themed group discussions, which focused on broader drivers and impacts of change as well as on personal connections and knowledge (the themes for these group discussions emerged from the first tranche of 40 individual interviews). All interviews and group discussions were based on semi-structured interview/discussion agendas and individually tailored/context-specific sets of photographs.

The themed group discussions also offered an opportunity to explore some of the local specificities and different ‘ways of doing’ in different

communities in more depth, to understand the reasons behind them and to interpret local practices in the context of the wider social, political and economic conditions prevailing at the time. The themes selected for group discussions were: 'Agricultural land management in north Devon 1970–90'; 'Celebrations in north Devon 1970–90'; 'Economic and commercial life in north Devon 1970–90'; and 'The daily life of women in North Devon 1970–90'. Discussion group participants were selected based on their specialist knowledge and/or specific experience and were not limited to those living or based in the Archive area. Groups included professionals, local residents, academics and practitioners. In this chapter, we draw on data primarily from these group interviews, to explore the ways that communities have navigated the challenges of adapting and responding to a changing world, while at the same time retaining aspects of their deeply rooted, and traditional, cultural norms and practices.

Communities and resilience

Resilience is an oft-quoted but rarely fully understood term. There are many definitions of resilience, depending on the context in which the term is used but, in its simplest sense, resilience is an ability to return to a state of stability or equilibrium following a disturbance event, and is closely associated with material properties such as elasticity. In socio-cultural terms, this means the ability to recover from, or adjust easily to, misfortune or change (Brand & Jax, 2007). This definition is particularly useful from a social science perspective, in exploring how communities have experienced change, and how and why they have responded in a particular way (Wilson, 2015).

As a complex and multi-dimensional concept, resilience always needs to be qualified; the resilience *of* what *to* what? In this case, we have examined the way that communities represented in the Archive have coped with the social, cultural, political/institutional, economic and environmental changes that have occurred in the region as a result of processes and trends operating at local, national and higher spatial levels. The resilience of these communities to cope with changes at any point in time depends on their unique mix of individual experiences and perspectives; their socio-economic and environmental contexts, and the balance of how well developed these factors are in each of

the five key domains shown in Figure 11.1 (Wilson, 2012; Kelly et al., 2015). The academic literature on community resilience tends to lean towards primarily examining social capital (in its broad sense) by analysing the role of people, and their use of resources in responding to crisis or change. However, resilience that enables communities to cope with sudden challenges as well as longer-term ongoing change is dependent on the relationship between components across all five domains. In many ways, community resilience in this context is about whether the worst-off stakeholder group (i.e. socially, economically or politically disenfranchised groups within a community) can recover from challenges by adapting or, where necessary, undergoing a fundamental shift in the way they function (Cutter et al., 2008).

Resilient communities are, therefore, those that have been able to adapt or transform in response to the changes going on around them; to survive and, ultimately, to thrive. In this respect, the speed and degree of change can be critical. Communities with lower levels of resilience may be able to adapt and continue where the change is gradual, and/or the speed of the adaptive response needed is gradual, or small. Where change is rapid, compounding and significant,



Figure 11.1: Key domains affecting community resilience (Source: Kelly et al., 2015).

however, a lack of balance between resilience domains, or an over-development of one domain (dependence on a single economic sector, for example) may undermine the community's ability to transform, leading, ultimately, to fundamental change either in part or all of the community (Diamond, 2005). For example, the sudden and deep impact of the Foot and Mouth outbreak in north Devon, in 2000, was such that for some farmers change was abrupt and transformational (Winter, 2003; Chapman & Parker, 2005). Scale mismatches between the speed of change and the resulting response often occur when change is initiated or driven by processes operating at a distance from the local community level, and without local contextual knowledge (Cumming et al., 2006). For example, a traditional Devon cob barn is often less readily adaptable to the needs of changing agricultural practices than a modern modular cattle barn. Inevitably, there is a tension between implementing productivist policy imperatives (such as subsidy schemes, for example), while at the same time remaining responsive to local infrastructure constraints and cultural values (Selfa et al., 2010).

Continuity and change in north Devon communities

Many participants had lived in Devon all of their lives. Some were octogenarians, or older and as such had lived through a significant period of global change. Their recollections were far-reaching and deep, and particularly vivid in relation to the period of the Archive between 1970 and 1990. Participants described communities as being held together in the past, in particular, by family and generational ties, common occupations and experiences (such as farming or parenting), faith ties (such as Methodist Chapel or Church of England) and participation in celebrations (such as creating carnival floats or participating in annual shows).

