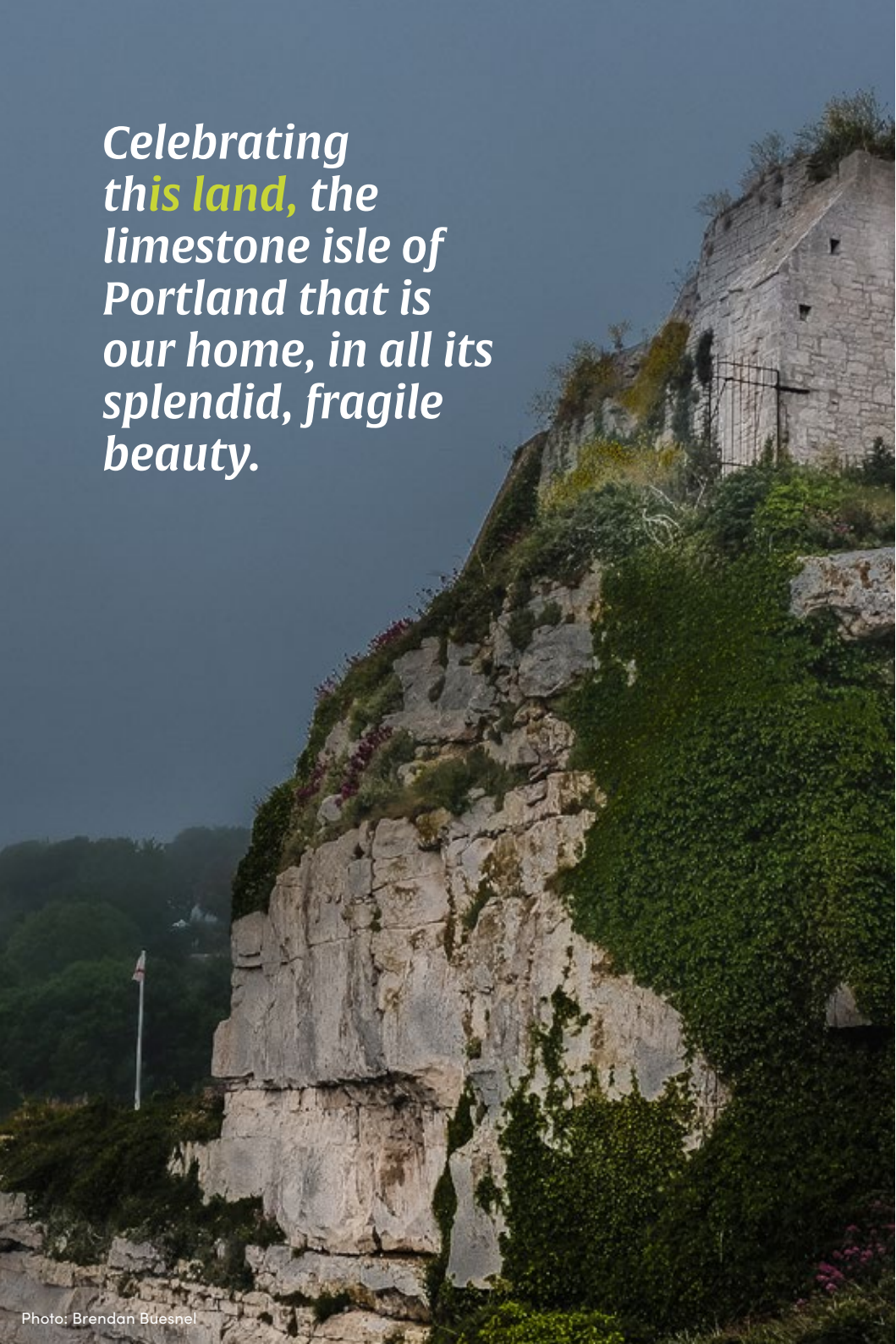




THIS LAND

Souvenir supplement



**Celebrating
this land, the
limestone isle of
Portland that is
our home, in all its
splendid, fragile
beauty.**

The 'isle' of Portland seen from the mainland ... is a dismal heap of stone standing out into the sea, with the ravenous, ship destroying 'race' tearing in front of it, with Deadman's Bay, the scene of a thousand wrecks, to the West, and a fatal shoal, well called the 'Shambles,' upon its eastern side ... There is a dour solemnity about the place, about its wall-like cliffs piled up at the base with a slope of fallen stone, about its greyness, its chilling isolation, its melancholy story. It is not expected that beauty will be found upon a rock which is in part fortress, in part a quarry, and in part a convict prison, writes the Victorian surgeon Frederick Treves, in his book The Highways and Byways of Dorset, published in 1906.

Considered an industrial landscape, this image of Portland still persists today and keeps the tourists away, leaving this extraordinary place – quite unlike anywhere else in Dorset – for those lucky enough to live here or who have discovered the attractions of this beguiling island.

However, this perception comes at a cost and Portland's incredible heritage and natural environment, although recognized, are not widely appreciated. The island does not get the protection it needs and residents are increasingly concerned. With tourism seen as an economic driver and the island's landscapes now increasingly 'discovered' by visitors, the pressure on these precious environments is being felt and land becomes a contested space.

An island has finite land and resources and space for residential and industrial expansion is limited. As the drive for economic growth and the impact of climate emergencies collide what opportunities are there for an island to develop a way forward that benefits local economies while also respecting our environment and communities?

This Land is a project exploring and celebrating the unique natural and built heritage of the Isle of Portland. Helping to raise awareness, share knowledge and empower our resident community to protect and enhance their environment. This Land is part of our Common Lands creative programme – hosting open conversations on topics that affect us both locally and globally.

HOW TO LOOK AFTER AN ISLAND ...

This Land has shone a spotlight on two vulnerable sites on Portland – the derelict remains of a Tudor cottage at Brandy Row, Chiswell as an example of a neglected building in a vulnerable seafront position, and the land at the windswept southernmost tip of the isle – the last area of Portland’s original limestone grassland landscape, supporting a delicate biodiversity and where traces of Portland’s past farming history can still be seen – The Last Landscape.

