# The River's Story……The Coquet

"How can I translate not in words but in belief- that a river is a body, as alive as you or I, that there can be no life without it?'

These are **Natalie Diaz's** words in the forward to **Robert MacFarlane's** book '**Is A River Alive?'** This is an exhilarating narration of 3 major journeys in 3 different Continents the story of 3 Rivers struggle to be recognised to have 'Rights' to life……..

A river is born it was once snow, hail, drops of rain, a flutter of silver movement, a pool, a ripple, a stream. As the river gathers so do the people eddying ebbs of people. We go to the river. Our history flows through us, and the river's history flows on. The flow gives life to all it is sparkling with life. The dryads of the trees and the naiads of the water gather with the whispered memory of their beginnings.

Each river has a different voice. Our river The Lady Coquet shall we give her a voice?

I call her a Lady because she has grace, power and beauty and I want to remember this.

Springs, wells and lakes are places where the air is thick with silence, but rivers are full of sound. Water slams against rocks and currents bubble over one and other laughing to be moving winning loosing.

The river has a voice? Let us give her back her voice let her be heard! Come with me on this path you will learn the great thing about a river which you will never forget that the moment you

look at the river that moment has already passed and everything is on its way to something else. She is movement! She is energy her story is the story of love and life. The bubbles and excitement of water meeting water, the fizz of togetherness of the journey. The big-hearted energy that bends and accommodates, the banks the gravel. Beached up flooded down the surprises she offers dammed one way she goes another but always on…

Let's be quiet now and hear her story? Rivers have deep histories they go back to times only myths can tell. Water Goddesses have been there to keep her secrets safe. Here in Northumberland, we have one such **Goddess Coventina**. You would be lucky if you saw her! **Coventina** lives in the dreamland: the place we sometimes visit in our sleep, on the edge of our knowing on the line between here and gone. Yet Roman Soldiers built a temple over a spring dedicated to the Goddess Coventina. The Roman soldiers left gifts thousands of coins, beads of bone, lead, jet and copper, a brooch of a water serpent. They lay down their spears and daggers quenched their thirst and made their heart felt pleas. Murmuring prayers. The temple was beside a well was found at **Carrowburgh** nearby Hadrian's Roman Wall.

Maybe we have Coventina's presence here in the Lady Coquet! What would she look like if we wanted to see her?  She may look like mermaid. Her vast curls pinned in a nest on the crown of her head. Her body as a spiral tail the shape of a conch shell. Her skin golden curving steeply from the hips to the waist. One hand holding a lily the other a giant urn. This is the place within which she holds our wishes.

But this world she lives in this dreamland has been driven away by the armies of the reformation. In 1**530 Henry V111** locked up the wells and smashed the power to heal bless and act with free agency. Still people come in the dark to the well spring of Hope!

Here in the upper reaches of the Coquet above Holywell there is a **Lady's Well**. The Roman's named it **St Ninians**. But these springs have deep history. Once the Lady had an ancient voice and that could have been Coventina. Her song is turned to the frequency of our hearts.

Come with me now Sara and I had an idea to dip in as many safe places as the Lady Coquet would allow. You can, you can't that's the way of it with rivers. The journey is usually down to the river but not always. It means green swathers across the path, snagging brambles and everywhere natures music. It's a **Blackca**p! I know it the Northern Nightingale. Plenty of Wood pecking going on. The ratatat drumming the territory beating out the boundaries. Now the great announcer in the high canopy **Chiff Chaff** persistent promise of summer. Bouncing through the warm days Chiff Chaff I'm back I'm back. There's a contralto squeak it means the river is nearby. It's the **Moorhen** busy in the reeds. Then wanting to be different the **Coot** with its clear popping call Coot, coot, coot. They like a good punch-up with their coot coot.

But the best whistlers in the woods are the Nuthatch. They are the referee's whistle in the woods. Keep off, offside, it's my tree loud and clear.

A fine summers late afternoon the **Wren** tries out her repertoire. For nearly the smallest bird in Britain tail erect singing 740 notes a minute.

We must be quiet now we are near the river the first ripple could be a gliding **Goosander** or it could be The Ring of Bright water's star the **Otter.** Be patient she can be seen even in daylight.

But we want to get to the water! Our avenue takes us to the carpet of yellow **Leopard's bane**, indigo blue of **Meadow Cranesbill**, **Yellow flax**, **Pignut**, **Sanicle** and don't be fooled it maybe '**Fools Parsley**' or **Hogweed** or even **Hemlock**. Everywhere we go the **Butterbur** goes. The pass narrows as the water rushes over rocks, and our shadows send 8 **Goosander** goslings scurrying together locked like a scrum of moving bodies. We are getting close now the garlic crunch of ramsons a reminder 'Pick some later for Salsa Verdi'.

The flat stones where we dip from have an ancient feel. We have been told this is not The Roman Path, but it has an ancient feel. Maybe Routes to move animals for summer pasture there is a ford near. Behind us is the heart of **Cocwudu** a reformed name from the old English 'wudu'...woodland. We are surrounded by an Ancient Semi Natural Woodland- **Gospatric** is its name.

In the 12century Henry 1came to an arrangement with the Earl of Dunbar. His daughter Juliana was to leave her castle in Scotland and marry the Baron of Morpeth. These lands were her dowry, Horsley, Stanton, Witton, Ritton and Wingates a grand Anglo-Saxon Estate.

Dropping into the silky coolness of deep water the sharpness lasts but a moment then we glide in the edgeless luscious coolness.

A river is protected by its inherent danger. She holds danger for us every time we try a new pool. We are alert, not wishing to disturb what's there our primordial self-wakes up we feel so alive and it feels good.

"I don't like weed" squeals Sara. Nobody does it's the lurking slimy unknown underneath of it all… We are at eye level with the river. We are just a head a funny duck to some. A flash past moment and a Kingfisher darts up feet away. Wagtail delighted not to have to be bothered to move putting energy into just wagging. Out of sight the Heron holds a vigil a quiet study of shadows and ripples.

The Mayfly ricochets off the water. The male is frantic it needs to find a female quick like speed dating there is only now she has only a few hours available he has waited for this moment for months, years.

So up and down he goes banging on the meniscus of the water …up again. She is the horizontal glider the lure.

Then the fairies arrive, they flash and quiver in reflections darting damsels tight bright fanciful. In-between worlds here iridescence means ..not for long.

We have to find the current follow the current it may mean danger reaching into our imagination always letting the river make the choices.

We have come to release our will power, the striving, the mental entanglement. Here anything could happen. The rain

could turn to hale; the white shape becomes an angry swan and from the dark  cloud …. thunder. From the unfathomable depts a great splash. We are sharing this pool with big fish.

We like the quiet of the river we listen to her voice the laughter as she babbles the whispering of wind on water. We have come to see Coventina. Now we have can come to remember we are all rivers. ¾ of our brains, 2/3 of our skin even our bones are water. We too are a flow of energy. We are entering her world because she has the answer to what we really want. The longing in our hearts if you are quiet, she will give you the answer ‘peace’ we hear it as she moves on and on and on…..

*Written and Presented by Virginia Kennedy*

*At the Wilds of Wannie*

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