Family connections

Family and generational ties were particularly strong within farming families, and were seen as helping to promote a sense of connection and 'rootedness' to the land. Several participants talked of how they valued these connections, for a number of different reasons:

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PETER: ‘You’re a custodian of the land you own for life and you aim to hand it on to the next generation better than you took it on. I thought that would be the attitude of most family farms.’

ALAN: ‘I feel very privileged to live in this part of the world ... My Grandfather decided to buy a farm here back in 1948. I hammer home to my kids, who are now teenagers “Look out the window here, it’s a pretty unique place. You’re very, very lucky to live here.”

LISA: ‘It’s wonderful to hear the continuity within the family of your farms, because that continuity being lost is one of the great threats to land because it leads to change of management without a knowledge of the land and without an understanding of it, bringing in a different perspective that hasn’t had that continuity. So things change, views change, fashions change and different pressures will change. But I do believe that there is a huge value in that continuity of knowing and working with the land all the way through and we are still lucky to still have a lot of that in north Devon.’

There were also, however, a number of tensions associated with these close generational ties and historical connections. Several participants highlighted the potential conflicts that could arise when the next, younger generation, began to want to ‘do things differently’ on the farm. Sometimes the change was to modernise, at other times it was associated with changing ways of managing land in order to comply with agri-environmental schemes:

PETER: ‘Well obviously when sons came along, they tended to want to, do something slightly different.’

Participants in individual interviews and discussion groups reflected on the tensions that also existed in responding to slow-onset macro-scalar economic and policy changes, such as falling market prices for livestock, or new agricultural subsidy schemes, while constrained

by a sense of responsibility for maintaining the landscape and its characteristic infrastructure for future generations (Plate 11.1):

JOHN: ‘There is some fairly hard soul-searching about buildings which aren’t fit for modern agriculture but the owners who are in charge of them, or the stewardship of that asset are spending money just to mothball it, for some future use, for some other successor to make the economic decision over it. And often the hard-economic decision is just to flatten it and put a new building up but the difference in the character that those buildings add, and who knows what that will be in the future. A lot of them have been turned into dwellings, that’s a change, isn’t it, you see that everywhere. And even some, I think any number on tenant farms or on the Estate, where the Estate has put money into preserving, or stopping the decline of the building, just to preserve that ... because so many of them have gone.’

One participant reflected on the way that the landscape of north Devon seen in the Archive images had changed in the last 40 years, and how perceptions of those changes were closely associated with differing generational and professional perspectives (on different ‘ways of seeing’ in relation to the images in the Archive, see Warren et al. in this volume). These changes in the natural landscape were the product of changing agricultural practices, primarily driven by policy and economic imperatives and they clearly had a cultural dimension as this discussion highlights:

LISA: ‘I have to say, this picture of the nicely scrubbing-up Culm grassland would be a real problem for us right now. This is the kind of thing one of my farm advisors would go on to and think “nightmare”. But they ... would actually think that from a rather selective wildlife view because there is actually so little Culm grassland left now, that we try to prioritise it wherever we can ... But a birder might look at this and say “great, it’s turning into wet woodland, lovely”, you know it’s all

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Plate 11.1: Parsonage, Iddesleigh, December 1976.
Documentary photo: James Ravilious/Beaford Archive.

totally subjective but this kind of somebody, who wasn't immersed in these kind of wildlife habitats might look at that and say, "oh, it's wild, it's a tangle". You [farmer] look at it and say it's unproductive. Everyone has a different window on it.'

PETER: (responding to Lisa) 'The whole mentality of people my generation was to grow two blades of grass where one, or two ears of corn where one grew before, you were encouraged to increase production and make your farm more efficient. Now, obviously there have been consequences but I do think in general in this part of Devon, it's not, we haven't destroyed the environment completely, it has changed, ... it's economic pressure again. We're a family farm, and old established family farming business and the financial pressures are entirely different. The fact that we haven't had to spread fertiliser madly, and it's very doubtful that the beef cattle that we keep and the sheep that we keep would ever have paid

for it.’

