

Trees Outside of Woodland

An exploration of social and cultural values

This photo essay was developed by Lestari in 2023 for Forest Research as part of research which explores the social and cultural value of trees outside of woodland, through the arts and humanities.

Despite making up almost one fifth of the tree cover in Great Britain, trees outside of woodland, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas, remain an understudied part of the treescape¹.

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This work is funded and supported by Defra as part of the Nature for Climate Fund programme of work. You can find out more information about the project by visiting: forestresearch.gov.uk/research/.

Cover photo: Lisa Schneidau with ash tree at Emsworthy, Dartmoor. Credit: Tony Whitehead. Design by Union Studio.

¹https://cdn.forestresearch.gov.uk/2022/02/fr_tree_cover_outside_woodland_in_gb_summary_report_2017.pdf



Introduction

The Defra (Nature Climate Fund) funded Trees Outside of Woodland project is focused on identifying and measuring the social and cultural values that the general public and specific publics associate with trees outside of woodland. Compared with research that has considered their economic value, there is little evidence about the social and cultural value of trees outside of woodland. A holistic understanding of multiple values is essential to inform their future management and conservation.

Trees outside of woodland exist in many forms including hedgerows, scrub, wood pasture, orchards, copses, groves, linear treelines, greenways/holloways, and lone trees. The arts and humanities offer valuable perspectives to support the exploration of the social and cultural value of these.

This photo essay is one of three mini-explainers, which explore different aspects of trees outside of woodland from these social and cultural perspectives. It was created from interviews with, and written submissions from, artists/creatives and researchers. A variety of media including writing, poetry, painting, printmaking, music, storytelling, and archaeology are used by these contributors to engage with and explore the lives of trees outside of woodland.

Contributors were asked to consider and discuss:

- How the arts and humanities have influenced how they relate to and engage with trees outside of woodlands;

- Their own relationships with trees outside of woodlands and the stories they seek to tell about these trees through their work; and
- The responses to trees outside of woodlands that they hope to elicit in the audiences who interact with their work.

Whilst working in different media, at different scales, and in varied landscapes, as a collection, the contributions to this photo essay identify strong recurring themes including:

- Childhood memories and experiences with trees outside of woodland;
- Emotional connections and relational engagement with trees outside of woodland; and
- The interconnectedness of humans and nature.

In addition, through their work, many contributors highlight their commitment to raising awareness of and advocating for, the importance of these trees in our lives. In this way, their creativity is also used as a means of activism to protect existing and to create new trees outside of woodland throughout the landscape.

We are very grateful to all the contributors for their time, thought and wisdom, and to all those who volunteered to take part, but who we were not able to include in this study. There are clearly many more stories, poems, songs, books and pictures which seek to celebrate and raise awareness of why these trees matter in our lives.

Joe Webster

Joe Webster is a plein-air painter whose work blends landscape painting with graffiti. He spends extensive periods observing the great outdoors, documenting the nuanced, adaptive patterns of species, and our complex relationship to our environment. He describes his work as recording the joy of the living world.

He values lone trees as a means to get to know, appreciate and build emotional connections with trees as individuals. Joe likens this to the relationships we build with close family and friends, with the possibility of an intimate one-to-one relationship and deep passionate connection with an individual tree – something that would be much harder to achieve in a woodland amongst a whole crowd of trees.

Joe notes that, along with other elements of nature, these relationships enrich us and without them, our lives are impoverished, less diverse and bereft. For example, the loss of a tree from a local park not only changes the landscape of the park, where once the tree had dominated and held space, but also leads to feelings of loss and grief, akin to the loss of a family member or friend. Through his paintings of individual trees, Joe's work is an expression of the beauty of nature and the destructive impacts of human activities upon it.

He represents this by employing industrial language and graffiti media, toxic and lasting, in his work:



The Emotions in Colours I, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 30x30cm. Credit: Joe Webster.

“I seek to present the contradictions and contrasts I observe in both nature and humanity, from fragile to forceful, brutal to beautiful. Graffiti marks strike through foliage or sky, raising awareness of the manifest collapse of our ecosystems and the indelible traces we leave behind. But whilst I incorporate awareness of these abrasive and incongruous elements into my paintings, I simultaneously aim to produce work which inspires hope, acting as a window to the magnificence I witness, inviting my audience to appreciate and preserve the powerful beauty of nature.”

Joe’s work also seeks to draw out the many parallels between trees and humans, be that physical, literal, metaphorical or symbolic:

“Trees are kind of standing frozen figures that are our counterparts in the world. Perhaps we’ve all got somewhere in the world where our tree twin is standing. One of the biggest go-to solutions to climate change is to increase the number of trees to counteract human impacts on nature. A tree for every one of us. I’ve always seen trees like that. I have a sense of the respiration. The cycles. The oxygen-carbon dioxide exchange. The balancing out. The bronchial branches which mirror our own exchanges in the world.”

Through this examination and portrayal of individual trees, Joe’s work invites deep reflection on their value and significance in our lives and provides a call to action to care for and heal our relationships not only with trees but with the wider natural world.



Joe working en plein air. Credit: Joe Webster.

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Joe Webster, artist.

Bryony Benge-Abbott

Bryony Benge-Abbott is an interdisciplinary artist of British-Trinidadian heritage.

Whilst primarily a painter, her practice has expanded through collaborations with creatives working in different mediums (including dance, poetry, music, sculpture and light) and through 'wild drawing', which she describes as "a kind of fieldwork practice that developed during lockdown."

The core theme of Bryony's work is "the message that humans are nature. That we all should have equal rights to access nature, and that deep, intimate engagement with nature is essential not only to our collective response to the environmental crisis but also to our own health and wellbeing. Ultimately, my work speaks to our human desire for belonging and community, as well as to our fear of 'the other'."

