

EXPLORING & CELEBRATING THE UNIQUE NATURAL & BUILT ENVIRONMENT OF THE ISLE OF PORTLAND, DORSET

THIS LAND

EDITION 02 FEB 2023

FREE



**THE LAST
LANDSCAPE**

**LOST IN THE
ARCHIVE**

**MEET OUR
ARTISTS**

Photo: Calum Kirkland

Welcome to our second edition

This Land is a project taking a closer look at the Portland environment and what makes the island such a special place. The project aims to gather and share knowledge to help protect and enhance the environment and character of Portland. We are focusing on two fragile and unique heritage sites – the last remaining area of original Portland landscape at Portland Bill and the ruins of a Tudor cottage on the seafront at Chiswell.

Our investigations into the history of Brandy Row continue and we are gradually piecing together the story of these seafront cottages and the people that lived in them. There is still much to do though, and anyone interested in joining us is very welcome. Equally if you have connections to that area or memories of Brandy Row and in particular the cottage known as 'Entry', please do get in touch.

If flora and fauna is more your thing, we have now started researching our second study site – the area of landscape between Southwell and the Bill. Much of this will focus on the biodiversity of the area but like Brandy Row we are keen to hear from people with memories of living or working in the landscape at the Bill.

In both places we are asking the question what could or should happen with these fragile and threatened sites. By mapping the past and present we can help inform the future. Raising the question what would we like to see, and how can we work together to achieve that.

Check the back page for how to get involved.

Call or email
Project Director, Amanda Wallwork
07816 224015 / amanda@b-side.org.uk or
Community Project Coordinator, Catherine Bennett
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St Andrews 1790 by Samuel Hieronymus Grimm

ST ANDREWS RUINS UPDATE

From the Portland Buildings Preservation Trust in partnership with Historic England, Portland Museum and the Pennsylvania Castle Estate the Portland Buildings Preservation Trust have been working on raising awareness and knowledge of the St Andrew ruins and wider area of Church Ope Cove. This has resulted in a new tourist information leaflet with updated information on the area, including trails which take people to the various areas of interest. One point identified was how overgrown the ruins of St Andrews had become which was causing issues with access and causing damage to the site.

Following advice from Natural England, Historic England have been able to access funding to clear the site and carry out some repairs, these works are scheduled to be completed in 2023 with the hope that a management plan can be put in place so the site can remain accessible for all to enjoy.

LOST IN THE ARCHIVES



Brandy Row archive

Using archives is an important part of the project research and training. Our researchers have visited Dorset History Centre to discover their collections and learn how archives work. We have also visited Portland's own archive centre – the family and local history centre at St Georges Centre in Reforne - entrance round the back if you've ever tried to find it and failed!

Project Research Facilitator Jeanie Sinclair describes the importance of archives.

Archives play an important role in safeguarding our past, collecting and preserving records for future generations. Far from being just a collection of dusty old documents, archives look after histories that might otherwise be lost, and can be relevant to issues today, as our project has discovered. The word 'archive' first begins to appear in English in the early 16th century. It derives from the Latin archium or archivum and comes originally from the Greek (arkheion) which refers to the house of the Archon, where state documents were kept. Modern European state archives were established in the early part of the nineteenth century. By controlling the nation's past, a state can control the narrative of its history.

They can be difficult to access, with complex rules on how to visit and look at collections. With their sometimes mysterious rules and requirements, it is easy to get lost. Archives can seem confusing and overwhelming to researchers just starting out on their searches.

Archival silence

The archive is often a function of the state, recording narratives of its own power. National archives provide an official version of history. What is absent from the archive also tells a tale; the voices of the poor, the marginalised; voices of dissent, the ordinary. This is an archival silence: when voices of women, people of colour, LGBTQ+ people, the poor and less educated, and people with disabilities are missing from the archive. Those voices are hard to find, and often lost to historians.

Online research

Archives of state records like ancestry.com and findmypast.com make finding and accessing historic data incredibly easy, and with a little knowledge, can be powerful tools for research. They allow researchers to find anything from census details dating back over 150 years, to military or prison records, parish registers and births marriages and deaths. The National Archives website is also really useful, and can direct users towards smaller, regional archives, or collections about a specific topic.

Digital archive silence

Many archives now have digital catalogues, which are searchable and list items that are in their collections, and some even have entire collections digitised and available to view online. This is great for researchers who may be unable to travel, and it makes finding things much easier. However, there is a risk that researchers can assume that if they can't find something online it doesn't exist. As more and more collections begin to be digitised this leads to the expectation that everything exists online. Archives, particularly smaller organisations, are not well-funded, and many don't have the money to produce an expensive online catalogue – another way that histories can get lost.

Cataloguing errors

Archives aren't perfect, and things can get lost, not through lack of care but through mistakes in cataloguing. Created by humans, they are subject to human error. Documents can be filed wrongly, names can be mistyped, or items can be catalogued with mistakes. For example, until the twentieth century, the census was recorded by a census-taker, who visited each house and was responsible for writing down people's names. Often leading to, names misspelt, or nicknames used, or the handwriting might be illegible. Census records are digitised using OCR, or optical character recognition, which means that handwritten documents are read by machine. This method isn't perfect, so names are sometimes digitised wrongly.

