

**YSP** **ON**  
**COMMON**  
**GROUND!**

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WOVEN SILVER BIRCH CIRCLE by Andy Goldsworthy, 13–14 December, 1985, made during residency on Hampstead Heath, London; commissioned by Common Ground and Artangel Trust





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YORKSHIRE  
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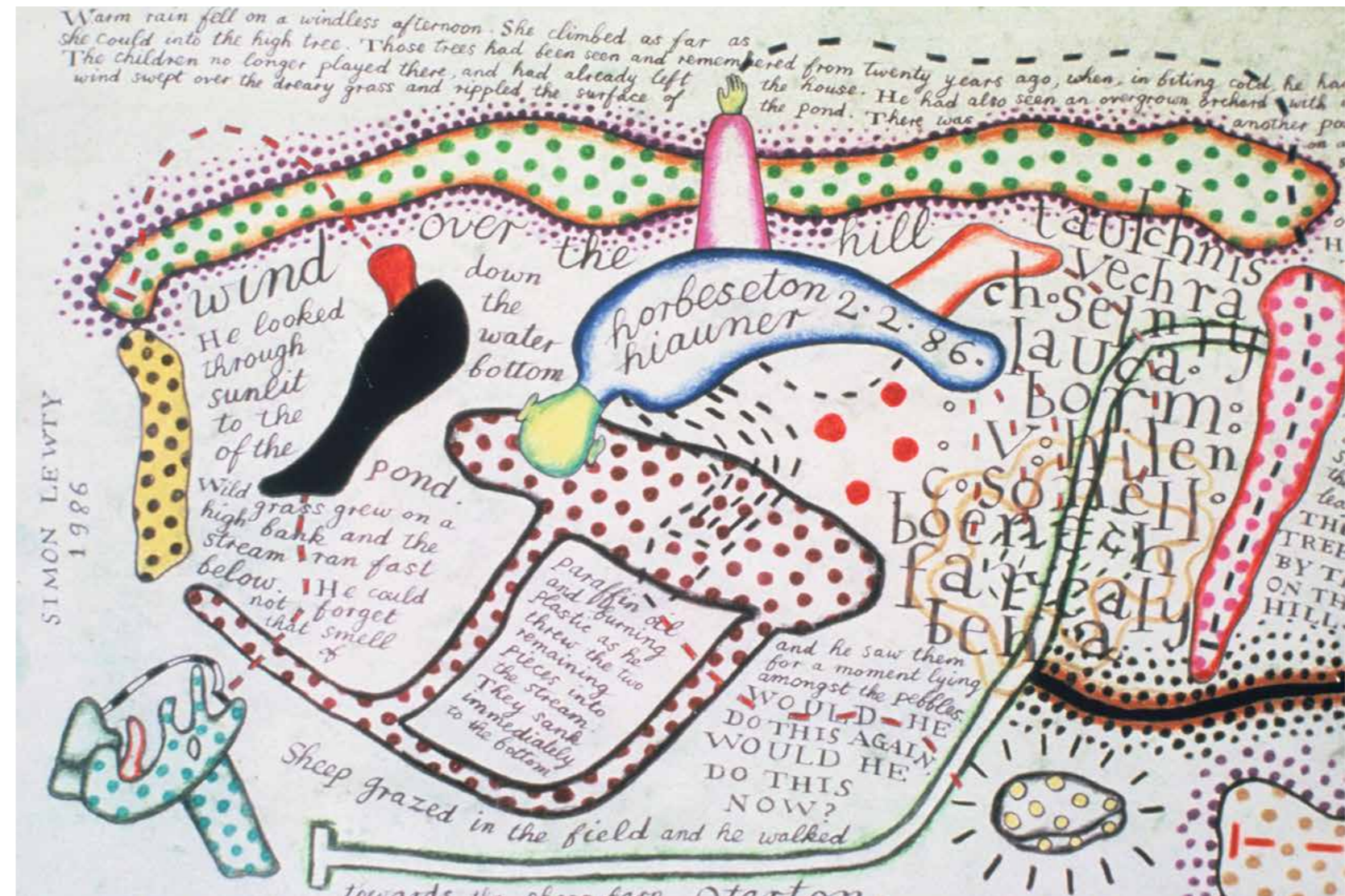
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COMMON  
GROUND  
2018

**COMMON GROUND AT YORKSHIRE SCULPTURE PARK by Dennis Gould, 2018**

From May to September 2018, Yorkshire Sculpture Park mounts exhibitions in the Garden and Bothy galleries which interpret the past and present projects of Common Ground, the Dorset-based arts and environmental charity known for campaigns such as Apple Day, Parish Maps, New Milestones and Trees, Woods and the Green Man. Founded in the early 1980s, Common Ground continues to champion the ordinary aspects of the local environment and draw attention to the easily overlooked richness of local landscapes. ‘Most of us take our everyday surroundings for granted,’ say Sue Clifford and Angela King, co-founders of Common Ground. ‘For inspiration we often return to a line of poetry by John Clare: ‘I found the poems in the fields and only wrote them down’. This quiet observation invites us to pause and unlock the richness of story upon history upon natural history which helps us place ourselves. Familiarity and particularity take us below the surface, to where the land might reflect back to us meaning and belonging, purpose and responsibility.’



Tim Dee on local distinctiveness in the age of the Anthropocene

**GROUND  
WORK**

Common Ground gave Britain the concept of *local distinctiveness*, and has worked since the 1980s to revive, preserve and celebrate the diverse, local and intimate connections that people and communities have had, and might yet have, with the landscape that surrounds them.

Thirty years ago, Sue Clifford and Angela King set up Common Ground to help us understand where we are vis-à-vis nature in Britain, to both acknowledge our footprint, the tyre tracks, a paved country, its concrete overcoat, but also to encourage some repairs, interventions, preservations and some new-fangledness, and to do this in the belief that a relationship with our local outdoor environment – even as we have clobbered it to within an inch of its natural life – remains fundamental to human health and happiness.

The genius of Common Ground is precisely its understanding that *genius loci* is all important; that, in our ever-more internationalised, corporatised, mediated and de-individualised world, the spirit of a place, the sum of the meeting of people and land, remains of vital importance. Crucially, as Common Ground saw and sees it, place pertains and operates most and best at a local level and on a scale that we still might call human. Consequently, their efforts were not about restoring the wolf, or rewinding by managing facilities for nature; they were about looking at and growing a feeling for those less dramatic times in our lives when we cross the path of our own community; moments when old ways seem still operative, times when dormant traditions wait to be woken, times

**PARISH MAP** by Simon Lewty, Old Wilverton, Warwickshire, 1986

Simon Lewty was one of several artists commissioned for the *Knowing Your Place* exhibition, which formed part of Common Ground’s Parish Maps project. The idea was simple: to use mapping as a tool for people to express personal landscapes and inspire community conservation. About his *Parish Map*, Simon Lewty explained: ‘This has long been for me a special place, although by no means scenic. Indeed, it must resemble countless other bits of countryside which have in time come to be more or less surrounded – yet not swallowed entirely – by the town. The map proposes a journey, that starts with the familiar but leads to the unknown.’

when our lives mesh with those of others who share the same weather, moments of intense and personal response to familiar corners. The strong presence of both directed projects of Common Ground and the spontaneous manifestations of the same ethos elsewhere, their tang and their *multum in parvo* feel – a great deal in a small space, much in little – is even more important today in our vastly

‘Common Ground’s work is made with an understanding that people and place are entangled at all levels.’

accelerated and denatured times. No one anywhere in the world knew of the internet when Common Ground began. But throughout its life the organisation’s engine has been and remains the creation and inspiration of site-specific work for what it recognises as site-specific lives. Most, though not all, Common Ground projects have happened away from metropolitan centres. While it is fully understood that rural Britain is as man-made as urban, the parish scale has proved to be the most fruitful ground for the organisation’s ideas. Where this scale can still be felt in the big towns and cities, projects that promote local distinctiveness can be as life-enhancing there as anywhere.

Common Ground’s work (art commissions, community projects, practical assistance) is made with an understanding that people and place are entangled at all levels – functionally

(eg the built infrastructure of the country and farming and food), emotionally (novels, painting and music, flower arranging), intellectually (planning and philosophy), physically (walking, knitting, hang gliding and working the land), and genetically (the home phenotype). Giving a local habitation and a name, Common Ground repeatedly declares, is neither yesterday’s thing nor just a job for poets.

Common Ground is still at work with the steadfast belief in the value of exploring what the natural world – even the broken-down rubbish-dump world – means to us. One of the reasons why almost every poet in Britain has written a blackbird poem is because Common Ground has reminded the country that local looking is as valuable as any panoptical survey – that the imaginative work that will address climate change, say, will come not from windy pieces blowing vatically around the planet, but from attending to what is close at hand.

There is still much to worry about. That tide is even higher, with the sea level rising, and lapwings, skylarks, even starlings and house sparrows depleted beyond the imaginings of 1984. We are on the far side of the river now and no amount of looking back is going to help the guildhalls. A kind of singing in the dark times has begun. It says that the state we are in is worth as much attention as the world we have lost, that there is masses to do and many struggles and obstacles ahead, but also that a renewed diligence and attention to what remains and what it means to us can help us live – more fully, happier, healthier, wiser, more humanly, and better placed to know why we should step back from finishing off our planet in our own cracked image. ♣



COMMON GROUND was established as an arts and environmental charity in May 1983 in London. The stated mission of the charity was to work closely with artists, writers, poets, playwrights and music-makers to inspire and embolden people across the country to speak up for their own locality and get involved in the most imaginative ways. Common Ground was founded by Roger Deakin, Sue Clifford and Angela King, who had met through Friends of the Earth. Concerned that more ordinary and everyday places did not show up as worth caring for in national surveys and were left outside the remit of scientifically designated areas, they began to explore a new way of looking. A primrose bank here, a millpond there; a street full of stories; an orchard or old coal tip; a network of hedges full of familiar birds and mammals, all of which give a place a character and a feeling that is often difficult to express, but that means so much to us.



LOCAL DISTINCTIVENESS was there right at the beginning of Common Ground and continues to be the ethos binding all of our projects together. Local implies neighbourhood or parish. Distinctiveness is about particularity in the buildings and land shapes, the brooks and birds, trees and cheeses, places of work and pieces of literature. It is about history and nature jostling with each other, layers and fragments, old and new. The ephemeral and invisible are important too: customs, dialects, celebrations, names, recipes, spoken history, myths, legends and symbols. Local Distinctiveness was a term coined by Common Ground in 1985 to encourage us to look closely at the land and streets nearby or observe the wildlife on our doorstep: however ordinary, we start to realise just how much of this life and history deserves our attention. These everyday and familiar landscapes are so easily overlooked but are often the things that mean the most, imbued as they are with personal affection and meaning, expressing that age-old intertwining of human life and the natural world.

Tim Dee is a BBC radio producer and author of *The Running Sky*, *Four Fields and Landfill*. He collaborated with the poet Simon Armitage on the anthology *The Poetry of Birds* and is a trustee of Common Ground.



**SECOND NATURE**

Richard Mabey's 'Entitled to a View?' is extracted from his foreword to *Second Nature*, an anthology of writing he edited with Sue Clifford and Angela King for Common Ground. With contributors such as John Berger, Liz Frink, Fay Godwin, David Hockney, Richard Long, Norman Nicholson, Colin Ward, Raymond Williams and Fay Weldon, *Second Nature* was a groundbreaking collection of writing that moved conservation and environmentalism out of the realm of experts and created a more emotive, personal aesthetic. The launch of the book in 1984 at the Institute of Contemporary Arts helped the charity set out a fresh approach to the environment, grounded in landscape history and alert to the potential that working with the arts had opened up.



*Richard Mabey* argues for a more personal, emotive relationship with the natural environment

## ENTITLED TO A VIEW?

We have all become well-informed about the world's ecological crises, about the destruction of the tropical rainforests, the pollution of the oceans, the profligacy of agribusiness, and even about the economic connections between all these. Yet this knowledge has remained curiously remote, not connected in any obvious way with our ordinary, everyday experience. The fate of the natural world, which is also of course our fate, has been declared the province of specialists.

Even here in Britain, where the relationships between humankind and nature have been a central part of our cultural life (especially our painting and writing) we have begun to shy away from making personal, emotional responses. We have been persuaded of the overriding importance of rare organisms and scientifically defined 'special sites' and conversely, of the disposability of the commonplace. We have been told that passion must be replaced by compromise and consensus, and that it is misguided to look for private political and economic interests behind the destruction of our last refuges. So we hold back (with relief, often) from making the links between, say, the destruction of our local copses and our foreign policy, between animal rights and property interests. And as our worries grow, so the conventional wisdom increasingly reduces them to purely technical problems, for which the gathering of more scientific or economic evidence will, by itself, generate a solution. Moral arguments are now seen as, at their best, sentimental and impractical, and at their worst – it is a favourite phrase – 'purely subjective preferences'.

Somewhere along the line many deep and widely shared human feelings – an affection for native landscapes, a basic sympathy towards other living things, a feeling of respect for our rural history – have become regarded as a devalued currency. One reason may be a root that goes deep into Western culture. The whole

### 50 TREES photographed by Martin Mayer on Waterloo Bridge, London, 1989

Much of Common Ground's past and present work explores the enduring relationship between trees, woods and people. This interest in all things arboreal began in 1986, when the Trees, Woods and the Green Man project invited different artists, photographers, illustrators, poets, cartoonists and writers to explore the natural and cultural value of trees. There were a number of major touring exhibitions of this work, several books and a host of pamphlets, posters, newspapers, and postcards. *The Tree of Life* was an exhibition of painting, photography, and sculpture that explored the tree as an archetypal symbol for different cultures all around the world at the Royal Festival Hall (24 July – 28 August 1989). *Out of the Wood* was an exhibition that ran later that same year (14 October – 12 November 1989) exploring the significance of wood as a material and medium for contemporary practitioners in the crafts at the Crafts Council Gallery in London. *Orchards* was an exhibition of commissioned photographs by James Ravilious touring venues across the South West in 1989 and showing vividly the rich cultural and natural heritage of apples and orchards across the region. Garry Miller's *After the Storm* offered visitors to the Natural History Museum an opportunity to reflect on the damage caused by the hurricane of 1987 through an exhibition of his photography and a series of guided walks. *Leaves* was another exhibition at the Natural History Museum by Andy Goldsworthy (27 September 1989 – 14 January 1990) in which the artist created a number of striking shapes from sweet chestnut leaves, sycamore leaves and London plane leaves.

Judaeo-Christian tradition (especially after the intellectual revolutions of the Renaissance) rested on the assumption that humankind and nature were fundamentally separate and different. Humans were unique, it was believed, in possessing souls and a moral sense. Every new scientific discovery and cultural achievement reaffirmed their intellectual

**'Our sense of locality is rooted as deeply in territorial feelings.'**

superiority. If there were still a few sensitive consciences unconvinced, there was always the scriptural edict that gave humans 'dominion' over the natural world and seemed to justify the idea that it was our property, to be used as we thought fit.

A major fault in English writing about the countryside is the way it has distanced its readers because the writers themselves felt distanced, by background, education or the process of writing itself, and have deliberately attempted to deny or hide their own viewpoint. It is as if they saw their learning and their capacity for reflection as barriers between them and the state of nature they wished to become. Edward Thomas, notoriously, said he wanted to write prose 'as near akin as possible to that of a Surrey peasant', with results that were often patronising to peasants, and fairly disastrous for Thomas's style. It was only when he turned to poetry and accepted his role as a displaced person, that his true – and, one might say, most

natural – gifts became available.

By contrast, the immense range of experiences of natural life and landscape reaching back through our history and often beyond any narrow definition of rural traditions, is part of a common culture. Our sense of locality is rooted as deeply in territorial feelings. We become imprinted by places, and familiar with them just as a cat or fox does. We plod out private routes, touch trees, and mark (in our imaginations, at least) our special spots – a bend in a road, a gate to lean on, a face glimpsed in a trunk. Loyalty to these marking posts can be fierce and personal, and given without the slightest regard for what is locally distinctive.

The development of my own viewpoint is reflected in my changes in feeling towards a particular stretch of landscape. I find that I have been in at least four positions in respect of it: trespasser, romantic, landscape historian, landowner. With each viewpoint, I was adding to the former rather than replacing it, and none of them very proper in an area where such a high premium is put on knowing your place.

But I am not at all sure how each new awareness of landscapes affects the way I regard them. It has vastly increased the intellectual fascination and the outrage I feel when they are gratuitously destroyed. If I am honest, though, it has not much altered the way they appear to me. In that I am still the romantic pantheist I was when I was a teenager. Whatever I find out about the origins of Grim's Ditch, its first meaning for me will always be a winter tunnel and a woodcock jinking away over the damp leaves; and in spring the bank where the first moschatel flowers, gothic and diminutive, glow palely amongst the twisted roots. ♣



*We must learn to love the narrow spot that surrounds our daily life for what of beauty and sympathy there is in it. For surely there is no square mile of earth's inhabitable surface that is not beautiful in its own way, if we men will only abstain from wilfully destroying that beauty.*

WILLIAM MORRIS

*Is it ecologically more disastrous for a nation to lose its last starfruit than for a village to lose its last primrose bank? ... In some ways, the local extinction may represent the greater overall loss, for here it is not just the species that is lost, but the day-to-day intimacy and associations, the neighbourliness, that builds up around a plant or animal that has lived on close terms with a human community.*

RICHARD MABEY

Over recent years we have seen great changes in the character of our countryside. Hedgerows have been grubbed up to make ever bigger fields and ancient deciduous woodlands have been cleared for conifers or barley. Our countryside is losing its local character, distinctiveness and variety; familiar places and our links with the past are disappearing.

The idea of Common Ground is to stimulate a new and imaginative approach to a problem that will become more urgent in the coming years: the widespread destruction of much that is wild and natural in Britain. Our aim will be to give inspiration and courage to people to conserve their local surroundings. As one means to this end we intend to provide a practical link between the arts and nature conservation.

We are concerned that until now the debate about our relations with nature has been unduly dominated by scientific arguments. For too long we have seen essentially moral problems reduced to scientific ones. To find our way again we must rediscover the great moral and poetic tradition that is represented in the names of Clare, Keats, Wordsworth, Ruskin and Morris, tempering and expressing our ideas with as much of the sturdy common sense of William Cobbett as we can muster.

People have been denied the right to express legitimately their emotional attachment to their surroundings. As a result, many of us feel shy about wanting to protect something which is common, which we are told is not valuable to science.

In fact, the whole of the countryside is common ground to all of us. Scientists or not, we can all appreciate and enjoy the hedgerows, woods, meadows, lanes, commons, ponds, ditches, banks, stonewalls, coppices, verges, marshes, heaths and downs – the intricate patchwork that adds up to what we think of as the countryside.

They are, as Richard Mabey has said, ours 'not by virtue of ownership, but of familiarity'. And they are vital to all of us, because in their life we recreate our own lives. We contend that what really matters is what is of value to us as individuals and as communities.

We firmly believe that conservation must begin at the local level, and with the commonplace. Although it is important to conserve sites of special antiquity, rarity, or aesthetic landscape value, it is equally important to conserve the local, the familiar, the common species of plants, insects and animals. To confine our attention to sites of so-called 'Special Scientific Interest' and nature reserves is eventually to put nature in a zoo; to devalue, by comparison, the vital organic connection people need every day with the natural world.

The chief purpose of Common Ground will be to create a far wider public awareness of what is happening to our countryside, and to move people and to take constructive action to mend matters before it is too late – most especially in their own locality or parish.

One of Common Ground's first projects is to publish a *Parish Action Guide*. Its purpose will be to reassure people that their own, familiar, local surroundings are worth defending – even though they may not be National Nature Reserves or National Parks – to foster a new attitude to the countryside and its guardianship and to give practical advice (including useful case histories) on conservation at the local parish level.

Another of our early projects is to publish a manifesto edition, giving coherent expression to the large body of writers and artists now deeply concerned about the plight of the natural world in Britain. A number of our most distinguished authors and poets have already agreed to contribute work to further endeavours of Common Ground.

Looking to the future, we intend to encourage the staging and possible televising of musical and dramatic events by artists who share our concerns. We would aim to become similarly active in the fields of cinema and the visual arts.

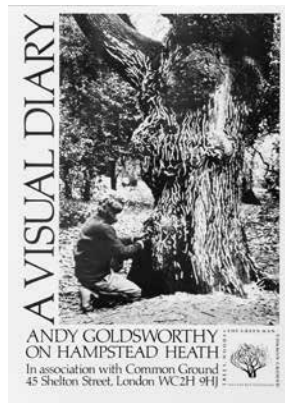
With such enterprises, we shall seek to stimulate the imaginative, popular initiative we believe is required to shake into life the debate about our future relations with nature. We are convinced that it is time for art, with all its emotional force and power of persuasion, to help spread, justify and strengthen the resolve of people to fight for what they personally find valuable in the natural world about them.

We will have no membership, preferring to act as a catalyst, sparking off ideas, forging new alliances and relationships.

*Published in 1982*

*Sue Clifford, Roger Deakin and Angela King*



**A VISUAL DIARY**

In the winter of 1985-6 a young Andy Goldsworthy came to London from his home in Cumbria to work with his hands in the ice and snow on Hampstead Heath. For six weeks, using only the materials to hand – twigs, leaves, feathers, stones, and the ice and snow itself – he created a series of ephemeral sculptures while locals or visitors to the Heath watched. This unusual artist's residency had been arranged by Common Ground and funded in association with Artangel and was one of the first undertakings for both organisations. Common Ground had only recently been launched a year earlier to 're-open the debate about our relationship with the land and with nature'. Goldsworthy's residency was a way of drawing people into subjects that they felt everyone should be invested in, a way of opening people's eyes to the wild nature on their doorstep and showing that 'inspiration is to be found in everyday places and materials'.



*Andy Goldsworthy* shares his unique approach to making art in the land

## RAIN SUN SNOW HAIL MIST CALM

What people value in their localities will differ from place to place. We cannot make sensible decisions about influencing change unless we know what we have, and who cares about it. The people who live or work in a place obviously know it better than council officials who might be based 30 miles or more away. Parish councils should be given more power, not less, but should first make full use of the powers they possess.

The extent to which we determine the future of our parishes, our localities, is largely up to us. The opportunities we have to alter our surroundings are enormous. Local groups and parish councils have the ability to do a whole host of things to benefit local people. There is a tremendous amount which is going on at the grass roots which we hope will give courage and inspiration to others to follow.

When I began working outside, I had to establish instincts and feelings for nature: some I never had, while others I had not used since childhood. I needed a physical link before a personal approach and relationship could be formed. I splashed in water, covered myself in mud, went barefoot and woke with the dawn.

I have become aware of how nature is in a

### ICE DETAIL FROM VISUAL DIARY by Andy Goldsworthy, Hampstead Heath, London, 1985-6

Andy Goldsworthy took up a residency on Hampstead Heath over the winter of 1985-6. During the residency, many local residents (including the author Marina Warner) came to watch Andy at work – he became 'their' artist in residence. Simultaneously, Common Ground curated an exhibition of the project in the gallery below their offices on Shelton Street in London. The exhibition took on the form of a 'visual diary', with several large frames of photographs hung on the walls, each frame representing a single day of Andy's residency and containing a mixture of photographs and writings in pencil expressing the development of different sculptures in leaves, ice and silver birch.

state of change and how that change is the key to understanding. I want my art to be sensitive and alert to changes in material, season and weather.

A rock is not independent of its surroundings. The way it sits tells how it came to be there. The energy and space around a rock are as important as the energy and space within. The weather – rain, sun, snow,

**'I have become aware of how nature is in a state of change and how that change is the key to understanding.'**

hail, mist, calm – is that external space made visible. When I touch a rock, I am touching and working the space around it. In an effort to understand why that rock is there and where it is going, I do not take it away from the area in which I found it.

I work with some materials and places many times over. Each time is different. Often I can only follow a train of thought while a particular weather condition persists. When a change comes, the idea must alter or it will,

I need my intuition to bring the idea out.

The ball, patch, line, arch, spire and hole are recurring forms in my work. I often feel with my sculpture that I am treading deep water and that these forms are familiar rocks that I can always put a foot on. In that respect they are important and probably necessary. They are also an effective way of exploring and extending a work over time, materials and locations.

The hole has become an important element in my sculpture. Looking into a deep hole unnerves me. My concept of stability is questioned and I am made aware of the potent energies within the earth. The black is that energy made visible.

I do not use glue or rope, preferring to explore the bonds and tensions that exist in nature. If I used glue I would forfeit the joy of discovering how materials join together by

their own nature. The coloured leaf patches were discovered when I found one dark and one light of the same size. I tore the dark leaf in two, spat underneath it and pressed it onto the light leaf: the result was what appeared to be a single, two-coloured leaf. Excited by this discovery, I went on to make yellow (elm), green (elm), orange (beech), white (sycamore) and red (cherry) patches.

Because I do not use conventional tools, I am forced to be more inventive and responsive to nature. I enjoy the unpredictability of breaking rock on rock – hand against rock against rock. Touching is essential to understanding and my art gives direction to touch.

In many ways my approach to the earth has been a reaction against the abuse of the land by the industrial farmer. But my approach to the earth has evolved, is still evolving and will continue to change. **✦**

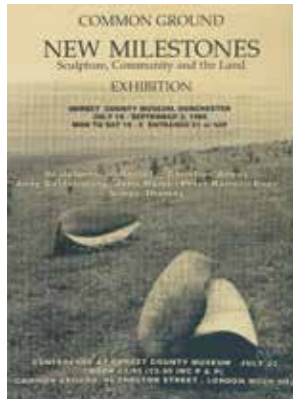


### DETAILS FROM VISUAL DIARY by Andy Goldsworthy, Hampstead Heath, London, 1985-6

Hampstead Heath itself was an important choice of site for this residency, not just because it brought this artist of the rural edges into the heart of the city. The poor soil quality in the area meant that it had long been common land, and has been the subject of at least two high-profile conservation battles on the Heath, to either 'parkify' the land or build on it.