In a programme of knowledge sharing and creative exploration between residents, visiting researchers and artists, the project has explored the past present and future of these two sites at the extreme ends of the island. Researching the documents and memories of Portland’s past and imagining ambitions for its future.

Walks, talks, workshops, coffee mornings and tea parties have shared knowledge and discussed community concerns. Artists Anna Heinrich + Leon Palmer, Knead, Emily Tracy and Wildworks have created new artworks in response – the result of many hours of collaboration, imaginative making, oral history telling, data collection and conversations between artists, residents and enthusiasts of all ages. A conversation that continues.

FUTURE PORTLAND

Project discussion events are taking a closer look at our land and working with residents to support a positive future for the island.

To join the conversation contact
amanda@b-side.org.uk or **b-side.org.uk**

“Promoting a kind of tourism economy that sustains or enhances the distinctive geographical character of Portland - its environment, heritage, aesthetics, culture, and the well-being of its residents.”





BRANDY ROW : CHISWELL

On the seafront at Chiswell is a small plot of land owned by Dorset Council – currently used for fishing stores. In one corner stands the derelict remains of a stone cottage – the last traces of what was once a picturesque row of 17th Century thatched cottages – featured on picture postcards and the cover of novels.

Built directly on the beach these cottages took the full brunt of storms and tidal surges. What remains has survived the ravages of weather, sea, and demolition.

Situated in an at-risk area, with sea levels rising, in very poor state of repair, with no listing or historical surveys, can this potential community asset be saved? And what are the challenges for coastal communities vulnerable to climate change?

The project has been researching this site and whilst posing these questions has gathered stories of the past of these homes and thoughts about their future.

Working with our group of community researchers has brought up many memories, connected families and sent us off in intriguing searches for lost documents to help tell the story of this neglected part of Portland's past. Is there a way to work together to give it an exciting future?



All that remains ...

