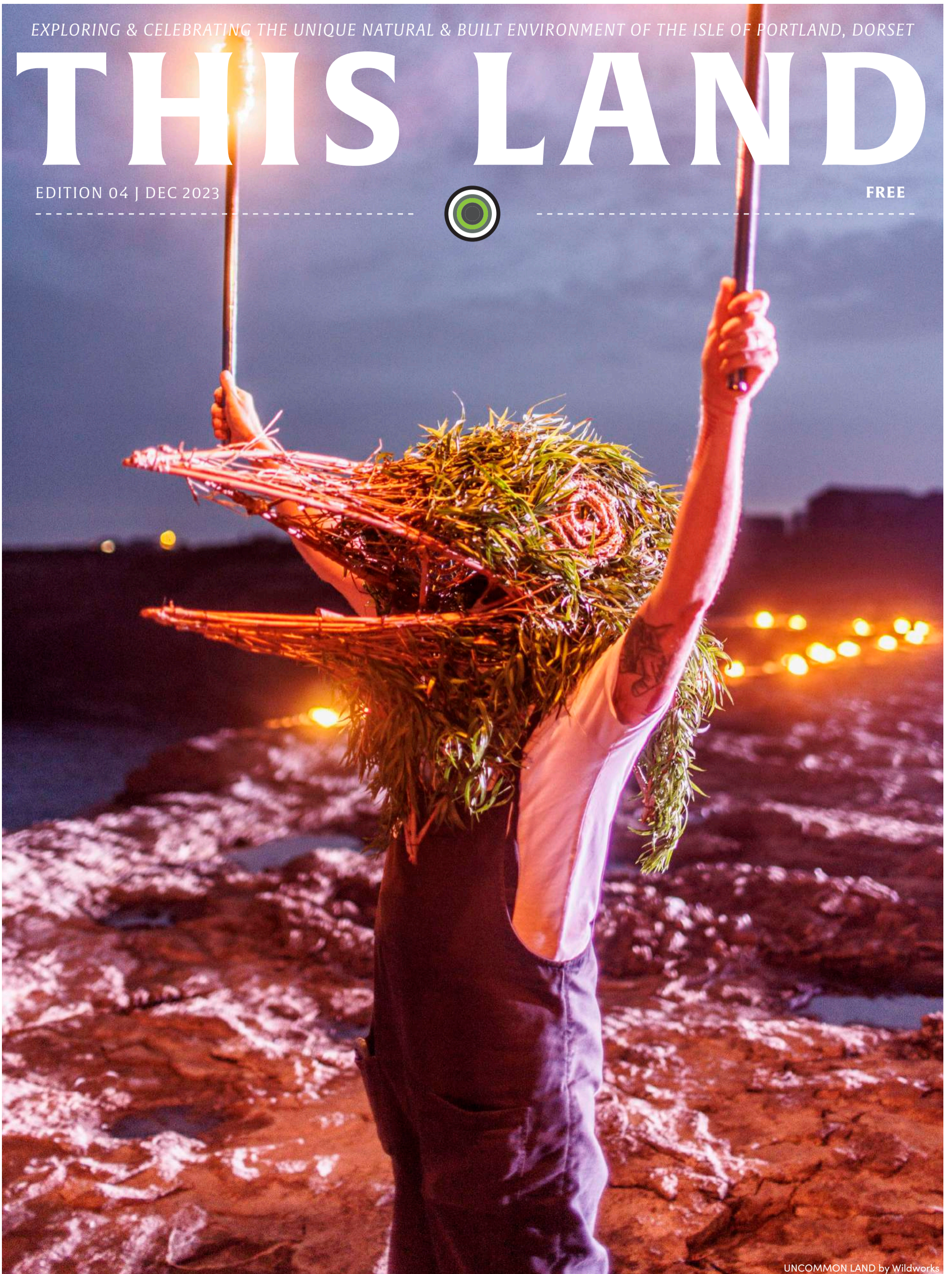


EXPLORING & CELEBRATING THE UNIQUE NATURAL & BUILT ENVIRONMENT OF THE ISLE OF PORTLAND, DORSET

THIS LAND

EDITION 04 | DEC 2023

FREE



Welcome to the final edition of This Land



As the project draws to a close, this edition celebrates the wonderful artworks developed by artists in collaboration with our community and presented at the festival in September 2023.

Supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Arts Council England, our 'This Land' programme has had a focus on the unique but fragile landscape and heritage of the Isle of Portland. Undertaking workshops, research projects, and discussions about how to look after and celebrate our island and to empower people to protect its future. Through these activities new evidence has come forward and recorded giving more insight on Portland's social and material history. Many more people have experienced Portland heritage through exhibitions, events and artworks bringing together and sharing the information that people have unearthed. This work has highlighted that our study sites hold a much greater significance historically, environmentally, and emotionally than initially realised and much work needs to be done to ensure their future.

Artists create new languages - or highlight existing ones - for what is taking place on Portland. This is particularly pertinent for an island that is often 'done to', rather than 'collaborated with'.

Through a contemporary arts festival which forefronts community dialogue, we are finding new models for how we can make decisions, take action, and enjoy Portland together.

We have interviewed many people as part of this project, recording oral histories and capturing memories. Regrettably, one we didn't manage was with Portland Archaeologist Susann Palmer who sadly passed away earlier this year aged 99. Responsible for discovering and recording much of Portland's extraordinary prehistoric past we pay tribute to her astonishing and invaluable work.

Susann Palmer & Portland's Prehistoric Past

Andrea Frankham-Hughes

Susann Palmer was a formidable character who was passionate about the archaeology of the Island. Born in South Africa she came to Britain to work for the BBC World Service, worked at the British Museum, was curator of the Bromley Museum in London and an archaeological advisor to the Guinness Book of Records.

She founded the Association for Portland Archaeology and was committed to researching and promoting the rich archaeological heritage of the Island, discovering the Culverwell Mesolithic site at Portland Bill. Dated to 6500 BCE, it is one of the most important in Europe. Her community excavation at the Multi Age Site on the playing fields at Weston provided a valuable insight into its repeated use by the inhabitants of Portland from the Neolithic to the Medieval. Entering archaeology at a time when it was mostly male

HOW TO LOOK AFTER AN ISLAND

For the final 'How to look after an Island' discussion event we collaborated with ICA to present 'Future Portland'. Prompted by the many community conversations voicing concerns for our island, this day was aimed at exploring positive ways forward and brought together a range of speakers, local and national, all of whom are leading the way on developing innovative solutions to many of the challenges we're currently facing. It was fantastic to see so many Portlanders packing the room and there were some really interesting conversations about the future of our island. A big 'well done' to Portland Youth Council for their speech that brought many of us to tears.

ICA and b-side will be following up this event over the coming weeks and are currently planning next steps.



FUTURE PORTLAND

Rebecca de Pelet

On Saturday the 25th of November, b-side and Island Community Action joined forces to explore what Portland's future could look like, with the help of a fantastic range of community activists from Stoke-on-Trent to Frome and from Watchet to Wellington, as well as from Portland itself. The event began with a powerful call from the facilitator, Sue Palmer, to make some space to think about what is best for Portland: "the times are urgent, let's slow down." This striking introduction to the day was just the beginning as we were challenged to think about "problems first, rather than solutions" (meet your community's needs rather than impose your own ideas), to get good VAT advice and to "befriend your local councillors" from Jess Prendergrast of the 'Onion Collective', to "Say, yes to everything!" from Anita Roy of 'Transition Town Wellington', and to consider having "a 100 year plan" and to remember when things get

tough, "It's not us against us, it's us against the problem" by Rebecca Davies of the 'Portland Inn Project in Stoke'. All valuable advice as we move forwards.



Image : Rebecca Davies, The Portland Inn Project

Experience, wisdom, practical advice and hope were in abundance as everyone in the room leaned in to consider how culture (what Fin from 'Into Bodmin' helpfully called "doing things together") might shape our island's future. After all, this is an island which is already host to the vibrant Portland Youth Council (who presented a powerful challenge to the adults in the room), The Portland Association, Portland 4 the Planet, Eden Portland and a big bunch of people willing and ready to embrace the three questions posed for us to consider during the event: What do you care about? What are you good at? What needs addressing? It was an inspiring event led by energetic, engaged people who put hope into action every day. Portland's future looks even brighter already.



dominated, she was a trailblazer as well as an award winner in the fields of community archaeology and education.