**NEW MILESTONES**

During the late 1980s, Common Ground ran a project in Dorset to encourage a new generation of town, village and countryside sculptures commissioned by the communities. The aim of New Milestones was to stimulate the creation of small-scale works of the imagination which express our sense of history, our love of place and of the natural world. It involved people in commissioning sculptors and craftspeople to help celebrate their place, with sculptures which will be valued and be enduring features in the present and future life of the whole community.

*Sue Clifford* on how Dorset became Common Ground's laboratory of ideas with the New Milestones project

## PEOPLE, PLACES AND MEANING

Places have meaning to people. They are rich in layers of possibility. If their structures are rigidly preordained, if history is obliterated, if there is no room for mystery, no provocation to interact, no pause in the daily reiterations of patterns, our places starve us and make unwelcome the lodging of memories. Places make sensuous, emotional demands on people. In our quest for the new it should not be beyond our wit to sympathetically respond to the particularities of the place, to listen to the knowledge and needs of local people, and to retrieve the soul as well as to create new, subtle, interesting places that have the ability to enrich, to haunt, to awaken: places with meaning.

If we accept that places rich in meaning have the capacity to lift our spirits and challenge our perceptions, can we then build on an assumption that things that reveal and transform, which encourage us to sense and ponder invisible presences, that guide the imagination in new directions, and provoke poetic meanderings may help us to confront our deeper feelings, to value them, and perhaps to act upon them?

**‘The New Milestones project is about what places mean to the people who live in them, about how to express that meaning’.**

The arts do have this power. Sculpture, music, film, poetry, painting, performance and pageant can stop us in our tracks, make strange the familiar, throw off course our expectations, prejudices and usual responses to places, and can make us rethink. Provoking our imagination, bringing into focus a separate reality, the arts can evoke feelings and add them to language. We need art, for as Bachelard has said, ‘Art, then, is an increase of life, a sort of competition of surprises that stimulates our consciousness and keeps us from becoming somnolent.’

The New Milestones project is about what places mean to the people who live in them, about how to express that meaning in an imaginative and accessible way through sculpture.

In encouraging people – landholders or local communities – to commission sculptors to crystallise feelings about their place in a public and permanent way, we are not only trying to liberate sculpture into the wild and to give anyone courage to commission art, however modest, to help communicate their caring. We are emphasising that our feelings about our everyday landscapes are important and should be taken seriously. Our moment in history has something to offer in setting our imagination free to explore place. We can help initiate new cultural touchstones worthy of our time.

Thousands of years of human activity have enriched the variety in the landscape, and generation after generation have built meaning into their places of living, work and play. It is only within the last four decades that we have



**TURNING POINT** by Christine Angus, Manor Farm, Dorset, 1988

“My initial introduction to Manor Farm was strongly oriented to the recent conversion of the farm to organic farming and the convictions behind this. I want the sculpture to be both part of the place and about the place in such a way as to reflect upon those very elements that the farm is working with. The local church is a central part of the community. Along with Norman decoration and friezes it has some very old columns and capitals – a traditional form evolving from the tree. As the sculpture and the site have much to do with trees, these seemed appropriately symbolic.”

extended our technical capacities and economic rapaciousness to change the land for all time. Deep ploughing obliterates subtle ancient field patterns, complex heavy machinery can remove miles of hedge and acres of ancient woodland in a week. Bulldozers can raze stonewalls and buildings to the ground and fill in marshland. Fertilisers encourage coarse grasses and cereal growth and the competition smothers wildflowers. With them (assisted by pesticides and pollution) the butterflies and bees, the small mammals and birds all disappear. Footpaths, commons and wild wood are lost as farming, industry, commerce, transport and housing become ever more greedy for land.

The New Milestones project may seem a very small measure in relation to the enormity of the problems; it may seem an oblique idea. It will take hundreds of policy changes, incentive schemes and changed attitudes to make the countryside better for people, wildlife and

domesticated animals.

But what is needed is imagination and humanity. Common Ground feels it is vitally important to celebrate what remains, to become more aware of what our surroundings mean to us, as a starting point for local action.

Public art has generally been commissioned by wealthy individuals, large companies, or large public bodies almost always in cities. Often ideas have focused around ‘spaces and sites’ not places, around ‘the public’ not people – abstractions which allow arrogance in commissioner and artist.

Rarely has a community, especially in a rural area, thought itself capable of commissioning a craftsman or artist. Our hope is that the New Milestones project is one of many measures which will rekindle an interest in local distinctiveness and be at the start of a balanced city/country renaissance with humanity and imagination at its centre. ♣



**CHISWELL EARTHWORKS** by John Maine, Portland, Dorset, 1986–1993

“The Isle of Portland, linked to mainland Dorset by Chesil Beach, has been the source of building stone for centuries. Residents of one of its villages, Chiswell, decided to celebrate the completion of a multi-million pound sea defence scheme by commissioning a large land sculpture by the artist John Maine. The sculpture consists of five terraces sustained by dry-stone walls up to 55 yards long. The wave-like form of the walls recalls the sea and the ancient stepped fields (or strip lynchets) typical of Dorset. Maine’s earthworks are so integrated into the landscape that they are often missed by visitors, who ask ‘Where’s the sculpture?’”



**GRAINS OF WHEAT (or BIG EYED BEANS FROM VENUS)** by Simon Thomas, Lulworth, Dorset, 1986

“Through local seeds from the hedgerows and fields collected during a walk, I developed an interest in historical land use of the area. The northern boundary of the walk is effectively a line between a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and modern techno-grain farmland. The SSSI has not been under the plough since the Bronze Age when it was changed from woodland to become one of the earliest recorded sites for grain cropping in Britain. This history of grain cropping in the area excited me; the modified grass grain seemed to symbolise the fertile relationship of men and women and the land. Upon finishing the carvings, I felt that these shapes must definitely nestle along the top path, in between the ancient grain land and the contemporary wheat and barley fields, as a fertile bridge between the two.”





*Peter Randall-Page* looks back at his collaboration with Common Ground in Devon and Dorset

## GRANITE SONGS

I don't remember the exact details of how we met, but Angela King and Sue Clifford must have contacted me some time in the early 1980s with an invitation to participate in the New Milestones project. The idea was that contemporary sculpture, like traditional milestones, could be absolutely specific to their location, a kind of *genius loci* articulating our relationship to place.

From the very beginning, Common Ground's vision resonated strongly with my own thoughts about the role of art in society: that art can take its place in life as a celebration of everyday revelry was compelling and totally in accord with my own thoughts and ideas.

I was to work along the public footpath between Lulworth Cove and Ringstead Bay on the Dorset coast. The landscape, seascape and skyscape are spectacular here, with cliffs plunging vertically into the sea. I felt quite overwhelmed both by the beauty of the place and the sheer scale. One feels very small in such places, and I wanted to make work that would relate to the intimacy of human scale – something on which to refocus the senses before returning to the enormity of land, sea and sky.

The most popular footpath followed the cliff edge; a second path is slightly further inland and was much less used. I chose to make work on this quieter path and to set three sculptures into niches built into a bank adjacent to the path. The vast elemental nature of the place was impossible to compete with, so I decided to make work on an intimate, human scale embedded within the landscape.

**WAYSIDE CARVINGS** by Peter Randall Page, Lulworth, Dorset, 1986

"One feels very small in such places and I wanted to make work which would relate to the intimacy of human scale – something one which to refocus the senses before returning to the enormity of land, sea and sky. My other objective was to make something that would strike up a resonance with the surrounding landscape by making a distillation of certain aspects of it, and I liked the ideas of making a kind of tribute to the ancient lives which now constitute our terra firma."

The local geology results from the accumulated remains of innumerable ancient sea creatures – gastropods, bivalves and ammonites that once lived in an ancient sea. The local Purbeck marble I used also consists of the fossilised remains of shells, and the forms I carved refer to these same spiralling growth patterns. I wanted to evoke a sense of scale, in both time and space, unique to this particular place.

A few years later, at the beginning of the

garden in the village.

Outside the art gallery, sculpture does not exist in isolation. The relationship of an object to a place and the people who inhabit that place is of utmost importance if the work is to have any real meaning. When Common Ground approached me with the idea of putting this concept into practice on public rights of way in the immediate locality of my home on the edge of Dartmoor, it represented an exciting but daunting challenge. The area is one of exceptional natural beauty which is easily marred – my audience are, for the most part, my friends and neighbours. I have tried to embed sculpture in the landscape, without the use of signs or labels. Discovering them by chance, I would like the experience to be direct, personal and unselfconscious. My hope is that the right object in the right place can set up a resonance, the effect of which may be more than the sum of its parts.

Common Ground has been the most inspiring arts organisation I have ever worked with. The ethos embodied by Common Ground's philosophy has never been more relevant. Tackling environmental degradation is not only a matter of physical survival but of emotional survival as well. Our aesthetic sense can be the canary in the coal mine. It is easy to see human beings as the kiss of death for the natural world but without optimism we can do nothing. Examples of symbiotic relationships between homo sapiens and the rest of the natural world can provide this much-needed optimism. Common Ground has promoted and facilitated such relationships not only in sculpture but music, literature and numerous other visionary projects. I have been lucky to work with them. ♣

**'Common Ground has been the most inspiring arts organisation I have ever worked with.'**

1990s, Common Ground won a well-deserved Prudential Award for the most innovative arts organisation. Using the prize money, Common Ground invited me to take part in another project. I had just moved from London to Devon with my wife Charlotte and our children. The new challenge was to celebrate our relationship with place – not through Sites of Special Scientific Interest or Listed Buildings, but in the everyday and commonplace. They called this project Local Distinctiveness, and the idea of making a series of works on publicly accessible land, in the immediate vicinity of my new home, was irresistible.

However, I was neither local nor distinctive so felt apprehensive about imposing my art on new neighbours and the Devon landscape. The project spanned almost a decade and resulted in five artworks culminating in an invitation from the Parish Council to redesign the public



**GRANITE SONG** by Peter Randall-Page, River Teign, Devon, 1991

*Granite Song*, lying on an island in the Teign, was carved from granite. Peter split the boulders and then inscribed their twin inner facets with a meandering line in mirror image, as if the stone were fossils. Long intrigued by what he might find inside boulders, he went on to explore the potential of imaginary interiors in other ways.



**WAYSIDE CARVINGS** by Peter Randall-Page, Lulworth, Dorset, 1986

Three sculptures in fossil-rich Purbeck Marble were recessed into a field boundary and sheltered by drystone walling built with the help of Charley Brentnall.

*Peter Randall-Page* was born in the UK in 1954 and studied sculpture at Bath Academy of Art from 1973 to 1977. During the past 25 years he has gained an international reputation through his sculpture, drawings and prints. He has undertaken numerous large-scale commissions and exhibited widely. His work is held in public and private collections throughout the world, including Japan, South Korea, Australia, USA, Turkey, Eire, Germany and the Netherlands. A number of Randall-Page's public sculptures can be found in urban and rural locations throughout the UK, notably in London, Edinburgh, Manchester, Bristol, Oxford and Cambridge and his work is in the permanent collections of the Tate Gallery and the British Museum.





**LOCAL DISTINCTIVENESS**

Although the idea of Local Distinctiveness was a founding ethos for Common Ground in the early 1980s, it wasn't until a little later that work began on the Campaign for Local Distinctiveness itself. From around 1990, Clifford and King began *An Exploratory Alphabet of Local Distinctiveness*, a playful poster-sized list of foods, crafts, wildlife, architecture, produce and seasonal celebrations for every letter of the alphabet. This grew into the poster *Rules for Local Distinctiveness* which was printed in *The Independent* on 1 May 1990. Conceived by Angela King and designed by David Holmes, it received an excited response and was reprinted two years later. In 1993, there was a conference and the publication of a booklet, *Local Distinctiveness: Place, Particularity and Identity*, edited by Clifford and King and with contributions from Roger Deakin, Patrick Wright and Neal Ascherson, among others, and soon communities were making their own alphabets of local distinctiveness for their own parish or borough. In 2006 came the publication of *England in Particular*, a magnum opus written for Common Ground by Sue Clifford and Angela King, which celebrates the commonplace, the local, the vernacular and the distinctive. It offers a way of looking for, and at, our many layered local cultures and identities, and could be applied to any corner of the world.



*Angela King* explains the guiding ethos behind much of Common Ground's work

# LOSING YOUR PLACE

What is there in a Cornish hedge  
The broken herringbone pattern of stones,  
The gorse, the ragged rick,  
The way the little elms are, sea-bent, sea-shorn  
That so affects the heart?  
A. L. Rowse, 'Cornish Landscape'

Local distinctiveness is essentially about places and our relationship with them. It is as much about the commonplace as about the rare, about the everyday as much as the endangered, and about the ordinary as much as the spectacular.

We sometimes forget that ours is a cultural landscape – a vast web of stone walls and subsidies, ragas and Northumbrian pipes, Wensleydale sheep and halal butchers, Islay whiskies and Fenland skies, bungalows and synagogues, pubs and May Day songs, round barrows and rappers, high streets and Ham stone, laver bread and Devon lanes, door details and dialect.

We have long recognised the importance of diversity. Most travel guides, geology books, volumes on architecture and language begin by asserting how varied our land and people are. Yet we have been subject to massive homogenisation

**WHITE HORSE** by Clifford Harper, for *England in Particular*, 2006

Apples, bandstands, beach huts, black dogs, breweries, bricks, cakes, causeways, chalk horses, cheese rolling, cider, dances, dialect, dry-stone walls, fens, fire festivals, foxes, gargoyles, geology, ghosts, heaths, heronries, ice houses, jet, lagoons, maypoles, mazes, moats, nightingales, peat, primrose banks, sheep, spoil heaps, terraced houses, topiary, weather, windmills, zawns... Places are rich with variety in buildings, landscapes, peoples and wildlife. But this diversity is under siege. Mass production and the forceful promotion of corporate identity have brought with them standardised shop fronts, farm buildings, factories, forests and front doors, while intensive farming has created a bland, empty countryside. A counterblast against loss and uniformity, and a celebration of just some details that cumulatively make places so distinctive.

– sometimes in the name of conservation – and it is bleaching the richness from our lives.

The variegation that we and nature possess appeals to our eye for richness. Our love of



texture and patina extends to language: to sounds that evoke the local landscape. In Welsh, there are at least forty words for rain.

Just as Thomas Hardy talks of sensing a mountain in the dark by noticing the absence of stars, we recognize our place in a landscape

through a subtle combination of signs. We can infer the past from markers small and large: the cut of a Roman road across Saxon fields, the presence, in Devon valleys, of Mazzard cherry trees brought to England by the Huguenots. But the future, as Gaston Bachelard observes, can only be heard, felt and seen through the imagination. 'If we cannot imagine,' he writes, 'we cannot foresee.'

Local distinctiveness can encompass so many things and affects everyone. In exploring the idea Common Ground has found it useful to work around key words, which allow reinterpretation for every different circumstance: detail, particularity, patina, authenticity. We are talking of quality in the everyday. Because these things are not straightforward or easy to pigeonhole, often involve emotional attachment and are hard to communicate, they are treated as 'soft' by the media. Because they are impossible to put a money value on or to explain through equations, these unquantifiable 'intangibles' are likely to be marginalised by the professionals. Debate rages, and decisions are taken which often leave out the very things that make life worth living. ♣



**MAY DAY MAY DAY POSTER** by Common Ground, 1990

On the morning of May 1, 1990, you might have bought a copy of *The Independent* and opened it on an eye-catching, full page broadside: 'MAY DAY MAY DAY-LIGHT ROBBERY!' it cried out. 'Richness and diversity in our daily lives are being plundered. Celebrate the things that are particular to your place and follow the Common Ground Rules to stop the rot.'

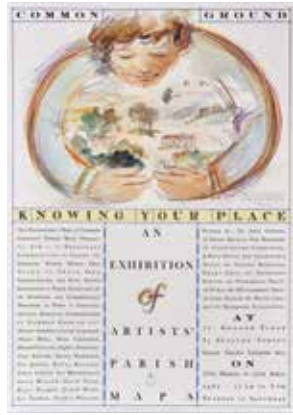
## SOME WELSH WORDS FOR RAIN

by John Christopher Williams written in a letter to Common Ground in 1989

- bwrr* to rain
- glawio* raining
- bwrrglaw* raining
- dafnu* spotting
- pigo* spotting
- glaw mân* drizzle
- gwllthlaw* drizzle
- brasfwrw* big spaced drops
- sgrympian* short sharp shower
- cawodi* showering
- arllwys* pouring
- toltti* pouring
- dymchwel* pouring down
- Mae hi'n bwrr hen wragedd a ffyn* It's raining old women and sticks
- byrlym* pouring very quickly
- lifo* flooding
- twlud* throwing
- taflu* throwing
- hegar law* fierce rain
- lluwlchlaw* sheets of rain
- chwipio bwrr* whiplash rain
- pistyllio* fountain rain
- piso* pissing down
- curlaw* beating rain
- tywwallt* absolutely bucketing
- stido* thrashing down
- tresio* maximum intensity

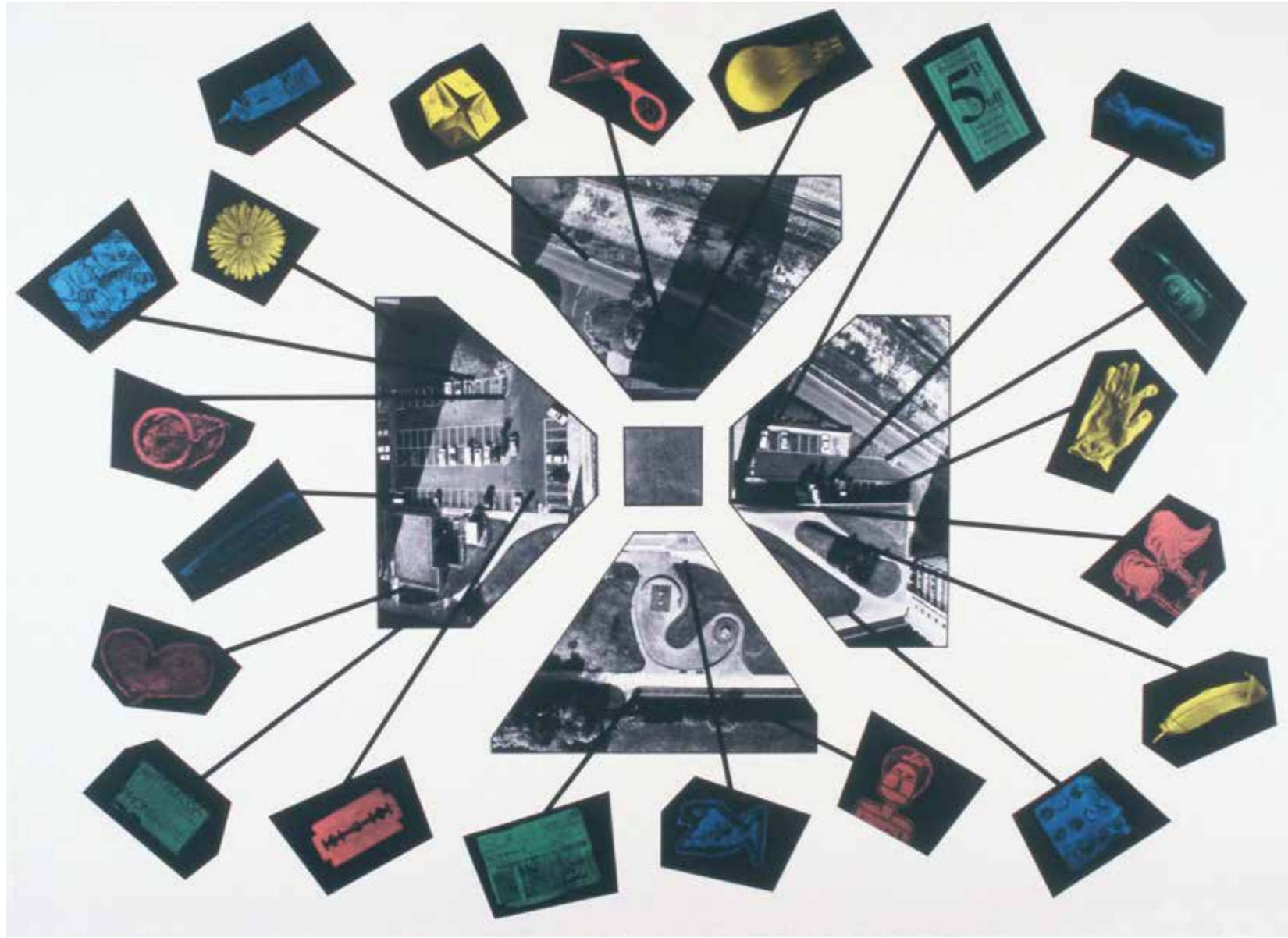
Please bear in mind that I have been away from home for almost 25 years, and, as a result, the list might lack comprehensiveness. Further, whilst most words listed occur in 'RP' Welsh, some are dialect forms which are probably peculiar to the locality of my birthplace, the village of Beddgelert, and may not be familiar to the men and women of Dyfed.





**PARISH MAPS**

With its roots in *Holding Your Ground*, a handbook of local action and conservation published by Common Ground in 1985, the idea of the Parish Maps project was radical and simple: people should come together to create maps of their self-defined locality to express what they value in their everyday surroundings and what their home ground means to them. It was precisely this challenge that Common Ground set eighteen well-known artists for the 1987 exhibition *Knowing Your Place*, which went on to tour in twelve different locations nationally, from Salisbury, Cumbria and Darlington to London, Gravesend and Newport. These artists were chosen for the unusual and imaginative approaches they took with maps made of collage, photographs, words and sculpture, and with maps that were beautiful, personal, self-reflexive, and even at times quite critical. In response to the exhibition and the artists' maps, Common Ground received hundreds of maps from people around the UK and beyond, from the USA and Australia to India and Italy. They vary from playful, witty, passionate, thoughtful, protective and thinking beyond the bounds of the scientific and spatial that we would ordinarily associate with a map. Inspired by Parish Maps, many local conservation projects and acts of community celebration have ensued.



*Robin Grove-White* sees the potential of community mapping

# PARISH MAPS AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Common Ground's Parish Maps are a modest idea. The success of the project is due to the fact that the maps are creative enterprises to which everyone can contribute. They invite people to say what they value about where they live, and to share those ideas in a tangible form. Parish Maps are personal and intimate, yet they are also expressions of collective endeavour generated outside official frameworks.

By all appearances, we are a society of growing discontent and disharmony. The old mores and mechanisms – the monarchy, Parliament, local government, the inner confidence of being 'British' – are corroding fast. The old securities – jobs, social welfare – are no longer guaranteed.

Addressing such corrosion of popular trust in institutions whose claim to legitimacy has rested precisely on their ability to 'represent' the public is becoming recognised as a major challenge for society as a whole. One conclusion seems obvious: such reconstitution of trust and interdependency will be likely to emerge not from top down pronouncements from central government, so much as from the careful rebuilding of shared understanding of public values from the ground up.

Today's universal concern with the environment is a case in point. Over the past two or three decades, the environment has emerged as a grassroots rallying-point – not only for a range of shared discontents about aspects

**FROM THE TOP OF HARVEY HOUSE** by Stephen Willats, exhibited in *Knowing Your Place* in 1987  
PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINTS, PHOTOGRAPHIC DYE, ACRYLIC PAINT, LETRASÉT TEXT, INK

"I see the map as one of peoples' everyday alienation, and of their struggle to express their own identity, and furthermore their need to create their own landscape within contemporary society. In this sense my map of what the residents of Harvey House left immediately beneath them may be considered in contrast sharply with the historical idea of the parish and its well-ordered, homogenous community. But not so, for both are social territories that reflect different stage of society sharing the common element that both were authoritatively defined." Making a Parish Map is about creating a community expression of values, and about beginning to assert ideas for involvement, it is about taking the place in your own hands, and begins with asking questions. What is important to you about this place, what does it mean to you? What makes it different from other places? What do you value here? What do we know, what do we want to know? How can we share our understandings? What could we change for the better? Turning each other into experts in this way helps to liberate all kinds of quiet knowledge, as well as passion, about the place. Making a Parish Map can inform, inspire, embolden. Finding the particularity of a place is not always easy and reminds us that communities are driven by tension as much as compassion, that the fluidity of insiders and outsiders needs constant bridge building. The biggest step is the first one – Parish Maps are a way of getting started.

of modern industrialisation, but also for fresh ways to picture a more harmonious social order.

Since the early 1990s, as the post-Rio vocabulary of 'sustainable development' indicates, environmentalism has begun to harden into political orthodoxy. In one sense this has represented success for the social movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Yet it has come at a price. The spontaneous common concerns for the environment are being homogenised and domesticated by the governing bodies that regulate and control them.

But the forces involved are impossible to contain in this way. At the very moment when governments have begun to adopt these new vocabularies, environmentalism has been spawning new mutations: novel patterns of grassroots protest and direct action.

Parish Maps have a role in what comes next – for they rely fundamentally on respect for the affective meanings of community and nature, for ordinary people on the ground. They are a medium for harnessing local knowledge. They reject the instrumental and 'objective' categories and vocabularies of bureaucratic discourse. Instead, they acknowledge and

incorporate dimensions of human experience that bureaucracies tend to sideline or ignore.

It is in this context that the Parish Maps idea holds promise of far-reaching significance. For the Parish Map is a device resting, above all, on respect for the affective meanings of 'community' and nature, for ordinary people on the ground. It is a medium, in short, for harnessing local knowledge of many kinds. Such maps reject, deliberately, the categories and vocabularies of even enlightened bureaucratic discourse, making explicit instead dimensions of human experience which tend to be sidelined or ignored. Common Ground's insights concerning the significance of the intimate, the relational, and the locally valued, and the ways in which these can be expressed and reflected in Parish Maps, thus hold considerable potential for the burgeoning wider process of reinvigoration of democratic politics, in the circumstances of an advanced industrial society like Britain.