The doorway known as entry is the only recognizable element of this row of 17th century cottages. This doorway allowed access to a row of homes behind, housing families up until the slum clearances of 1935.





Existing stories suggested that the property had been derelict and uninhabited since the end of the nineteenth century, and photographic evidence of its poor state supported this idea. It was both unexpected and exciting to discover that this property, known as 'Entry' because of its passageway, led to a courtyard containing five dwellings that were still inhabited well into the twentieth century, right up until the slum clearances shortly before the Second World War. The housing was poor quality, and conditions for the families living there were hard.

RESEARCH & ARCHIVES

The history of Portland has been well documented in the excellent publications of Stuart Morris and websites such as The Encyclopaedia of Portland History by Ashley Smith. All cite the same handful of historic texts as reference sources, and it is these documents that have shaped our understanding of the history of the island. Seeing these documents brought home the significance of preserving memories, documents and images in the telling of a story. That these documents survive and are available for research is thanks to being cared for in museums and archive centres. These Archives play an important role in safeguarding our past, collecting and preserving records for future generations, looking after histories that might otherwise be lost, as our project has discovered.

Archiving is an ongoing process, acquiring and assessing what to keep of our past, and our present, and how to catalogue it so it can later be 'found'. Often, it's not official documents but diaries and notebooks that are the most illuminating. This is what makes 'John Ways Diary' such a poignant document – recording the church accounts but also notes of events alongside that both document and evoke a sense of the people and place. Chance discoveries in house clearance and car boot sales have recently led to significant documents being rescued by residents and saved for future research.

Dorset History Centre in Dorchester and the Portland Local & Family History Centre at St Georges Centre, Reforne hold vast collections of documents recording the islands past and welcome additions to their archives. Our project has collected oral histories and newly found documents to add to these archives.

[illegible]

An archive search for a C19th document referred to in publications as 'John Way's Diary' initially drew a blank, prompting fears the original document had been lost until inquiries suggested it could have been catalogued under a different name. It transpired that the same document was also known as William Pearce's Collecting Book and was subsequently found.

Eerie Nights



This delightful 17th Century cottage in Brandy Row was inhabited at the time of this photograph although the house next door was comprehensively bricked up. The lower half is, of course, still there.

known use was as a Coastguard Station. The late Mr. Culverwell in an article in F.P.N. some years ago described eerie nights spent there on watch.

Does anyone know anything of the cottage's history?

We believe that its last

People seem vague about the Brandy Row cottage shown in our photograph "Eerie Nights". It was certainly still standing up to 1918 because the war-time period was when it was used as a coastguard station. We are told it

DEAD HOUSE

was also used as in the early years 1914-18 war until transferred to Methodist Church beach. Another the identical with the date 19

By Kind Pe

The Chiswell Lane has permanently appeared suddenly warning, and looting thought it had been vandalised, but the G.P.O. tell received per Chief Executive Weymouth we have to better?

FOR QU

LT

EDITOR

Sir,
in the picture of Eerie Nights in your April issue, you would like to tell you about the house behind the white apron was the Coast Watchers stayed in 1914.

As a boy scout I used to go there after school to take messages to the Look out at the bottom of Albert Terrace. It brings back memories of days gone by. My great uncle Richard Way was one of the Watchers. They were armed with sword sticks and used to patrol from Rocks to the Pole which the Coastguards used for practise. By the way I am a Portlander born in a cottage behind the Cove House Inn on the Beach in 1904, and moved to 147 Brandy Row in 1910.

I have very happy memories of Brandy Row apart from the floods.

T MAN



We are grateful to Mrs. Caddy for this unique photograph, taken in Brandy Row and showing the Portland Rocket Rescue Crew going to action. The building on the left no longer exists and the one in the background is where Allah Bow and Monkey Stone used to live. We were surprised how tiny all the

the average Portlander is but we think it might be an illusion created by a large wagon and two massive horses. Running with the crew in the background are two Naval, or possibly Coastguard, officers. It is obviously a practice run

In Brandy Row



This is one of those photographs we published trembling because it is badly faded and it will reproduce. Apparently

Now a 'Waste'-Pipe

very seriously and leaflets are circulated in town. The citizens naturally not very keen and we Portlanders will

G.A.S.P. tried to help from a bay without any may live a stand a situation.