For many participants, changes could be managed through the long-established tradition of adaptation; making changes to everyday practices but essentially, carrying on as before (Plate 11.1). Socially and culturally, ‘coping’, ‘adapting’ and ‘just getting on with it’ were epithets mentioned by many participants in multiple contexts, as the hallmarks of north Devon people. Technology and mechanisation during the last part of the twentieth century in particular, was recognised as both a driver and an enabler of adaptation. Mechanisation also significantly altered the labour resources needed on the farm, which opened life to other off-farm employment opportunities and new patterns of work had a significant impact not only on labour requirements, but also on livelihoods, family life and economic opportunities:

BRYAN: ‘There was Grandad, Uncle George, father, two full-time workmen, and Albert who was three days a week. So you had five and a half labour units ... They hadn’t got the technology we’ve got, probably a lot less stock than I’ve got and I’m here a lot of days on my own, sort of thing. But that’s technology.’

PETER: ‘Salaries and wages have gone up hugely in relation to food prices. This is why farmers have had to specialise and intensify, because to make a living. If you went on producing what you did in the 1970s you wouldn’t, this is of course why small farms gave up. It just wasn’t economic unless you had a reasonable acreage you couldn’t make a living.’

Being able to cope, and to continue to adapt was a source of pride for many participants, although in some cases, adaptation was no longer possible as the scale of the change was too large, or the onset of the change too rapid:

MICHAEL: ‘Do you remember the Outgoer Scheme? That was a policy to really try and have fewer dairy farms and bigger dairy farms. And he [uncle] milked ten cows,

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y’know, he was a classic old ten cows, a few sheep, a bit of this and a bit of that. And the big thing for him at that point was whether he went into the Outgoer Scheme, he wouldn’t have been able to sell his cows, which might not have been a good thing financially, but he could not afford to turn to bulk; he reckoned it was too late for him to turn to bulk. And so the shift from churns to bulk was his, “So I’m going to get out of cows.” And he didn’t go into the Outgoer Scheme ‘cos he had nice cows and he wanted to sell them on to someone else’s dairy herd. So there were policy changes in the 1970s ... pushing more capital investment and scaling up really in the industry.’

Rapid shocks, whether driven by policy ‘discontinuities’ such as the Outgoer Scheme, or major outbreaks of disease, such as the Foot and Mouth epidemic that devastated north Devon in 2001, also generated tensions and impacts well beyond the originating agricultural sector, causing abrupt and, for some, transformational changes not only in these small mixed farms but also across communities and economic sectors. Often, these major events spelled the end of a multi-generational connection to farming, severing ties with farms, landscapes and people.

Community connections

During the period of the Archive (1970–90), economic and commercial practices were also rapidly changing in north Devon, mainly in response to wider socio-economic changes, including the rise in private car ownership, the establishment of large supermarkets and diversifying employment opportunities. Allied to the changes in working lives, many participants highlighted the gradual disappearance of shops from villages. Thus, in this period, farms got bigger and communities became denuded of their local shopping facilities.

Mobile shops were a key adaptation to some of these macro-scalar changes; they bridged the ‘gap’ between the traditional local specialist shops in rural communities, like the butchers and the grocer’s, and the new supermarkets that were appearing in towns (Plate 11.2):



Plate 11.2: Women buying food from mobile grocer's van, Kings Nympton, May 1977 (Source: Beaford Archive).

PAUL: 'Transport, and transport changes, and the availability of cars to the greater number of people was absolutely crucial. What you're talking about I think is an economy in which people are shopping locally, partly because they don't find it very easy to go to bigger settlements. And so it's (a) how much people have their own transport, and (b) what's happening to things like bus services, rail services and that kind of thing.'

GEOFF: 'I can remember as a boy when some of the larger shops had vans going round. Lipton's in Barnstaple had a van that was going round the villages. John Bradley who lived until only about a year ago, in the 1960s had a large mobile shop that was the size of a single decker bus, and it bridged the sort of village or town grocer's to the onset of the supermarket. I well remember seeing photographs recently of this large mobile shop which was based in Barnstaple but was driven around the whole of north Devon.'

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This key adaptation enabled people in Devon to continue living and working in rural areas but also to engage with the ‘new’ ways of shopping, cooking and eating. Women could work off-farm, or outside of the community, although those who did so, were required to juggle traditional home responsibilities with their new working lives.

JENNY: ‘My impressions of visiting, and it was mostly farms I think, or farmers, is that actually women did farming, the house work, the home, the cooking, the lot actually. The men did the farming, but the women did it as well. They were milking, and all sorts, yes, and getting breakfast ready and evenings for when they came in and then lunch, so the women actually did ... it all.’

JO: ‘And of course that became important sometimes if the farm, say with milk quotas or something when some farms suddenly had a really drastic decline in their income, then suddenly women’s, the work that women did was you know much more important, much more central to the business.’