Let us build on such devices, and the respect for human sensibility that they embody, to enrich the ways in which we are to organise ourselves. ♪



**COMMON GROUND: REGENTS PARK** by Adrian Berg, London, exhibited in *Knowing Your Place* in 1987  
OIL ON CANVAS

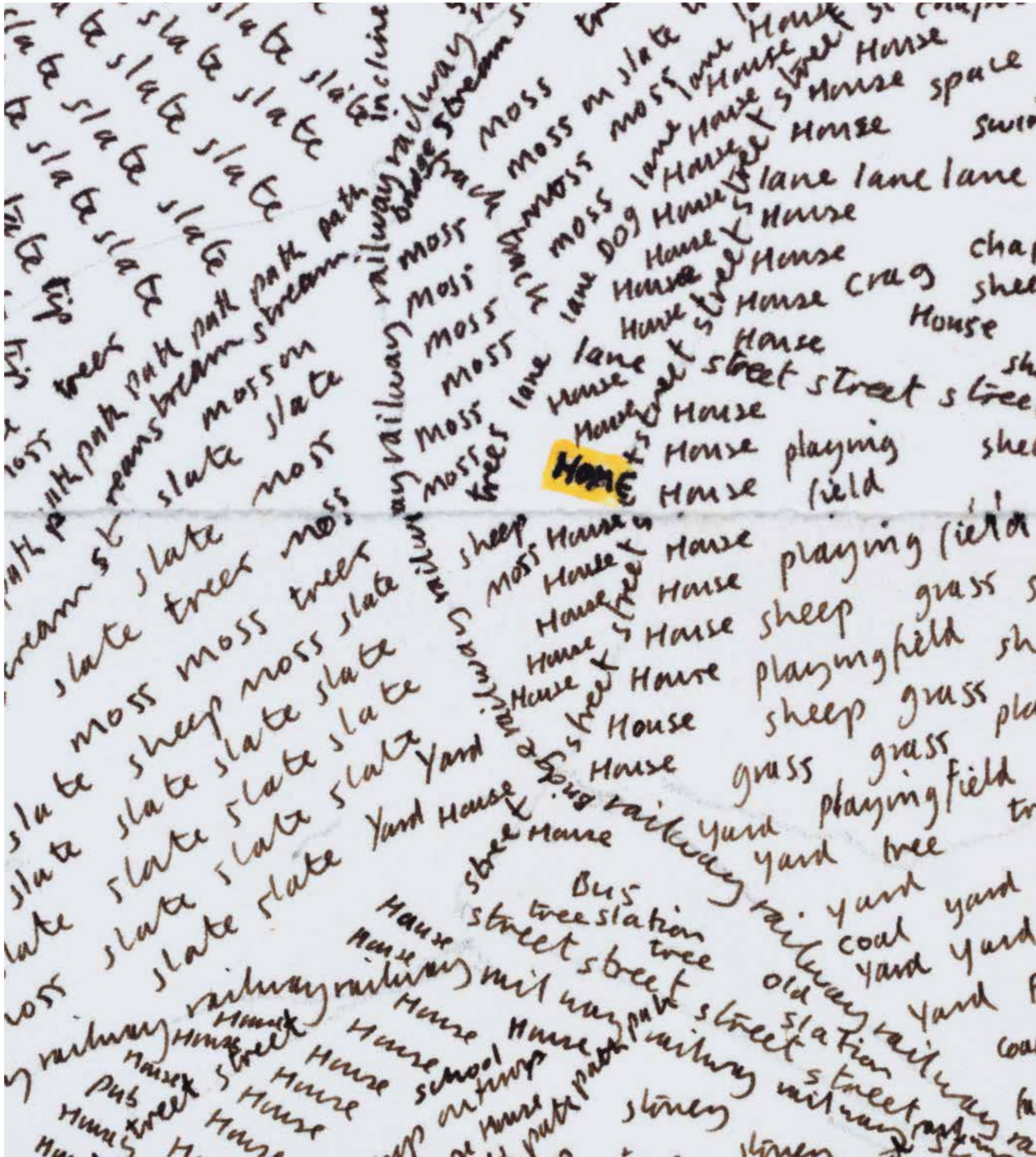
"In the top half of this picture I have tried to show that what I see from my front window – well-gardened park stretching west and north, with Nash terracing to the south. Below and across the middle of the picture stretch the buildings that act as the immediate backdrop to this bit of the park. At the bottom of the picture is what I see from my back window and my bit of roof. Not a pretty sight, but one which gives me pleasure."



**CLEATOR MOOR (detail)** by Conrad Atkinson, Cumbria, exhibited in *Knowing Your Place* in 1987  
MIXED MEDIA: PHOTO MONTAGE, ACRYLIC, FELT PEN

"Whenever I try to make a landscape piece I seem to keep reworking *The Deserted Village* or *The Old Cumbrian Beggar* and their themes of revolution and displacement and work. Maybe it is not currently possible to paint a landscape and find the sublime . . . I keep remembering something I saw written with a felt pen on a piece of slate by Ennerdale Lake in Cumbria, just over the mountain from Sellafield, near where I was born and brought up. It read 'Nuclear power is thalidomide forever'. What most disturbed me about this was not so much the words but the fact that I couldn't decide whether this was an act of vandalism or not."





**A PERSONAL PARISH, TWENTY YEARS OF LIVING AND WALKING IN THE ENVIRONS OF BLAENAU FFESTINIOG** (detail) by David Nash, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Wales, exhibited in *Knowing Your Place* in 1987, from Collection Capel Rhiw  
 INK AND GRAPHITE ON PAPER  
 "By making this map, I found the boundary of my personal parish, a form of extended physical body, the area within which I feel in direct contact with the sense of home."



**THE REAL CENTRE OF THE UNIVERSE** by Balraj Khanna, Maida Vale, London, exhibited in *Knowing Your Place* in 1987  
 OIL PAINT  
 "I was commissioned to paint a picture of where I lived, and I chose the Lord's Cricket Ground. This is my spiritual home. I was born in the Punjab, and studied for an English Masters in India before coming to England in 1962 with the intention of studying at Oxford. But when I arrived in England, war broke out between India and China; my funding was withdrawn. To pass the time, I took up my old hobby of painting and was reborn in England near the Lord's."



### WHY PARISH?

The ecclesiastical parish has been the measure of the English landscape since Anglo-Saxon times. Boundaries, some dating back more than a thousand years, are often still traceable; here, history marches with nature and each is the richer for the discourse. The civil parish emerged in the 1890s as the smallest theatre of democracy. Much has changed since then and boundaries reworked. But weaving together a twenty-first-century environment and society has to be about constructing a more participative and pliable democracy, too. Knowing your place, taking some active part in its upkeep, passing on wisdom, being open to ideas, people, development and change, but in sympathy with nature and culture which have brought it this far, will open the doors of dissent. But conversation, tolerance and the passing on of memories, are civilising forces. Whatever the forms of knowledge we shall need for the next millennium, humanity and imagination must take a high priority in organising them. It is in this sense of a self-defined small territory, that Common Ground has offered the word 'parish', implying people and place together, to keep us grounded.



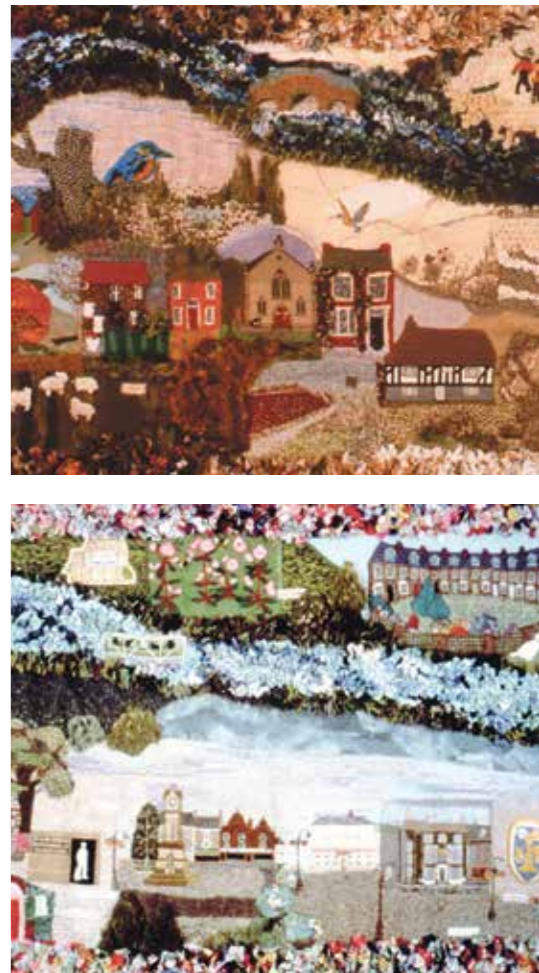
**PARISH MAP OF MUCHELNEY** by Gordon Young, Muchelney, Somerset, 1987  
The question 'What do you value in your place?' turns everyone into experts. From the smallest of details to the most enduring stories, no one else can dictate what is important to you. The lovely doors along the row, Geoff's hedge and how he keeps the holly trimmed, the pollarded willows, the sluice gates, orchard and wandering chickens. The seasonal things, too, such as where the best blackberries or mushrooms can be found, or the way Jim ploughs and where the toads spawn and memories of the floods. Events and places become stories: 'Do you remember when lightning struck the holm oak?' All of these and many more are captured by Gordon Young's beautiful *Parish Map of Muchelney*. It could not be anywhere else!



**EASTON PARISH MAP** by the community of Easton, Bristol, 1993  
A grassroots arts group travelled around Easton in Bristol on a double-decker bus to engage the community and enlist their help in creating this map over a period of two weeks. The bus lent a sense of occasion, making its arrival an event in itself, with much talking, singing and swapping of stories between the different ethnic groups and generations living in the area. The finished 2.5 metre x 2.5 metre batik was given a home at the Easton Community Centre.



**THIRSK PARISH MAP** by the community of Thirsk, North Yorkshire, 1989  
People in Thirsk, North Yorkshire, were worried about the proposed development of a supermarket on a nursery site. The community wanted to tell the developers how they felt and hoped they would think twice before investing their money in destroying something other people valued. For two years, the upstairs room in the town library became a hive of activity for much of the map-making, at first for all the background research and later some nine months of making. People of all ages sat together chatting, sewing, knitting, embroidering, quite literally stitching their feelings together. Nearly everybody in the community got involved along the way. The villages of South Kilvington, Carlton Miniott and Sowerby are included, as well as the market town of Thirsk, which together make up the parish of Cod Beck.



### WHY MAP?

A map is an expression of resistance. Today, maps are made by satellites and published by Google Inc. Ground knowledge is regarded as less precise, less useful. While we gather ever more facts about the planet, and share incredible amounts of research around the globe, at each extension of scale, detailed place-based knowledge gained over generations is lost, and wisdom mislaid. With each level of abstraction, we feel less able to argue what we know, and less sure in our valuing of the unquantifiable smallnesses which can make everyday life a delight and help nature and culture to interact benignly.



The naming of fields is our way of knowing places, says *Adam Nicholson*

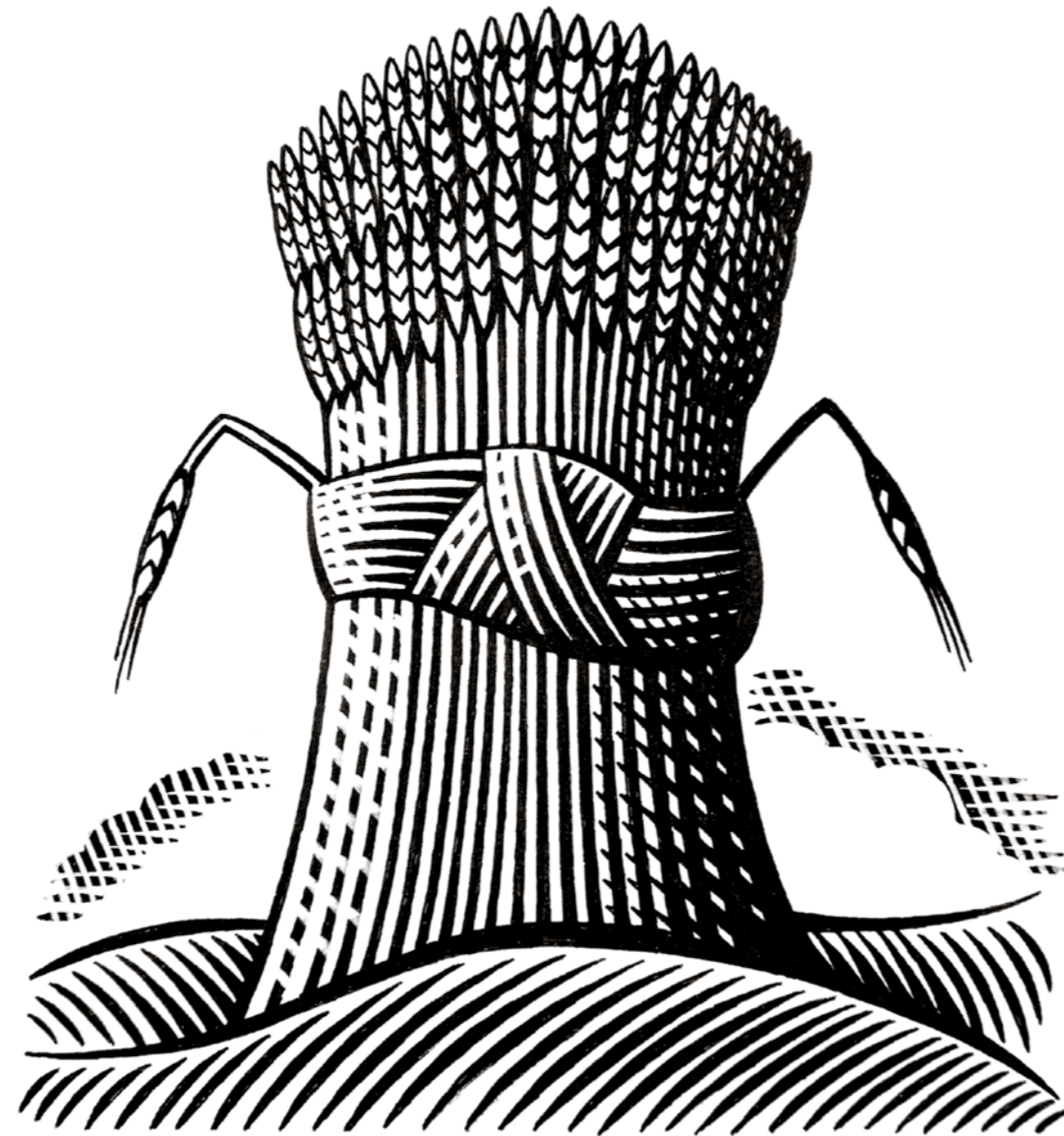
## IN THE FIELDS

A field is an anthology of details. Every field does, after all, have a name which the microdots of a known place never do. There are eleven fields here: Way field (which we now in fact call Rosie's field because my daughter Rosie had her first birthday party there in the summer after we arrived at this farm), Beech Meadow, Toyland, the Orchard, Cottage Field, Long Field, Jim's Field, Slip Field, Target Field, Hollow Flemings and Great Flemings. Those names adumbrate a whole sequence of lives lived here, including ours. I planted the orchard several winters ago. I don't know what it was called before. Target Field was given that name in the war when some Canadian soldiers billeted here set up a rifle range. Its earlier name has gone. Jim's Field was rented by the gamekeeper of the local estate, Jim Mephram, to graze his bullocks in the 1930s and 40s. Beech Meadow does have one beech tree growing in one of its hedges but I have no idea why the field carries the name. Perhaps there was an earlier, bigger beech there once, of which this tree – a curious and magical thing, growing within a foot of and the same age as an oak so that the arms of each are intertwined with the other – is the less conspicuous descendant. Slip Field slipped a few decades ago when it was deep ploughed for the first time. Toyland is a misheard corruption of Tyeland, a Kent and Sussex dialect word meaning common land, which it must once have been but I have no idea when – perhaps before the farm was made in the sixteenth century. Long Field is not the longest but is probably one of the oldest. I guess its name preserves the memory of a time when fewer fields had been cut from the wood here and it was indeed the longest, a sinuous run along a stream that was chosen for the parish boundary. And the Flemings remain a mystery. Certainly there were Flemings near here in the sixteenth century, immigrants skilled in the making of glass and the forging of iron. Beyond that, I know nothing.

**“The essence of a field is that the cultural accommodates the natural.”**

These layered changes, this dialogue with the place that the names record, this mixture of memory and oblivion, fragmentary preservation and partial erasure, comes near the heart of fields' significance for us. They are a form of current memorial, a marriage of life and permanence, halfway between now and then, between the made and the given, between the local and the abstract; beautiful, in Ivor Gurney's astonishing word, for their 'usuality'.

Recognising that beauty, or even searching for beauty in the form of the field, is a modern taste. Earlier visions of rural beauty did not, on the whole, involve the field. The Arcadian idea was either of a liberal and liberated woodland existence or, with the invention of the attitude encapsulated by the ha-ha, an open savannah at ease with itself, wood-pasture without the definition or restriction of the wall, gate or hedge. At the height of Romanticism, this appetite for freedom stretched to untrammelled heights. “The farther I ascend



WHEATSHEAF by Clifford Harper, 2006


Fields have meanings and memories for millions of us. In their manifold forms, fields express our cultural crafting of the land. They are our unwritten history, carved clearings in the wild wood, the accumulation of practical experimentation, invention and subtlety, extending over generations. Yet under our gaze this rich combining of culture and nature has been smoothed and sprayed out of existence in half a lifetime. Farming with nature, culture and locality, rotating crops, mixing livestock with arable production and reducing our dependence on artificial pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers, could solve many problems. The more farmers produce food for local consumption the more they are in direct contact with the surrounding community, and more likely to be valued and understood. We need to re-think what fields are for if we want them to continue to fulfil a wider role than just crop and livestock production. Fields are not factories – they are our unique and variegated expression of a long relationship with the land.

from animated nature', Coleridge wrote early in 1803, looking back on his ecstatic fellside experiences of the previous summer, 'from men, and cattle, & the common birds of the woods, & fields, the greater becomes in me the Intensity of the feeling of Life'.

That primitivism and relish for the wild dominated the nineteenth century but became at least suspect after the First World War. I have a feeling, although this is perhaps difficult to substantiate, that the Western Front changed the meaning of wildness. The merciless wildness of a place, previously seen in the wake of Coleridge as an entrancing prospect, became in Flanders and on the Somme a maddening and horrific reality. The total absence of safety in what was called 'the devastated zone', and the complete remaking of the previously agricultural world in which that war was fought, may in themselves have stimulated the hunger for the field.

'Poetry', Auden wrote, 'is a momentary stay against confusion'. Thus, I think, at least for the modern mind, a field and a poem are the same. They are both, of their essence, cut off from and even set against what surrounds them. Each is a small world defined by its boundaries. In each is a particular vision, a particular history, a difference from 'the waste sad time stretching before and after.' But each holds something else within its boundaries. The essence of a field is that the cultural accommodates the natural there:

the field is a poem to symbiosis and a human contract with the natural. A poem makes that accommodation too. The searing Gloucester-surrealist language of a Gurney poem is the equivalent of those places in a field where a hatch of common blues is flitting over the vetches, or a bunch of rushes at night takes on the outline of a deer, head bowed to graze. In both, the other is held within a containing form. That is the reason, in the end, that we think of fields now, after Passchendaele, after Buchenwald, as such good places. We are neither alien nor omnipotent there. They belong to us but there are things beyond us in them. We shape them, make them, control them, name them but they are not what we are. They are our partners. Or at least that is the ideal condition. Industrialised farming is so often painful and disturbing precisely because it involves the breaking of that contract and the chemical reduction of partner to slave. But there can be a better way than that, a concordance between the human and the natural, a mutuality, which as Wendell Berry has written, is the essence of music, goodness and hope:

Now every move answers what is still. This work of love rhymes living and dead. A dance is what this plodding is. A song, whatever is said. 

# COMMON GROUND

## A MANIFESTO for FIELDS

*'I found the poems in the fields and only wrote them down.'*

JOHN CLARE

1. LOOK FOR NAMES IN THE FIELDS AND HISTORY IN THE HEDGEROWS

2. LET WILDLIFE MAKE HOMES IN FIELDS AND TRAVEL SAFELY ALONG HEDGES

3. LEAVE THE POLLINATORS BE – DON'T SPRAY WITH HARMFUL CHEMICALS

4. COULD A NUMBER OF FIELDS IN EACH PARISH CAN BE LEFT LIE FALLOW OR UNDRAINED AND UNFERTILISED?

5. WE NEED MORE COMMUNITY FIELDS WHERE PEOPLE CAN WALK AND PLAY

6. FIELD SPRINGS MUST BE PROTECTED

7. SEASONAL FESTIVITIES SHOULD BE ENJOYED IN FIELDS

8. FIELDS CAN PROVIDE WHOLESOME FOOD FOR LOCAL MARKETS AND WILD FOODS FOR FORAGERS

10. MAKE GATES AND STILES LOCALLY DISTINCTIVE

11. FOOTPATHS THROUGH FIELDS SHOULD BE PROTECTED

12. DON'T LET FERTILISERS OR PLASTICS LEACH INTO WATERCOURSES AND AQUIFERS

13. LEAVE CLIFFS AND QUARRY FACES IN FIELDS TO REVEAL LOCAL GEOLOGY AND HISTORY

14. LEAVE THE EDGES OF FIELDS SO WILDFLOWERS CAN FLOURISH AND WILDLIFE SHELTER

15. SOIL EROSION IN FIELDS CAN BE PREVENTED BY RESTORING HEDGES, PLANTING TREES, CONTOUR PLOUGHING, DIRECT DRILLING AND MULCHING

16. FIELD TREES HAVE BEEN LEFT ALONE BY OUR ANCESTORS. LET'S LEAVE THEM BE FOR THE NEXT GENERATIONS

17. HEDGEROW TREES CAN FLOURISH IF SAVED FROM HEDGE CUTTING BLADES

18. OLD HEDGEROWS AND BANKS SHOULD BE RETAINED, ESPECIALLY ANCIENT BOUNDARY AND PARISH BOUNDARY HEDGES

19. FIELD DITCHES AND BANKS CAN BE MANAGED FOR WILDLIFE

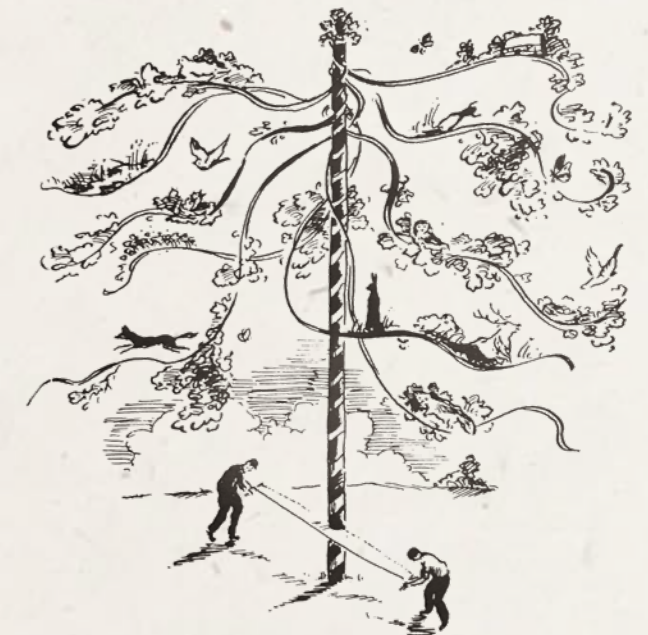
20. CONSERVE AND CREATE PONDS AND DEW PONDS

21. THERE SHOULD CONTINUE TO BE A PRESUMPTION AGAINST BUILDING ON GREEN FIELDS

22. PLAYING FIELDS AND ORCHARDS SHOULD BE PROTECTED.

23. CONSERVE OLD FIELDS AND CREATE NEW ONES IN TOWNS AND CITIES

24. FIELDS SHOULD FEAST OUR IMAGINATIONS: CONSERVE FIELDS THAT HAVE BEEN SOURCES OF INSPIRATION TO WRITERS, POETS, COMPOSERS AND ARTISTS



### NAMING THE FIELD

by *David Hart*

We here call this grass, you can pick it like this, it is the earth's hair, feel hair on your head. Pick a strand of grass, one of the earth's hairs, you can whistle through it like this, you can chew it and, spread out, it is a kind of carpet. This is what we call rock

sticking through the carpet, the rock is not a strand but is hard, like my head, you see, if I tap it, but harder than head. This, flowing through the field, we call stream divides it. Is this place the end

of your pilgrimage or are you passing only, have you become astray here? Hedge is what we call this flowing upwards of shrubs and bushes, of runners and nests, of parasitic blooms. The field in its flowing to us through time

is named Saint Alphege's, who was beaten to death with ox bones. These, under the skin, we call bones, you see I am thin, my bones stick through almost like rocks. This all around us, invisible we call air. I have had my place here, I wash my bones under my skin in the stream, so as to be clean when the earth claims me back. This – splash, splash – we call marsh. These reeds in the marsh are the long thin gravestones of those who went straight down thrilling to the call of the steep deep, their bodies long thin needles – 'This won't hurt, this won't hurt a bit.' I cannot explain home, it is not room, nor is it contained within stone walls. The stream

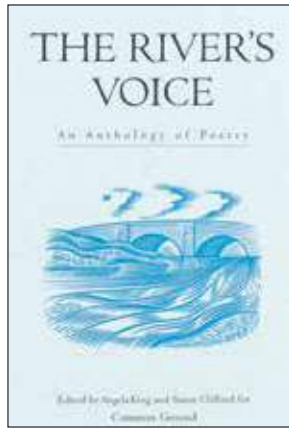
is at home in field, rocks are, air is, grass is, honeysuckle is – smell it and I am.

DAVID HART grew up in rural Wales but has spent most of his life living in Birmingham where he served as the city's Poet Laureate in 1997-98. More recently he was appointed Poet of the New Library in Birmingham, now the largest library in Europe. With this poem, David won the Common Ground/Blue Nose Poets 'Field Days' competition.