Her engagement with, and artworks featuring, trees are a clear expression of her message. She notes that through "celebrating the micro and macro worlds of urban trees through wild drawing, installations and artworks, my work highlights our interconnectedness with trees as kin and how we are reliant on the presence of these everyday and often over-looked beings. From close observation of the tiny grooves of the sycamore bark to the recalling of folklore tales of silk cotton trees in the Caribbean, I hope that my work engages the imagination in such a way that – momentarily – our egos are overcome with senses of awe, mystery and humility."



Bryony in the woodlands. Credit: Ewelina Ruminska.

As a person of mixed heritage, bringing alternative, non-Western insights and perspectives to our understanding and engagements with trees is an essential element of Bryony's work:

"While many recent artworks have their roots in Western science, it has become essential to my practice to explore different cosmologies, global mythologies and indigenous wisdoms throughout my work. They offer powerful portals into moments of heightened attentiveness, that take us beyond dominant europatriarchal understandings of nature through their use of metaphor, symbolism, ritual and song. I have been particularly drawn to exploring Trinidadian and English folklore within my own studio practice, reimagining tales of the African witch of Tobago, Gang Gang Sarah, and her silk cotton tree, and building new works based on English folklore stories and symbolism of hornbeam, oak, beech and silver birch. Such stories offer a kind of contact with ancestral lineage, opening us to the wonder of trees, who witness human life while inhabiting a dimension beyond human time."

Grounding her work in community perspectives and lived experience is also important for Bryony. Around the time of the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), she worked with Orleans House Gallery, the Grantham Institute of Climate Change, Octopus Energy, Waldergrave School and Orleans Park School to co-create the 'Take The Time (to notice nature)' mural, which celebrates an individual oak tree.

As Bryony describes: "The artwork highlighted the underground and airborne networks of communication that travel between trees, and the roots, trunk and canopy as habitat. The students were also keen to present the tree as a member of their community and wrote poetry alongside the mural as if the tree were speaking to and with passersby."

"Whether in the studio or out in the field, drawing solo or co-creating with others, Bryony describes her work as existing at the "intersection of science and spirituality, where [she searches] for alternative languages that are inclusive and that have the potential to illuminate humans-as-nature in an expansive and embodied way."



Take The Time (to notice nature) mural. Credit: Ewelina Ruminska.

Stewart Taylor

Stewart Taylor has been a printmaker for over 30 years. Growing up with parents who were members of the Royal Horticultural Society, Stewart thought he knew quite a lot about trees but when he embarked on his Tree Portrait series, he realised that there was much more to explore and understand. Whilst the series was initially inspired by the street trees in his local neighbourhood in London, the work has expanded outwards. It now includes Joshua Trees from the Mojave National Preserve, and ancient oaks and the Monterrey pines which he encounters dotted along the South West Coast Path near his home in Dartmouth.

Through his Tree Portraits, Stewart hopes to evoke feelings of awe, wonderment and beauty and to pique people's curiosity and awareness of individual trees, which he feels can be rather overlooked or invisible within a landscape. He also seeks to highlight how the lives of so many creatures –including ourselves – are intimately entwined with and dependent upon trees.

“Who among us has not gazed up at a tree from this perspective and been in awe of its mass, its strengths, its longevity? And yet, this perspective is rarely seen in artwork. Taylor has made a series of prints with the subject of Monterrey pine trees from his intimate perspective which makes us appreciate the reach, and therefore the age, of these living organisms. No matter who we are or what we do, the humbling fact is that we will never be as large as a redwood, as strong as an oak, or live as long a bristlecone pine.”

- Review by Jordan Nobuku of Stewart Taylor's Monterrey pine portraits.



Brownstone (Monterrey) Pine III, mixed media print, 71cm x 100cm. Credit: Stewart Taylor.



Old Man of Calke, mixed media print, 100cm x 71cm on Fabriano 5. Credit: Stewart Taylor.

Stewart's 'Old Man of Calke' exemplifies his approach, portraying the grandeur, size and longevity of this ancient oak, known to be over 1,000 years old, but still growing healthily and supporting a vast ecosystem above and below ground. Stewart describes how he was shocked to learn that, unlike man-made structures, most of the UK's ancient trees have no protection – something that he also wants to raise awareness of and challenge through this work.

A significant inspiration for the Tree Portraits has been artist Sarah Gillespie's work with moths, where she similarly seeks to show the deep interconnections between ourselves and other organisms. Stewart's series has become a conversation about our lack of connectivity with the natural world and he anticipates that this is a conversation that he will continue to develop as "an ongoing project that's probably going to occupy me for maybe the rest of my life."

In addition, Stewart donates prints from the Tree Portrait series to help raise funds for various progressive conservation and rewilding fundraisers.

Nicola Chester

Nicola Chester is a nature writer and activist. She says, “I have written about our human relationship with nature, the life-affirming joy and wonder it generates, and our relentless ability, as a species, to disregard or, at worse, destroy it, for as long as I can remember. I write as a form of activism, hope and connection: bearing witness to the losses, celebrating what we have, and moving people, in the hope of galvanising them to care and have the courage to act for nature, and ultimately, ourselves.”

Nicola describes how trees engender a sense of awe and joy, “and I think the more we know and find out about how they exist and ‘work’ in the world and how absolutely vital they are to our health, wellbeing and existence, this feeling and connection only deepens. Trees outside of woodlands often have a greater personal or historic significance; they become landmarks and touchstones. They are living monuments full of life, meaning and story, even in their old age and senescence.”

Nicola’s memoir, *On Gallows Down*, includes a rich description of the loss of an ash tree from her garden (see excerpt). She notes: “Losing trees, losing nature in the midst of a climate and ecological crisis can be very hard to bear. I have seen so many trees felled that shouldn’t have been. And when all other routes to stopping this have failed, I have put myself between them and a man with a chainsaw many times! It only makes me more determined to celebrate the importance of trees and hopefully engage others. Reading, listening to or seeing other people’s stories and representation of trees that

mean something to them is incredibly empowering and hopeful. We know that we are not alone in our love for trees, in our recognition and tribute to their importance. Increasingly, we are hearing from marginalised voices or those that have been suppressed, ignored or unheard on nature and trees, due to race, colour, gender, class, bias or disability – and this is exciting and important. We cannot hope to tell our full stories, and the stories of trees and what they mean to us, without these voices. This gives me hope. I’m all ears.”