TAXIS

alternative Can anyone speak with absolute

GLOOMY ADVICE

Confidence in the Chesil Sea Defences could hardly be improved by the issue of a circular letter from the Borough Council, to houses Chiswell, giving advice in event of a flood. We suppose that arrangements have to be formalised and the public informed but the letter is distinctly down-beat and doom-ridden.

On balance, however, Chiswell residents should welcome the letter because it does at least make clear that our own Flood Bailiff will make the first assessment of the likelihood of a flood and not police officers council officials or long-distance experts.

BRANDY ROW PLAN

The Borough Planners are preparing a plan for redevelopment of the Southern end of Chiswell which should be available in January. It is believed to include the derelict property at the Southern end of Brandy Row.

ALAN RUSSELL

actors

A WART ON THE LANDSCAPE

The deep storm drain running along Brandy Row has caused a problem at the junction of Chiswell cars backing out of the road tended to fall into it. and else

TOO NARROW

The police have advised that they are unable to force the double yellow lines in Brandy Row.

The reason is that they are not the statutory 6' wide.

Is the beach going?

As a spin-off to our questions on floods we received a number of statements about the deterioration and loss of the Chesil Beach during the span of single lives. A correspondent sent us a photograph of Brandy Row with another row of houses nearer to the sea. The 'Islander' quoted in the front page was born on the beach in one of these on the beach is categorically



LINES ENFORCED

The Police have informed us that they are enforcing the yellow lines in Brandy Row. This is not of the correct but there is provision in the law beauty spots conservation areas.

PORTLAND UN

The 50

A trawl through the archives of The Free Portland News at Portland's Family History Centre - a valuable resource for researchers.

ENTRY

ANNA HEINRICH + LEON PALMER

Early photographs depict a building quite different to the one you can see today yet throughout time the doorway, known as 'Entry', has remained a constant threshold to the ebb and flow of community life and the elements.

Artists Anna Heinrich and Leon Palmer worked with Lidar survey technology to create a 3D scan of the brandy row site. Combining this data with photogrammetry of local artefacts, archival imagery, film and time-lapse footage they have created a projection and audio installation that captures the past and present of this vulnerable site.



Tom (Guts) Gibbs in the doorway of Entry
Photo: Penny Piddock



STORMS & FLOODS

Stories of shipping disasters and heroic rescues dominate the history of Chiswell. The power of the sea is ever present in accounts of life here on this vulnerable bit of coast.

Inevitably the weather featured a lot in our conversations, especially the dramatic storms that hit this coastline and have such a devastating impact.

The inhabitants of Brandy Row were no strangers to daring rescue operations. This illustration, originally appearing in Illustrated London News, Sept 22, 1877, depicts the two Portland Lerret boats launched from Chiswell to rescue survivors of the collision between the Avalanche & the Forest off Portland in September 1877.



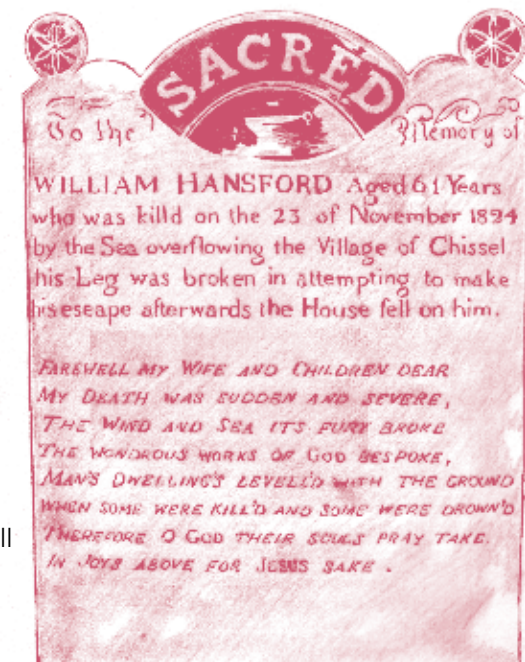
November 22nd 1824. In the Evening of this day, which will ever be memorable for the dreadful Catastrophe which caused such destruction along the whole Western Coast of the Kingdom, the Village of Chisel was nearly destroyed, twenty six of the Inhabitants drowned, and upwards of eighty Houses damaged or washed down by a tremendous Surf which broke over the Chisel Bank, and tore every thing away with irresistible violence before it. This awful Visitation was occasioned by a heavy Gale, which, happening at a Spring Tide, and commencing from the South South East, increased till eight o'clock, when it blew a most dreadful Hurricane, such as never had been known before in the memory of Man. At nine