*'In December the stubble nearly is Most loved of things. The rooks as in the dark trees are its friends And make part of it'*

IVOR GURNEY





#### CONFLUENCE

Between 1998 and 2001, Common Ground encouraged communities to explore and express their relationship with local springs and rivers. Working with people in a single catchment they created music for a river. From Stourhead to Christchurch in Dorset, Confluence focussed attention on the River Stour. Karen Wimhurst was commissioned as the composer-in-residence, and Helen Porter as music animateur. With a team based in Shaftesbury they encouraged people of all ages and musical abilities to compose, sing and perform their own water music. With local musicians they created choirs and sang water carols, gathered up classical ensembles, jazz groups and bands of plumbers, commissioned music for a working mill and organised a Water Market, which later spread to towns from Devon to Kent.



**PIPEWORKS** photographed by Phil Yeomans, River Stour, Dorset, 2000

Common Ground devised the first-ever 'Water Market' on 18 August 2000 at Blandford Forum, followed by a concert of Pipeworks in the Corn Exchange. The intention was to host a street market which drew together a mixture of people whose trades were inextricably linked with water, from plumbers to watercress growers and conservationists, bustling together as in the souk or bazaar.

Swimmer, writer and co-founder of Common Ground, *Roger Deakin* on the poetry of water

## THE RIVER'S VOICE

I know of few people and no poet for whom water is not a first love. We all spend the first eternal dreamtime of our lives in the same internal mother ocean, so even after we have lost our gills and dived into the world, we are forever water babies, responding playfully to the least drenching; singing in the rain or in the bath, thinking or dreaming wild thoughts as we are borne weightless in the swimming pool, the river or the sea. D. H. Lawrence had the idea that you could tell the true water-people, like Herman Melville, by their blue eyes, and that 'we are most of us who use the English language water-people, sea-derived.' W. H. Auden thought all poetry should sound like running water, and his line 'A culture is no better than its woods' would ring just as true for rivers.

The realisation that rivers and woods are the measure of our civilisation is no different from the notion that you can tell a man by his shoes. It was brought home to me a year or two ago as I lay beside a limestone pool in the Gordale Beck in a sunny cleft above the Gordale Scar waterfall in the Yorkshire Dales. It was a hot day; all the hotter after a scramble up the tufa steps beside the cascade, and I had been bathing in the crystalline water. I imagined how this merry, jingling beck would soon become a river, the Aire, then flow on through Skipton and Leeds and eventually join other rivers in the turbid tide of the Humber, shedding its innocence all the way, reflecting the state of the land and air around it.

You cannot go near a river, or any water, without thinking of history. My own favourite stretch is still the slow river of the moat across the lawn behind my house in Suffolk, and when I gaze into its reflected clouds and trees with the filmy world of newts and water weed moving about beneath like a double exposure,

it feels 'deep as England'. It must have been dug by hand at enormous expenditure of labour and, probably, pain as well, someone having divined the spring in its depths that keeps it clear and invisibly flowing. To prefer one's own, most intimately known Walden Pond might seem narcissistic, and in gazing into the mirror of water, it is true that we stare into our own souls. We are ourselves nine-tenths water, have feelings that overflow or brim over, and writers,

**'I lay beside a limestone pool in the Gordale Beck in a sunny cleft above the Gordale Scar waterfall.'**

especially, dread drying up.

All poets are diviners, dowsing for the 'Third Thing', as D. H. Lawrence calls it, that comes about when you juxtapose unlikely atoms like hydrogen and oxygen and the whole sparks into more than the sum of its parts, 'the divine pen twisting in the hand', as Dannie Abse says. In the beginning, the divine was water, and to dowse it was an act of faith. The French verb 'deviner' can mean guessing at anything, from a riddle to a source. The original divines, or diviners, simply intuited the presence of god, which in those days was water, and as far as U. A. Fanthorpe is concerned (see 'Water Everywhere'), still is. Philip Larkin seems to have agreed, when he wrote that if he were called in to construct a religion he would make use of water.

The history of a river is often most apparent in its natural history: in the timeless running of the salmon or eels, the arrival of sand-martins from far across the sea to nest in a bank, or when I gaze of toads along an ancient route to spawn. The wild creatures and their ritual journeys are as unstoppable and rhythmical

as the river itself, unless we interfere, in the blind way we so often do – as in the case of the mayflies on the River Test at Stockbridge, who, in the spring of 1920, laid their eggs on the glistening surface of the newly tarred village street after a rainstorm.

Mutability is also evident in all the forms of things in the river, which always wants to round everything to its own patterns of flow and is forever in a state of flux itself: 'Nobody steps into the same river twice,' says Derek Mahon, quoting Heraclitus. Where others might meditate on their mortality with the help of a skull, my desk is cluttered with stones and sticks from rivers I have explored and swum all over the country. A tiny megalith of striated mauve sandstone came out of the bed of the Usk near Talybont at a sandy bend in the river, its corners and edges well on the way to being rounded into a sphere. About two inches cubed, it caught my eye in one of those beaver-jams of sticks and stones and bits of torn plastic that accumulate as river flotsam at the still centre of a beached vortex. The eddy curls upon itself like a question mark and leaves this full stop.

The action of the water has much the same effect on bits of wood as on the stone. Amongst my relics from the Usk, which seems a specially magical river to me, is a duck's beak of hazel and a tiny boomerang of ash so bleached it could be bone, where only the tough knot of an elbow has survived the river's sandpapering. Every tree is a stream of sap. How much of a tree is ebbing and flowing you discover when you saw up logs and dry them out in a stack for a year or two. The seasoned wood is so much lighter than the sapwood. On a summer's day thousands of gallons are drawn through an acre of woodland to evaporate through the leaves into the atmosphere. And when a river runs into the sea at low tide it pencils the form of a tree on the wet sand. Conversely, my wooden relics are full of the same eddies and whorls as the river's own body. Little swirling knotholes like whirlpools, and the undulating flow of grain. ♪

# COMMON GROUND

## A MANIFESTO for RIVERS

*'in the black gland of the earth  
the tiny inkling of a river'*

ALICE OSWALD

**1. MAKE A PARISH WATER MAP – CHART ALL THE WATERY FEATURES FROM 100 METRE WIDE RIVERS TO THE SMALLEST STREAMS, SPRINGS AND WELLS, AND FIND OUT THE NAMES OF STRETCHES OF RIVER REACHES, POOLS, ISLANDS, BRIDGES, RIPARIAN FIELDS AND DISCOVER WHAT THEY MEAN.**

**2. COLLECT ORAL HISTORIES, RECORD PEOPLE'S KNOWLEDGE AND MEMORIES ABOUT THEIR LOCAL RIVERS – WORKING, FLOODING, SWIMMING, OTTERS. TRY MAKING THESE INTO A BOOK OR TAPE FOR SALE. EXPLORE THE PLACES THEY KNEW AND RE-INVENT THEM.**

**3. CELEBRATE SPRINGS AND WELLS WITH SEASONAL FESTIVITIES. FOR EXAMPLE, IN SOME PLACES PEOPLE 'CREAM THE WELL' BY TAKING THE FIRST WATER OF THE YEAR FROM A SPRING OR WELL TO BRING THEM LUCK.**

**4. MAKE A PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD BY DOCUMENTING ALL THE WATERY FEATURES OVER THE SEASONS. CREATE AN EXHIBITION.**

**5. COLLECT AND USE INFORMATION FROM LOCAL PEOPLE, LOCAL NEWSPAPERS AND THE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE.**

**6. START A PARISH ARCHIVE OR LOCAL MUSEUM USING WATER AS ITS FIRST THEME. ASK FOR OLD PHOTOGRAPHS AND ARTEFACTS – FROM BITS OF PLUMBING TO STONE BOTTLES.**

**7. RESEARCH WATERY INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY SUCH AS MILLS, LEATS,**

**WEIRS, BREWERIES, SHEEP WASHES, LAUNDRIES, WATER MEADOWS AND WATERCRESS BEDS AND WRITE ABOUT THEM FOR A LOCAL LEAFLET. DEVISE WALKS AROUND THEM.**

**8. IF YOU ARE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO LIVE OR WORK NEAR A RIVER OR STREAM, CONSIDER MAKING A RIVER DIARY OF YOUR DAILY OBSERVATIONS.**

**9. CREATE NEW MUSIC AND SONGS FOR YOUR RIVER AND ITS TRIBUTARIES. CONFLUENCE, RUN BY COMMON GROUND, IS CELEBRATING THE RIVER CTOUR WITH MUSIC OF ALL KINDS.**

**10. CELEBRATE YOUR RIVERS IN POETRY, PROSE AND DRAMA. USE THE RIVER AS A STARTING POINT, HAVE READINGS AND PERFORMANCES BY THE RIVER, AT THE MILL, ON THE BRIDGE, PRODUCE A BOOK.**

**11. NAME BROOKS AND BRIDGES – ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY GROUPS TO SEARCH OUT ELUSIVE NAMES, OR MAKE A RIVERSIDE ALPHABET USING THE LETTERS CARVED INTO BRIDGES**

**12. ORGANISE RIVERSIDE WALKS AND ANNUAL PICNICS. ENGAGE A STORYTELLER TO RESEARCH LOCAL TALES AND LEAD WALKS, AS WELL AS ANGLERS, NATURALISTS AND ARCHAEOLOGISTS.**

**13. DISCUSS THE BROOKS WITH FRIENDLY LANDHOLDERS AND SEEK OUT POSSIBILITIES FOR MORE ACCESS FOR PICNICKING AND PLAY.**

**14. INSTALL A NEIGHBOURHOOD RAIN GAUGE, GET TO KNOW THE LOCAL PATTERNS OF PRECIPITATION.**



LONG NANNY BURN, BEADNELL BAY

by Katrina Porteous

This place changes with every tide;  
Buries the wheels and springs of World War II machines,  
Twisting them deeper under the tons of sandhills  
Like and obscene dream inside.

Down where the river scoops low, wind smooths, time passes,  
Mounding the dunes up, carving them through from the floodland.  
The sky, swept cold blue, sprawls enormously wide here.  
Winged skeletons litter the sand.

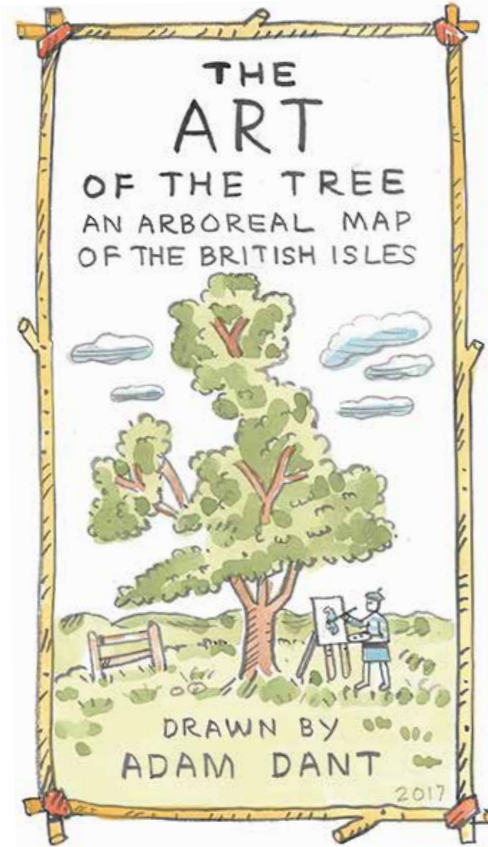
But week by year, the river is shifting its wash.  
It wrestles the irresistible push. The sea,  
Its rage contained, inhales; retreats, revealing  
Sharp-edged scrap, mud-sunk. Hard memory.

I've watched this, life-long, longer than all life; fighting  
River, struggling, tight as a muscle, months; then suddenly strong,  
Forcing its straight path through overnight, slicing the sand clean.  
Nothing buried lies safe here for long.

KATRINA PORTEOUS is a poet, historian and broadcaster, specialising in work on the theme of 'nature' in its widest sense, and 'place' in its deepest. Born in Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1960, she grew up in County Durham, graduated from Trinity Hall, Cambridge, with a First in History in 1982, and studied at Berkeley and Harvard universities in the USA on a Harkness Fellowship. She has lived on the Northumberland coast since 1987 and is best known for her innovative radio-poetry. Her most recent publication, *Two Countries*, was shortlisted for the Portico Prize. Katrina is President of the Northumbrian Language Society and an ambassador for New Networks for Nature. Common Ground has been an inspiration to Katrina since the 1980s, 'confirming and helping focus my feeling for large issues at work in the local and particular'.

*'At the turn of the river the language changes,  
a different babble, even a different name  
for the same river'* CAROL ANN DUFFY





**TREE TRAILS** traces a 200-year-old story of trees in British art, celebrating the cultural history we share with our arboreal neighbours. It is an invitation to explore this rich seam of arboreal culture wherever you might live.

The artworks featured on the map are either on permanent display or in national collections across Wales, Scotland, England and Ireland – a reminder, too, of the way ideas and people move across borders to weave a shared history. Trees and woods are both the frame within which the human drama unfolds and the material of choice for the artwork itself. Across the British Isles, from Samuel Palmer's visions of *The Magic Apple Tree* (1830), the grand views of Wales in the paintings of Richard Wilson, to the moorland paintings of John William Inchbold, David Hockney's industrial scenes of Bolton, Andy Goldsworthy's *Hanging Trees* (2007), David Nash's *Habitat* (2015) and Katie Paterson's *Hollow* (2015), *Common Ground's Tree Trails* maps the different places and spaces – imagined and real – that we all cohabit with trees.

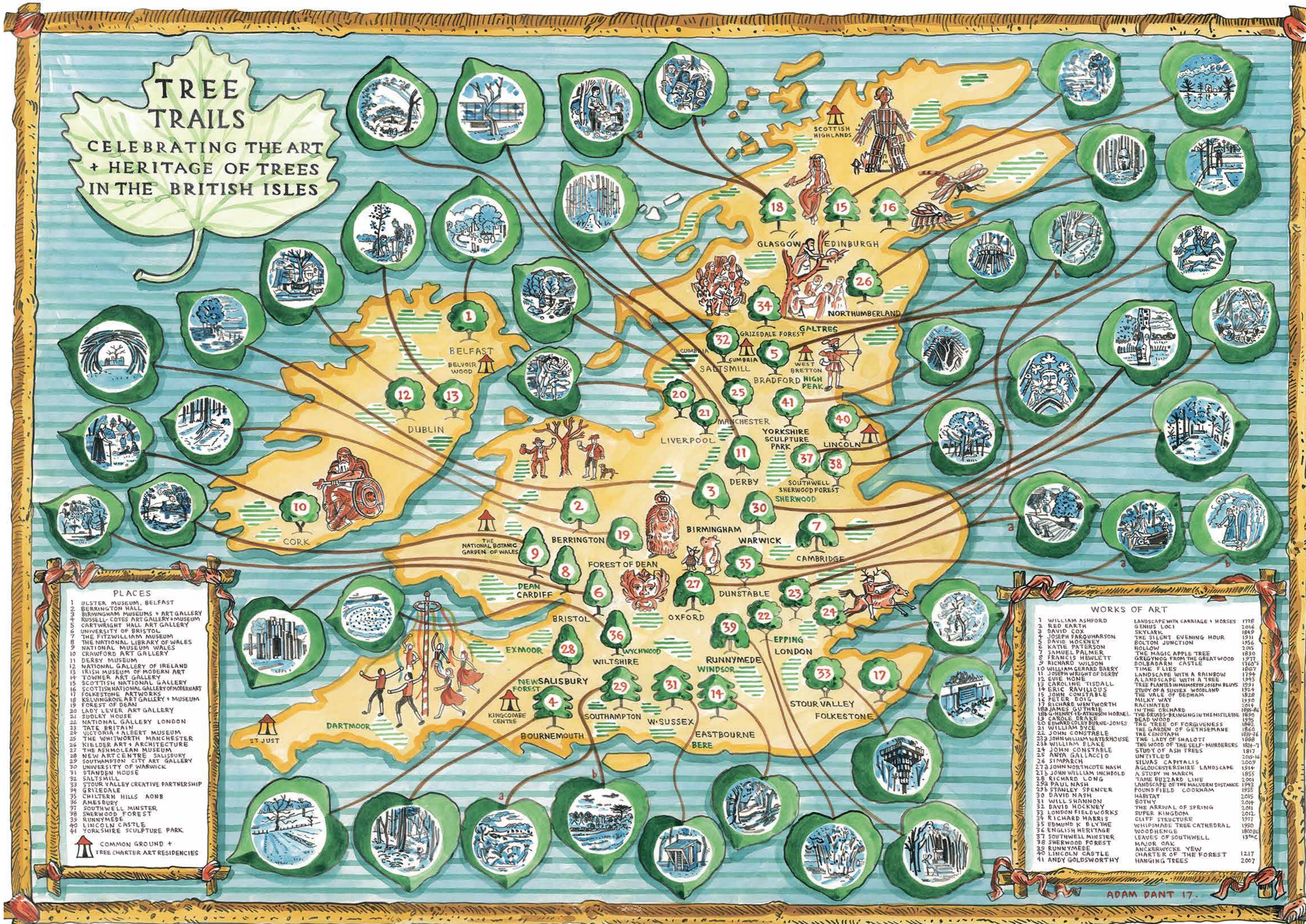
Celebrating the 800th anniversary of the Charter of the Forest, *Tree Trails* was created for the Woodland Trust by Common Ground and illustrated by Adam Dant.



**COMMON GROUND**



Adam Dant was born in Cambridge and attended the Liverpool School of Art and later the Royal College of Art. In 2002, he received the Jerwood Drawing Prize and was selected as the official artist to document the UK General Election in 2015. His dense, elaborate narrative drawings provide a unique insight into the complexities of social, cultural and political life. He lives in London with his family.



**PLACES**

- 1 ULSTER MUSEUM, BELFAST
- 2 BERRINGTON HALL
- 3 BIRMINGHAM MUSEUMS + ART GALLERY
- 4 RUSSELL COTES ART GALLERY + MUSEUM
- 5 CARTWRIGHT HALL ART GALLERY
- 6 UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL
- 7 THE FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM
- 8 THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF WALES
- 9 NATIONAL MUSEUM WALES
- 10 CRAWFORD ART GALLERY
- 11 DERBY MUSEUM
- 12 NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND
- 13 IRISH MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
- 14 TOWNER ART GALLERY
- 15 SCOTTISH NATIONAL GALLERY
- 16 SCOTTISH NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART
- 17 FOLKESTONE ARTWORKS
- 18 KELVINGROVE ART GALLERY + MUSEUM
- 19 FOREST OF DEAN
- 20 LADY LEVER ART GALLERY
- 21 SUDLEY HOUSE
- 22 NATIONAL GALLERY LONDON
- 23 TATE BRITAIN
- 24 VICTORIA + ALBERT MUSEUM
- 25 THE WHITWORTH MANCHESTER
- 26 KILDER ART + ARCHITECTURE
- 27 THE RASHMOLAN MUSEUM
- 28 NEW ART CENTRE SALISBURY
- 29 SOUTHAMPTON CITY ART GALLERY
- 30 UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
- 31 STANDEN HOUSE
- 32 SALTSMILL
- 33 STOUR VALLEY CREATIVE PARTNERSHIP
- 34 GRIZEDALE FOREST
- 35 CHILTERN HILLS AONB
- 36 AMESBURY
- 37 SOUTHWELL MINSTER
- 38 SHERWOOD FOREST
- 39 RUNNYMEDE
- 40 LINCOLN CASTLE
- 41 YORKSHIRE SCULPTURE PARK

 COMMON GROUND + TREE CHARTER ART RESIDENCIES

**WORKS OF ART**

1 WILLIAM ASHFORD	LANDSCAPE WITH CARRIAGE + HORSES	1778
2 RED EARTH	GENIUS LOCI	2016
3 DAVID COX	SKYLARK	1849
4 JOSEPH FARQUHARSON	THE SILENT EVENING HOUR	1911
5 DAVID HOCKNEY	BOLTON JUNCTION	1956
6 KATIE PATERSON	HOLLOW	2015
7 SAMUEL PALMER	THE MAGIC APPLE TREE	1830
8 FRANCIS HEWLETT	GREGYNOC FROM THE GREAT WOOD	1977
9 RICHARD WILSON	BOLBARN CASTLE	1760's
10 WILLIAM GERARD BARRY	TIME FLIES	1867
11 JOSEPH WRIGHT OF DERBY	LANDSCAPE WITH A RAINBOW	1794
12 CAROLINE TISDALL	A LANDSCAPE WITH A TREE	1855
13 ERIC HOME	TREE PLANTED IN MEMORY OF JOSEPH BEAVIS	1991
14 ERIC RAVILLIOUS	STUDY OF A SUSSEX WOODLAND	1924
15 JOHN CONSTABLE	THE WALK OF BETHAM	1828
16 PETER DOIG	MILKY WAY	1990
17 RICHARD WENTWORTH	RACINATED	2014
18 JAMES GUTHRIE	IN THE OSCHARD	1890-4
19 G. HENRY LEATONSON HORNEL	THE BRIDS-BRINGING IN THE MISTLETOE	1850
20 CAROLE DRAKE	DEAD WOOD	1992
21 EDWARD COLEY BURNE-JONES	THE TREE OF FORGIVENESS	1862
22 WILLIAM BYCE	THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE	1860
23 JOHN CONSTABLE	THE CROFT	1824-6
24 JOHN WILLIAM WATERHOUSE	THE LADY OF SHALOTT	1868
25 WILLIAM BLAKE	THE WOOD OF THE SELF-MURDERERS	1802-7
26 JOHN CONSTABLE	STUDY OF ASH TREES	1817
27 ANYA GALLIACCI	UNTITLED	2015-16
28 SIMPARCH	SILVAS CAPITALIS	2009
29 JOHN NORTHGOTE NASH	ALDROUDESTERSHIRE LANDSCAPE	1514
30 JOHN WILLIAM INCHBOLD	A STUDY IN MARCH	1855
31 RICHARD LONG	TAME BUZZARD LINE	2001
32 PAUL NASH	LANDSCAPE OF THE MALDEN DISTANCE	1942
33 STANLEY SPENCER	FOUND FIELD COOKHAM	1925
34 DAVID NASH	HABITAT	2015
35 WILL SHANNON	BOTHY	2014
36 DAVID HOCKNEY	THE ARRIVAL OF SPRING	2011
37 LONDON FIELDWORKS	SUPER KINGDOM	2012
38 RICHARD HARRIS	CLIFF STRUCTURE	1977
39 EDMUND K. BLYTHE	WHIPSHADE TREE CATHEDRAL	1950
40 ENGLISH HERITAGE	WOODHENGE	1800-8
41 SOUTHWELL MINSTER	LEAVES OF SOUTHWELL	1390
42 SHERWOOD FOREST	MAJOR OAK	
43 RUNNYMEDE	ANCKERWYCKE YEW	
44 LINCOLN CASTLE	CHARTER OF THE FOREST	1217
45 ANDY GOLDSWORTHY	HANGING TREES	2007

ADAM DANT 17.



Sue Clifford and Angela King celebrate the apple as a wonderful symbol of variety and meaning

## A IS FOR APPLE DAY!

Together, the apple and the orchard provide a way of expressing both the robustness and the vulnerability of our local landscape and culture. With the loss of an orchard goes the loss of ecological diversity and the loss of knowledge of recipes, songs, customs, wassailing, cider-making. Lost too are the social gatherings for work and pleasure, the sharing of knowledge about the place and the sharing of skills of pruning, grafting and growing. The intricacy of a community and its distinctiveness is diminished if orchards and apple varieties are lost.

In Charles Dickens's day, costermongers sold apples on London streets. Would that they were still crying their wares! But we have let this rich inheritance slip through our fingers. Even in autumn, when apples are bending boughs in English orchards, apples from Chile or New Zealand, stifled by carbon dioxide to suspend their ripening, are plucked from supermarket shelves.

Even conservationists, we discovered, have 'apple blindness'. Fruit trees were not appreciated as trees; orchards were not considered 'natural'. Yet almost every farm from Cornwall to Cromarty once had its orchard, every cottage its fruit tree. Walled gardens in grand estates, Victorian suburbs and urban allotments: all are scented in spring with blossom that, with the help of bees and flies, yields dozens of varieties of fruit, from Bramleys to quinces and damsons.

Yet orchards are vanishing. In 2008, according to Natural England, the total area planted to orchards had fallen by 63 per cent since the 1950s. In half a century, England had lost almost two-thirds of its orchards.

Orchards are wonderfully diverse – a perfect illustration of Common Ground's idea of 'local distinctiveness'. We discovered 60-foot-high cherry trees around Faversham and diminutive cobnut platts on the ragstone of Kent. We savoured cider from orchards in Somerset, and damsons from trees planted along stone walls in Westmorland. We discovered, as we tasted fruit from three-hundred-year-old perry pears in Gloucestershire, that some varieties will not grow more than a mile or two from where they had first grown.

There are more than 2,300 varieties of dessert and cooking apples and hundreds of varieties of cider apples been grown across Britain. Their names are beguiling: descriptive and evocative (Catshead, Forty Shilling, Hoary Morning, Roundway Magnum Bonum, Sheep's Nose, Slack ma Girdle); others suggesting half-forgotten stories (Isaac Newton's Tree, Laxton's Triumph, Peacemaker) or pointing to places of origin (Crawley Beauty, Devonshire Quarrendon, Kentish Fillbasket, Keswick Codlin, Lass O' Gowrie, Norfolk Biffin, Yorkshire Greening); and seasons and qualities of keeping (Benenden Early, May Queen, Hambleton Deux Ans).

In order to keep these varieties going, we had learned to graft. When people emigrated from across the world, or married into the farm over the hill, they took fruit graftwood with them – twigs carefully chosen, cut and kept moist to splice onto existing trees or rootstocks. It's a venerable art, described by Virgil in the *Georgics*. Court Pendu Plat, a French cultivar that thrives in the south of England was very likely propagated by the Romans. 🍏



### SAVE OUR ORCHARDS

Orchards were once widespread throughout the British Isles – apple varieties hail from north of Inverness to the edge of Cornwall. Until recently every farm, country house and suburban garden had its own collection of fruit trees. Pressure on land for new houses and roads and the importation of cheap fruit from abroad has caused the loss of many of these small orchards. Orchards in villages and on the edge of towns are prime targets for development. In 1988, Common Ground launched a campaign to save old orchards by commissioning artists like James Ravilious, publishing a number of books and maps, and organising events such as Apple Day.