Nicola highlights the importance of sharing stories about people’s connections with trees: “A woodland tree is part of the ‘wood wide web;’ a complex social support system hidden beneath the woodland floor. Trees outside of woodland are more isolated from this network – but it is a network we can and should provide for them, for our mutual benefit. We can be the lone tree’s wood wide web community as much as it is part of ours. We can offer it all of these things, through celebrating, caring for and protecting it – telling its stories as part of ours.”

She concludes, “If we do not mark, acknowledge, appreciate and marvel at trees, and include everyone in this, it is almost impossible to protect them or see them as part of our lives, communities and stories. Ultimately then, the tree and the network of life it supports, as well as us, lose out. Our lives are all that much poorer – or simply cease to exist at all. I hope that by encouraging people to see their community as one that includes

nature and trees, and is not separate from that, they will be moved to see them in a more important and vital light. I hope that my readers will tell their own stories, however they want to tell them. That these are the trees of our lives and can and should be written into our own histories, for the sake of all our futures and a better, richer and more gentle, inclusive community.”

In *On Gallows Down*, Nicola describes her relationship and emotional connection with an ash tree in her garden. This tree’s close proximity to the house enabled a bird’s-eye view of the comings and goings of a host of birds and insects. Its canopy provided shade in her baby daughter’s bedroom, and the dappled light through its leaves created an ever-changing mobile on the walls. The tree was very much a part of her and her family’s life. However, the tree had lifted their and their neighbours’ path and was deemed a trip hazard, which had to be removed. Nicola recounts waking one morning from a vivid ‘bypass’ dream of woodland destruction.

The following is an extract from ***On Gallows Down: Place, Protest and Belonging*** (Chelsea Green Publishing, October 2021) by Nicola Chester and is reprinted with permission from the publisher.

“I sat up, hair plastered over my wet face: Evie was crying and the sound of a chainsaw was not in my head – it was very close by. Evie was stood in her cot in a furious, frightened rage, arms out to me. I picked her up, her whole body racked with sobs, and opened the curtain. The ash tree in the garden that reached above the roof of the house was imprisoned in scaffolding. The two farmworkers looked sheepishly up at the window; one was on the

platform and had already lopped limbs off the tree. I could feel shock and anger and downright indignation rising uncontrollably; I couldn’t get the window open with Evie in my arms. How dare they? In my garden, without asking, without notice, without knocking? I flew down the stairs in my dressing-gown with the baby, Billy now awake and alarmed. I heard ‘here we go’ muttered as I opened the door, the chainsaw laying like a threat on the grass. Once, I’d held my arms out in front of running chainsaws and gangs of jostling men – these two affable and apologetic men in my front garden and a tree encased in scaffolding should have been a walkover. But I had a baby in my arms and it wasn’t my garden. It wasn’t my house. My home, but in no other sense was it mine. The then estate manager had the habit of calling our home or the Estate ‘his’: my woods, my field, etc. On coming in for an inspection one day, he asked me not to leave ‘those clothes drying on the radiators, you’ll damage my walls.’ I had absolutely no rights or grounds to protest about the tree. I didn’t own it. The men had the right to enter the garden of my home without asking, and chop it down.”

“A woodland tree is part of the ‘wood wide web;’ a complex social support system hidden beneath the woodland floor. Trees outside of woodland are more isolated from this network – but it is a network we can and should provide for them, for our mutual benefit. We can be the lone tree’s wood wide web community as much as it is part of ours. We can offer it all of these things, through celebrating, caring for and protecting it – telling its stories as part of ours.”

Nicola Chester, author.

Lisa Schneidau

Lisa Schneidau is a storyteller and environmentalist. Originally trained as a scientist and with many years of experience working in nature conservation, she was drawn into performance storytelling due to its ability to touch emotions much more deeply than facts can. Whilst she does weave science and information into her stories, she identifies the power and value of storytelling as “providing a means of connecting and creating resonance and memory and many questions within a person that hopefully will last a lot longer than the storytelling performance.” Lisa’s stories also enable her to reach new and wider audiences, engaging them in conversations around trees and the wider natural world.

She created ‘The World Tree’ performance storytelling piece in response to ash dieback and its catastrophic impact on ash trees and the wider landscape. She notes that ash is one of our commonest trees, growing as individuals, small stands, in hedgerows and as part of woodlands.

However, although it has been a constant companion in our lives and landscapes, Lisa feels that people haven’t paid much attention to ash or understood the ramifications of the large-scale loss of these trees from our lives.

‘The World Tree’ is centred on Yggdrasil, the giant ash tree from Norse mythology, it also draws on Irish mythology and English folk tales:



Lisa with ash tree at Emsworthy, Dartmoor. Credit: Tony Whitehead.

“In a world of magic and miracles, Yggdrasil, the ash tree, holds all of creation in its roots and branches. Odin the Allfather hangs upside down from the great tree, waiting for wisdom to come. But what happens when the ash tree falls sick? Ash is one of our commonest trees, bringing many gifts: timber, fuel, tools, inspiration and protection. Now ash dieback is on the march through our countryside, and in ten years’ time most of our ash trees will be lost. The World Tree is a storytelling dedicated to our beloved ash trees, past, present and future. Here’s a tangle of Norse myth, Irish legend and English folktale, where you can hear the latest about our tree pandemic, learn some juicy reptilian insults and discover what happened after the world really did end.”

- Extract from ‘The World Tree’ promotional flyer.

Lisa has performed ‘The World Tree’ as a story walk and as a performance piece both indoors and outside in a variety of locations, in partnership with Beaford Arts and as part of Devon Wildlife Trust’s Saving Treescapes project. Many of these locations were in communities that wouldn’t normally be involved in conservation work but were living with a variety of trees, including ash, in their local neighbourhoods. Whilst the story of ash dieback is one of loss, Lisa also ensures that her story is also one of hope, care and appreciation as well – to encourage us to make the most of these trees whilst we can and to plant and care for new trees which grow in their wake.