Adaptation for one group of community members, however, sometimes resulted in a complete transformation for others. As private transport became more readily available, and people chose to shop elsewhere, traditional businesses within communities could no longer remain viable or, as in the agricultural example noted above, for others a relatively modest shift in daily life became the trigger for a transformational change:

GEOFF: ‘I think I can remember I guess in the early seventies the smaller shops closed down, a lot I think partly because people wanted to retire. I think we were then beginning to see the change from you know, the family butcher, the family grocer, the ironmonger shops.’

The loss of local shops within communities was highlighted by participants as having a cultural impact beyond pure economics. The quotes below highlight the social role that these places played

in retaining connections of friendship and support, as well as being conduits through which community organisations attracted new members and retained their profile within changing communities:

JOHN: 'There was a greengrocer's there in Market Street, Mr Moyles – he was also the bandmaster – ran the boys brigade. So as soon as you went into the shop and you were that sort of age: "Ah! You must be the age to start in the boys' brigade..." and you got pulled in there. All of the groceries were bought in that shop and there was a cobbler's there to repair the shoes. We didn't go to Bideford or go out of Appledore at all for anything. The butcher's was there. I don't remember jumping on the bus to go to Bideford to get anything really.'

JENNY: 'If you look at the picture of [the interior of the shop in] High Bickington, there's a chair there and the customer would always sit down and have a chat. And anybody else coming in would join in the conversation. And there was another one on the other side of the shop – there was two chairs. You don't see that in shops nowadays.'

Local shops had always maintained a close connection (through knowledge of who's who; and continuity of use) to their customers. Shop owners knew their market; what their customers did and didn't like, and what people would and wouldn't buy. That close connection was lost when shopkeepers were unable to compete with the new supermarkets as habits and tastes, as well as working practices, changed.

For some businesses, however, adaptation to new markets and 'ways of doing' was possible, as this quote below shows. Key here is the speed of change and the adaptability of the skill set of those involved. Blacksmiths in these communities had historically produced a range of goods and services, from shoeing horses to producing agricultural implements and thatching tools. Shifting or expanding that skill set to maintaining agricultural machinery and cars was within the bounds of possibility for these businesses. Key in this respect was the speed of change, which was slow enough to enable these businesses to adapt:

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PAUL: 'I'm interested that you're talking about this change from blacksmiths to garages as late as the 1960s or even early 1970s, because this is something that you can begin to see happening in the interwar years. There are figures indeed that show the decline of the blacksmiths and the increase in the number of garages from 1918 onwards and it happens very rapidly.'

JOHN: 'The garages in those days did cater for most things. We used to do cars, agricultural machinery, and got more specialist as the cars developed over the years.'

This slower speed of change in this part of Devon up until the 1970s, however, has been replaced in the twenty-first century with much more rapidly propagated change. New communications technologies mean that new ideas and ways of working can be spread more easily and widely than has been the case in the past. Farm businesses must 'keep up' with new technology to remain viable. Several participants highlighted the trend for agricultural businesses to become shoehorned and subsequently 'locked in' to narrower production pathways and increasing dependence on debt, which may undermine their ability to adapt readily to change in the future:

JOHN: 'That's back to mechanical – it's almost a devil in disguise, 'cos it increased productivity, forced the prices down, so now industry is forced – farmers have gotta keep up with the next technology to maintain their pricing. Because if they don't keep up, they're suddenly, they're not economic. Economies of scale have taken over. In a way machinery's destroyed the old ways of farming ... Farmers now have more money borrowed than you've ever known. When I started selling machinery, 35–40 years ago people paid for it. But now everything's on ... nobody buys: it's all on finance. But they have to do that to stay in the industry.'

JOHN [referring to automated milking machinery]: 'It's a management tool; it's not a lazy man's tool. It's not

easier. Because the phones – it's connected to your mobile phone and it bleeps. If you go away for the day and a cow breaks a pipe, or it's run out of chemicals, the phone will bleep. It just bleeps 24 hours.'

New communications technologies also mean that the impact of broader macro-economic trends propagate more rapidly to local communities, farms and rural households than in the past. This also means that the adoption of new practices may be much quicker, and with less geographically differential impacts than in the past, although this rural part of north Devon is still more isolated in infrastructure terms than other parts of the country.