An imperfect archive requires an imperfect approach to finding what you might be looking for. Sometimes you need to do a bit of creative searching, as only trial and error different spellings or names will find what you are looking for. The way that something is catalogued can mean that an item doesn't sound like something useful, but on closer inspection, is exactly the thing you are searching for. Again, there is a risk of stories being lost if researchers are not persistent.

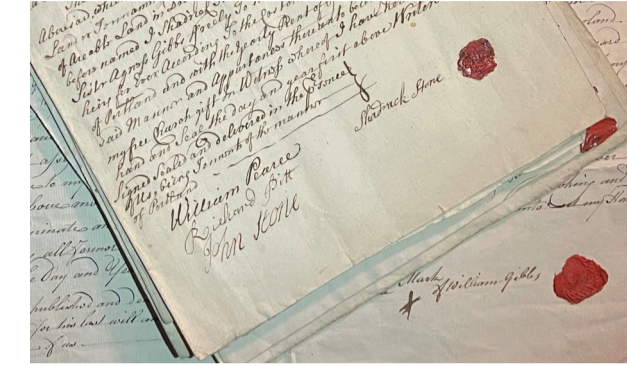
A recent example of this is the notebook referred to as John Way's diary we featured in the previous issue. This was in fact catalogued as William Pearce's Collecting Book. This was entirely correct, as John Way's name isn't on the document at all, and it was only by taking a chance and viewing it that we could discover John Way's notes inside. It had been catalogued correctly, but that lack of local knowledge meant that the notebook had effectively been lost.

It is the possibility for chance discoveries that makes searching the archives so exciting. Thinking about what might be lost in the archives is another way of telling stories, and making sure that they are not lost, but kept for future generations. For This Land, our researchers are working hard to uncover lost stories that reveal the importance of our two sites, at Brandy Row and Portland Bill, that are themselves at risk of being lost.

Some such stories may be waiting to be uncovered in two recent incidents of 'lost' archives ...

RESCUING LOST ARCHIVES

Portland Museum has recently acquired a fascinating old book, donated by a visitor who had been brought up on Portland and was keen to see it return to its island home. He had been offered the book by a bookseller in Puddletown who knew of his connection to the island. The book seller having obtained the book from a house clearance. Titled **'John B Scriven. Memorandum Book, commencing since the 1 January 1827'** the volume has yet to be transcribed but appears to contain handwritten agreements, wills and other notes on a number of transactions including the memorandum from a meeting held to "suggest the best method for discovering the author" of a threatening letter to Governor Penn "it was unanimously resolved that the parish should offer a reward of 100 pounds to be paid to any persons who may give such information as shall apprehend and convict the offender."



IN PRAISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Grahame Knott

Love or hate social media there are one or two things it does really well, platforms such as Facebook have some great community and local history groups, more often than not they are supported by one or two highly knowledgeable folks that make up the backbone of the group. History is my passion mainly in the form of social and industrial with a heavy maritime list (forgive the pun) I am lucky to live on Portland where you can taste the history in the air and having spent many years diving and researching shipwrecks all around the Island and beyond, retirement from the sea means my history interests are now partly based on land lubber territory.

While browsing some Facebook history groups, I came across the Maiden Newton Community Museum Trust, this caught my attention as I lived there as a child and reading through some of the posts, I realised I had some

So before you rush to declutter, call in house clearance or throw out old books and papers check for diaries and documents that might contain significant or lost stories.

LOCAL ARCHIVES

What should I do if I have any old books or documents that could be of interest?

Portland Museum welcome people to bring in items of interest. However, like the Local & Family History Centre, following an initial assessment they may advise that it is passed on to the Dorset History Centre where there are better environmental conditions should they be necessary for preservation of the document. Opening times and more information at www.portlandmuseum.co.uk

ART AS RESEARCH

Stephen Yates

Inspired by B-side's 'This Land' project focus on Brandy Row, Chiswell, Stephen has created individual works using textures extracted directly from the walls of the remaining buildings, as well as a community installation in ceramics during the 2022 B-side festival fringe. This work has been influenced by local stories of the power of sea level rise, storms, flooding and shipwrecks.

Ever since escaping as a young teen on club trips to the sea or camping with the Scouts in the karst limestone scenery of the Yorkshire dales and moors of the West

Portland Local & Family History Centre are always pleased to receive any photos, family trees, stories, anecdotes or anything interesting relating to Portland. It doesn't have to be old to add to their archive. If a document needs specialist preservation they will recommend it goes to Dorset History Centre. Based at St Georges Centre, Reforne the Family History was set up to aid research and provide a large archive of original and facsimile documents and photographs, books, leaflets, newspaper articles and family histories. Open Monday and Thursday mornings 10.30 to 12.30 or by appointment. **Contact portlandheritage@gmail.com**

Riding, Stephen has spent a lifetime either working or teaching with clay. Now at 70, Stephen loves to work with a mixture of local clay he found just along the West Cliff here on Portland during lockdown, mixed with black clay. His semi-abstract work blends this local clay with beach material, sand, pebbles and Portland stone fragments.