“Engaging in a deeper way than statistics and figures and science. The stories brought alive a different relationship/fondness for trees, and the ash tree. With many great morals and laughs too.”

- Audience member review – Saving Devon’s Treescapes show.



Lisa storytelling in theatre Credit Emily Appleton. Credit: Emily Appleton, South West Theatre Photography.

Suzanne Iuppa

Suzanne Iuppa is a poet, photographer and conservationist. Growing up North America, Suzanne describes her childhood as “pretty feral”. Through exploring the scrublands and wetlands around her, and spending hours climbing trees, she developed strong emotional connections with these trees and gained a sense of their animism. She is very aware that, for many people, these connections are lost as we age:

“We all did it when we were kids. We all realised that there was animism, that plants and animals were alive. But somehow, we’ve come away from that and I think we’re coming further away.”

The trees she grew up with, and the ones on her doorstep in North Wales (where she now lives), are very special and important to Suzanne and have inspired her poetry. Her creative influences also include Emily Carr, a British immigrant and a British Columbian artist and writer, who made hundreds of paintings of trees and indigenous cultural items made from trees and timber.

Suzanne has also worked in forestry, an experience which has additionally shaped, and been shaped by, her creative work. Her poems seek to remind, draw attention to and honour trees as non-human others with whom we share our lives, as givers of fuel, food and so much more, and as mirrors to reflect upon our individual lives as part of a much bigger landscape and timespan. Her poems, ‘The Hawthorn’, ‘Foraging (Christmas Yew)’,

and ‘The First Fire’, convey these themes strongly, bringing to life her own encounters and explorations with trees.

Suzanne has also been involved in policy work around climate adaptation. She believes that poetry has much to offer to enrich policy work in this arena – helping us to honour and respect all that trees give and mean to us and to inform how we care for and manage them in the future:

“I’m interested in the way that people come into the policy and decision-making space, and how plant and animal communities, which trees are a part of, are never really centred in any of these meetings...they don’t have a voice. I’m very interested in poetry as being a frame for resetting us as stakeholders before we come together to co-design policy that will actually help us adapt to our climate and future.”

Suzanne is currently hoping to develop her work at the intersection of poetry and policy. She aims to do this through the development of a proposal which positions climate risk poetry in the policy-making space.

The Hawthorn by Suzanne Iuppa, reprinted with permission from the author.

The Hawthorn

When it's not raining
it's a true August
still, the leaves starting their turn,
wild carrot seeding itself
berries for mouths
the scree of a kite.

The clouds hunker down here
but not today
the Dyfi has a rest
from gorging on spate
heat slows all living things down,
opportunities
for collisions
and recognitions,
allowing the study of small creatures
wanting to be close:
hoverflies suspended,
some taken for beetles.
some taken for bees.

Dry white tufts hang on the creeping thistle.

*I slip into grassland, plain-faced
and unimproved,
onto the ridge, parallel with
unpassable bracken;
to straighten eye-level over
clear-felled tops.*

*I make for you, tree,
out of a stint of
outgrown hazel coppice
sheep desire-line and cow pats
losing their juice in the sunshine.*

*I hear rough retorts to the wind—
obstinate seasons,
constant rivulets joining at rootdepth.*

*There are channels in the bark
to sink love notes into;
a returning language.*

*But today, it's not raining,
and the tree says, wait.*

*Laminate years swell and chip,
yet it holds hundreds,
in lichen and pale branches.*



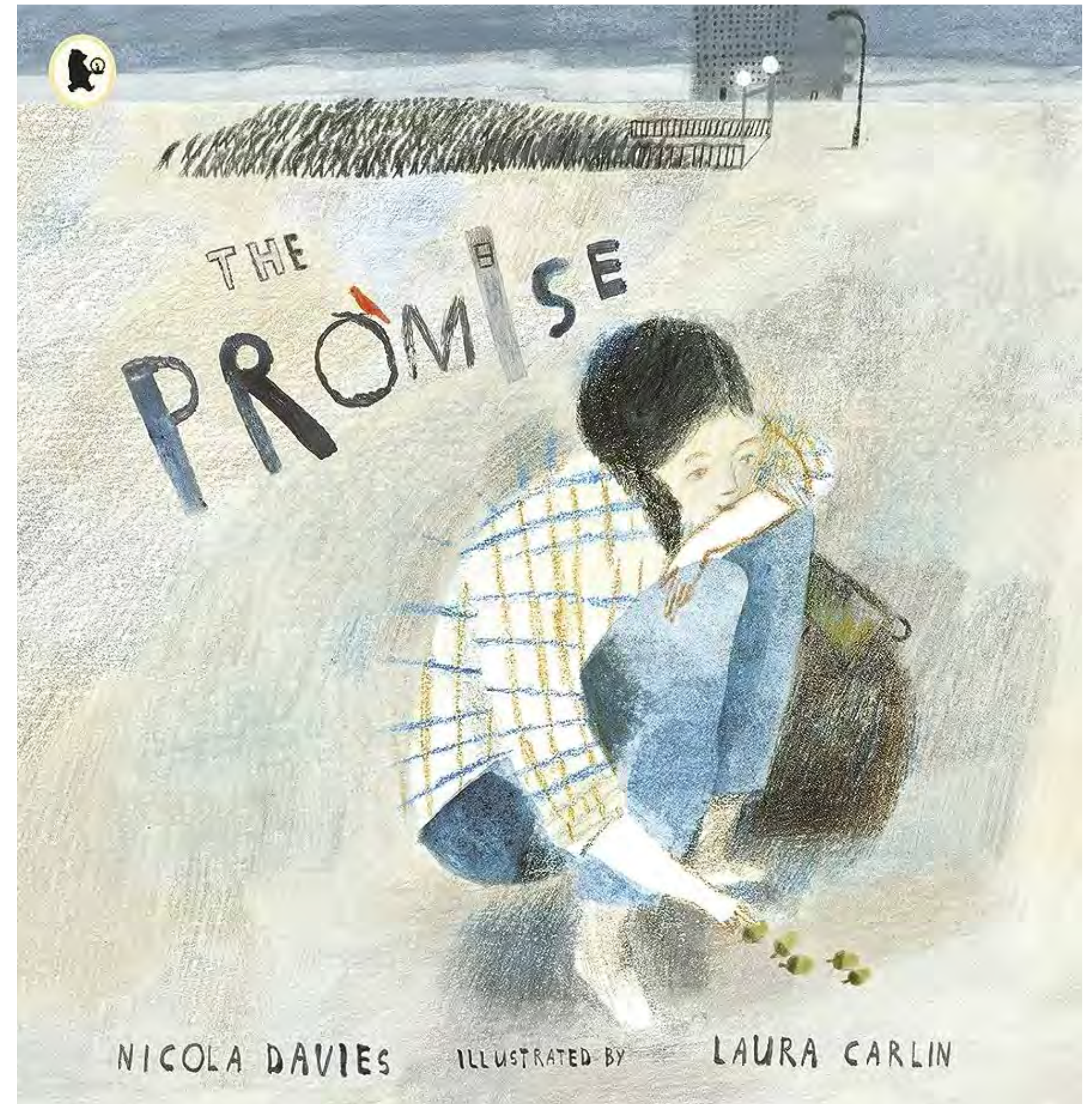
Suzanne's hawthorn tree. Credit: Suzanne Iuppa.