↖ A first hand account of the impact of the "Great Gale" of 1824



The cottages on Brandy Row have been witness to hundreds of years of storms and floods. The mirror pictured here once hung in a first floor bedroom of 149 Brandy Row and shows the height the water reached on the night of the great gale of 1824. The mirror now hangs in Portland Museum and features in Heinrich & Palmers artwork.

↖ Gravestone of William Hansford who was killed when his house fell on him during the 'Great Gale'.



Go the
SACRED
Memory of
WILLIAM HANSFORD Aged 61 Years
who was killed on the 23 of November 1824
by the Sea overflowing the Village of Chissel
his Leg was broken in attempting to make
his escape afterwards the House fell on him.

FAREWELL MY WIFE AND CHILDREN DEAR
MY DEATH WAS SUDDEN AND SEVERE,
THE WIND AND SEA ITS FURY BROKE,
THE WONDERFUL WORKS OF GOD BESPOKE,
MAN'S DWELLINGS LEVELLED WITH THE GROUND
WHEN SOME WERE KILL'D AND SOME WERE DROWN'D
THEREFORE O GOD THEIR SOULS PRAY TAKE
IN JOYS ABOVE FOR JESUS SAKE.



Photo: Richard Broome





WEATHER OR NOT STATION

KNEED

Over recent months, artist duo Kneed have collaborated with young people, island experts, community organisers and the people of Portland, gathering memories, stories, rumours and imaginations of the past, present, future 'weather' surrounding Brandy Row.

A combination of recordings from these sessions have been woven into an audio narrative and broadcast as a forecast for the future.

The Weather or Not Station is a vehicle to imagine: acting as a provocation of a future alternative economy that can resist, sustain and combat such 'storms' – drawing on wider conversations surrounding ecology, community organising and resilience on Portland and beyond.





Photo: Pete Milson

THE LAST LANDSCAPE: SOUTHWELL & PORTLAND BILL

There's more to Portland Bill than the lighthouse! Two more lighthouses for starters – the Higher Light, once the home of Marie Stopes and now a holiday let, and the Lower Light now the Portland Bird Observatory – monitoring bird sightings, with over 60 years of records and the inspiration for Emily Tracy's installation Constant Effort that explores this amassing of data.

A treeless windswept landscape this area is steeped in history and mystery. It is the last remaining area of the island largely untouched by quarrying and where the original land surface remains. Here the traces of Portland's agricultural past can still be found, with ancient strip field systems still visible and evidence of prehistoric occupation, including the site of a Mesolithic settlement.

The particular geology, coastal position and large areas of open land support an incredible diversity of plant and wildlife dependent on the maritime and limestone grasslands.

The exposed rugged beauty makes the Bill attractive for leisure and recreational activities, and this area is facing new challenges as pressure on the land from increased visitor numbers and commercial development challenges the effectiveness of current protections and raises uncomfortable questions on priorities of protection.



Conflicts between the needs and desires of different parts of the community around land use, and different ideas of what a sustainable future might be is a continuing conversation.

Sturt Common

Large areas of the Bill are common land, giving residents and visitors open access to roam. These lands are the remnants of Portland's old common grazing fields. Contrary to popular belief Common Land is privately owned land, but with 'Rights of Common' over that land, traditionally sustaining the poorest people in rural communities who owned no land of their own, providing them with a source of fuel and pasture for livestock.

