

**Review of CAVA Conference 2007:
Across the Borders – Locating the Border in Film, Narrative and the Arts**

22 March, Saltash Guildhall, Cornwall



CAVA's Annual Conference for 2007 explored the theme of identity on the Cornwall-Devon borders. This one-day public conference investigated issues of locating 'psychological borders' in the context of the Tamar valley. The keynote speaker was Professor Chris Williams from the University of Swansea, an expert on border identity and former Co-Director of the Centre for Border Studies at the University of Glamorgan. The conference featured panels of academic papers on the theme of representations of 'borders' in film, narrative and the arts. There were also exhibitions by local community heritage projects and organisations, music and poetry performances relating to the Cornwall-Devon border, and the premiere showing of the auto-ethnographic film *Kayleigh's Story: Identity in the Tamar Valley*.

The interdisciplinary study of borders (physical and metaphorical) has grown in recent years. Chris Williams's paper, 'On the Razor's Edge: Understanding Borders in Modern History', explored the range of meanings covered by 'border studies', and considered the extent to which conceptual and methodological innovation in this area has also been present within modern historical writing. It argued that an appreciation of the often fluid and contested nature of borderlines and borderlands not only illuminates our understanding of how it actually was for peoples and societies in such areas but also facilitates the challenging of the orthodox nation-state paradigm of much contemporary historiography.



Locating the Border in Film

The first panel, *Locating the Border in Film*, began with a presentation by Elayne Hoskin, Director of the South West Film and Television Archive, an independent registered charity, which is responsible for the conservation, preservation and dissemination of the audio visual heritage of the South West. This

presentation, entitled 'Edge track: Borders and Moving Image', explored the concept of borders – both actual and psychological – using moving image examples from SWFTA's collection.

Kayleigh Milden then introduced her auto-ethnographic film. This draws in archive film footage from SWFTA, new film material, and oral history recordings, to produce a creative synergy of sound and moving images that seeks to break down the barriers between academic research and community dissemination. Kayleigh is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Cornish Studies (University of Exeter), and has worked on projects with the Cornish Audio Visual Archive since 2001, most recently being CAVA's *Tamar Valley Project: Promoting Knowledge Transfer, Special Tourism and the Creative Industries through Audio-Visual Research*.

Locating the Border in History and the Social Sciences

The second panel, *Locating the Border in History and the Social Sciences*, began with Kayleigh's paper, 'Creating Border Narratives: Cornish Nation Vs South West Region'. This considered how texts, whether written, oral or visual, dictate where the border lies between 'us' and 'them'. Discourses are dispersed beyond the covers of books, newspapers or the television screen, creating border narratives. Within the context of the Cornwall-Devon border, there exists a tension between the discourses of a 'Cornish Nation' and a 'South West Region'. This paper explored the mechanisms behind these two opposing border narratives, and challenged them, by proposing that spatial identity at the 'micro-level' reveals how the boundaries which people map out in their minds is far more complex than dominant discourses suggest.

Garry Tregidga, Director of CAVA and Assistant Director of the Institute of Cornish Studies, then presented a paper, 'Remembering the Tamar: Border Representations in Cornish Studies'. This addressed historical and contemporary constructions of the borderland in the context of interdisciplinary research on Cornwall. The emergence of New Cornish Studies in the early 1990s was driven by an underlying desire to highlight the territorial unity and cohesion of Cornwall. Yet the recent interest in micro research and the heterogeneous nature of the region creates a theoretical space for analysing the wider significance of the Tamar border. Using core debates in Cornish Studies this paper suggested that border research can offer fresh insight into the ways in which Cornwall itself has been constructed. The first case study focused on the importance of spatial factors in explaining the region's distinctive pattern of political behaviour since the 1880s. Moving further back in time issues of territorial identity in the Early Modern period were explored in the context of both changing notions of 'Cornishness' and popular perceptions of the Royal Duchy as a separate institution. Theoretical ideas on the nature of cultural memory were then considered in relation to competing discourses of the Tamar from the Middle Ages to the present day.

Malcolm Williams and Stuart Burley, from the School of Law and Social Science at the University of Plymouth, gave the final paper for this panel: 'Economy and Migration on the Cornish – Devon Border'. While most sociological studies of Cornwall, in areas such as migration and economy, have either concentrated on Cornwall as a whole, or case study areas in West or Mid Cornwall, the 'borderlands' in Caradon and North Cornwall have been shaped economically and socially by the adjacent districts across the Tamar, especially Plymouth. In turn the latter areas, in Devon, have also been shaped by socio-economic factors in Cornwall. Despite this, there has been little work to study these complex cross border interactions. This presentation provided some baseline economic and migration data on the 'border' areas and offered some suggestions for a sociological research programme to further investigate economy and society in the Tamar Valley.

Locating the Border in the Arts

This final panel for the day focused on music and literature. Merv Davey, musician, director of the An Daras Cornish Folk Arts Project, and part-time postgraduate researcher at the Institute of Cornish Studies, began with ‘Cross Border Raids: Conflicting interpretations of folk music collected in the borderlands of the Tamar Valley and Dartmoor’. This questioned the ‘received wisdom’ and ‘common sense’ about the nature of traditional music and community identity in the British Isles, which continues to be defined by the cultural aspirations and backgrounds of a small group of enthusiasts active in collecting and publishing folk material during the early part of the last century. From the perspective of Cornish identity this is thrown into sharp relief by the contrasting interpretations of material collected in the borderlands of the Tamar Valley and Dartmoor. This paper considered some of this material and looked at the impact of these early activists on perceptions of Cornish traditional music. This music was then brought to life with Merv’s stirring performance on his bagpipes of some of the tunes discussed.

Alen Kent, lecturer with the Open University, then examined literary imaginings of the Cornwall/England border from an Anglo-Cornish literary perspective, in his paper: “‘When Saltash was a busy town, Plymouth was a fuzzy down’”: Border Identities in Anglo-Cornish Literature’. This drew on a wide range of literary sources – both ancient and modern – which consider the issue of borders, crossings and identities along the River Tamar. The fluctuating nature of literary identity was debated specifically in the literature of the Launceston-based poet Charles Causley.

Finally, Mike O’Connor, associated with CAVA, presented ‘Music on the Edge: Vernacular music in border areas of Cornwall’. He noted that the Tamar and the seas around Cornwall do not comprise an impermeable membrane; rather, selected elements of musical culture seem to have travelled across such borders freely. Yet certain musical characteristics are retained within such borders. Which characteristics are popularly considered Cornish are often a matter of taste, and vary with era and even politics. This paper briefly identified some characteristics that have been considered typical of music in Cornwall and explored how they may vary in liminal areas. It also considered how we should consider the evolutionary processes in repertoire. Again, some of these points were illustrated with lively violin performances of some of the music under consideration.



The Tamar Valley Project and Acknowledgements

Kayleigh Milden then gave a short closing speech, acknowledging support with funding from the European Social Fund. This conference signalled the completion of the first phase of the Tamar Valley Project, which

has explored the historical and contemporary identity of the border country through oral and visual research. Building on oral testimony studies of the river communities this initiative was launched in April 2006 by the CAVA team at the Institute of Cornish Studies with financial support from the European Social Fund and the Tamar Valley AONB Service.

Compiled by Shelley Trower