Portland's prehistoric legacy is often overlooked, with many archaeological discoveries made and destroyed in the 1850's when the Island was subjected to intense quarrying.

Archaeological recording was not as rigorous as modern-day methods with many important sites and artefacts sadly lost. We do however have some records from the time in books and old papers. These provide a tantalising glimpse into the prehistoric occupation of the Island and hint as to its strategic and cultural importance. Two Iron Age collars were found as well as bronze mirror fragments. The collars are held at the British Museum, and a mirror fragment is in the Dorset Museum archive. One of the most significant finds from the Island, discovered at the Verne, was of two iron ingots dated to 400-100 BCE which, it is thought, were imported along trade routes from Germany. These are the only ones ever found in Britain and are held by Portland Museum. The most

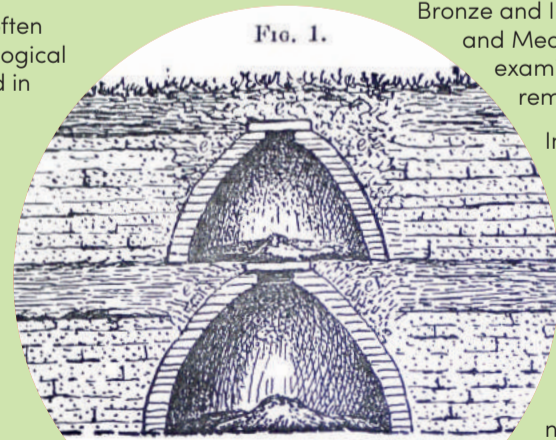


Fig. 1. Curious underground chambers recorded by T.V Holmes, 1883

intriguing discoveries include curious underground corbelled 'beehive' structures unique to Portland, which show evidence of possible use from the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages through to the Roman and Medieval. As none were ever fully examined their date and purpose remain a mystery.

Inspired by Susann's work and b-side community research for the Portland Pathways and Church Ope Cove projects, I researched evidence of the prehistoric occupation of Portland as part of my BSc in Archaeology at Bournemouth University. This showed that Portland had a highly significant number of burials and artefacts. My research continues looking at the human remains of the Iron Age and Romano British individuals found at Weston playing fields and will be holding an open day at Portland Museum next year to talk about my work. Portland has many archaeological stories to tell and even though much of the Island has been developed the last landscape of Portland Bill could still have more prehistoric secrets to reveal. There may even still be archaeological evidence in our gardens, so keep your eyes peeled and report back!

THIS LAND

THE FESTIVAL • THE FESTIVAL • THE FESTIVAL • THE FESTIVAL • THE FESTIVAL • THE FESTIVAL

The festival this year was the culmination of a vast amount of community research, collaborative working between researchers and artists, and visioning from a diverse range of residents about the future with a focus on two vulnerable sites on Portland.

We called on all kinds of people - many who wouldn't see themselves as heritage experts but definitely as active citizens - to first learn and then visualise and share what is unique about these places, and why they need protecting.

With artworks, walks, talks, workshops, and performances, 'This Land' became a festival for everybody, an opportunity for all to learn more about the rich cultural landscape of the Isle of Portland.



THE FESTIVAL • THE FESTIVAL • THE FESTIVAL • THE FESTIVAL • THE FESTIVAL • THE FESTIVAL



“A brilliant exhibition that has really got me thinking about Portland heritage.”



This Land (Home)

Linda Levi, 2023

Pebble dashed by winds over time
Fertile lands much quarried for stone
Royally praised much travelled lime
Out of this land we call home

Neolithic settlements revered
The Vikings came but were sent away
Like the R word all invasions shunned
Across this land we call home

The farmers made way for quarry firms
Sheep and arable now stone crops instead
Locals adapted like they always did
Upon this land we call home

Court Leet beating bounds tithes to pay
Batting press gangs we soldiered on
Historic past well recorded here
Involving this land we call home

Birds flock to enjoy our shores
Nature thrives on this rocky mound
Undulating tides from Race to Roads
Over this land we call home

Pirates and smuggling hidden trades
Lerrets knew how to battle the seas
Now Portland crab is our rich bounty
Around this land we call home

Try castles just come take your pick
Watching over our much loved coast
Kings and locals shared homes here
On this land we call home