"Life on Portland has been influenced by the weather for as long as it has existed, and this community has been depleted by the sea and curiously lies fragile against rising sea levels and future global warming. These factors led me to investigate and research further into the whole Brandy Row area and joined the team at B-side to learn and listen. Our relationship with Clay is the same as our relationship with the Earth. I wanted to create a sense of capturing the fragile nature of this community

items of interest in the form of programmes for the long gone Maiden Newton Fancy Fair. I hate things just left in draws to rot and contacted the group offering to donate the items to anyone interested. Straight away one of the key group members said yes please and I was in the car on my way to the village. I found myself at my old junior school which is now a house but was still very recognisable from when I was last there in nineteen sixty five!

While I was getting over the weirdness of drinking tea in my old classroom, conversation turned to Portland and out of the blue my new found friend suddenly remembered that in one of her draws never to be opened she had some documents relating to Portland, "they are yours if you want them". What I found myself looking at took my breath away, a whole pile of documents dating from the mid 17th century to the early 20th! Comprising of last will and testaments, property deeds and other legal documents plus a whole pile of receipts relating to persons and businesses long gone. Although many family names are mentioned the Gibbs family, Pearce family, the Combens and the Stones seem to be the constant link and my guess is this collection of documents was in the possession of the Gibbs. My feeling is they were probably part of a house clearance from many years ago, no one is entirely sure.

I am now slowly plodding my way through hoping that I may come across something that refers to my house in Brandy Row or my family the Robinsons, Portland shoemakers in the 19th century. Although beautifully written they are hard to read without the aid of a magnifying glass or photographing and enlarging on the computer. For sure these documents are a serious piece of Portland social history and after consultation with all interested folks and families concerned, I would imagine somewhere like The Dorset History Centre is where they belong. So there we are a big thumbs up for Facebook and the best social media has to offer, instant access to history!

Dorset History Centre in Dorchester houses Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole's archives - from council records to personal collections. As a specialist archival centre they are able to keep records in environmentally controlled conditions. They collect, preserve and make documents available to view; including paper, parchment and printed documents as well as audio-visual material and digital records. They can also carry out conservation work on documents and can provide copies and high quality prints of documents. They hold a number of diaries, maps and other documents relating to Portland. Info at www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/libraries-history-culture/dorset-history-centre

and involve them in creating an installation too. During the B-side festival last year, I was a fringe artist and created an opportunity for the local community to come and make land tell more stories."



THE LAST LANDSCAPE

It's difficult to imagine how Portland must have looked before so much of its landscape was drastically altered by quarrying – the industry that defines the island today. What was this Island like before this massive land remodeling and removal operation began in earnest?

The drawings of Samuel Grimm in 1790 and descriptions by visitors such as Leland in 1542 give us some idea, all describe a treeless, open grassland of grazing sheep and villagers thriving on growing crops and fishing, managing to supply all their own needs. Initially Portland was quarried from the edges, but the combination of advancing mechanisation and increased demand accelerated the pace, and with land for stone more profitable than farming, encroached rapidly inland. By the late 1800s so much of the land surface had been removed that farming became unsustainable and quarrying took over.

Over time most of the island has now been impacted by quarrying, with existing mineral extraction permissions dictating the fate of much that is left. However, there is one small part of Portland that has so far escaped and where this original landscape remains, here are open common lands and the still visible traces of medieval strip farming. A haven for wildlife, still retaining limestone and maritime grasslands and rare species such as Portland Sea Lavender. A layering of directives and conservation designations seemingly protect parts but even these are under pressure from demands and changes in how we use this land.

This area now faces new challenges – pressure on the land from increased visitor numbers and commercial development challenges the effectiveness of existing protections and raises understandable questions on priorities of protection. Uncomfortably people are becoming concerned and want to know – who decides?

This landscape means many different things to different people. A place to walk, play, work, live and visit. As a green space it is valuable both to people and to nature. Both land use and land management systems have varied impacts over time and what's good for some isn't so good for others. **Here we take a look at what's good for birds ...**



Photo: Dorset County Museum Archive

Bird Lands



Photo credit: Stuart Morris

When bird-watching really became popular at The Bill area in the 1950s with not just local enthusiasts, but also bird-watchers from far and wide, they came into an agricultural landscape. One that was varied and interesting and perfect for biodiversity. There was a large variety of native birds, mammals, insects and arachnids. Generally, arable crops were grown by local farmers, but the prison farm grew crops for their own consumption, such as root vegetables and cabbages. All this variety was good for both flora and fauna. It was great for 'weeds of arable cultivation' such as Shepherd's Needle and this variety was good in turn for native species of birds.