Nicola Davies

Nicola Davies is a nature-inspired author. She crafts stories that merge with the environment to nurture awareness and awe in readers of all ages. Nicola has a deep affinity for nature and traces her roots from psychology to environmental education, fuelled by her early bonding with trees outside of woodlands. She has childhood memories of finding solace and companionship among trees and these have shaped her creative work (from nonfiction narratives to fantasy novels). She describes her stories as vehicles for conveying environmental messages through relatable characters – human and animal – each reflecting the interconnectedness of life. She highlights:

“Engaging in narratives curates our minds, fostering mental health and resilience. As a conduit for stories, I aim to create connections beyond myself. Stories belong to readers, empowering them to interpret and personalise.”

Nicola’s aspiration is to kindle a universal epiphany: namely, the inherent interdependence of all living beings – knowledge already embedded in indigenous wisdom. This insight, she believes, holds the key to addressing pressing ecological concerns by rekindling a sense of identity, purpose, and affiliation with the natural world. Her tales have resonated deeply with audiences all around the world, possibly due to their ability to communicate the urgency of these themes.



Book Cover of 'The Promise'. With permissions from the author. Credit: Nicola Davies.

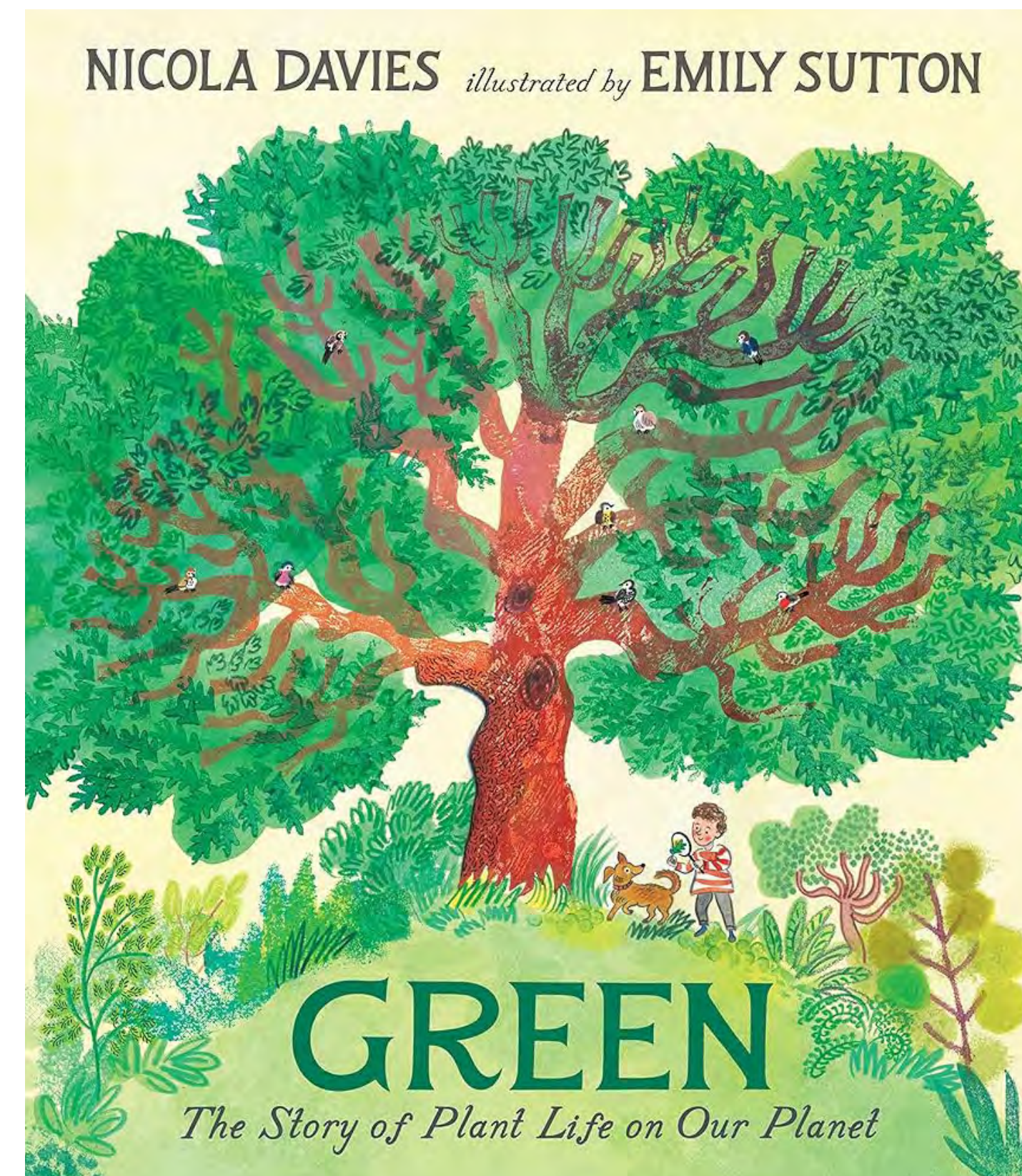
“Trees and the planting of trees, particularly in urban environments, is hugely significant and potentially enormously transformational, not just in the practical sense of all the reasons we know that trees in urban environments are important, but that action is a hugely subversive action. It is a simple thing that demonstrates how the world can be changed and changed for the better.”