At one time nearly half of the land in Britain was Common Land, but from the C16th onwards the gentry excluded Commoners from land which could be 'improved' through agriculture. That is why most Common Land is now found in areas with low agricultural potential, but areas which we value for high conservation significance and natural beauty.

The common land here at the Bill forms part of the Crown Estate and is managed locally by Portland Court Leet. This involves maintaining the balance between preserving important geological features and protected grassland habitats against increasing pressures of public access for leisure and recreation.

That Portland retains this area of common land is due to the extraordinary efforts of one resident, Stuart Morris, who when the Commons Registration Act 1965 was introduced, took it upon himself to register Portland's common land. A task that would go on to keep him busy for the next thirty years. It is thanks to Stuart's dedication and research that common land on Portland remains accessible to all.

The drawings of Samuel Grimm in 1790 and descriptions by visitors such as Leland in 1542 give us some idea of what Portland was like pre quarrying. All describe a treeless, open grassland of grazing sheep, with villagers thriving on growing crops and fishing, managing to supply all their own needs.

The village of Southwell and the land that runs down to the Bill is the last bit of Portland revealing what the island's landscape was like in the past. Fields still follow ancient boundaries and the medieval strip lynchets create undulating patterns across the gently sloping land. Known on Portland as Lawnsheds (the shed actually being the baulk of earth between the 'lawns') these multiple narrow strips were cultivated alongside open grazed common lands. By all accounts the land was productive despite the wind and thin soils. Farming practices were developed in response to the harsh environment and continued on the island long after new ways had been adopted on the mainland. Enclosure of the land came late fiercely resisted by the people here.

"There was a Public Meeting about sharing the Commons and the Parish land but almost all the inhabitants were against it."
John Ways diary, 7th July 1846.



Portland 1790, by Samuel Hieronymus Grimm



"The most noteworthy feature in the old Portland customs was the position of women in the local social fabric. Centuries before the Married Women's Property Act came into force, a woman of Portland was allowed to own property, and to demise it in her own right, quite independently of her husband."
H.E. Wrotesley, Settlement On The Isle of Portland, 1934



"Portland laws give a married woman rights she doesn't get in other places, I've heard."

*“Is Portland Bill my heritage? I suppose so.
I hadn’t thought of a piece of land like that.”*



Whilst the landscape of the Bill may be a contested space it is home to many. The stories we have gathered of this landscape are from living memory, spanning the latter half of the twentieth century to the present day. The area clearly holds a special place in many people’s hearts, both visitors and residents.

Interviews with beach hut owners explore the history of the Bill’s beach huts, and with it, its landscape and ecologies, revealing the unique character, as well as the changes in the Bill’s natural environment and species loss over the last half century. Oral histories from the residents of the Bill, give insights into what it is like to live in such an unusual environment. residents describe life in a place with a “millionaires view for ordinary people”.

The expanse of time that these memories span come with a sense of loss that is tangible in people’s stories of the Bill. There are fewer crabs and lobster now than there used to be, and fewer fish. But there is also perhaps more care for the landscape, an awareness of its fragility and a greater attention to, and sense of responsibility for, its flora and fauna because of a sense of its scarcity.

The collective memories of the ‘hutters’ and Bill residents provide a record of what has been lost, absences haunt the stories of what is no longer heard, seen, tasted. But along with the stories of loss, there are hopeful moments, of changes in thinking about how the land is used, or how it should be used, of Portland sheep and bee orchids, of crickets and storm petrels. And most of all, a sense of the uniqueness of Portland’s last landscape, its fragility and preciousness.



MAPPING
BIO-
DIVERSITY

Residents use Social Media to document and share the flora & fauna of their landscape, helping to record the incredible biodiversity of the grasslands & coast.

GRASSLANDS

The range of plants, insects and birds in the landscape here is dependent on the delicate ecosystem of these maritime and limestone grasslands. Along with the Court Leet and Natural England other landowners and managers are looking at how to look after their land to increase biodiversity.