Changes to the landscape

However, this type of more old-fashioned small scale mixed farming came to an end in the early 1990s. The Bill farmer Eric Harden and the prison farm both stopped growing crops, with Eric going over to dairy cows. This led to a period where there was little crop growing and an increase in grazing which changed things dramatically and quickly. Bad news from a bird point of view and Corn Buntings and Yellowhammers both disappeared from The Bill area due to these changes. Corn Buntings nest on the ground and producing hay and silage for the cattle caused the nests to be chopped and the buntings driven off. Yellowhammers met a similar fate as there was no spent grain on the ground to feed on. This is, of course a national picture, but The Bill area is a perfect microcosm of how these things happen and why. Small changes that don't appear to impact us will trigger major changes to an ecosystem that supports many different species.

New opportunities

As the area increasingly shifted to grazing, Portland Bird Observatory Trustees talked about renting land to try and reverse some of the changes for the benefit of bird species. This became a reality thanks to generous benefactors and in 1999 they were able to rent 3 acres of land. In 2004, they obtained the freehold of 3 large fields, which amounted to 8 acres. Kevin Symes, who had a tractor and all the gear was employed as a contractor to plough and plant grain crops in the newly acquired fields. These were all sacrificial crops for the birds, so there would definitely be spent grain on the ground for farmland birds. In 2005, the 16 acre field opposite the bird observatory was leased from Crown estate. At this point, it was too much land to manage for someone in their spare

time, so a tractor was bought, and the land was managed by regular bird-watchers with the necessary skills.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Six years ago, the Bird Observatory entered a new phase as they became classed as farmers and able to benefit from the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. They had managed to buy the 16 acres from the Crown Estate, a few more strip fields and what is referred to the Quarry Field next to the bird observatory. The scheme is very prescriptive in its management criteria but aligns perfectly with the diversification of crops that suits the bird observatory aim to make the landscape more attractive and amenable to birds. The scheme covers the costs of farming such as seed and diesel. They are now into their second 5-year stewardship scheme with the funding continuing unchanged, for now, post Brexit.

Limestone grassland

This continued stewardship scheme support allows them to dedicate the quarry field and two strip fields as managed limestone grasslands. Encouraging the varied grasses and multiple flora of these valuable habitats. This management practice is in essence very simple. The fields are cut and any cuttings taken away to deplete the fertility of the ground. Fertile ground encourages rank grasses to take over, reducing the variety of flora which, of course, reduce the variety of fauna – so less mammals, birds and insects. Avoiding fertilisation of the land from sprayed fertilizers, dung or introduction of undesirable species from the dung of grazing animals is essential.

Last on the list....

There are a lot of demands on a small area of land: including grazing, walking, cycling, riding, climbing, tourism, residents, camping, mining and a home for wildlife. It is important that wildlife – flora and fauna are not always last on that list and Portland Bird Observatory are doing what they can as a Portland charity to make sure that happens. Variety is the spice of life and the Portland Bird Observatory are able to prove that introducing more variety back into the agricultural land of The Last Landscape is improving biodiversity and making for a much less hostile environment for nature (especially birds) in this iconic landscape.

Thanks to Catherine Bennett.

Our (once) Enchanted Landscape

Scott Irvine

Portland's landscape was once rich with earth spirits thriving in nature among the many stone circles and standing stones from the Neolithic (4,000-2,500BC) and the Bronze Age (2,500-700BC) and Iron Age burial mounds (700BC-AD43). When the Saxons settled here nearly 1,500 years ago they created field strips which only survive today around Barrow Hill and Culverwell between Southwell and Portland Bill. The strips were designed to be worked by and feed a family for a year with a little left over for the church to store and manage for emergencies. These thin strips of arable land were called lawns and separated from each other by unploughed turf known as lawns. The whole of the area around Culverwell is believed to be rich with Mesolithic artefacts. A Middle Stone Age site (12,000-4,000BC) was discovered just across the road from the bird observatory and excavated by the Portland Field Research Group formed by Susann Palmer and Bob Cooper in 1967, working part time over the next thirty years with the help of volunteers uncovering the earliest evidence of a continued occupation settlement in England. The first Portlanders if you like. Back then, the sea level was much lower than it is now with the shore about half a mile further out and Portland was still part of the mainland.

The antiquarian travel writer John Leland visited the island in 1542 during the reign of Henry VIII who gave the Portland Royal Estate to his last three wives as a wedding gift, recorded 'the isle is fruitful of corn and geese and also plenty of sheep'. Leland also noted that the islanders lived

mostly by tilling the land and fishing. Then, a person could walk all around Portland along the shore.

By 1811, Portland was a Royal Estate of George III and had a population of 2,079. A visitor to the island at that time, Mr W. Stevenson reported of an ancient custom where half the arable land was sowed with wheat, barley, oats and a few peas and ryegrass while the other half was left fallow each year. His reason for this was down to the lack of fertility of the soil, which would normally be overcome by digging in manure. Because of the lack of trees on the island for fuel other than driftwood, the dry cow dung was used to burn for heating and cooking. Stevenson noted a long-standing practice of saving urine in casks over the winter and spread over the crops in the spring. It worked well because the average produce was 18 bushels of wheat per acre compared with 17 ¾ bushels produced on the mainland.