Cultural connections

Echoing the tensions between generations in the agricultural community, participants often talked of tensions between generations or within organising committees over the way 'things were done', particularly in terms of local fairs and festivals. These subtle but culturally important 'ways of doing' were explored during individual interviews, and during themed group interviews. The feeling was expressed that you 'need to' do it but that it is also an honour to take on these roles. Again, this aspect was closely associated with inter-generational ties and responsibilities around ensuring a sense of continuity and connection. Parents pass on their organising roles to their children; past history matters in this context and legitimacy is cemented by genealogy. 'Bequeathing' community roles to other family members led to a strong sense of community through a strong sense of responsibility:

DEBORAH: 'There's a committee which meets every month all year long. There's no let-up in the organising and upholding of the traditions, and people get gifted with that responsibility until they fall off their perch really. It's just in the blood and if it didn't happen there would be a furore: so we have to do it, or feel we must.'

PETER: 'I think really in small communities each generation feels they have a responsibility as custodians of tradition. And it's as simple as that.'

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Committees were also seen as having a ‘core’ of key members, who upheld ‘traditional’ ways of doing things, but these committees were also recognised as having a mechanism to allow change, through new people joining, although at times it could be very intimidating for the newcomers:

DEB: ‘I’m on a number of different committees and trying to fill vacancies is getting more and more difficult. An interesting committee in [local community] is the ... committee because that’s almost a closed shop – there are certain families that have been on that committee for generations ... I think new members on the committee find it quite difficult. But thank goodness they are there, those strong families because they are the ones who are going to keep fighting for this to keep going.’

DEBORAH: ‘I think it’s to do with passion; when there are big fallings out it’s because people are so passionate, and selfish to a certain extent, and families do take over for several years. And thank heavens for them in a way. But when I came back from having lived away, I got terrible daggers looks when I went up to the AGM and said I want to be a member of the committee. I should have run away! Having known some of these people I thought, no I’m staying, but you really had to be brave to face the disapproval of what you might do.’

As is clear in the discussions above, although there was a strong sense of continuity of traditions, importantly, there was also clear evidence of opportunities for adaptation. Several participants talked of changing traditions, or introducing new ones although the extent to which adaptation was possible varied across communities, and within communities across committees, and depended on the personal perspectives of those involved:

DEBORAH: ‘The earliest person I can remember was my Sunday school teacher who always did the penny scramble, she gave it to [a local lady], who when she

didn't want to do it anymore, gave it to me. And so I'll carry on doing it until I don't want to or can't and that's the traditional core of the fair. And then we invite newcomers to think of new things because we're often criticised for doing the same old boring thing, and so we ask them and they do things that last for a few years but perhaps not as long as the usual core events.'

These mechanisms that enable change to happen are critical in supporting continuity while at the same time, through challenges to that central core, facilitating the changes that prevent the system reaching breaking point or becoming too entrenched to adapt. We see the same mechanisms in the adaptation of farming practices around a central core of activity, until significant and community-wide shocks push the adaptability of the system beyond its point of return. When such major shocks happen, such as after the Foot and Mouth outbreak in this part of Devon in 2001, re-establishing celebrations and community events is an important mechanism for communities to celebrate their 'recovery' and signal their return to normality; keeping hold of the old traditions and using them as a marker of surviving those challenges:

NICOLA: '[the revival of traditional celebrations] is a kind of self-conscious re-establishing of normality; we're back on track now and one of the ways we can show that is by reviving tradition.'

Another aspect of change in communities during this period was the arrival of increased numbers of people from outside of the region. Some saw the influx of 'incomers' as weakening, if not destroying, community practices. These participants spoke of how, as old(er) members of the community in which they had lived most of their lives, they were now either patronised or ignored by people who had no links to 'their' community. Several participants considered this shift in population, along with the decline in the Christian faith, as responsible for the community becoming increasingly indifferent to its vulnerable members. Not all participants, however, viewed the 'incomers' negatively. Some participants saw that these newcomers

made a positive contribution to community life, particularly in keeping flagging local celebrations alive, although some found it difficult to accept that changes made to ‘the old ways’ helped to sustain the community in new and different ways.

What is clear from the discussions with participants is the delicate balance across resilience domains that these tensions create. Communities need the continuity of individuals with the tenacity to maintain the traditions and ways of doing that are culturally important but at the same time, there is also a need for adaptation to enable responses to change. These tensions also govern the balance between adaptation and transformation in any one community. The relationship between adaptation and transformation is finely tuned, and needs time to re-establish after significant shocks (slow or fast onset). If change in one resilience domain is too rapid, or too large (rapid social change, for example, when a large housing development is built), it can threaten the ability of the existing socio-cultural structures within the community to adapt sufficiently, and can trigger transformational change.