With support from the Stewardship Scheme Portland Bird Observatory are able to maintain some of their land 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 infrequently, 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.

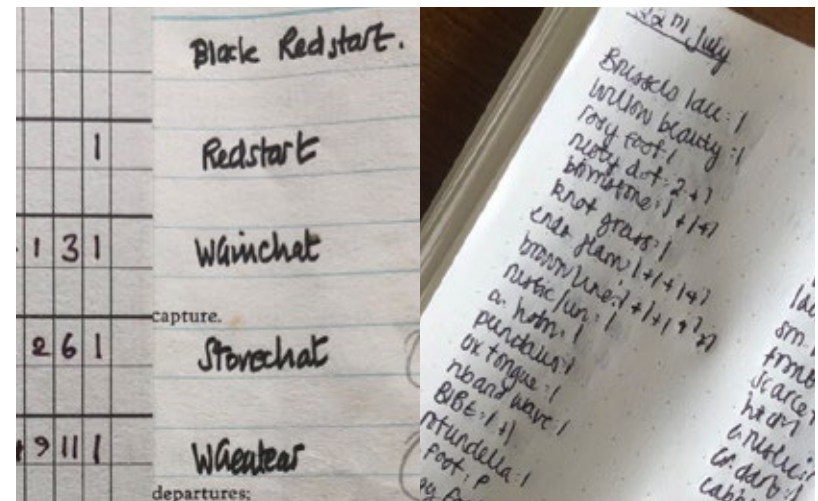


CONSTANT EFFORT

EMILY TRACY

For 60 years, The Portland Bird Observatory and its dedicated voluntary birdwatchers, have closely observed the skies and their surroundings on The Bill. This collective action 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.

Artist Emily Tracy's installation in the tower of the observatory, visualises some of this data on Portland species. Incorporating birds, moths and flora and fauna 'Constant Effort' is the result of spending time asking a lot of questions of those that run the observatory and some of the many people that visit it. Made through collective creation, the making sessions with community groups across the island sparked conversations about the rich intertwined ecology that exists in the area and what is happening to the UK Bird population and our environment.



“Working on ‘Constant Effort’ has been about conversation”

*Extract from the writings of Hollingshead, the Tudor historian,
in a chapter on "The Ile and Manner of Portland"*

In November 1457 was seen a cock coming out of the sea, having a great crest on his head, a great red beard, and legs half a yard long. He stood on the water and crowed three times and every time turned himself about and beckoned with his head, North, South, and West. He was in a colour like a pheasant, and when he had crowed he vanished.



UNCOMMON LAND

WILDWORKS

A new ritual created for Portland at the edge of the Isle.

The Isle's ancient beginnings and speculative histories tell stories of a land of ritual, ruled by the seasons and their symbolism and where fire was used as celebration, as a source of community cohesion, as a beacon for seafarers. Landscape theatre company Wildworks have been looking for the traces of these ceremonies, in the land, in the archives, and in the memories of people.

They were inspired to create a modern ritual where people and symbolic animals come together in celebration. Performed in the last landscape at the southernmost tip of the island. At the coming of the dusk, the borderline hour between light and dark, when anything is possible.





Produced for the This Land project,
September 2023.

This Land has produced a quarterly newspaper, sharing stories and research by the project. This supplement celebrates the island and some of those stories.

Content written & compiled by
Amanda Wallwork
Dr Jeanie Sinclair
Catherine Bennett

Design by
Spike for 3 Hours West

Thank you to all who have provided images and info for the project including Stuart Morris, Steve Christmas, Portland Museum, The Portland Family History Centre, The Dorset History Centre, Des and Shirley, Chris Hornby, Kate Moatt, Wayne Copperthwaite and members of the Protect Portland Bill Facebook Group, The Portland Association and The Portland Building Preservation Trust. Thank you to all our community researchers and everyone who has contributed to the project and shared their memories of Portland past and thoughts for the future.



VALENTINE
TRUST

PORTLAND
COMMUNITY
PARTNERSHIP

KESTRELMAN
TRUST

Photo: Chris Hornby

b-side.org.uk