During the Victorian Age, Portland had eight arable fields, each comprising of a large number of smaller field systems. There were also considerable areas of common grazing land, at the Bill, around the cliffs and the whole of the Verne Common. A Portland custom allowed sheep and cattle onto the arable fields to graze the stubble after the crops had been harvested.

With the increase of steam technology available at the beginning of the 19th Century, quarrying started to move inland from the cliffs and Portland's sacred landscape changed forever. Because it was a Royal Manor, the land belonged to the Crown and contracts were offered to the quarry industry. To be able to offer land for quarrying it needed to be 'parcelled' up into sections. In 1846, it was put to the inhabitants to enclose the arable and common land but most were against the idea. Those opposed to enclosures were not prepared to sacrifice their ancient grazing rights in favour of 'more efficient agriculture' that would not only increase the worth of the land but also increase the cost of their rents. Unfortunately for the Portlanders and the earth spirits, the rich and powerful got their way and by the end of the 19th Century most of Tophill was either quarries or Admiralty defence establishments. Some farms survived in

Easton, Weston, Southwell and the Grove and because of the substandard stone under Barrow Hill and Culverwell, the ancient strip fields between Southwell and Portland Bill were left intact.

With the fields on top of the island being destroyed by drills gouging out great chunks of Mother Earth making such a racket, disturbed the earth spirits that once flourished in the vegetation that some believe manifested into physical creatures taking up residency in the gaps of the stone boundary walls of Coombefield between Southwell and Wakeham. These Elfish type beings, known locally as Nanny Diments would cast an evil eye on anyone who dared to disturb them. Any unlucky soul who came across them, either purposely or accidentally would lose their sanity almost immediately. In an attempt to put off the quarrymen, they would cause the stone to collapse on them and blame it on the bunnies. Some believed smugglers made up the story of the Nanny Diments to keep away any unwanted attention when a shipment of contraband arrived in Church Ope. The old tales reveal the Nanny Diments arrived here with the Celts, conjured up by their powerful priest kings, the Druids to protect the sacred stone circles on the island while other ancient stories claim they are much older than that, coming into existence during the Neolithic period when stone was first used to build their stone temples. Either way, it was not until the late 19th Century when they turned against the islanders. These small folk are said to be anywhere between six inches and knee height to an adult in size, wore green tunics and kilts with a wide black belt and white cone shaped hats with a small feather tucked into the hat band. Many of them left the island when they heard the first toll of the bell of the newly built St. George's Church at the top of Reforne in 1766. The noise irritated them so much it drove them to leave Portland for the mainland. So, just a word of warning when walking between Southwell and Wakeham, especially after a night out at the Eight Kings, do not look over the wall into Coombefield, you just never know who or what could be lurking in the darkness waiting to cast an evil eye.



Southwell 1790 by Samuel Hieronymus Grimm

INTRODUCING THE ARTISTS

The This Land project culminates this year in four incredible artworks commissioned especially for Portland.

Over the last year our Community Researchers team have been beaver away guided by Heritage specialist Jeanie Sinclair reading archives, digging up local knowledge, sharing stories and memories of two special places on Portland – a ruined cottage in Brandy row and The Last Landscape at Portland Bill. This research has been used by the artists to inform and inspire the final artworks which will be revealed for the first time at the Festival in September. So who are the artists and what are their plans?

Get involved!

Over the next few months all these artists will be coming to Portland, visiting sites, talking to residents and gathering inspiration for their final artworks which will be showcased in Sept. There are plenty of ways you can be part of this story through taking part in workshops, sharing your stories or maybe just by asking what's going on! See back page for upcoming events and how you can get involved.



b-side festival
7-10 Sept 2023

Wildworks

Wildworks is a theatre company that doesn't work in theatres or make theatre in the traditional sense. They work in unconventional spaces together with the people who inhabit, love or hold memories of those spaces and collectively share those stories back to the community.

"Our process starts with a conversation, often with marginalised communities, who help us shape the telling of everyday human stories in ways that are familiar and re-imagined."

"Wildworks originate from Cornwall, and that remains our emotional and physical home. We continue to build on Cornwall's long history of working outdoors, and our practice is shaped by the defining features of Cornwall: a place in which artists naturally collaborate across artforms and with communities; a peninsula somewhere on the edge that looks outwards to the world, much like Portland."

Uncommon Land

For b-side Festival 2023 Wildworks will be creating a brand new piece of work – an uplifting creative celebration about Portland's unique landscape. Through workshops and play they will discover those local stories that connect the community to this Uncommon Land. Prepare to have your senses tantalised, to connect with others around you, and to experience the landscape like never before.