APPLE DAY by Jonny Hannah, October 2016, published as the front cover of LEAF! newspaper

One foggy February morning in 1990, Angela King, co-director of Common Ground, said, 'I think it would help if we could create a calendar custom for the apple'. Apple Day, 21 October, was launched in 1990 by Common Ground. The aspiration was to create a calendar custom, an autumn holiday. From the start, Apple Day was intended to be both a celebration and a demonstration of the variety we are in danger of losing, not simply in apples, but in the richness and diversity of landscape, ecology and culture, too. The first Apple Day celebrations, in the old Apple Market in London's Covent Garden (below), brought fruit to the market after sixteen years of absence. Across 40 stalls were taken. Fruit growers and nurseries producing and selling a variety of apples and trees rubbed shoulders with juice-and cider-makers, as well as writers and illustrators with their apple books. It has also played a part in raising awareness of the provenance and traceability of food.



Apples are Ripe  
Nuts are Brown  
Petticoats Up  
Trousers Down

STROUD APPLE  
"Lodgemore NonPareil"  
"Clissold's Seedling"  
Handset Printed for Stroud in BLOOM STAGUD BOOKSHOP, Emery 2003 WOODBLOCK LETTERPRESS dg OCT-21 is APPLE DAY contact - www.commonground.org.uk

APPLE  
I touch your Skin  
I eat your Flesh  
I feel your Crevices  
I suck your Juices  
PP  
EL A

Oct. 21st - Apple Day Common Grd. dg

APPLES  
An apple a day keeps the doctor away.  
APPLE  
OCTOBER 21st  
APPLE DAY

SCRUMPIN  
CELEBRATION  
APPLES & ORCHARDS  
LAURIE LEE  
WINIFRED FOLEY  
LESLEY GREEN  
RICHARD VALENTINE  
DENNIS GOULD  
JUILLET HARMER  
7.30 BAPTIST HALL UNION STR.  
STROUD. TICKETS: BISHOPSTON TRADING. £3.50 \* CIDER TASTIN  
FRI. OCTOBER-21.

STROUD APPLE DAY POSTERS by Dennis Gould, 1995-2018

Dennis Gould is a poet, peace activist and printer from Stroud. His distinctive letterpress style is a continuation of his cut-and-paste work from the late 1970s, when he set up his Woodblock Letterpress workshop. Printing is Dennis's way of getting ideas into the world, and in response to Apple Day he has for many years sent Common Ground the wonderful posters he printed for local events in Stroud. When not printing, Dennis can be found manning his bookstall in Stroud every Saturday and occasionally performing poetry at The Albert pub.

APPLE-PIE & I SCREAM!  
POETS & MUSIC  
Celebration of APPLE DAY.  
(Oct. 21st.) - Created by persons alive to Local Diversity - who began COMMON GROUND

Music & Song: Richard Valentine. Bob Bray. Phil Palmer. Becky-Violin. David Stringer - Cello. & The Tickle Fishermen

Poets: Roger Berry. Stuart Butler. Ms. Pat West. & Special Guests - Old Gloucester Apple-Demons Grafters & Orchard-Planters!

Gloucestershire Apples - 1884  
Ashmeads & Captain Kernel  
Chaxhill Red: Corse Hill: Gloucester  
Quoining & Costard: Holbert's Victoria: Hunt's Duke: Maggie: Rusty Coat: Severn Bank: Sops-in-Wine: Extreme Stroud Lodgemore Nonpareil! The Fruit Manual. Hogg. 1884

COMMON-GROUND APPLE DAY

SCRUMPIN

Adam & Eve went Scrumpin  
Adam & Eve went wild  
Adam & Eve were lovers  
Adam & Eve had a child  
They went scrumpin the Orchards  
They went scrumpin the Fields  
Scrumpin over Hedgerows  
Scrumpin Head-over-Heels!  
Scrumpin in the Garden-Shed  
Scrumpin in the Kitchen  
Scrumpin in the Bedroom  
Scrumpin with a Mission!  
Yes! Scrumpin! Scrumpin! Scrumpin  
Scrumpin with a Mission!

Handset in 18pt. Plantin  
Letterpress Print 3.10.96

I touch your skin  
I eat your flesh  
I feel your crevices  
I suck your juices  
APPLE APPLE  
21.10.00 Stroud dg

APPLE TREE  
FRUIT FOR ME  
APPLE PIE & I SCREAM  
OCT 21st  
APPLE DAY

Apples are Ripe  
Nuts are Brown  
Petticoats Up  
Trousers Down

Common Ground  
11 High St. SHAPTESBURY  
DORSET SP7 8JE



APPLE DAY  
The apple is a symbol of what is being lost in many aspects of our lives; Apple Day shows that anyone can take positive action towards change. Each year on Apple Day, alongside tasting, juicing, baking, pruning and grafting, an imaginative array of games and cultural activities have flourished – ranging from simple apple printing to mums' apple plays, new songs and poetry evenings. But invariably, year after year, the most popular event is the display, tasting and buying of numerous varieties of apples and the presence of an expert to aid identification. Common Ground would still like Apple Day to become an official bank holiday in Britain!





**COMMUNITY ORCHARDS**

Since 1992, when Common Ground put forward the idea of Community Orchards, hundreds have been planted across the country. The orchards reinforce local distinctiveness, as people band together to save vulnerable old apple, pear, cherry, damson and plum orchards, and they have encouraged people to experiment with Mediterranean crops such as apricots, almonds and olives in response to changes in climate owing to global warming. Over the years we have worked on planting and conserving orchards with organisations including the National Trust, National Forest, the RHS and RSPB, Woodland Trust, Learning Through Landscapes and the Soil Association, as well as inspiring local authorities, schools and other organisations like The Orchard Project.



*Daniel Keech* explains why community orchards are healthier for us, good for our communities and offer local wildlife safe places to flourish

**THE NEW COMMONS**

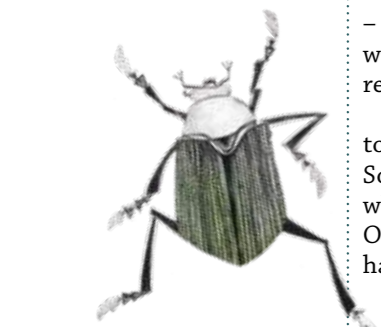
Agricultural specialisation and consumer expectations make it commercially unattractive to retain orchards on many farms. This means the disappearance of orchards from counties which might previously have identified themselves as orchard landscapes, and the consequent loss of seasonal fruit varieties, customs, produce and distinctive wildlife. Recent surveys in England and Wales by the People's Trust for Endangered Species confirm that most surviving orchards are in bad shape.

Even so, the cultural vibrancy of orchards – especially so-called traditional orchards with tall-stemmed and widely-spaced trees – remains indefatigable.

A recent increase in cider drinking has led to the re-planting of commercial orchards in Somerset, Herefordshire and parts of Ireland, while Common Ground's idea for Community Orchards, put forward in 1992, has proved to have great traction.

The objective of all Community Orchards is to protect, plant and renew orchards within a format of community organisation that captures and sustains the many functions and cultural meanings of these evocative places. Some orchards have been in public ownership or use for years. In other cases, parish councils, heritage associations or 'Millennium Greens' have offered devices for community ownership.

In southern Germany, large tracts of fruit trees become de facto Community Orchards with open access when locals own just a few



*Daniel Keech* worked with Common Ground in the 1990s, he is now a Research Fellow at the Countryside and Community Research Institute, a partnership of the University of Gloucestershire, the Royal Agricultural University and Hartpury College.

**MAY DAY FESTIVAL** by James Ravilious, Town Orchard, Lustleigh, Devon c.1989–1990

When Common Ground launched a campaign to save old orchards in 1998, one of the first things we did was commission the photographer James Ravilious to document orchards in the West Country. The resulting photographs were published in a book called *Orchards: A Guide to Local Conservation* and began touring as an exhibition to venues across the South West in 1989, and these vividly rich images of the cultural and natural heritage of apples and orchards continues to be exhibited nationwide to this day. Today, we still desperately need more places to relax and play in, and we also need shared activities to enable people of different age groups and backgrounds to come together. In city, town or village, the Community Orchard is becoming the equivalent of the wood in the countryside a century and more ago – a communal asset for the whole parish. But more than that, it can be the focal point for the whole village – the open-air village hall. We could have school orchards, city, museum, hospital and factory orchards open to all. Community Orchards help to revive an interest in fruit growing, provide a way of sharing knowledge and horticultural skills and stimulate us into growing food for ourselves again.

trees each. In Sheffield, pickers gather surplus garden fruit to make juice, to be shared with the tree owners as a type of tithe. The Urban Orchard Project supports the initiation of Community Orchards in many cities, including the capital (where other campaigners argue that London's biodiversity and green spaces

**'The idea is that orchards should be accessible and provide healthy fruit.'**

should qualify it for National Park status). The idea is that orchards should be accessible and provide healthy fruit, spaces for leisure and contemplation, convivial work and natural habitats.

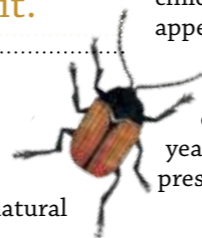
The richness of orchards to wildlife is now scientifically well documented, thanks to Natural England and the National Trust, among others. Communities of tree sparrows, woodpeckers, flycatchers, bats, bugs and lichens are systematically or anecdotally recorded by hundreds of amateurs who are more able to notice visiting and resident creatures, thanks to broader, shared priorities offered through community orcharding.

Some farmers are also blurring boundaries between private ownership and community

involvement. Last weekend, my family and I renewed the autumnal ritual of a pick-your-own picnic in a nearby commercial dessert and cider-apple orchard. For three years, the owner has allowed a group of us (we called ourselves a co-op) to rent a few rows of his trees and space in his cold store for a supply of decent varieties, and to have fun picking with our (then) young children. This year, a scrapper and hand press appeared, reminding me that these tools are ubiquitous at the hundreds of Apple Day celebrations on 21 October. We had to queue for the press. I suggested that next year the owner should invest in six more presses. 'Good idea!' he grinned.

**West Yorkshire Orchard Mentors**

For the last three years The Orchard Project has been working with hundreds of committed, inspiring and passionate people to create Community Orchards. There are now over 60 in the Leeds area which they support with a training programme and Orchard Mentors. The Mentors are around to give advice and encouragement to others. This year they are widening our work to the Wakefield area with Incredible Edible Wakefield. For more information and booking: [yosp.org.uk/commonground](http://yosp.org.uk/commonground)



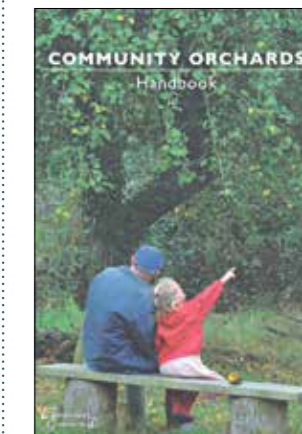
**PICKING APPLES** by James Ravilious, West Bradley, Somerset c.1989–1990

In orchards of tall trees we have achieved an exemplary relationship with the world, one that is mutually beneficial and life enhancing. Orchards demonstrate how we should live with nature, as a neighbour and collaborator. In face of climate change, Community Orchards are reviving interest in fruit and teaching us how to grow locally and reduce our food miles.



**SAVE OUR ORCHARDS** by James Ravilious, Carhampton, Somerset, c.1989–1990

Establishing a Community Orchard is no mean achievement: they are part of a bigger movement for change. Looking at your orchard from above, you can imagine it as part of a complicated web along which wildlife can spread. An orchard can connect to other green spaces, like a park, allotments, playing field or nature reserves, creating corridors of biodiversity in villages, towns and cities.



Drawing on more than twenty years of championing orchards and the experiences of many people in town and country around the UK, Common Ground published *The Community Orchards Handbook* in 2008, full of inspiration and practical advice to those who would like to become Community Orchardists.

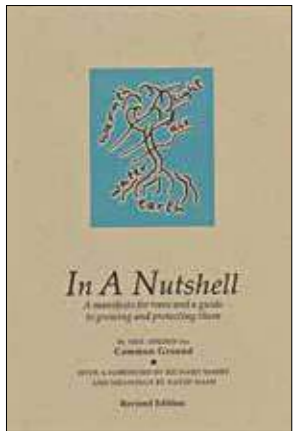
*James Ravilious* (1939–1999) was a photographer who lived in north Devon and worked with the Beafon Centre, where he created an 'endless tapestry' of rural life. Common Ground worked with James in the 1980s, commissioning him to document the orchards of southwest England.





**TREES, WOODS AND THE GREEN MAN**

In 1986, Common Ground started work on Trees, Woods and the Green Man, a project which invited different artists, sculptors, photographers, illustrators, poets, cartoonists, playwrights and writers to explore the natural and cultural value of trees, and worked to deepen popular concern and practical caring for trees by publishing pamphlets, a newspaper called *PULP!* and several books, including *In a Nutshell* and *Trees Be Company*, as well as commissioning plays, curating a season of films and lectures at Tate Britain, and initiating art exhibitions at the Natural History Museum, the Crafts Council and the South Bank Centre.



*Oliver Rackham* was the outstanding botanical and landscape writer of his generation. His books include *The History of the Countryside*, *Trees and Woodland in the British Landscape*, *Ancient Woodland and Woodlands*, which was the hundredth volume in the Collins New Naturalist series. He commended Common Ground for being the only conservation organisation to get advice right directly after the Great Storm. He was Honorary Professor of Historical Ecology at Cambridge University and was Fellow of Corpus Christi College for fifty years. He was also an Honorary Member of the British Ecological Society and a Fellow of the British Naturalists' Association. He died in Cambridge in February 2015, aged 75.

The great botanist and landscape historian, *Oliver Rackham*, always argued for a more nuanced appreciation of trees

**THE LIFE OF TREES**

The most difficult task in the whole of art is to draw a tree. Any picture has to leave out most of the detail, to the point of being a caricature; the skill lies in knowing which details are essential – that distinguish hornbeam from beech and one individual hornbeam from another hornbeam – and which can be omitted. In most centuries a few special artists have acquired this skill: the others select inessential details, and succeed in portraying just Fir-trees, Poplars or Bushy-topped Trees.

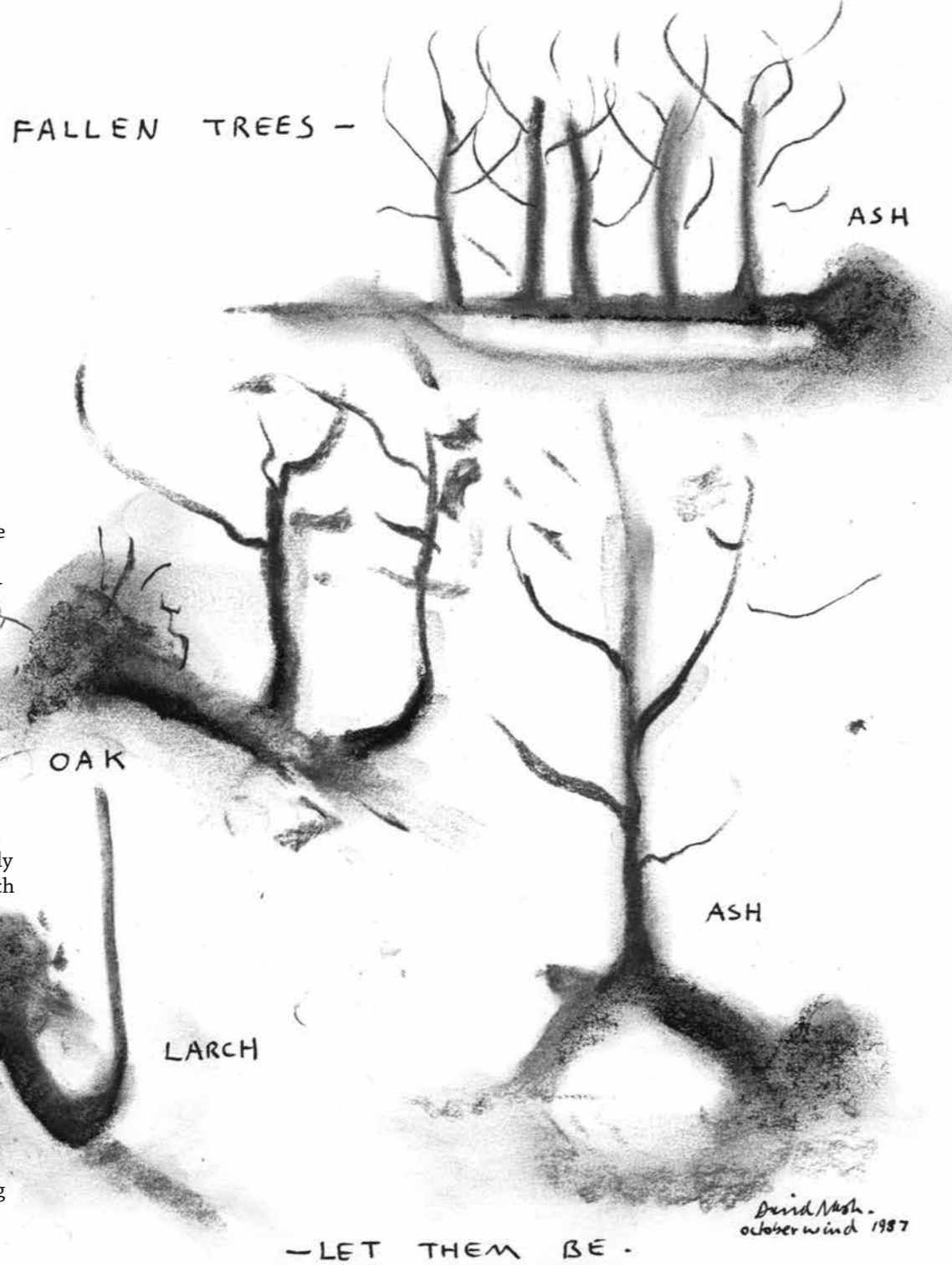
Of all our fellow-creatures, trees are the easiest to misunderstand. They seem just sufficiently like us to have anthropomorphic ways attributed to them: they have their origin (we suppose) in the mysteries of sex, reach 'maturity', become 'senile' and die 'of old age'. For many of us they are gods, enemies, slaves, pets, entertainers or friends. It is easy to forget that trees are immeasurably unlike us and unlike each other. They are much less anthropoid than dogs or codfish. An ash is less like a pine than a dog is like a cod. Elms mostly manage without sex, and oaks do not know old age as we do.

Anthropomorphism, although a misunderstanding, does at least recognise that trees are wildlife: that they live lives of their own which we cannot wholly understand or control. Not so the modern myth: the notion that a tree is just something which people plant, a kind of gatepost with leaves. This cannot be true: a moment's thought will show that there were trees long before there were nurserymen. Yet on this naive hypothesis rests much of the popular attitude to trees today. Tree-planting has come to usurp the place of conservation.

Trees are physically difficult to comprehend. They grow while we are not looking. The vital part of a tree is its roots: yet how many people have a clear idea of what the root-systems of different trees look like? Parts of trees also die from time to time; this causes further misunderstanding by those of us who fail to appreciate that this is normal.

Trees once covered most of the world's land. Down the millennia these wildwoods were grubbed out to make farmland, or else became managed woodland yielding regular crops of timber and poles. In Britain this happened so long ago that there is no record or legend of wildwood; we have to borrow stories of other nations' wildwoods. Already in the Iron Age, over 2,000 years ago, Britain had a settled and thickly populated countryside, and the remaining woodland had been adapted to use for definite purposes. Throughout history we have had less woodland than almost any country in Europe. Our traditions are of trees and woods in the cultural landscape: of smallish woods, wood-pastures like Epping and Hatfield Forests, hedges and hedgerow trees. To see wildwood one goes to the eastern United States, and finds little of it remaining even there.

Many trees, such as ash and oak are native: they are inherited from the wildwood. Others



**A FALLEN TREE IS NOT A DEAD TREE** by David Nash, 1987–1989

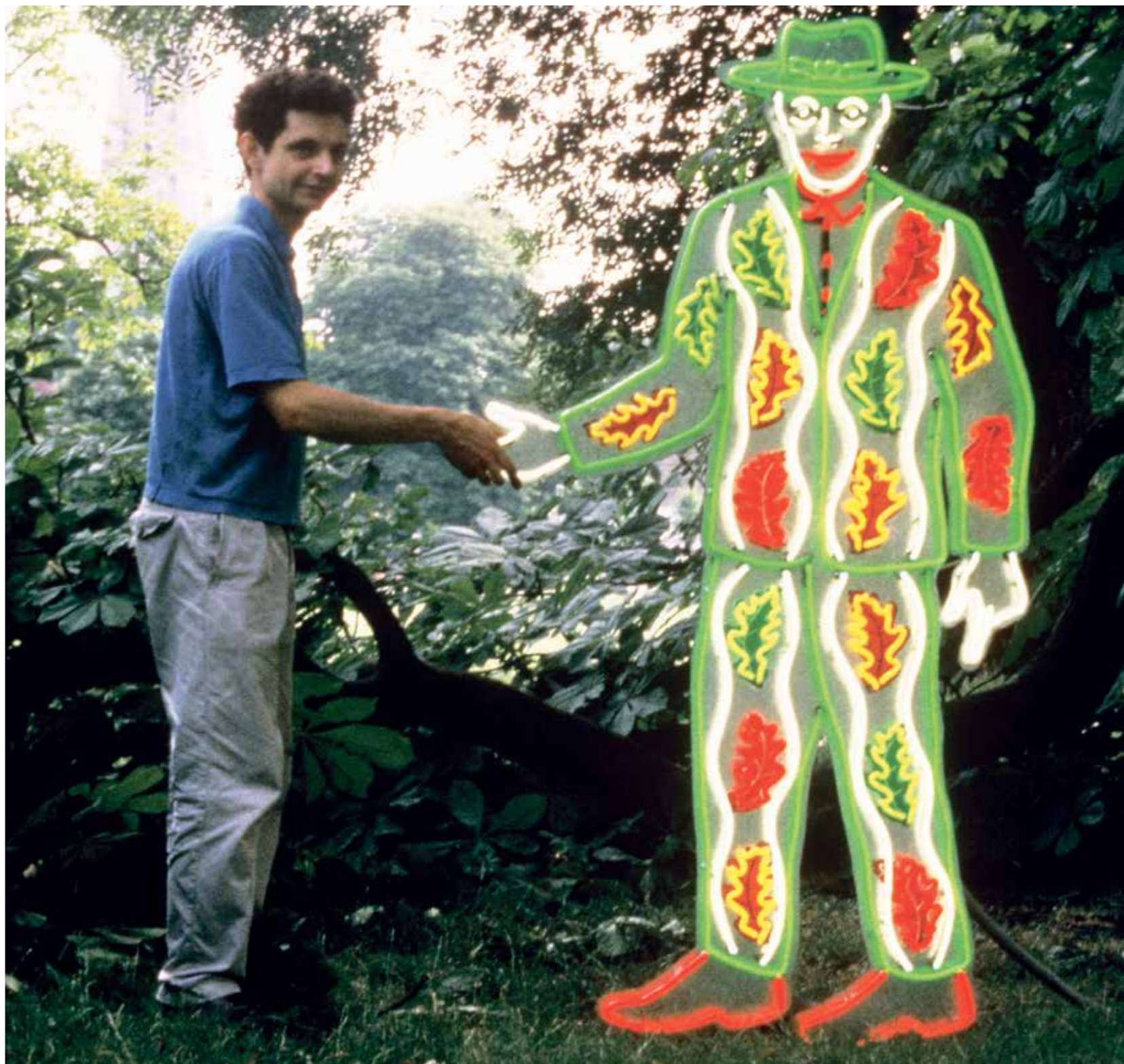
The Great Storm of 15–16 October 1987 transformed the landscape and lives of many, unleashing a great swell of public affection for trees and woods but also a sense that an entirely natural disaster was only repairable by human intervention, by tidying, by chainsawing, clearing away the tilted or fallen trees, even if they were still alive and growing. On the morning after the storm, Common Ground turned to the artist David Nash and asked him to work on several charcoal drawings that could be printed as postcards – 56,000 of them were eventually distributed within a month of the storm, all with a simple message: a fallen tree is not a dead tree. This collaboration with Nash continued when he created the artwork for *In a Nutshell*, Common Ground's 1989 'manifesto for trees'.

have been introduced at various times. A few of these, such as sycamore (brought from Central Europe) are naturalised: they grow of themselves and have become part of our wildlife. Others remain exotic: they grow only where they have been planted, and would die out without further planting. An exotic tree is the horsechestnut, brought mysteriously from its homeland in Albania. The Romans introduced walnut and sweet chestnut from Southern Europe. Sweet chestnut has become naturalised, enters into ancient woodland, and has only recently been proved not to be native. Walnut does not look after itself and is still unmistakably exotic. Yet other trees are cultivars, created by gardeners: for example Lombardy poplar and London plane are nowhere to be found wild. In general, native and naturalised species are the trees of woods, hedges and wild country. Introduced species and cultivars predominate in the formal situations of gardens, towns, orchards and

forestry plantations.

Native trees once covered most of the land, and are forever trying to return. Any piece of land, if nothing is done to it, becomes a wood. If farming were ever to cease in Britain, the country would be one vast wood within a century. A wood of oak, ash and thorn, not like the original wildwood which was largely of lime and without the wealth of plants – anemones, oxlip, herb Paris and lily-of-the-valley – which ancient woods have today. Conservationists spend much of their time cutting down trees and hoping they will not grow again. If they did not do this, there would soon be no heaths or fens and not much old grassland.