Lighthouses beam for the sailors aid
An Avalanche of shipwrecks seen
Now a safe haven for many here
Is this land we call home

The Navy barracks and prisoners
All found their way up on to our rock
The locals said they baint one o we
About this land we call home

There are houses shops and pubs long gone
Fewer churches but faith still strong
Many tales are weaved in our folk lore
Within this land we call home

Railways lost but not forgotten
Ferryman for pleasure nowaa not need
Olympic sports that many enjoy
To and from this land we call home

Locals from Top and Underhill
Now spend their days with foreign folk
No more slinging over the beach road
Much love for this land we call home

Photos: Paul Box, Jayne Jackson, Pete Millson, Kim Cullimore.
Map: Rachel Akerman
Front Cover: Paul Box
Back Cover: Kim Cullimore
Design: Spike Golding



“We thought we knew Portland but today our eyes have been opened, this place is even more special than we had already imagined.”



“Lovely to learn about the history of Portland (arrived knowing nothing) and getting the chance to compare current day versus the 1800s. Really fascinating experience.”

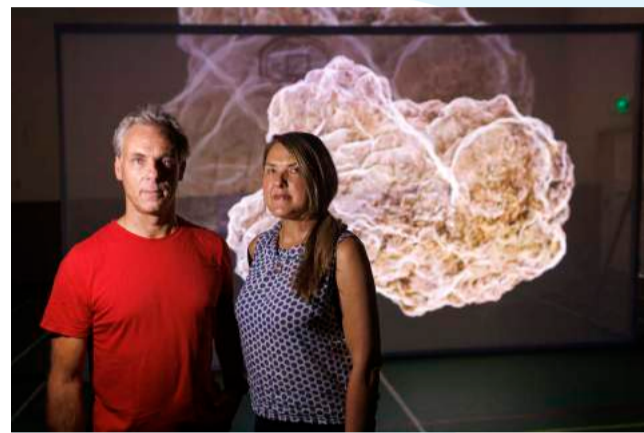


“Absolutely phenomenal installation- incredibly strong and totally captivating.”

BRANDY ROW

“Fantastic thought provoking audio. I am inspired by Kneed and their lens on the world, it made me think about the future in a more positive way.”

CHISWELL



ENTRY – Heinrich & 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. Inspired by the community led research that uncovered the stories of the people that lived here, 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 created a breathtaking, projection and audio installation that captured the past and present of this vulnerable building. Entry was shown at the Islanders Youth Club in East Weares.

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 posing these questions and gathering stories of the past of these homes and thoughts about their future.

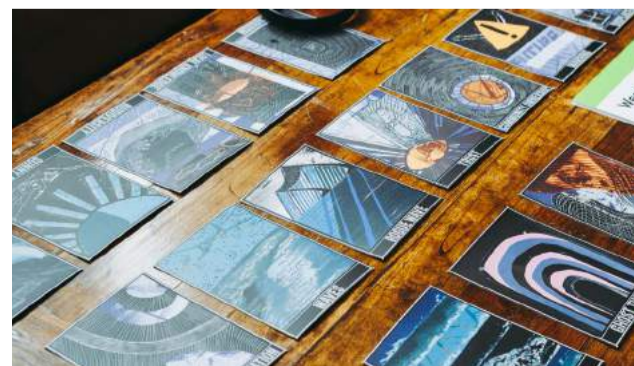
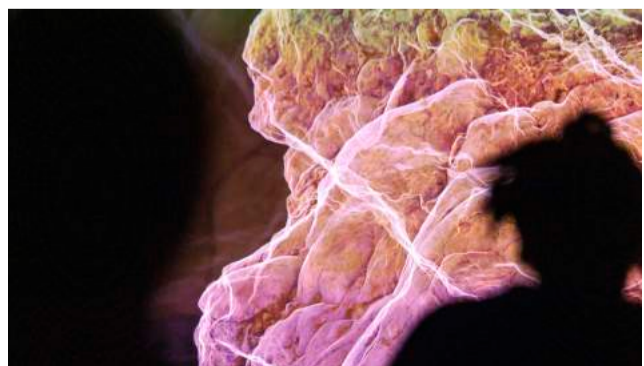
Working with our group of community researchers has brought up many memories and connected shared histories, helping to tell the story of this neglected part of Portland’s past. We are now collating all the material gathered and asking - is there a way to work together to give it an exciting future? Please get in touch if interested.