Wildworks: I am Kevin, Cornwall 2022. Photo Ian Kingsnorth

Anna Heinrich & Leon Palmer

Anna and Leon have worked together since the 90's and use lots of different media and techniques to create installations, interventions, large scale projection events, films and photography. They often collaborate with experts from other disciplines such as architects, engineers, programmers and fabricators.

"The focus of our research and the inspiration for the work we are making for this year's b-side festival, is a derelict Portland Stone Tudor Cottage located at the southern end of Brandy Row in Chiswell. This site, once a collection of cottages inhabited by fishermen and quarrymen, is now owned by Dorset Council, and currently used as stores. The future of the remains of the cottage is uncertain as it fights against deterioration and rising environmental concerns."

For their b-side commission Anna and Leon are interested in exploring ideas around permanence versus impermanence and memories of place, through the medium of film, sound and digital imagery. Over the coming months they will visit Portland and meet with the This Land project researchers, undertaking films and sound recordings of the site which will be used to develop a final piece for the festival.



Heinrich & Palmer: Ship of the Gods, commissioned by Absolutely Cultured, Hull 2018

Emily Tracy

Emily likes to collaborate with people and uses collage, objects and collaborative research, and inspired by museum or archive ordering systems, creates small sculptural pieces, collage and artist books. You may have met Emily at the Portland Bird Observatory at the 2022 b-side festival, and this year she returns to the Observatory with a larger scale installation entitled 'Constant Effort' to be created by many hands

Constant Effort

For 60 years The Portland Bird Observatory and its dedicated voluntary birdwatchers, have closely observed the skies and their surroundings on The Bill. This has amassed a huge and valuable set of data which is fed into national databases and used to understand what is happening to the UK Bird population and our environment. As humans we have a desire to interpret, to see patterns, to put things in boxes so that we can understand them, but often things are far more complicated.

"Constant Effort' attempts to start conversation, to explore and celebrate this data, and its means of collection, through the presentation of a visual snapshot of species sightings at ten year intervals from 1962 to 2022. We can't always see the 'wood for the trees', but this installation will attempt to visualise some of the data on Portland species, incorporating birds, moths and flora and fauna, in order to spark conversation and understanding of the rich intertwined ecology that exists in 'The Last Landscape'"



Emily Tracy: Fieldwork, Portland 2022

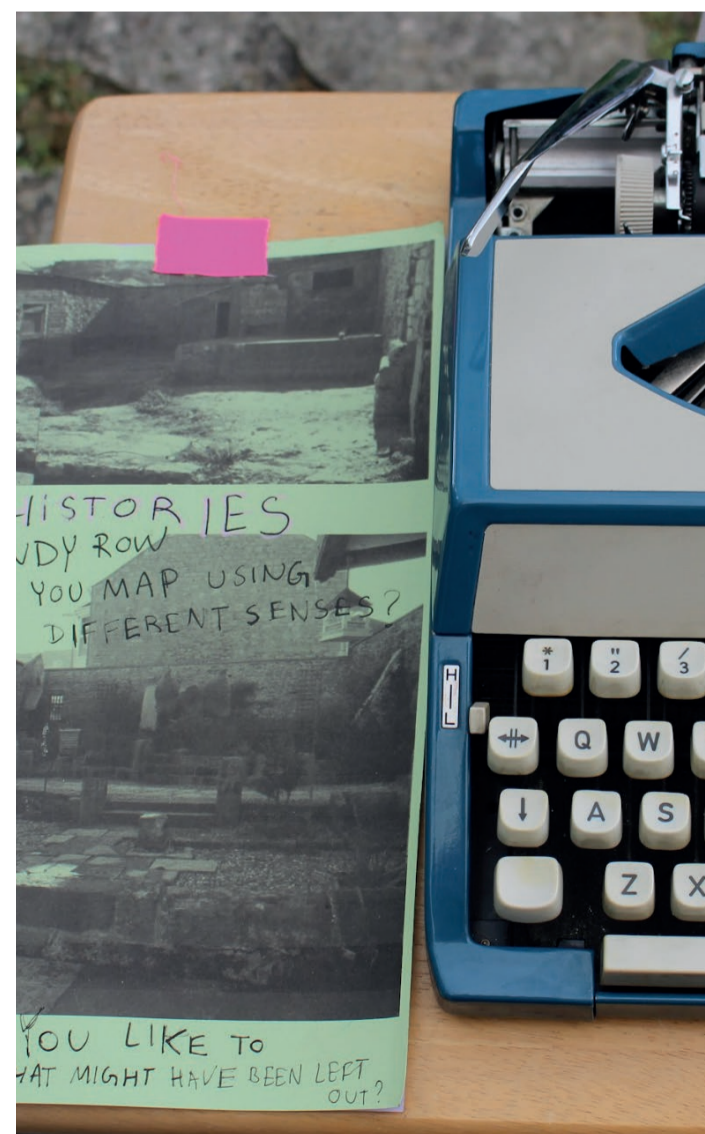
Kneed

Ishwari and Leonie have already made several visits to Portland and popped up in the Chesil Community Garden last year, perhaps you joined them for a chat or to make a cyanotype? This year Ishwari and Leonie will be producing a series of broadcasts for their temporary pop up radio station.