Another aspect of community life emerging from the discussions was the importance of faith and faith groups. Participants spoke of the role of their Church or Chapel not just as a place to visit on a Sunday, but also as a social presence in community life. There was both Church and Chapel in most villages in the area but in general, people spoke of the different denominations supporting and cooperating, rather than competing with each other. A key aspect of these faith groups is that they provided support to vulnerable community members and, as importantly, continued to act as the pivot around which responses were organised during community crises. These formal Christian organisations provided an infrastructure of care and communal concern within communities, strengthening social and cultural capital and offering a sense of continuity and permanence when other aspects of life were in flux.

Drawing on the past, looking towards the future

Drawing on theories of community resilience helps to explain how the communities so richly represented in the Archive have navigated some of the key socio-economic challenges of the last 40 years, and

why some aspects of those communities appear relatively unchanged while others have changed almost beyond recognition (Wilson, 2013).

The area featured in the Beaford Archive is predominantly rural, and economically focused on farming and agriculture, including primary production activities, food processing and ancillary trades and industries (Winter, 1986). This rural agricultural context of ‘make do and mend’ has historically shaped the way that communities and individuals have responded to, and navigated change, and continues to have a profound effect on their resilience in the twenty-first century (Winter, 1986, Shucksmith & Winter, 1990). Supranational economic and environmental directives and policies may mean that traditional small-scale family farms in this corner of Devon have gradually given way to larger and more specialised farms with multiple on- and off-farm income streams (Selfa et al., 2010), yet these agricultural communities still revolve, to some extent, around family, community and culture.

An important determinant in shaping resilience to change in these communities is the way that the social and cultural norms that draw from, or connect to, the past are valued, used and adapted by different sectors of the community in order to retain identity and cohesion or, conversely, to highlight the loss of cohesion between community members (Wilson, 2013; Kelly et al., 2015). Past history still matters for these communities in facing challenges to their well-established ways of life, yet past history is complex, uneven and personally nuanced (Stump, 2010). Communities are not static but dynamic; people move in, others move out. New members are born into the community and others die, and the resulting mix of human experience, knowledge and perspectives is in constant flux (Plate 11.3). That flux inevitably impacts on the way that the constituent parts of the community respond to change at any given moment in time (Magis, 2010; Berkes & Ross, 2012).

Adapting and transforming differentially across sectors inevitably leads to the tensions within and between resilience domains that we see. The scale and magnitude of responses is different, and the affected sections of the community need recognition to be able to draw on the social capital that exists, in order to survive in the immediate aftermath of a crisis and to recover and re-establish, or to transform, in the longer term (Cumming et al., 2006).

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Plate 11.3: Hatherleigh, June 1984.
Documentary photo: James Ravilious/Beaford Archive.

The speed of change is key to providing ‘breathing space’ to enable adaptation. The same process can have very different impacts on the various sectors of the community. This is the source of ‘differential resilience’ within communities, and across communities facing similar challenges. The slow-onset changes in the communities reflected in the Archive have resulted in strong adaptive responses to change because these communities have been able to draw on a long history of doing just that. Sudden onset shocks are harder for them to cope with because of the loss of alternative options, often through concurrent macro-scalar economic and political or institutional processes (Wilson, 2013). Despite these challenges, the oral history discussions show that north Devon rural communities are able to draw on resources across the five resilience domains to enable ‘survival’ in the short term (sharing food, helping the less able, or those restricted from movement due to Foot and Mouth). The key threat to their resilience to change in the future will be the speed and magnitude of change, which may lead to differential and potentially destabilising resilience across the five resilience domains as well as across geographic and temporal scales.

An important objective of the oral history work has been to understand the impact that change has had on north Devon communities (both geographic, such as villages; and of practice, such as the farming community); critical if we are to gain insight into the persistence of these communities now, and in the future. As John Lane, the founding director of the Beaford Arts Centre, and originator of the idea for the Archive, said in 1974: ‘*The material of the Beaford Archive, belonging to its future and rooted in its past, is of and for north Devon in the most fundamental sense.*’ If this idea can be seen as a founding principle, then the ongoing work and development of the Archive must uphold the centrality of the people of north Devon to the Archive’s continued use, interpretation, and growth; maintaining their role in its history, and the stake they have in its future.

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Hedger's lunch break: Stephen Squire, Lower Langham, Dolton, 1980.
James Ravilious/Beaford Archive.



Bert Heard, builder, in his workshop, Arscotts, Dolton, July 1983.
James Ravilious/Beaford Archive.