WEATHER OR NOT STATION - Kneed

Artist collective, Kneed, also researched the cottage. They worked long-term and sensitively with an incredible array of community groups; young people, library users, chip shop customers, gathering memories, stories, rumours and imaginations of the past, and present, of Brandy Row. A combination of recordings from these sessions were woven into an audio narrative and broadcast as a forecast for the future.

The Weather or Not Station talked about how the weather has affected the cottage and shares views on what the cottage might become - a fishing museum, a shop, a young person’s gaming hub... let’s see!



“I’m so impressed by b-side in Portland - it’s heart warming being here.”

THE LAST LANDSCAPE

“Really great way to present complex data -thought provoking and fun.”

SOUTHWELL & PORTLAND BILL



UNCOMMON LAND - Wildworks

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. Renowned outdoor theatre makers, Wildworks, were inspired to create a modern ritual for this landscape - where people and symbolic animals come together in celebration.

Featuring residents wearing masks created in workshops, the performance took audiences along the coastline at dusk in an unforgettable atmospheric experience of fire, song, costumes, and a mind-blowing mix of natural landscape and human movement at the very south of the island, in the ‘Last Landscape’.

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.



CONSTANT EFFORT - Emily Tracy

In the same landscape but with a completely different medium, Emily Tracy created an installation in the tower of the former lighthouse - now Portland Bird Observatory. Stacks of archive and storage boxes containing painstakingly cut out paper birds, moths, flora, and fauna created a visualisation of the incredible data collected here over the last 60 years of monitoring.

This work was made through collective creation working with small groups and gatherings and sparked many a conversation about the rich intertwined ecology that exists in ‘The Last Landscape’.



Portland Speaks

Working with the voice of Portland . Pam Du Val

Asked to work with Wildworks, I got to hear local people who love Portland speak about their sense of its landscape, animals and history and stories of our island. also dig deeper into my own experience of walking this island daily for years, and more recently, due to disability, just spending a lot of time with the land and the lighthouse. And to ask - if Portland could speak, what would she say?

Portland Speaks formed part of the Wildworks performance, with words by Pam Du Val. Here is an extract.

The tides came in and returned, as they always did, as they always do, bringing shouts and whispers of all the world on the salt to trouble and colour my mind. I turned over in my sleep, muttering. I hunched my shoulder to the west wind and I slept on.

Rooted and girdled, alone yet encircled, I awoke in bright day to sea star, fleabane, vipers bugloss, rest harrow, self heal, bryony and bedstraw, wild salt bending and hot little suns lifting their faces to the one sun, a patchwork threadbare bald spot blanket of colour and rushing green under the sweet high limitless blue.

During the warm days, the hot days, the dog days, all of us quiescent panting in the sun, I drifted into gold, asleep on the tides. I closed my hand around a hot pebble and was still. Everyone went underground, all of us paused on the inbreath.

Sea fret, sea mist, curling and rocking me, crept up to kiss me. The lullaby of the foghorn, my nightlights keeping guard. I was the only one in all the world, but the animals curled into my arms and slept warmed by my breath. The seals rocked around me.

The crash of waves wakes me. Sea squall, pewter sky, gods and thunder, fickle and flashing, I feel it all. Nothing harms me, I am here. I am shouting fiercely alive. I learn from the wise dark cow how to lower my head and turn my shoulder to the blast. Shipwreck, heartwreck, the wild and the timid, I feel all, I embrace all.

I hear again the crash of Pulpit arch collapsing into sea. I feel the tide and it's wild horses vibrate in my breastbone, I do not fear the clash or the surging to shore, I love to taste the salt on my lips. I am in one place, and I, Portland, declare, shout into the heart of the storm, that I am alive, and that my mind is free.



UNCOMMON LAND by Wildworks



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND



VALENTINE TRUST
PORTLAND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP
KESTRELMAN TRUST



b-side is a cultural organisation based on Portland. b-side commissions artists from all disciplines to make site specific artworks and community engagement projects in response

to the Isle of Portland. **This Land** is a project supported by Heritage Lottery funding, exploring the unique natural and built environment of Portland - working with communities to uncover

histories, share knowledge and help empower people to help look after the island. For details on this project, or b-side please visit b-side.org.uk