Trees are part of the world of nature, but even native species interact with human affairs in a complex way. What we think of as the natural shape of a birch or yew is that of a free-standing tree: it is an artefact, to the extent that somebody has made the space around the tree, into which it has had room to expand. ♣



*Marina Warner* reminds us how deeply rooted trees are in our imagination

**THE FIFTH ELEMENT**

Consider the baobab, as big as a house and much taller, its bulbous girth swelling skywards for over a thousand years, its jagged crown so brittle in the dry season that branches may crack with a loud retort and burst into flame. Often hollowed out – by fire or other means – the trunk forms a natural cistern, where water can be kept fresh for passing herders and their animals. If only as a waystation in the parched African plains, the baobab represents vividly the idea of the tree of life.

Or consider the rainforests of the Pacific Northwest: the redwood trees of California, the hemlock and Douglas fir of Oregon, and, on the Sierra Nevada's heights, the giant sequoia, the oldest trees on Earth. In these forests, where lacy ferns unfurl from crevices in the tree bark and mosses fling deep-pile carpets on the tangled forest floor, new saplings spring from the trunks of fallen giants, 'nurse logs' that lift seedlings nearer the light and air they need to

**GREEN MAN** by Peter Freeman, *Out of the Wood* exhibition, 1989

Peter Freeman's neon *Green Man* was included in an exhibition *Out of the Wood*, a collaboration between Common Ground and the Crafts Council which – through glass, ceramics, sculpture, jewellery, wood-turning, photography, metalwork and neon – explored the vitality of wood as a material and the historic cultural relationship between craft and the natural world. The show opened at London's South Bank in August 1989 and travelled to Barnsley, Middlesbrough, Stoke-on-Trent, Leicester, Birmingham, Derby, Kendal, Eastbourne and finally, Aberystwyth, where it closed in 1991.

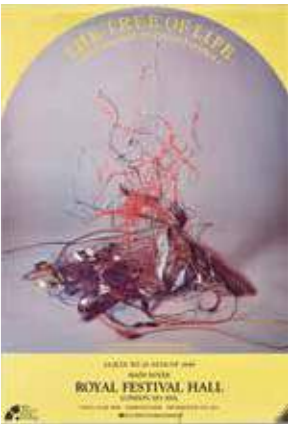
grow, in a perpetual cycle of regeneration.

Or consider the English apple tree, the weeping willow and the may tree – the holy thorn of Glastonbury. All of them are ordinary, and yet each is richly symbolic. Trees refuse to remain inanimate or literal; they attract the mythopoetic imagination and grow metaphors and stories. On the ancient stone monuments of Babylon or Assyria, trees are tokens of immortality. The living olive around which Odysseus built his marital bed assured him the patronage of Athena, and hence peace and plenty; further north, the world tree of Norse belief, the Yggdrasil, held up all of creation. Trees occupy the heart of mythological accounts of good and evil, and are laden with forbidden fruit (the apples of the Hesperides, as well as the Bible's).

They provide an ideal of order, in the medieval scholar's didactic tables, or the hermetic philosopher's map with the axis mundi at its heart. They excite dreams of wholeness. W. B. Yeats longed for the individuality of essence and matter, expressed by the chestnut tree:

Labour is blossoming or dancing where  
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul . . .  
O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,  
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?  
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

Like the heavens, like light and darkness, like the categories of above and below, the idea of the tree cannot be confined to empirically known examples or particular specimens. Trees strike us as beautiful, as mysterious, as frightening; they possess certain properties that have a natural physiological value, like the capacity to grow and to rise, to endure, to renew, to bear fruit, to burn, and these properties bring their own freight of social, familial, and emotional metaphor. Particular specimens – the beech climbed in childhood and much loved, the cherry orchard, the village oak – transcend their immediate circumstances, and cannot help speak of greater matters. ♣



**THE TREE OF LIFE** (24 July–28 August 1989) was an exhibition of painting, photography and sculpture that explored the tree as an archetypal symbol for different cultures all around the world. The exhibition at the Royal Festival Hall also offered original essays about the history of the tree from the very different perspectives of Marina Warner and Oliver Rackham. A later exhibition, *Out of the Wood* (14 October–12 November 1989) explored the significance of wood as a material and medium for contemporary practitioners in the crafts at the Crafts Council Gallery in London.



*Marina Warner* is a British novelist, art critic, short-story writer and historian. She is known for her many non-fiction books and has written for numerous publications, including *The London Review of Books* and *The New Statesman*. She has been a visiting professor, given lectures and taught on the faculties of many universities. She is the first President of the Royal Society of Literature. This essay is an extract from the catalogue that accompanied Common Ground's 1989 exhibition, *The Tree of Life*, at the Royal Festival Hall, London.





**TREE DRESSING DAY**  
In December 1990, Common Ground decorated three large London plane trees on Shaftesbury Avenue with large reflective banners printed with 'Every Tree Counts'. The Shaftesbury Theatre shone spotlights on them at night. This launch of Tree Dressing Day was followed with the publication of a free newspaper, *Tree Dressing Day Times* and *Tree Dressing Day News* to encourage events across the country and inspire more and more communities to celebrate trees in subsequent years.



**TREE DRESSING** by Britta Tackentrup, commissioned for LEAF!, 2017  
Every December, more and more people throughout the UK are celebrating the trees in their community by decorating the bare winter branches with coloured yarns and pieces of fabric. This world-wide tradition of re-leaving trees has been revived in modern times to express our intimate relationship with trees and woods.

Fiona Stafford discovers the long tradition of tree dressing

## CELEBRATING TREES

On a grey afternoon in early December, I was driving through the narrow streets and red-brick terraces of what was once an old railway town but is now stitched into the miscellaneous urban quilt of Milton Keynes. After a right turn into one of the small squares, a few streets from the main road, instead of the usual starved grass and black silhouetted branches, there was a startling patch of summer colour – scarlet, mauve, saffron, magenta.

It was as if the trees had all been Christmas shopping and come home clad in the brightest knitwear they could find. Trunks were covered in bespoke woolly pullies, twigs were sporting stripy scarves. There were even knitted robins, with oversized heads and cherry-red breasts. The square has never been the same since: for anyone who witnessed this transformation, the trees will always trail colourful memories of the ordinary becoming extraordinary.

Fiona Stafford is Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Oxford. She recently broadcast *The Meaning of Trees* on BBC Radio, on which her new book *The Long, Long Life of Trees* is based.

Trees feel the cold less keenly than most residents, but their new winter coats were a lift to everyone's chilled spirits. Graffiti knitting, guerrilla knitting, yarn-bombing or yarn-storming, as this practice of silent giving is variously known, has been growing across

the world for the past decade. The oxymoronic fusion of violent and homely language is in keeping with the wit of the knitters, who like to link



**TREE DRESSING DAY** by Peter Hatton and Wendy Helps, Richmond, c.1991  
Artist Peter Hatton with designer Wendy Helps dressed this cedar tree in the grounds of York House, Twickenham, with disposable gloves filled with leaves and twigs suspended in tiers from a circular steel ring.

things that don't usually go together. Taking knitting outdoors, domesticating trees: such playful crossing of normal conventions helps boundaries to fall.

The first weekend in December is now the time for community groups and schools to gather for their annual Tree Dressing. Ribbons and remnants and candles in coloured jam jars are hung up in local trees. If it feels like an ancient rural custom, Tree Dressing Day

'Ribbons and remnants and candles in coloured jam jars are hung up in local trees.'

is, in fact, a relatively recent phenomenon. Common Ground launched the festival in 1990, by decorating the plane trees in central London, on the corner of Shaftesbury Avenue and High Holborn. In the wake of the devastating storm of October 1987, in which some 15 million trees crashed to the ground, the idea was to bring people together from all cultures to celebrate city and country trees and the natural world.

But the roots of modern tree dressing run deep and wide. Long before I saw the cosy-knit-clad sycamores in Milton Keynes, I noticed birches in the Scottish Highlands and hawthorns in Ireland festooned with coloured cloth. 'Cloutie trees', covered in rags to represent wishes and woes, are as surprising in remote glens or overhanging single track roads as yarn-bombed urban branches. Traditionally, cloths or 'clouts' were offered with prayers for recovering health or happiness – as the rag decayed, so the problem would fade. The nearby spring or well was dedicated to a local saint, perhaps deriving ultimately from pre-Christian beliefs in the spirit of the water; Munloch Well in the Black Isle is sacred to St Boniface, the Well at Buxton in Derbyshire to St Ann. Abundant natural waters made Derbyshire a centre of the community festival of Well Dressing, which was held not in defiance of the oncoming winter, but in the spring, with a play on the season's double meaning (the annual blossom and the bubbling springs all helped the celebrations of Ascension Day). The adornment of trees is ancient and international: in Nepal, the bright-red blossom is sometimes hard to distinguish from strips of matching scarlet cloth.

Trees form natural centres and communal calendars, so although Tree Dressing Day may not have found a place in every town, public Christmas trees are very well established. All over Britain, in market places, shopping malls, village greens and city squares, December sees the reassuring return of that sizeable evergreen, decorated with coloured lights. The best-known Christmas Tree is the giant Norwegian spruce that towers over the statues and pigeons in Trafalgar Square. It is an annual gift from the people of Oslo for British support during the Second World War and draws children, students, office workers, shop assistants, pensioners, gallery-goers, tourists and homeless people together at the heart of the city. Each year, London's vast, amorphous population pauses to catch breath under the tall, tufted dark-green canopy, as the tree stands still, a beacon of light and hope, and an elongated mirror image of all those small, babled, belled and tinselled spruces in homes across the land.

# THE STORY OF TREE DRESSING

Tree Dressing Day falls on the first weekend of December. It was initiated by Common Ground in 1990 and has grown to become much more than an expression of a love for trees. It is a chance for the whole community to gather and celebrate the leafy friends we all have in common. It's also a chance for communities to reflect on the social and cultural history of their local area, and the role trees have played in shaping this story.

As a society we take trees and woodlands for granted most of the time. But there is a long tradition of celebrating trees and giving thanks for their existence. The tree of life, or world tree, is a symbol of immortality and fertility across all faiths and the focus of many religious festivals. Buddha sat under the Bodhi (a fig) tree when he gained enlightenment. Tu B'Shvat is the New Year of the Trees in the Jewish tradition, when trees are planted and celebrated, while the Sidra Tree is an important symbol in the Arab world frequently depicted in Islamic art. These deep and diverse cultural associations provide a rich basis for tree festivities across the world.

In Japan, the arrival of the cherry blossom in the spring – *sakura zensen* – is monitored, mapped and eagerly anticipated for weeks. People also celebrate Tanabata, known as the Star Festival, by writing wishes and poetry on *tanzaku* (small pieces of paper) and hanging them from trees. The cherry blossom celebrations in Washington DC are an annual event that attracts thousands of participants. On a slightly smaller scale, this year at Ruskin Land we organised a blossom walk through remnant and restored orchards which once formed what was the second-largest cherry-producing area in England. This was followed by a talk by the chair of a local beekeeping group on the importance of bees and other pollinating insects.

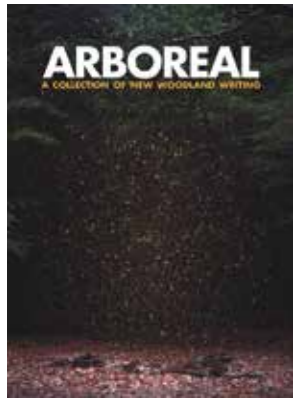
The decoration of trees on festive days such as May Day, which has the maypole tree symbol at its heart, and, of course, at Christmas, is an old tradition in many parts of the world. The Arbor Tree, a black poplar in the centre of the village of Aston-on-Clun, in Shropshire, is permanently adorned with flags which are renewed in May each year in a ceremony whose origins have largely been forgotten. In Appleton in Cheshire, late June sees the 'bawming of the thorn', an old custom involving the decoration of a hawthorn tree by local children with ribbons and garlands. Other tree-dressing rituals, such as the shoe tree near Studley Green in the Chilterns, are not so ancient and perhaps less aesthetically pleasing!

Tree dressing is a powerful way of expressing our relationship with trees. Organising a Tree Dressing Day in your community is a wonderful way of saying 'thank you' to the trees and celebrating where you live.

**FOR MORE IDEAS AND INFORMATION:**  
[COMMONGROUND.ORG.UK/TREE-DRESSING-DAY](http://COMMONGROUND.ORG.UK/TREE-DRESSING-DAY)

COMMON GROUND





No other landscape matches the complexity and variety of life in a woodland, both above and below ground. Woodlands are given names on maps, shape our language and feed our imagination. With *Arboreal*, edited by Adrian Cooper, Common Ground assembled novelists, botanists, poets, artists, architects and foresters in a landmark collection which explores why woodlands still matter and mean so much. Two pieces from the collection, contributed by Nina Lyon and Kathleen Jamie, are included here.

Rebel, god, myth, cultural icon. . . *Nina Lyon* discovers the faces of our oldest and most elusive character

## RETURN OF THE GREEN MAN

Two years ago, I embarked on a hunt for the Green Man. He turned out to be a more elusive creature than expected: was he a long-forgotten god of the Old Religion, a wilderness rebel or just an anarchic boozier as seen on pub signs across the land?

We draw these conclusions from a set of ancient images. The oldest are gory figures with vines growing from their mouths. Some are sunnier figures, sanguine-looking chaps with foliage for beard and hair. They only got their name in 1939, when the amateur folklorist Lady Raglan concluded that the foliate heads of her nearby churches and old folk traditions like May's Jack-in-the-Green were related.

Today, historians dispute this: the foliate heads are too disparate in character, there is no consistent historical thread to the Jack-in-the-Green, and there is no evidence to suggest that some pagan forest-god was tacitly allowed into the darker recesses of the Church. But nobody seems to care too much about that: in our age of technology and human progress, the Green Man has come to mean something in his own right.

I lost count of the Green Men I encountered on walls, amulets and arms. Publicans, artists and retired accountants all seemed to find themselves in him; I'd mention in passing that I was writing a book about the Green Man and all sorts of unexpected people would declare an interest that far superseded mine. The Jack-in-the-Green traditions, which nearly died out in the postwar period, are becoming fashionable again. Some Morris dancing sides use a Green Man for their summer performances; he still battles the Frost Queen on the bridge at Clun in Shropshire to usher in the month of May.

Nobody could agree on exactly what the Green Man was or what he stood for. They all had their own ideas. The unambiguous conclusion that I could draw was that a part of our mindset that meditates on what lies beyond our immediate sphere of the human and material resonated



GREEN MAN by Kathleen Basford, Norwich Cathedral

Kathleen Basford (1916–1998) was a British botanist with a special interest in genetics, but was also known for her research into the cultural significance of the Green Man in the British Isles and around the world. In 1978 she published *The Green Man*, a landmark exploration of how the foliate head has been used as an ornament in building since the fourth and fifth centuries, first borrowed from antiquity and modified to express particular ideas and meaning. Basford herself called it the 'spiritual dimension of nature' in architecture. The collection of photographs that Basford amassed during her research and writing of the book was left to Common Ground to become part of the charity's wider art collection.

with him, in much the same way that it resonates at the top of a mountain or in the depths of a forest.

Once upon a time, Britain was covered in forest. We have shaped our land into our own image and there's not much forest left. We still look to it for meaning, though, a meaning whose urgency has only strengthened as our

relationship with non-human life becomes more precarious. The Green Man, who might once have been intended as a grim-faced warning of what might happen if you delve too deep into the woods, has become a way of imagining a more equitable relationship with them, and like insistent spring shoots, he is having a resurgence.

### INSHRIACH

by Kathleen Jamie

This clearing in the wildwood –  
just as good as anywhere.

Frost-breath rises  
from the heathery floor.

A woodpecker drums  
that just flew between two birches.

Spangles on birch-twigs  
as the sun breaks through.

Through ancient pinewood  
the gleam of snow mountains.

Below the pines, a river  
winding from the snow.

With its glance, a breeze favours  
this pine-branch, not that.

Now that pine-bough wafts,  
though not now this.

From wraiths of juniper  
wren-song sparkles.

Fungus hooves harden  
on fallen trunks.

Heaving a pine-needle  
one ant, like a penitent.

Two cock chaffinches  
tussle in mid-air.

From a bed of moss, leaf-litter,  
wintery heather

I gaze up through the branches  
of my guardian birch.

The white clouds pass  
way beyond the tree tops

making me a child again,  
responsible for nought.

Night, the trees stand dark  
as though switched off at the mains.

Badgers, in the small hours  
topple our empty bottles.

May Day brings a lambing storm:  
snow on the forest floor;

The stone out-staring the sky  
blinks slowly white, then thaws.



HASTINGS TREE MAP by Eleanor Taylor, commissioned for LEAF! newspaper, 2017

*Jos Smith* explains why mapping the trees in your community and sharing stories about them can also ensure their survival

How do you feel about the city's trees? Which are your favourites? Trees are our neighbours and in many towns and cities, where they face threat from pollution, disease or unnecessary felling, a tree map can be used as a tool to express the importance of trees in the local community. It is not worth imagining our streets without trees, so instead start telling stories about them and marking them out in maps.

## TREE MAPS, TREE TALES

If you were to make a map of the trees in your area, what would it look like? Are there particular avenues, copses, clumps and woods that stand out? What memories do you and your neighbours have of distinctive local trees? Are there trees associated with particular birds, seasons, flowers or fruit – an island full of poplars that fill with crows at dusk, a row of hawthorns that signal a turn in the weather when they blossom? Are there conkers, apples, chestnuts, sloes? Do any have names or histories, Gospel Oaks, Boundary Oaks, Kissing Trees or Wishing Trees? Are there stand-out characters like the Major Oak of Sherwood Forest or Wordsworth's ancient Borrowdale Yews, 'Up-coiling, and inveterately convolved'? Have any

trees been fought for in the past? What would you put on the map?

Of course, it's not only such notable trees that matter, but it does make you wonder what memories, histories and associations other people in your village or borough might have about the trees nearby. As Richard Mabey reminds us, 'what you take for granted might be a revelation to your neighbour.' A Tree Tales map shows how we might all have small pieces of the puzzle and that putting them together can produce something rich and memorable that the people of an area can treasure as a record of their heritage. And who knows what other ideas making the map might prompt: tree walks, tree tours, tree dressings, booklets, annual picnics, new artworks, perhaps even the planting of new trees themselves, carefully matched to soil and surroundings?

Knowing some of the meanings and values of the trees around you is more important now than

ever. A concerning trend has recently begun to see city councils outsource highway maintenance to private companies that are less accountable to civic democracy. In Sheffield, for example, the city council has signed a twenty-five-year contract with Amey PLC and scheduled 18,000 mature highway trees for felling, including the healthy, mature lime trees of 'Rustlings Road'. To strip a road called 'Rustlings' of its trees is to strip it of its history and its culture.

A map or collection of Tree Tales for your local area can help to share some of the values associated with the trees you know and care about. Mapping these values is a way of articulating their meaning and offers a strong argument for their conservation. Moreover, it can also be a fun way to get to know your place better as well as the people who live there from a whole new angle. Seeing the trees you know through the eyes of your neighbours can bring them alive in new ways.



In 2016 Common Ground invited the people of Exeter to tell their stories about the city's trees. *Tree Tales* is the result, a collection of memories, artwork, photographs, articles, songs and poetry. It is both a celebration of one city's urban silva and a wider reflection of the cultural importance of our trees today. *Tree Tales* puts the city's trees firmly on the map, partly to celebrate civic heritage but also to demonstrate how we can conserve street and park trees from the ill-considered actions of some local councils. *Tree Tales* was collected and edited for Common Ground by Luke Thompson, Jos Smith and Rose Ferraby.





Harriet and Rob Fraser met one of Britain's most important sculptors and land artists to talk about woods, trees and the natural environment

**DAVID NASH AND ASH DOME** by Rob Fraser, Wales, 2017  
 "I love the concept that when you have an idea, it hasn't got any molecules until you've incarnated it in some way, by making a sketch or making a note. If you don't do anything with it, it evaporates. You had your chance, it winked at you, you need to respond."

## WOODWORKER

David Nash has an intimate connection with wood, having worked with it as his chosen material for many decades. His work is globally acclaimed. To stand in his studio, or walk through woods with him where he has planted and coaxed trees to encourage particular patterns of growth, is an absolute privilege and an opportunity to share his vision of wood as an object with almost as much life as the trees from which it comes.

"You look at a piece," says David, "and you think it's made of wood. But a tree makes that material. Working with wood is so special because it is something that has grown, a life force that weaves earth and light into the tree's body. It has got a time element to it, which we instinctively recognise, though not necessarily consciously. When I char wood sculptures black, it changes the sense of time. You're not seeing wood any more, you're seeing carbon."

Many of David's pieces are site-specific. The *Wooden Boulder*, perhaps the most well-known,

has been moving down the Ffestiniog valley since 1978 when it was pushed into a stream. 'It is entirely dependent on its engagement with the elements: the tide, the wind, the rainfall, all contribute to where it gets placed. And it may go out of sight, which it is at the moment.'

**'David realised early in his career that wood was right for him: 'I wanted a material which would inform the work or be a partner in it.'**

We walked with David into his *Ash Dome*, a living sculpture of 22 ash trees that he planted 40 years ago, and has gently worked with. 'A tree grows with the energy, the nutrients, the light, and all the natural circumstances it needs, of that particular place. I was looking for a way to have a sculpture outside that was genuinely of where it was sited. The dome shape came from the foothills around, and there's a simple

spiritual geometry of the circle and of the dome, and of the inside-outside. I wanted to grow a space, a simple space. And it's a collaboration: the *Ash Dome* is a token of working with nature.'

There's no sign here, yet, of ash dieback, which is appearing across the UK. I ask David how he feels about it. 'I was worried, at first, but really, I'm working with natural forces, and this is something of nature that is happening. I have to accept it. I never thought the *Wooden Boulder* would get to sea in my lifetime, or even into the estuary, but it did. And the *Ash Dome*, I didn't know whether it would get to the twenty-first century. I took a photograph of it on the last afternoon of 1999 and another from the same space, the next morning, like its graduation photograph. They are exactly the same! It doesn't care, does it?'

David realised early in his career that wood was right for him: 'I wanted a material which would inform the work or be a partner in it. When I was first working I was just dominating the material - I'd cut it to shape, I'd paint it, sand it ... then I thought: why don't you just look at the wood, where it's coming from? So I did. The wood is a partner, and it leads me.'

**1 Choosing the right tree for you**

When planting trees, take the time to ensure you choose trees that will thrive in your conditions.

Look around locally to see which trees are doing well as a useful guide. We champion native broadleaf trees because they are better adapted to our climate and more likely to succeed. All trees provided through Woodland Trust schemes come from seeds gathered and grown in the UK.

**PLANT SMALL SAPLINGS** about 40-60 cm in size. This is because they are inexpensive to replace, quick to adapt to the new conditions and grow at a fast rate. Larger trees have a more developed root system and need LOTS of care after planting.

**2 How to grow a tree from a seed**

- Put some stones at the bottom of the pot and fill it with compost almost to the top.
- Plant seeds 2cm deep.
- Put the pot outside in a shady corner.
- Check it every week to make sure the soil hasn't dried out. **BE CAREFUL NOT TO OVER WATER IT.**
- Re-pot the shoot into larger pots as it grows and once it reaches 40cm find a suitable place to transfer it into the ground.
- As your seeds start to grow keep them sheltered during winter to protect them from frost.

**3 How to plant a tree**

- Hold the tree upright and gently push back the soil. Don't compact the soil as this will stop water & air circulation.
- Put the turf back over the hole with the split either side of the young tree, grass side down.
- Cover the tree with a guard if necessary, using a cane or stick to provide extra support.

**4 Caring for your trees**

Now you've planted we want to help you ensure that your young trees **SURVIVE** and **THRIVE**.

Your trees will need care and attention during the first few years to help them achieve their full potential. If you have any questions or would like more info on maintaining your trees please contact the Woodland Creation Team at [plant@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto:plant@woodlandtrust.org.uk) or on 0330 333 5303.

We'd also love to hear how your trees are getting on. Please send us your pictures and stories.

**The Good Planting Guide**

**THE GOOD PLANTING GUIDE** by Barry Falls, commissioned for LEAF! newspaper, 2017

Planting trees is a good thing, isn't it? The outstanding botanical writer, Oliver Rackham, argued that this has become a modern myth because 'there were trees long before there were nurserymen'. He went on to point out that industrialised approaches to planting and the globalisation of plant commerce has actually caused much damage, and that the act of planting should not be mistaken for conservation. So how do we plant trees in the right way?

Harriet and Rob Fraser are artists who work in collaboration as Somewhere-nowhere. They highlight the beauty of nature and the benefits of being outdoors and building connections between people and nature. In their collaboration, Rob shoots on digital cameras and physical film with a large format camera. Harriet's writing includes documentary, prose and poetry, and she frequently takes poetry away from the page by placing it in the land. The Frasers are both fellows of the Royal Geographical Society and are patrons of Friends of the Lake District.





**LIVING WITH TREES**

Common Ground has launched a new project to widen engagement with trees and woodlands. Through publishing books, film-making and a series of artist residencies, the project is drawing attention to the many inspiring ways people are redefining woodland use around the country, and how important trees remain to all our communities. The project also aims to show how community engagement can improve local biodiversity, well-being and social cohesion. In particular, community woodlands provide a unique opportunity for us to participate in this process and take collective responsibility. The piece by Robin Walter featured on this page is from *Living with Trees*, a new community handbook published by Common Ground, exploring the relationship between trees, woods and people. To find out more visit: [commonground.org.uk/trees-woods-handbook/](http://commonground.org.uk/trees-woods-handbook/)



It is time we rediscovered our cultural relationship with trees and woods, argues *Robin Walter*

**LIVING WITH TREES**

The story of human civilisation describes our gradual detachment from nature and our emergence from the forest into the 'civis', the city. We have made clearings, pushed back the shady forest and created pools of light for our great projects. These clearings gradually joined up, leaving the forest matrix fragmented. We also feared the forest for its wild animals and social outcasts, a place of danger, even terror, both real and imagined. Originally the forest was 'the condition' and the clearings were the exception; now the human project is the condition and forests and wilderness are the exception.