Nicola’s journey is one of personal communion with trees. One vivid recollection centres upon an oak tree from her childhood, an unspoken aspiration to depict its beauty mirroring her creative ambitions. A sacred hollow tree in a Brecon Beacons village evokes a mystical encounter with bats and nature’s energy:

“Lombardy poplars imprinted on me, their majesty against dark skies. Ancient trees hold deep presence, like standing in a sacred space with bats slipping between dimensions. A tree can be a bridge between worlds.”

Her picture storybook, *The Promise*, follows a young street child living in a city who discovers a bag that she thinks contains money and food. However, she soon realises that the bag holds something much more extraordinary: the power to transform the urban landscape through planting trees. As the child starts to plant trees, the environment around her changes, impacting not only the physical landscape but also the way people interact with each other and their mental wellbeing. The Lost Woods Project in Glasgow (a children’s tree planting project) was built on the premise of *The Promise*. Nicola notes the value of this:

“Imagination is a powerful force. The most powerful thing that came out of that [tree planting project] was the fact that every single child involved now knows that you can imagine something and then you can make. This process will bring down old powers and create something new, more sustainable, and more connected to the real values that we now need in the changing world.”



Book Cover of 'Green: The Story of Plant Life on Our Planet'. With permissions from the author. Credit: Nicola Davies.

“Trees and the planting of trees, particularly in urban environments, is hugely significant and potentially enormously transformational, not just in the practical sense of all the reasons we know that trees in urban environments are important, but that action is a hugely subversive action. It is a simple thing that demonstrates how the world can be changed and changed for the better.”

Nicola Davies, author.

Rose Ferraby

Rose Ferraby is an artist and archaeologist. She is interested in our relationships with landscape through time.

Growing up surrounded by trees gave Rose an awareness of the individual characters and histories of trees and their special position in our own stories of place. This sense has been further developed through her work as an archaeologist. She describes how this allows her to “encounter trees in their past worlds, sensing the strength of feeling that people hundreds or thousands of years ago had for particular trees in their landscapes. This gives a broader context for understanding the often-deep-rooted feelings we hold for trees, the complexities of life that can be held in these arboreal time-travellers.”

This appreciation of the multiple and personal significance of trees has left Rose “increasingly dissatisfied with the way trees are treated as ‘resources’ in our landscapes. The strength of cultural attachment or social meaning that trees can and should hold is often dismissed or underestimated, as seen during the felling of trees in Sheffield and Plymouth.”

Through her artwork, Rose highlights that she’s keen to “communicate the strength of accumulated feeling and meaning that dwells with trees, but in a way that goes beyond the romantic to create a sense of urgency and core social and environmental values.



‘Seahenge’ 2022, Rose Ferraby painted collage. Credit: Rose Ferraby.

I want to get across a sense of the visceral stories, the personal narratives, but also a sense of why these are important – the strength of feeling and emotion that accompanies them. My work seeks to give space to forgotten voices and narratives, and to inspire curiosity and attentiveness that results in a care for trees.”

Rose’s artwork about the Bronze Age monument, Seahenge (commissioned by the British Museum as part of the AHRC funded Rethinking Symbols of Power project), exemplifies the coming together of her work as an artist and archaeologist. Seahenge is a circle of split oak timbers set around an upturned stump of oak. It was discovered in the salt marshes of north Norfolk. The original monument would have been like a huge tree trunk. It is thought that it may have been a funeral monument and that a body may have been placed on the top of the stump.

Rose created a painted collage as an exploration of the preserved remains of this great oak tree. In her blog, she describes the sense and meaning that she sought to convey in her work:

“The inverted stump is a powerful form. It inspires ideas of the regenerative power of trees and natural cycles of life and death. To lie amid the roots of the great oak, a body might have been part of both the earth and sky at once – perhaps unifying life and death.”

- Excerpt from Rose Ferraby’s ‘The art of Seahenge’ blog.

Rose was struck by the audience’s responses to her Seahenge collage, which she summarises as “an enduring sense of the upturned stump as something beyond just a tree, an intrinsic part of human life and death. This work reflects that trees matter.”



The Seahenge display in The world of Stonehenge exhibition. Credit: Rose Ferraby.

Jackie Morris

Jackie Morris is a writer and illustrator who has a deep and multifaceted relationship with trees that permeates both her personal and professional life. With a career spanning four decades, she is known for her enchanting illustrations in books, where she skilfully blends naturalistic and fantasy elements.

Jackie's work has evolved to become an inseparable part of her life, with writing and painting interwoven into her daily existence. Her artistic journey provides her with a creative outlet and a profound connection with the natural world.

Living previously in a relatively treeless environment, Jackie has always particularly valued urban trees and has since deliberately chosen to surround herself with trees. She is captivated by their varied lifespans, from young saplings to ancient giants, each telling its own unique story through growth patterns and distinctive features:

“That kind of different lifespan and all the things these trees have seen... and the way they've grown, twisting upwards in this astonishing shape and all the lives that have been welded into them.”