"We use workshops to create film, performance, text and textiles. Our approach is to meet up with people and go on walks or have conversations, either meeting people by chance or by working with groups and individuals in the communities they live in. By looking, listening, making and documenting with others, we try to shift power relations and amplify people's stories and voices."

The Weather or Not Station

'The Weather or Not Station' is a portable DIY radio station, made up of anecdotes, conversations, rumours, diary entries and poems collected over the next couple of months. The BBC shipping forecast to the non-nautical is a nightly lullaby of the sea; this station is an eccentric and poetic tale of Portland and its future. Using Entry, the site of the last Tudor cottage on Brandy Row, as a point of speculation, through technological wizardry they will create a broadcast from, and for, the future, focussing on the last Tudor cottage on Brandy Row: what will it see, feel, hear, and become?



Kneed: Portland 2022

Portland Sago

the story continues

Thanks to Steve Christmas for this update.

In our previous edition we ran a feature on Portland Sago (Arum Maculatum), the story continues in this account from volume 33 of the Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club, published in 1912.

"Until about 55 years ago, comparatively little was known of the flora of Portland" writes W. Bowles Barrett in his presentation in 1911 to the Society on Contributions to a Flora of Portland. His observations on the plants of Portland makes special mention of Arum Maculatum, (more commonly known as Lords and Ladies and the source of Portland Starch or Sago) and the landlady of The Portland Arms! He continues

"The native flora has suffered much in recent years by interference with the old Common, the construction of the Government Works on the Verne and in the Mere, the making of the Easton and Church Hope Railway through the most romantic part of the Island, and by extensive quarrying operations, especially on its south-eastern side. The efforts of the quarrymen have destroyed the beautiful Maiden-hair Fern, dozens of specimens of which, bearing fronds 4 to 5 inches long, I found, in 1877, in the crevices of a sunny Portland cliff."

"Arum maculatum abundant in open pastures ... The fresh root like the rest of the plant, is very acrid and poisonous; But it contains a large amount of nutritious starchy fecular. This starch, separated by crushing and washing, was formerly prepared for laundry work and other purposes, and at one time was much esteemed on the island of Portland as a food for sick folk. In 1797 the gold medal of the Society of Arts was awarded to Mrs Jane Gibbs of Portland for producing starch suitable for economic purposes from material unfit for the food of man."

This led us to track down the transactions of The Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce which states in 1797 ...

"During the time that wheat, from which starch is usually manufactured, was at a high price in the year 1796, the Society, in order to save as much as possible of that grain for the purpose of bread, offered a premium of THE GOLD MEDAL or THIRTY GUINEAS, for discovering a method of manufacturing starch from materials not used as food for man; on this session a claim was made for that premium by Mrs Jane Gibbs, of Portland."

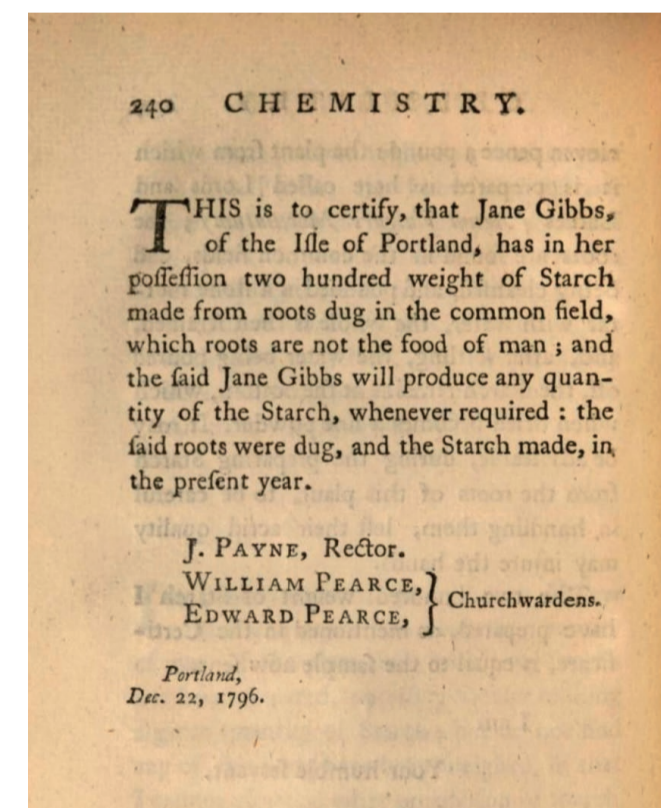


Image from 'Transactions of The Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce; With the Premiums Offered in the Year 1797' VOL XV

THIS LAND PROGRAMME

GET INVOLVED!

as a researcher or joining in with our artists, activities and events and contributing to collecting and sharing stories of This Land. Funded by Heritage Lottery, the This Land project aims to raise awareness, collect and share knowledge to protect and

enhance Portland, with a special focus on two fragile and unique natural and built heritage sites identified as at risk: the landscape at the southern tip of the island and the history of the ruined Tudor cottage at Brandy Row.