Having lost so much woodland cover, both the protective mantle of actual trees and the cultural protection of a tree-based society, it is difficult to imagine how such a culture could emerge again, especially in the face of competing cultures.

In the West, our understanding of our world has been shaped by a series of detachments from the natural world: first Greek philosophy divided the material world from the ideal realm of Truth; then the Christian religion continued this by dividing Heaven from Earth; lastly the Scientific Revolution placed Man firmly in control and completed the conquest of Nature, now seen as a machine of no intrinsic value. These beliefs have shaped our values and culture and influenced the path of our civilisation.

It does not have to be like this. The web of natural life includes people. But how can trees and woods become more valuable and meaningful for people again? If we can understand our long cultural relationship with trees, we might see why we now have so few, when once we had so many.

But what has led to the demise of trees?

**TREEFOLDS** by Harriet and Rob Fraser, Cumbria, 2017–18

Harriet and Rob Fraser created three treefolds in Cumbria celebrating trees and the value of walking and slowing down in their presence. The treefolds were built with locally sourced stone, using dry-stone walling techniques thousands of years old, and will protect a newly planted tree as well as providing a space in the landscape for people to rest at or gather in years to come. The project was supported by the Woodland Trust and inspired by the 800th anniversary of the Charter of the Forest.

In the deep past, our once-extensive forests were cleared for agriculture and this has been sustained into modern times. We thought we could do without trees.

What has been the effect of this loss? Our country has very low tree cover for this part of the world, we import most of our timber, our landscapes are largely open and exposed, we have little forest habitat for wildlife, and we ourselves have only passing acquaintance with trees and woods.

How has this affected our culture? 'Woodland culture' barely exists in the UK; we are a modern

industrial economy removed from nature. Trees and woods are degraded and accorded low value and status. If, as Auden put it, 'a culture is no better than its woods', then we have indeed sunk low. Yet we persist in the delusion of England's 'Heart of Oak', despite having lost our trees long ago.

How might we bring trees back into our landscapes, our lives and our culture? We have made great progress with industrial forestry over the last century, but much less progress on the wider wooded landscape. We could accord trees their true value and recognise

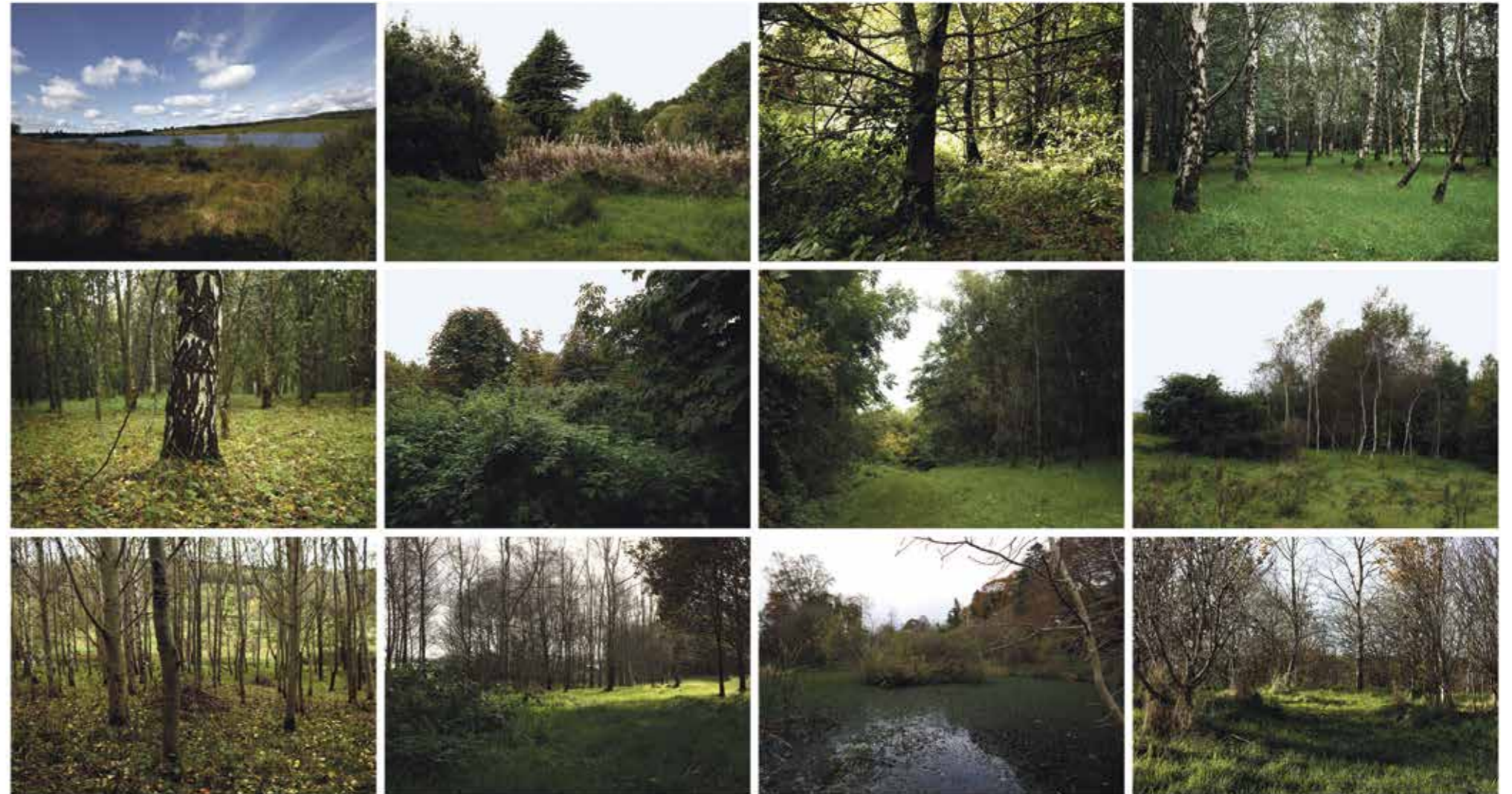
**WE MUST LEARN TO LABOUR WITHIN NATURE AS A PACK**

**AS human wolves we swear to use our animality in aid of earthothers freedom to our earthother brothers + sisters**

**MAN AMONG MEN, WOLF AMONG WOLVES** by Alec Finlay, 2017

Alec Finlay explored innovative pinewood regeneration projects at the Invercauld, Dundreggan and Mar Lodge Estates. These conservation schemes include Project Wolf, which employs a pack of 'human wolves' to patrol the woodlands at Dundreggan between dusk and dawn. The walkers disturb deer, discouraging them from eating young seedlings, allowing the next generation of trees to flourish.

*Alec Finlay* is an artist and poet whose work crosses over a range of media and forms. He has published over forty books and won six Scottish Design Awards, including two Grand Prix Awards. Recent publications include *minmouth*, *A Variety of Cultures*, *ebban an' flowan* and *a better tale to tell*. The posters featured in this article were made as part of his *man among men a wolf among wolves* project for Common Ground in the Scottish Highlands.



**TO DRAW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF GHOSTS** by Christine Mackey, 2017–18

'I wanted to find out how the local communities actively use these different woods,' explains Christine. 'I wanted to explore the different historical processes that have shaped these landscapes.' It is almost 17 years since the Woods On Your Doorstep programme, initiated by the Millennium Commission, planted approximately 52 new woodlands in Northern Ireland. What is the legacy of these new woods? Do big planting schemes like this work? We assume that planting is, by default, a good thing to do. But what happens after the funding and good intentions fade? Do the trees survive? How do people engage with the new woods? Filled with these questions, Christine Mackey wanted to explore the relationship that communities in Belfast have with these 'millennium woods'. So she took to walking them, and along the way collected stories, visited archives and met people who lived and worked near the woods. Christine decided to turn her gaze on wooden benches in the woods, places where people sat and enjoyed the view. She began collecting wood from the different tree species growing near various benches and with these made charcoal with people living in the area. Back in her studio, Christine later used the charcoal to create a wonderful series of ghostly tracings which capture on paper both the sites and trees from which the charcoal was made.



their contribution to our lives; we could take responsibility for our timber use and make better use of wood; we could restore an ecologically connected landscape framed around trees; we could show how more of the right trees in the right places can benefit us all.

How could such a cultural shift happen? We need a compelling narrative for the restoration of trees in our lives. We need to re-order our priorities to support the well-being of our natural world and the people living in it. This would be a significant cultural shift and there are encouraging signs it is already happening.

Trees mean many different things to different people and there is a wide range of social constructions around trees – they can be anything from a source of timber to eco-system service providers to an ideal state of nature to living spirits. Trees are stubbornly meaningful to us and we need to develop that relationship in its many forms into robust action – both protection and an ambitious restoration of a tree landscape. Indeed, trees could be the standard-bearers for a new and deeper connection with nature; our relationship with trees could serve as a model for our relationship with nature, a cultural metaphor of our place in the web of life.

We have destroyed much of our natural home, but we believe we can learn to live within nature. We must restore what is damaged, support natural processes and re-acquaint ourselves with our erstwhile surroundings.

How can we live together with woods? How do we reach a *modus vivendi* with trees?

*Christine Mackey* is based at the Leirim Sculpture Centre in Ireland and works across a range of practices and places of interest. Her evolving projects, public engagements, publications and exhibitions are meticulously researched. She pursues a narrative structure based on an assemblage of key research material, places of interest and the active and creative involvement of other voices. Her work embeds a series of sensitive responses in relation to site, agency and ecology.

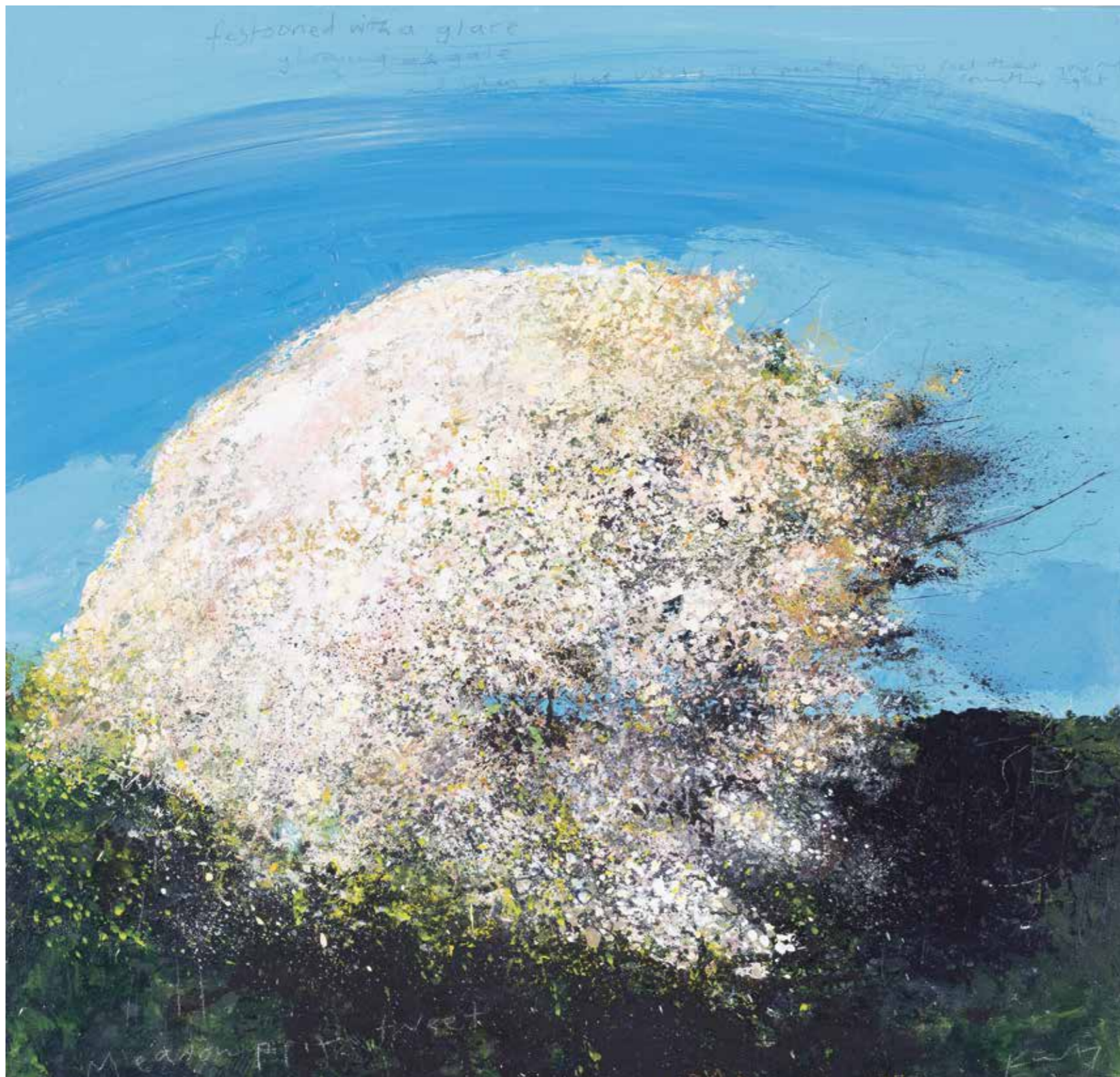
*Robin Walter* has worked as an arboricultural climber in London, 'on the saws' in Dorset and as a woodland officer for the Woodland Trust. Since 2010, he has been working independently as a forester and writer.





## TIME AND PLACE

Our relationship with nature and the cycle of the seasons has long been celebrated by communities in every corner of the country. Seasonality is experienced in all places, rural and urban alike, binding us to nature and the passing of time. With the author Alexandra Harris, Common Ground is celebrating the cultural history of the seasons by looking at the way artists mark time through visual art. By challenging artists to create an almanac or calendar, we are asking them to observe closely the shifting seasons in landscapes near where they live. The work they create will be used as a tool to inspire schools and communities to celebrate the seasons, their locality and themselves.



Alexandra Harris celebrates the art of making calendars and almanacs

## TIME AND PLACE

Towards the end of his first year of solitary, shipwrecked island life, Robinson Crusoe goes to bed in a state of drunkenness. In an attempt to calm a raging tropical fever, and subdue its attendant nightmare hallucinations, he has taken a good dose of tobacco soaked in rum. Predictably, since he is no habitual drinker, the alcohol goes straight to his head and the next he knows it is three o'clock in the afternoon.

Crusoe has had a long sleep and is the better for it, but at some stage (he does not say exactly when) a worry sets in. 'Nay, to this Hour, I'm partly of the opinion, that I slept all the next Day and Night, and 'till almost Three that Day after.' Has he really slept through a whole day?

I have always thought this one of the most frightening moments in the novel. It is a small thing not to know how long you slept for, but if it means that you don't now know the date, and may never know the date again, there opens a giddy vista of doubt and displacement.

Alexandra Harris is the author of *Romantic Moderns*, *Virginia Woolf and Weatherland: Writers and Artists Under English Skies*. She is Professorial Fellow at the University of Birmingham and Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

Kurt Jackson is an artist who embraces a range of materials and techniques to celebrate the natural environment. He was born in Blandford, Dorset, and graduated from St Peter's College, Oxford, with a degree in Zoology. He has been Artist in Residence on the Greenpeace ship *Esperanza*, the Eden Project and at the Glastonbury Festival since 1999. He lives in St Just, Cornwall, with his family.

**MAY IN MAY. FESTOONED WITH A GLARE, GLOWING IN A GALE** by Kurt Jackson, St Just, Cornwall, 2017. MIXED MEDIA ON WOOD PANEL

Kurt Jackson returned to the same hawthorn tree growing in a hedge near his home at St Just, Penwith, in Cornwall, and responded to how it changed through the seasons in 2017. This solitary tree is the remnant of an ancient hedge, and its form has been shaped by the weather and landscape over the years, contorted by wind, nibbled at by sheep and deer. "It's low, almost bonsai'd in its form," says Kurt. "It leans or rather points into the east, swept and blown from the west, from the prevailing winds off the Atlantic cliffs. It is a crashing wave of branch and stick. On this edge, the hedge. A small stunted hawthorn tree."

Moments of disorientation like Crusoe's are common enough, and they are easily settled. We stretch out a hand from bed towards a watch or a radio. The date flashes in green digital numbers, or it's there at the top of the newspaper, and immediately we are back in time, back on course. Robinson Crusoe, entirely alone, has absolutely no way of knowing what day it is. He has let down his guard for a moment, and it has sent him awry for all foreseeable time.

Dates are, in a sense, invented things. Nothing in nature decrees that this is Thursday January 12. But for millennia, human beings have been dividing time into portions and giving them names; the names are shared across whole cultures, so that most of the world population is bound by a common agreement that this is January 12. The convention is useful in practical ways: we can make arrangements, we can enumerate and communicate time. But it's more than practical: the calendar tells a kind of truth. Today is January 12.

Defoe the satirist sees that it's a little ridiculous for Crusoe to be concerned with dates when he has no appointments to keep. But he also hypothesises the genuine horror of not knowing. Crusoe realises the problem during his second week on the island: 'it came into my Thoughts, that I should lose my Reckoning of Time for want of Books and Pen and Ink, and should even forget the Sabbath Days from the working Days'. He realises that to lose track now would be irreparable; he would then be faced with undifferentiated days, or he would have to impose a scheme of his own in the knowledge that 'his' Saturday had no meaning beyond himself.

If he is to have a calendar he must make it himself from what is available. He takes a 'large Post', or perhaps two posts, makes it into 'a large Cross', sets it on the shore where he landed, and inscribes it with the date of his coming ashore, September 30 (which was the autumn equinox in the old, or Julian, calendar of Defoe's time).

'Upon the Sides of this square Post I cut every Day a Notch with my Knife, and every seventh Notch was as long again as the rest, and every first Day of the Month as long again as that one, and thus I kept my Calendar, or weekly, monthly, and yearly reckoning of Time.'

Crusoe could be accused of making Time his god. His 'great Cross' or crucifix is of the sort that Christian travellers might erect on the sand of a new country as they spread the Word and, like the cross of a church, it is both an icon and a landmark (Crusoe gets his bearings from it when lost in fog). This cross, which becomes a central point in his life, shows the date rather than the Passion.

From the very beginnings of Christianity, religious thinkers have been much concerned with the reckoning of time, and time as it is understood in the West has been definitively shaped by the observations of the Church. The complex dialogue between clock and crucifix was well established in England by the 720s, when Bede worked on his treatise about time, *De temporum ratione*, close to the spot where a sundial was carved on a great stone Celtic cross at St Cuthbert's, Bewcastle.

**'What can these calendars have to do with me? Perhaps I should start on a calendar of my own.'**

The earliest surviving English clocks are mass dials like this, sculpted in stone, or scratched onto a church wall, showing monks the hours of prayer through the day and parish priests the time for Sunday mass at church. Calendars, too, were made for the purposes of worship, and Christianity gave the English calendar its character. The feast days and holy times carried over into secular life, so that a farmer paying his tithes would refer to Martinmas rather than November 11. The associations went too deep to be shaken off lightly.

One calendar is in some ways just like another, whether it's a notched post or a shiny picture book hung on the wall. It will be divided into twelve for the months, and if it is a calendar of days it will count them into weeks and months. It will mark the repeated periods of time: that's the point of it. A completely original calendar would make no sense at all. The joy and the achievement of calendrical art and literature exists in finding an expressive balance between the repetition of established motifs and the introduction of sympathetic adaptations.

The Winchester Psalter is on one side of my desk, and The Shepherd's Calendar is on the other, and I wonder why I'm so drawn to them. Is it familiarity or distance? Monday follows Tuesday across centuries. February is still a time for warming by the fire. But the highly disciplined sense of time expressed in the Psalter is hardly repeated in me: I'm a tourist among its precisely defined turns of the hour and the day. If I read enough, and with concentration, I can think myself just a little way into the spiritual timetable of Winchester Cathedral, but though the exercise feels valuable, it is only ever a brief and willed experiment, temporarily chosen and then set aside. And so, too, with John Clare's agricultural year. If, for a moment, his 'clouds of starnels' feel close in January because there are starlings gathering, now, this afternoon, on wires and parapets across Oxford and at dusk they will converge for the night on Otmoor, still I have no notion of a winter day when ditches are to be dug. What can these calendars have to do with me? Perhaps I should start on a calendar of my own.



**AUTUMN/KEX, CALENDAR OF THE SUSSEX WILD** by Jo Sweeting, Brighton, April 2018  
PRINTED ON SOMERSET SATIN 300GSM PAPER, 75 X 75 CM.

In response to Alexandra Harris's essay, *Time and Place*, Jo Sweeting has carved four woodblocks depicting different seasons: Spring/Callow, Summer/Combe, Autumn/Kex and Winter/Shaw. Each is bordered by words in Sussex dialect, and together they form a work called 'Calendar of the Sussex Wild'.



**THE WINTRY HEAVEN** by Jem Southam, River Exe, Devon, 2017

Jem Southam has walked the same bend on the River Exe in Devon for the last three winters, documenting in photographs the moonlit shards reflected on water, the detritus collected after autumn floods, migratory birds using the bend in the river as an overnight resting place.

Jo Sweeting is a sculptor and letter carver based in Brighton. She trained at Leeds and Newcastle in Fine Art/Sculpture and Art History. She teaches at West Dean College and in John Skelton's workshop, where she also studied to become a letter carver.

Jem Southam, born in Bristol in 1950, is one of the UK's leading photographers. He is renowned for his series of colour landscape photographs, beginning in the 1970s and continuing until the present. His trademark is the patient observation of changes at a single location over many months or years.





**RAISE THE ROOF** is a collaborative research project exploring how historic and contemporary vernacular architecture emerges from the landscape, culture and community of particular places. Through a series of participatory projects with artists, land trusts, architects, conservationists, historians and craftspeople, the aim is to demonstrate the ecological and social potential of creating new community spaces from locally sourced skills and materials. In the words of Roger Deakin: 'Architectural vernacular can be thought of as one of the main points of connection between people and place.'



*Assemble* explains the context for its collaboration with Common Ground

## LOG BOOK

We can read rich histories within the fabric of many of Britain's towns and cities. The tonnes of stock bricks and blocks of stone that make up humble dwellings and grand institutional buildings describe periods of local and national prosperity, moments of technological innovation, social progress and the endurance of regional lores and traditions. From our built culture we can infer a wealth of information about a particular place at a particular moment in time. The different materials, techniques, tools and forms are reflective of the specific cultural, social, economic and technological factors that create an enduring idea of a place's history and our relationship to it.

In any encounter with contemporary buildings, this is more challenging. Modernism sought to make a clean break with history by adopting industrialised methods and materials. But in the wake of its failure, much of what we build today is rootless: a confusion of styles and superficial details that bear no relation to either how buildings are made or where they are sited. Across the UK, new homes are often defined by vernacular pastiche, overlooking local and regional physical geographies, and replacing them with architecture which is increasingly indistinguishable from place to place.

We propose to look at the capacity for contemporary construction to recapture this narrative scope through a renewal of the relationship between buildings and context.

We question where and what opportunities might exist; how might innovative environmental policy, material re-use and extraction, contemporary methods of construction and open-endedness in the design of our built environment precipitate a new and locally distinct built culture within the industrial machinery of modern volume housebuilding.

*Assemble* is a Turner-prize-winning collective of 15 architects whose work addresses the relationship between people and the built environment. They take a hands-on, collaborative approach. While their work usually includes design, it rarely starts or ends there, often employing a range of ways to make spaces that enable independence, creativity and difference. *Assemble* started working together informally in 2009, and delivered their first project, *The Cineroleum*, in 2010.



**LOG BOOK** by *Assemble*, Chapter House, Lincoln, December 2017

For ten days a group of skilled woodworkers worked in concert within the Lincoln Cathedral Chapter House to process wood from the round felled form into regular sections of timber. The work of the four hewers composes a process-led installation celebrating the technique and skill required to work with the material of the forest in its raw form. Set beneath the extraordinary timber structure hidden above the vaulted masonry ceiling that forms the Cathedral's Chapter House roof, the project exposes the vernacular architecture of the place, drawing out the beauty of the structure concealed within the building. *Log Book* was conceived and directed by *Assemble* and Common Ground, with lighting design by Katharine Williams, theatrical direction by Emily Lin, photography by Henrietta Williams and woodwork by Robert Ley, Anna Ley, James Irvine, Allan Eley, Shawn Farrell and Tom Wood.



*Owen Griffiths* on creating his participatory residency at the National Botanic Garden of Wales

## Tŷ UNNOS

In Wales there is a tradition of *tŷ unnos* (one-night house), which dates back several hundred years. It suggests that if you were able to build a house on common land, with a fire smoking out from the chimney, the land and house would be rightfully yours. The idea of a one-night house appears throughout the world, mostly as folklore but sometimes in customary and even statutory law.

The dramatic potential and symbolism of a community getting together for this purpose is intriguing, even if it is practically challenging. It was in the spirit of *tŷ unnos*, in particular how urgency can create material invention and the need for community involvement, that our structure was made one cold December morning, at the National Botanic Garden in Carmarthenshire.

Over 30 volunteers met at 7am to dig, build, make willow-lath panels, and assemble a building. The aim was to create a piece of useful public art: a place for outdoor lessons and celebrations. This utopian aim seemed harmonious with the layers of the surrounding landscape, the cycles of seasonal life, the varying habitats, the mycelium rhizomes. It also contrasted with the historic landscape and the formality of the Regency gardens, designed by Samuel Lapidge, with colonial associations.

But making is not just about the result. The process created a free space for us to talk and exchange ideas. In particular, we talked about the housing shortage, brownfield sites and whether self-building could be a solution. These conversations reminded me of Walter Segal, a German architect who built extraordinary houses in the 1970s and 1980s, giving people who were on the waiting list for council houses in south London the opportunity to build their own homes – not just any old homes but aspirational and remarkable houses which are now part of our architectural heritage.