For Jackie, trees serve as markers in the landscape, guiding her as she navigates her surroundings. She also finds fascination in the textures, barks, and branching patterns that



'Golden Peace of the Riverbank' with permission from the artist.
Credit: Jackie Morris.



The Oak - From 'The Lost Words A Spell Book' with permission from the artist.
Credit: Jackie Morris.

trees offer. She appreciates the gradual pace of nature, emphasising the tyranny of clocks, keeping time and schedules, and the value of experiencing the weather and environment at their own rhythms: “When you experience the weather and the environment, you truly understand their rhythms.”

Birds are another source of inspiration for Jackie, and they often feature in her illustrations and narratives. Their presence and songs fill her life and work with awe and wonder, and she describes them as “my constant companions. Their songs and presence infuse my life and work with a sense of wonder and connection.”

Jackie recalls stories of specific trees she has encountered, including a 1,000-year-old yew tree with long embracing branches forming a large circle. Such trees, with their enduring qualities and adaptation to changing environments, hold a special place in her heart.

She laments the disappearance of nature-related words from children’s lives, emphasising the importance of inspiring younger generations to appreciate and safeguard the natural world through creativity.

In her work, trees serve as symbols of perseverance, adaptation, and the enduring wonder of the natural world. Jackie also uses her art and her deep connection with trees to champion environmental causes, conveying the beauty and significance of trees and the broader natural world. Jackie emphasises the power of creativity as a means of protest and change. She has been involved in creative protests against environmental destruction, and she believes “in the power of creativity as a means of protest and change. Art conveys messages about interconnectedness and the urgent need to protect the environment.”



Swallows with permission from the artist. Credit: Jackie Morris.



Sleeping with Wild Hares with permission from the artist. Credit: Jackie Morris.

Volkhardt Muller

Volkhardt Muller is a multidisciplinary artist, who works individually as well as within collectives and collaborations.

Volkhardt notes that trees have always been part of his life. As a child, he spent many hours climbing and sitting in the trees in his parent's garden, and he has strong memories of the experiential nature of these encounters.

These engagements with trees have continued throughout his life. Today, his interest in trees is centred on two areas: timber – with its values, functions and materialities; and the aesthetic and mythological values of trees – especially single trees. Concerning the latter, he highlights the role of single trees and groves as an indispensable part of the pastoral iconography of the English landscape garden, and notes that this has been influenced by the baroque painter Claude Lorrain: “Single trees have an aesthetic function, they frame and punctuate the painting. Nearly always in Lorrain's paintings, his stages are framed by trees on one or both sides. They frame the whole thing.”

Volkhardt describes contradictions between this aesthetic portrayal and its underlying foundations: “The English landscape garden [looks] open, gentle, harmonious, also really dignified, right for the old trees and all that. But at the same time, they really do mask and underpin vast claims to land that historically benefit a minority population. So, it's a really gentle but firm stranglehold, and because they are our cultural heritage, we're supposed to like them.”



Augmented reality tree 'planted' on the mid point of The Common Line. Credit: Volkhardt Muller.

Drawing on the tensions within the imagery of the landscape garden, Volkhardt developed the idea of the 'Common Line' – a collaborative project with other artists and researchers, and the general public. Combining virtual and physical trees, the project seeks to create a linear forest across the longest stretch of mainland Britain, 'planting' digital augmented reality trees where living trees cannot be planted (or haven't yet grown) every twenty metres along the line. The project aims to:

'..foster thinking, discussion and action about the futures of trees and the landscapes they live in, as things that need to be cared for together. [The project is] a means to prompt thought and conversation around ideas of land ownership, stewardship and the value of trees and our responsibilities to them – including and beyond 'ecosystem services.'

- Excerpt from The Common Line website thecommonline.uk.

Community participation and helping to engender relationships of care are key elements of this project:

Imagine a host of Augmented Reality trees – hand drawn, modelled and animated by members of the public. The kind of trees we played in as children, that mark our daily journeys, feed us and offer shelter.

- Excerpt from The Common Line website thecommonline.uk.

In addition to the digital aspect of the project, of the Common Line, the project partners hope that it will stimulate negotiations with landowners to allow physical tree planting at points along the Common Line. As one of the fieldwork participants from the Common Line project expressed:

"You plant a tree for another generation to sit under, so I think we have got a stewardship role of anything we put in the landscape."



Creating a tree for digital planting. Credit: Volkhardt Muller.

Tom Hiron

In the wide open spaces of the moor, a tree is a landmark and a beacon, a world in its own right and an icon. Much of my work is located on Dartmoor and in particular the high moor, where trees are scarce. Here, a tree is as much an image as it is the tree itself, an echo and a watcher over the barren land. The sharply-leaning hawthorns of the high moor have a characteristic of unlikely endurance. In our human lives, beset with the madneses of twenty-first century living, the sight of a lone hawthorn bent double against the moorland rain speaks volumes in the world of resonances; at the same time, it is itself: a moorland hawthorn, surviving the weather and the poor soil and the grazing of sheep and deer. To lean against such a tree, to sleep beneath it and dream in the afternoon or overnight – this is to come into contact with another world. And so, these trees are intelligent agents within the landscape – some say they carry memories, but all I know is the effect they have on me when I encounter them. As we have just learned through the felled tree at Sycamore Gap by Hadrian’s Wall, a single tree can be a potent symbol and marker in the wild landscape, but also in the timeline of human lives. On the moor, beyond the wooded fringes and the wonders of the stunted oaks of Whistmans Wood, I encounter mostly hawthorns and rowans; they are also a clock or a calendar – I know the year through them and their leaves, berries and flowers, the way they call to me.