RESEARCH JOIN IN WITH THE RESEARCH - STILL TIME TO CONTRIBUTE.

FIELD MAPPING: THE LAST LANDSCAPE

Fancy doing a bit of field research? Or maybe you are already observing or recording Portland's wildlife or monitoring other aspects of the environment? We are collecting and collating information on land use and Portland's flora and fauna. Did you farm the land, do you have stories, or know myths or folklore associated with this place? We would love to hear from you. Help us map this landscape and contribute to protecting its future.

CREATE A MAP OF PORTLAND'S ACCESSIBLE LANDSCAPE.

We are looking for anyone interested in helping us explore access to Portland's landscape for those with limited mobility and contributing to creating a map of access to nature.

For all research queries please contact
amanda@b-side.org.uk or
catherine@b-side.org.uk

RECORDING ORAL HISTORIES WORKSHOP WITH JO TYLER.

Learn how to use recording equipment and conduct interviews.

Sat 18 Feb 2-4pm
Sat 25 Feb 2-4pm
Sat 4 March 2-4pm

The sessions are **FREE** but as space is limited, please be sure to book a place.

EVENTS & ACTIVITIES THERE IS LOTS TO DO - MAYBE YOU CAN HELP?

THE WEATHER OR NOT STATION

'The Weather or Not Station' made by artists KNEED: Ishwari Bhalerao and Leonie Rousham, is a portable DIY radio station, made up of anecdotes, conversations, rumours, diary entries and poems collected over the next couple of months. Through technological wizardry they will create a broadcast from, and for, the future, focussing on the last Tudor cottage on Brandy Row: what will it see, feel, hear, and become?

The station will be roaming around Portland and dropping into various venues over of 18 - 24 February, and again between 10 -13 April.

Please come, say hello and record your story!

FRI 10 & SAT 11 MARCH UNCOMMON LAND WORKSHOP

A creative exploration of the local landscape led by Wildworks core creatives. This intensive 2 day workshop is aimed at artists, theatre-makers, or people who just love to write, sing or make stuff. Anyone is welcome who has a love of being creative and would like to delve into what makes Portland so special. See website for full details.

Places limited - **BOOKING ESSENTIAL**

FRI 19 / SAT 20 / SUN 21 MAY

60 YEARS OF SIGHTINGS FROM THE PORTLAND BIRD OBSERVATORY

Willing hands needed to help create artwork for b-side '23

Work with the artist to create a visual record of the 60 years of sightings from The Portland Bird Observatory from 1962. There are several jobs to be done including cutting out images and creating typewritten labels. Whilst our hands are busy we will use the time to chat, listen and share knowledge, listen to podcasts and share playlists. Tea, coffee and biscuits will be provided to keep us going.

If you are 15+ come along and take part! For full details contact catherine@b-side.org.uk

ENVIRONMENT FORUM

HOW TO LOOK AFTER AN ISLAND

In partnership with ICA and The Portland Association

Join us & be part of the conversation.

SATURDAY 20 MAY LOOKING AFTER A LANDSCAPE

A day of discussions walks and talks with local representatives of organisations helping to look after our environment. Including Dorset AONB, Dorset Environmental Records Centre, Local Nature Partnership, Butterfly Conservation, Jurassic Coast Trust and People Need Nature.

SAT 3 JUNE CELEBRATING THE LAND

Activities, talks, walks and discussions exploring and celebrating our land.

Are you managing, working with, or interested in Portland's natural environment? Would you like to contribute to either event or just like to come along?

For details contact amanda@b-side.org.uk

7-10 SEPT 2023

B-SIDE FESTIVAL 2023

The grand finale of the This land project with artworks created for this special Isle that explore themes of biodiversity and climate change.

Plus the **b-side Fringe Sept 7 - 17**, the now infamous Portland Parade and lots of activities, workshops, talks and screenings. Prepare to have your senses tantalised and to experience the landscape like never before.



DETAILS, UPDATES & BOOKING

Keep checking our website and social media channels or sign up to our mailing list to get all the latest event and workshop information.

For news specific to the This Land project please sign up to our dedicated This Land mailing list b-side.org.uk/project/this-land/ or join our This Land Project Facebook group.



VALENTINE TRUST
KESTRELMAN TRUST



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND



b-side are a cultural organisation based on Portland, b-side's ethos is to develop projects that sustain or enhance the distinctive geographical character of a place - its environment, heritage, aesthetics, culture, and

wellbeing of residents. b-side commissions artists from all disciplines to make site specific artworks and community engagement projects in response to the Isle of Portland and showcases the work in a festival format. We work with

communities to uncover histories and hidden narratives, which are shared widely across physical and digital platforms. For details on this project, or the festival please visit b-side.org.uk