There is a huge potential in reclaiming the *tŷ unnos* tradition and applying it to contemporary housing problems. I live in Swansea and we have just seen the latest architectural development plans for the city and they are unhinged from

**Tŷ UNNOS** by *Owen Griffiths*, National Botanic Garden, Carmarthenshire, Wales, December 2017

In the spirit of *tŷ unnos*, *Owen Griffiths* created a public performance and vernacular structure in collaboration with over 30 volunteers, staff and visitors of the National Botanic Garden of Wales. By weaving local tree stories and timber materials into his residency with Common Ground, the project also explores contemporary political issues of land and sustainability through the relationship between the trees and people in the Carmarthenshire landscape.



any building tradition or sense of vernacular. Commercial property developers and local authorities seem to depend on cloning, which erase the rich details of place and rub out the historic expressions of a community. Against the backdrop of this homogenisation, the *tŷ unnos*

idea feels fresh and radical. As the co-founder of Common Ground, Roger Deakin, wrote: 'Architectural vernacular can be thoughts of as one of the main points of connection between people and place – for its materials constitute its vocabulary.'

*Owen Griffiths* is a social practice artist working with sites and communities, responding to architecture, people and place. His work addresses the disconnection between community, our local environments and the forces and ideals that maintain our experiences of the everyday. He was awarded Creative Wales Ambassador 2016 and is emerging as one of the most important artists of his generation.



YSP

Extending Common Ground's exhibitions at YSP into the open air, the South African artist James Webb undertakes a residency and presents a new sound work, *Supernature* (2018), in which the artist tells stories and creates conversations between trees within the YSP landscape. Broadcast from speakers concealed within trees around the Park, Webb gives an audio reading of the Bretton Estate, paying special attention to the presence, history and imaginative possibility of trees. The residency is supported by the Woodland Trust.



Pioneer of sound art *James Webb* on his new arboreal work at Yorkshire Sculpture Park

## SUPERNATURE

“There was a man who saw the face of his first love in the crying tree by the edge of the lake. He sat, day in and day out, and spoke to the tree, calling it Elizabeth. We knew it was false, as did the tree, but soon a love grew from the roots and Elizabeth's face emerged. But it was too late. The man was long gone and now Elizabeth, the lovelorn tree, weeps sap for her departed lover.”

Over the centuries, from when the ground on which Yorkshire Sculpture Park now stands was a swamp to its present manifestation, what have the trees seen and been privy to? What secrets have they overheard? What dramas have they witnessed? What would they say given the chance to express themselves?

For my Common Ground residency at YSP, I invited various local specialists to visit and help me read the landscape through the lens of their own disciplines. They included Richard Flowerday, historian; Andrew Bowman-Shaw, arborist; Steve Jones, pagan; John Ledger, artist and YSP staff; Claire Midwood, YSP staff, flora and fauna specialist; Hester Reeve, artist, philosopher and lecturer; Alex Bridger, critical social psychologist, University of Huddersfield lecturer; Andrea Freeman, artist and postgraduate, University of Huddersfield; Gray Davies, psychic and medium; and a private detective.

The findings, as well as other cartographic, literary and photographic research was shared with the playwright, Louis Viljoen, who was

**ROOTS** by James Webb, research photographs in Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 2017

What if these trees could witness things? What would we hear if we could understand the language of trees? What would they tell us? James Webb's residency gives voice to the trees at YSP, and invites us to listen to their fragmented, arboreal stories.

then asked to write a script for performers to voice in a whisper. Part alternative history, part science fiction, and even part psychoanalysis of the West Bretton landscape, the sounds of these words are broadcast from audio speakers hidden in the trees.

I want to populate the landscape with arboreal voices, speaking of the past, present and future, creating a phantasmagoria of dreams and histories which create a sense of the Park speaking its thoughts, talking in its sleep, bubbling over with psychodynamic potential.



**BRANCHES** by James Webb, research photographs in the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 2017



*Paul Kingsnorth* responds to a new feature film conceived and produced by Common Ground

## ELYSIUM FIELDS

What if magic is real? What if the power of place speaks through the human forms that walk its surface? What if the truth is in the soil? These are the questions that *Arcadia* invites us to ask. No questions are less fashionable, or more dangerous, in the age of the Machine. Like the land itself, *Arcadia* provides no answers that can be comfortably categorised. Like this island, it is a multiplicity.

Children play in streets empty of cars. A community holds hands in a ring around a church. Naturists dance in the meadows, ridiculous and free. Wide eyes smile in black and white. A strange beast shimmies away from the camera. Men are dressed as walruses, sheep; a transformation is affected that for a second becomes real. There is a strange dreamlike quality to this lost Elysium. Dream and reality here are one; really, they were never anything else. This is folk magic. It is the summoning of a world we have lost.

*What is this land?*

This is our land of lost content.

What if we are the breath of the land? What if a place creates a people, and not the other way around? If we believe that to be true, we had better start paying attention to the songs we once sang, the stories we once told, the dances we once performed around the elms and through the closes.

*This is England.*

*There is nowhere else like it on Earth.*

*Arcadia* is like a bucket of cold water to the face. Wake up! it shouts. Wake up! Look! This world you see on screen; it is alien, and yet it brings a shiver of recognition. What is that in the trees?

**ARCADIA POSTER** by Stanley Donwood, March 2018

The poster for the film *Arcadia* is based on Stanley Donwood's *Vale of the White Horse*, an image created in response to the many train journeys he made between Oxford and Bristol, during which he would pass the prehistoric Uffington horse cut into the chalk downland of Wiltshire, surrounded by ancient and modern field systems. In addition to the film poster, Stanley has created a limited run of prints on Somerset satin paper.

What do I see from the corner of my eye? I have been here before.

Here is aboriginal Britain. You thought it was gone beneath a deluge of motorways and malls and screens and engines and scurrying human feet. Much of it is. But what remains? What remains, and what will you do with it?

*A land of a great magic. A land of great mystery.*

The island known as Great Britain is both of these things; less so than ever, but still, if you know where to look and know who to talk to, you can hear the old songs still sung. It is

“There is a strange dreamlike quality to this lost Elysium. Dream and reality here are one.”

not always humans who sing them. All lands, all places across this wide Earth, are home to magic and mystery. The complex of human relationships which spring from those lands, the clots of shared behaviour which we call ‘cultures’, are distinct from each other because the places whose stories they tell are distinct also. A mountain people tells different stories from a people of the plains.

Britain no longer has a culture. Instead, it has a civilisation, and magic is anathema to civilisation. Civilisations suppress magic, and mystery, and beauty, and wonder. They overlay these rough superstitions with a patina of money and reason and progress, ringed around with border guards of scorn and dismissal. Civilisations are the enemies of real places. But magic will not be rooted out. Hidden, perhaps, around the edges of

the fields; but never grubbed up.

Listen, watch, and you will see that the place, the landscape, is the star of this film. There is little human speech, and the human bodies that play across the screen are like fireflies in a forest at night. They are part of the scene, they light it up, they distract the eye, cause a few intakes of breath, but they are incidental in the end. The great, brooding presence of the trees is what frames the picture. The darkness around the edges, inviting and fearful.

*What is this land?*

There are spirits in every well, and each is subtly different from the other. Places do not take kindly to being homogenised. They don't like being talked over. They like the people who sit by them and pay attention. When you pay attention, what do you notice? Do you feel the land breathing you in, then out again? What if you are the breath of the place? What if these dances, these songs, these rituals and ceremonies are a sensory image of the personality of the part of the Earth that manifests them? A folk map of Britain would show us the speech pattern of each river, the face of every field and spinney, the curve of every hill painted pewter by the moon.

*We need a new humility and a reverence.*

What happened to our *Arcadia*? We stopped listening to it. We stopped dancing, we moved away, we started listening to the chant of the Machine instead. It is debt we chase now, not the moon. We are individuals, not parts in a wider whole. In a broken time, it is taboo to remember what was lost, and that fact alone makes *Arcadia* a revolutionary document. Look, it says. This is how it was. This is what was broken. At night, when you lie awake with your phone flashing under your pillow – do you miss it?



**ARCADIA** is a provocative and poetic film about our contradictory relationship with the land. Supported by the BFI, BBC and Creative Scotland, the BAFTA-winning director Paul Wright scoured 100 years of footage from the BFI National Archive and set it to an expressive original score by Adrian Utley (Portishead) and Will Gregory (Goldfrapp). *Arcadia* will be in cinemas from June 2018 and be screened on the BBC later in the year. Live screening events are planned throughout the year. The film is also available for community screenings and events. Common Ground's first feature film will form part of a wider campaign to explore archive and landscape history.



*Stanley Donwood* is an artist and illustrator best known for his Glastonbury festival posters, book projects and collaborations with Radiohead, having created all of their album and poster art since 1994.

*Paul Kingsnorth* is an environmentalist and writer of novels, poetry and non-fiction whose recent books include *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist*, *The Wake and the Beast*. He was deputy editor of *The Ecologist* and a co-founder of the Dark Mountain Project. He lives in the west of Ireland.



Rachel Massey finds alternative ways to walk through woodlands

## WOODLAND WALKING

Walking in woodlands is the best way I know to 'get back to myself' when I've been whirled up in the usual maelstrom of life and work. Every footstep connects me back to previous walks, from childhood family walks on a Sunday afternoon, through longer hikes as a teenager, and wild camping trips ever after. All these walks connect me back to the truths of life; the world really does keep on turning. The seasons cycle on and the trees bear witness. It really is reassuring to fall into step with a world that knows exactly what it should be doing, whether that's squirrels hiding stashes of nuts in the autumn, stoats in their winter coats in the snowy winter or birds staking out territories in the spring.

The birdsong has come as a relief this year after a long winter, but being indoors has allowed me to dig deep into research about why walking amongst trees is good for you – scientific studies about chemicals released by trees that when inhaled boost our immune systems; folklore and stories about magic and healing trees; fieldcraft; bushcraft and tracking which included spending the night alone in a wood under a tarp.

Over the years I've joined nature groups, read books, filled journals and sketchbooks and trained as a meditation instructor, all to help me understand how woodlands are good for us. In the end, I'm happy to report that while all of this helps me get closer to nature in different ways, it still comes back to some undefinable magic – it just makes me *feel* good.

I use this knowledge as best I can to create experiences for other people. My Other Ways to Walk project takes people on different guided walks, and twice a year a small group of us gather in the woods for meditation. We've been joined by bats, noisy roosting jackdaws and a mink, so we never know who might turn up to the party. It can be quite a culture shock going back into the world of cars and buildings – but it recharges the batteries enough to keep us going until the next day in the woods.

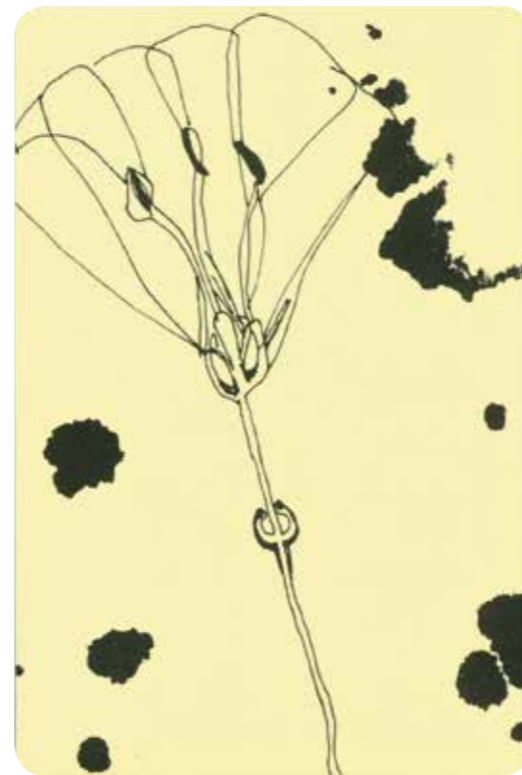
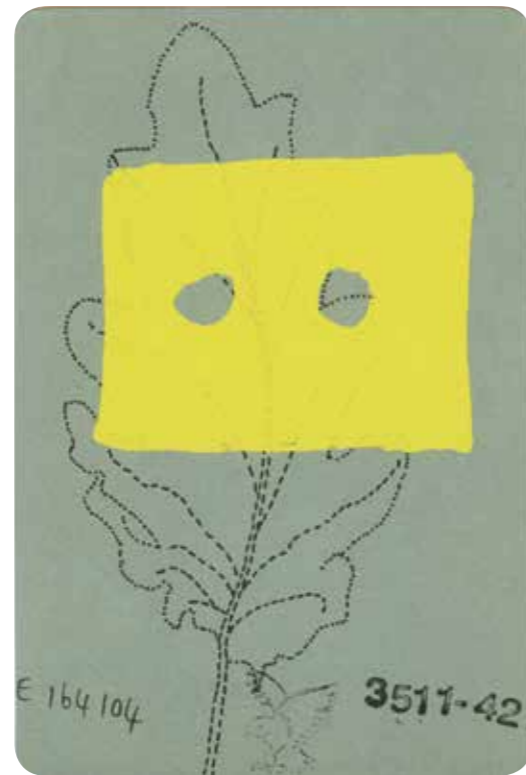
### Other Ways to Walk at YSP

Join Rachel on 8 May or July 28 to discover the West Bretton landscape afresh. A guided walk with a difference: forest immersion and natural navigation. For more information and booking: [ysp.org.uk/commonground](http://ysp.org.uk/commonground)

When was the last time you enjoyed crabbing the parson? Have you ever tried fork apple, worlsing, dookin for apples, griggling, souling, pothering and ponking?

## APPLE GAMES

Everyone knows that an apple a day keeps the doctor away, and you may associate apple bobbing with Hallowe'en. But there are hundreds of other wonderful apple games to discover. Not only are they fun but they also show us that the simple apple has been the most popular and commonplace fruit for hundreds of years and that our relationship with it is profound. Here are some to enjoy on Apple Day or all year round!



### OTHER WAYS TO WALK IN WOODLAND by Rachel Massey, 2017

Forest bathing (or *shinrin-yoku*) was an idea developed by government officials at the Forest Agency of Japan. They wanted to encourage healthier lifestyles amongst the population, so they designated forests around the country. It is now a cornerstone of preventive healthcare in Japan. For escape, solitude, fitness, slowness, happiness or fresh air, there is no doubt being in woods is the answer to many of the world's woes. Rachel Massey's cards (above) are based on her walks with only a notebook and flask for company, and are designed to inspire you through the twists and turns of your own woodland walk.

### The Longest Peel Competition

A popular game played at many Apple Day events. The aim is to see who can make the longest peeling in the shortest time, but without it breaking.

### Apple prints

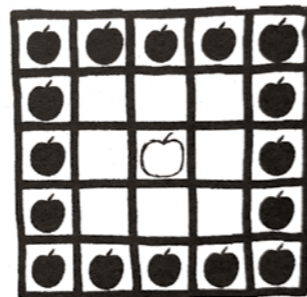
Take apples of different sizes and shapes, cut them crossways to reveal the magic star in the middle. Dip into paint or use an ink pad, print on paper to discover that each variety will leave its own special mark.

### The Apple Tree Guard and the Scrumper

For two players. The board can be drawn out on paper or made in clay or wood board. The Apple Tree Angel has one apple, placed in the middle

hole, while the Scrumper fills each hole on the edge of the board.

The Apple Tree Angel moves their apple to any adjacent space in any direction to capture the Scrumper's apples by jumping over them. But they must also make sure the Scrumper doesn't hem them in. The Scrumper's apples may only move one space and one apple per turn, and may not jump or capture. The Apple Tree Angel can win by capturing so many of the Scrumper's apples that they cannot be blocked by them. The Scrumper wins if their apples manage to block the Apple Tree Angel from moving.



Martin Maudsley, Common Ground's storyteller-in-residence, is inspired by tales of trees and woods

### SEASONAL SCHOOLS, Hooke Park, Dorset, 2016, photography by Graham Shackleton

Martin telling stories in the woods during Common Ground's Seasonal School project, which explores how seasonal change and celebration can inspire and enrich the curriculum learning experiences of children.

## THE STORY TREE

Twelve years ago, when I was first cutting my teeth as a storyteller, I regularly helped with an adventure play scheme in the countryside near Bath. Our rucksacks filled with provisions, we'd set out, like hobbits leaving the Shire, rambling across the wooded valleys. On one occasion, at the edge of a neglected wood, we came across an old ash tree that had fallen into the field, uprooted by a violent storm.

*'The very language we use to understand ourselves is suffused with tree metaphors'*

With several of its limbs now wedged against the ground, the tree was more accessible for the children and they could climb and perch on the horizontal trunk, like rows of chirpy sparrows. As we basked in its boughs, the tree became a natural habitat for storytelling – at first by myself but eventually by the children themselves, each revelling in the magic of the moment.

Over the course of a few more trips this particular ash became 'the story tree'. Every time we passed its familiar shape we would stop and climb into its branches for another story, the tally of told tales accruing over time like growth rings in the trunk of the old tree. After a while, I began to notice that the stories were often about trees: our story tree was becoming both the context and content for our storytelling.

The very language we use to understand ourselves is suffused with tree metaphors. We

take root, branch out, go out on a limb, we bear fruit. The Anglo-Saxon word 'trew' was originally used to denote both 'tree' and 'true': trees as pillars of truth, truth with the strength and longevity of a tree. In Ireland, there was once a written alphabet of runes (the Ogham) with each character based on a different native tree species. Celtic culture in Britain also venerated trees, and left a legacy of spirituality and symbolism that still survives today in tree folklore. In old Norse mythology, deeply permeated into British landscape and literature, Yggdrasil (the World Tree) was the dwelling place of the gods, while the land of the dead clung to its deep, dark roots. J. R. R. Tolkien famously drew on these northern European myths when he created the 'Ents' of Middle Earth – a fabulous (but somehow easily believable) fusion between treekind and mankind, oaks and willows that walk and talk like us. Even now, coming across a gnarled and knobby tree deep in the woods, it is easy to imagine 'Treebeard' stirring to life amongst the leaves.

When we walk into a woodland we open a door into a world of stories, a place of myth and mystery. Here we can leave the orderliness of our lives and step into treetime. From my own experiences as a storyteller, something magical happens while telling tales amongst the trees. The atmosphere of the woods feeds the creativity of the storyteller and the listeners are able to let their own imaginations merge with the sensory richness of the setting. Often the living, breathing forest itself takes part in the storytelling: a crow caws loudly above; a leaf drifts down slowly in front of us; a twig snaps from somewhere else in the forest. Serendipitous moments that are woven into the thread of narrative, summoned into being by the story itself.

Yorkshire Sculpture Park  
STORYTELLING WORKSHOP  
with Martin Maudsley

## TREE TALES

"Stick Stories"

START BY FINDING A STICK

Not just any old stick but a stick that you like and that likes you. It's a good way to explore the immediate environment – in parks, woods or gardens – and also to tune into playful instincts and intuitions. Like us, every stick is unique. And it's always interesting to discover what sticks are chosen, and why. We can use these sticks to help make and tell stories, and storytelling is somehow easier with a stick in your hand.

Each individual stick's characteristics of shape, size and texture offer possibilities to play with our imaginations. One by one going round the group, or else talking in partners, come up with ingenious ideas for what the stick could be (apart from a stick, that is). Perhaps start with the phrase "This is not a stick, it's a..."

staff for a wizard  
magical sword, lost long ago  
piece of a bridge where a troll lives

Sometimes the descriptions naturally lead onto full-scale improvised stories based around that initial idea. Other times it's fun to just keep it short and snappy – like a stick!

### Tree Tales Workshop, YSP

Join Martin at YSP on May 5 or 22 August to celebrate trees with a series of storytelling sessions for the family. Drop in and hear stories told in the open air or book to join a special story-walk amongst nature's sculptural giants at YSP. For more information and booking: [ysp.org.uk/commonground](http://ysp.org.uk/commonground)

Martin Maudsley is an ecologist, writer and storyteller based in Bridport, Dorset. Since 2016, he has been Common Ground's storyteller-in-residence and project lead for the Seasonal Schools campaign: [commonground.org.uk/seasonal-schools](http://commonground.org.uk/seasonal-schools)





MAY

MAY DAY  
1 MAY

COMMON GROUND SHOW OPENS!  
5 MAY

DAWN CHORUS  
5 May at 7am  
Join RSPB experts on an early morning walk of YSP identifying the local songbirds

TREE TALES  
5 May  
10.30am & 2.30pm  
Join Common Ground's storyteller-in-residence a day of arboreal stories at YSP

BEAT THE BOUNDS  
7 - 9 MAY  
Ancient custom celebrating the boundary marks of a parish and blessing the land with wands!

YSP FAMILY SCULPTURE WALK  
13 May  
11am - 1pm  
2pm - 4pm  
Celebrate the beauty of spring with a family art walk in the park and woods



TREES, WOODS & COMMON GROUND  
THE GREEN MAN  
IMAGE BY BEN NICHOLSON



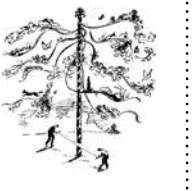
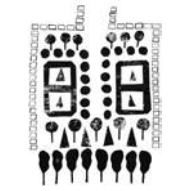
# An ALMANAC

for COMMON GROUND  
at The Yorkshire Sculpture Park 2018

For further information and booking:  
[yvsp.org.uk/commonground](http://yvsp.org.uk/commonground)



WHIT SUN  
20 MAY



TWILIGHT LAKE WALK  
18 May 7.30pm  
Join a walk around the YSP's lakes and discover its follies by candlelight



NIGHTFALL IN THE WOODS  
18 May  
8pm - 11pm  
Enjoy twilight in the woods with Rachel Massey, YSP well-being and walker-in-residence



FRUIT TREE PRUNING  
22 June 11am  
Join YSP's Head Gardener for summer pruning tips at the park

SUMMER SOLSTICE  
21 June

UNDERNEATH THE STARS FESTIVAL  
22 - 24 July  
A new family festival of music and arts  
Connon Hall Farm, West Yorkshire

JUNE

ART & SOCIAL  
28 July  
Tree identification walk through the YSP grounds for over 55s

OAK APPLE DAY  
29 MAY

BOTANICALS  
20 May 10am  
Join Medical Herbalist Sue Salmon gathering, drawing and learning about the medicinal properties of plants



ROOM TO BREATHE  
23 June  
9.30am-4.30pm  
Summer walk around the YSP grounds led by GP Andrew Wilson and Chris Powell



MIDSUMMER DAY  
24 June

ART & SOCIAL  
28 June 2pm  
An afternoon for over 55s exploring the Common Ground and Penone exhibitions at YSP

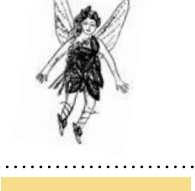
JULY

GRAIN & KNOT  
7 July 10am - 4pm  
One-day workshop at YSP introducing wood carving using sycamore wood and hand tools

COME RAIN COME SHINE  
17 July - 5 September  
Every Tuesday during the school holidays, visit YSP to build sculptures inspired by artists in the park

ORCHARD MENTORS  
16 July  
West Yorkshire's Orchard Project mentors visit YSP to give advice on apples & community orchards

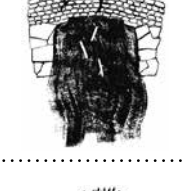
FOREST FRIDAYS  
27 July  
Half-day family workshops in 'balance beam sculpture' at YSP



FOR EVENT BOOKINGS VISIT:  
[yvsp.org.uk/commonground](http://yvsp.org.uk/commonground)



ART & SOCIAL  
28 July  
Over 55s canopy drawing workshop below the trees of YSP



ARCADIA FILM SCREENING  
4 August 8pm  
Common Ground's new feature film is a visceral journey exploring the beauty and brutality of our relationship with the land

HIDDEN FOREST  
4 - 31 August  
11am - 4pm  
Every Saturday throughout August come and enjoy the magic beneath the YSP trees

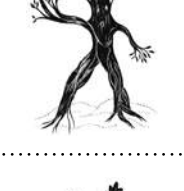
FOREST FRIDAYS  
3 August  
Full day family bushcraft workshops at YSP

AUG

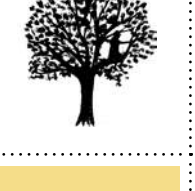
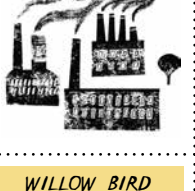
MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME  
29 July - 4 Sept  
11am - 3.30pm  
Make, draw, construct and explore ideas inspired by Common Ground and Penone exhibitions at YSP

OTHER WAYS TO WALK  
28 July 11am  
A meditative walk in the woods with Rachel Massey, YSP well-being and walker-in-residence

PENONE'S WRITINGS  
28 July 11am  
Poetry walk inspired by Giuseppe Penone's writing on trees and forests and our relationship to them



TIMBER  
6 - 9 August  
International forest and arts festival  
The National Forest Feanock, Derbyshire



WHISPERING WOODS THEATRE  
15 September  
6pm & 8pm  
Immersive acrobatics, spoken word, music and storytelling in the woods at YSP

HARVEST MOON  
16 September



DRAWING FROM NATURE  
10 August  
Canopy drawing workshops under the trees at YSP

FOREST FRIDAYS  
17 August  
Half-day family workshops exploring and making woodland tools at YSP

TREE TALES  
22 August  
10.30am, 12pm & 2.30pm  
Join Common Ground's storyteller-in-residence a day of arboreal stories at YSP

WILLOW BIRD FEEDERS & NESTS  
24 August  
10am & 1.30pm  
Weave bird feeders and nests from willow to take home and put in your garden

ART & SOCIAL  
31 August 2pm  
Storytelling for over 55s canopy drawing workshop in around the YSP grounds

SEP

ORCHARD MENTORS  
1 September  
West Yorkshire's Orchard Project mentors visit YSP to give advice on apples & community orchards



DONATE

Common Ground is a catalyst for change, not a pressure group or membership organisation. As a small charity, we fundraise independently to run campaigns and commission work, but rely on donations so we can research new projects and cover daily running costs. If you have enjoyed the YSP show and this newspaper, or find our work inspiring, please visit [commonground.org.uk](http://commonground.org.uk) where you can support current and future work by making a donation or purchasing something from our online shop.

COMMON GROUND