My work with and about trees has very much been my own hobbledehoy journey, but reading and hearing other poets and writers has emboldened me to forge my own way in relating to them and in writing about them. In the 1990s, I spent two years living in a

caravan in East Anglia, during which I held long conversations with the hedge-trees of the Suffolk-Norfolk border. During that time, I was reading little, but listening greatly to the feral voices around me. In more recent times, the work of poets such as Galway Kinnell, Ted Hughes, Pablo Neruda, Wendell Berry, Jane Hirshfield, Robert Bly, Edward Thomas, John Clare, David Wagoner, William Stafford and others have been a great encouragement. Anthropological writing about initiation and rites of passage have also informed my written work, as well as being formative in my approach to undertaking similar work myself. These writers include Laurence Van Gennep, Meredith Little and Stephen Foster, Bill Plotkin and others. The last ten years or so have seen me move very much along my own track however, experimenting with a number of ways of writing about the moor in general and my encounters there. In that time, folktales of this country and beyond have been more influential than other writers. The moor speaks to me in the language of story and myth and image (in its widest sense) rather than in the language of social sciences.

I want to tell the story that each stone, flower, tree, stream, bird and lizard on the moor – and all other creatures and beings out there – are both irrevocably connected and their own voiced being. And that the voice of that singular and entangled being is intimately, forever embroiled with our own. No encounter is insignificant. No part of that conversation is irrelevant.

If one person regards their encounter with a tree-outside-of-woodland as a gateway or a cave-mouth, as the opening of a labyrinth or the beginning of a breadcrumb trail to the otherworld, as an opportunity for an adventure or an exploration, then my work is done well. If someone were to fall in love with a tree through being reminded in my work that it is allowed or possible to become enraptured by the tree-beings around them, I'm overjoyed.

I've had plenty of reviews for my books and poetry, but the one that is most relevant here is the private message that says:

"This poem saved my life. Without it I would be dead. Not metaphorically or spiritually dead, but in the cold hard light of day dead."

Other messages have said the same.

As a poet or artist, really what more can we hope for?

Cultural change, of course. To save the world, yes. But, one life rescued from the catastrophic moment of slow or quick suicide. This makes the thousands of hours worthwhile.

Work:

The Worship of Place (recorded on the banks of the East Dart)

Excerpt from *Merrivale*

The Worship of Place

There is a temple I know whose roof is made of sky.

On its ceiling are painted clouds and stars

And the rooms and corridors are made of leaves and branches;

Its doors are open to all people, day and night.

Anyone may enter, whether or not they listen

To the wise words spoken within.

I know a synagogue through which a river flows

Against boulders inscribed with scriptures of moss,

Where salmon leap in exaltation and wild doves sing.

The rabbi has a beard of green-grey lichen and

His prayers are carried on the gurgling silver stream.

I know a mosque in which every direction is sacred.

Within that holy place, I see the face of the beloved

Beneath every stone and in the heart of every flower.

Fallen oak leaves are the flurries of the faithful, dancing;

The call to prayer is sung upon the whirling, wild wind.

*The priestess of this shrine bars entry to no one;
She greets me in silence and in silence I depart.
Everyone is welcomed in for worship;
The congregation of all creatures give praise
And offerings to the hallowed sanctuary;
The object of their veneration is the world itself.*

*When I arrive in this boundless cathedral,
With my eyes unclouded by guile or cunning,
I know the presence of such exquisite beauty
And a joy so intense it's almost unbearable.*

*I fall over myself trying to find the best way to worship;
I press my back against the trunk of a broad tree
Or a tower of cracked, stacked stones;
I tell my confession to the twisted heather,
And bow down before the yellow-flowered gorse;
I renew my vows in the presence of the damsel fly
And receive the blessing of the magpie and the wren.
All the while, skylarks carry my prayers to heaven.*

*At the altar of this great temple,
There is a fountain, invisible to my eyes.
If my worship is whole-hearted, I am washed
Clean of sorrow and all my restless thirst
Is quenched.
Standing in this sublime sanctuary,
I am cracked in two and an old well
Bubbles in my heart once again.
The water is so clear and delicious,
I cannot keep it to myself.*

*Will you come with me to that fountain now
And fill your cup of longing from this endless, untamed
spring?*

*from **Falconer's Joy** (2018), Hedgespoken Press*

Excerpts from Merrivale

2.

*Speak to me in the language of Moss and Stone:
The brook and fox-den know well my
Mother-tongue. Let us be clear:*

*This Moor-language sings sweeter in my ear
Than all the songs I ever heard from angels,
Clear and beautiful as they were.
I tell you no lie, not here. I could not,
For all my skill in falsity.*

*This peat-brown water,
These rain-stacked stones;
Oaks both mighty and small.
That stream-crouched May
Beneath which I sleep so deeply*

*And forget and remember my most
Noble and ignoble truths.*

7.
Three horses,
A skewbald foal as fresh as dawn.
A score or so of sheep
Bleating in the hill-dew.
A wagtail on a finger of rock.
An immense Bear, asleep,
Stretching its arms in the stars.

The high moor is calling;
They have uncovered the queen
With the knotted hair,
And the king is sleeping
In the black-bird's eye.
Now is not the time for silence.

The chill wind cuts.
The hard ground bites;
The mist becomes rain and I,
A mortal man with
Aching legs and heavy arms,
Awaken to the thin daybreak light.

*I will learn to speak with the bear's tongue;
I will tell my story from the stone-mouth of the kistvaen;
I will learn again to walk the long way home.*

*I rise and step towards my life,
Daring in this damp dawn to trust
That not all things worth loving are lost.
Another star is rising on the pale horizon
And the moon has yet to sing.*

*from **Falconer's Joy** (2018), Hedgespoken Press*



East Webburn on the Moor. Credit: Tom Hiron.



East Webburn on the Moor. Credit: Tom Hiron.

Amy-Jane Beer

In September 2023, the sycamore at 'Sycamore Gap' on Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland was mysteriously and tragically felled overnight. The resulting public outcry was widely shared across print and social media. The loss raised aloft the range of values attributed to such lone trees outside of woodland. Naturalist and award-winning author Amy-Jane Beer had visited the tree just a few months before with her family, and on hearing the news turned to writing as a way of bringing together some of the nuances of feeling and personal stories being shared.

Amy spoke of the way in which people made personal connections with this single, iconic tree; and how over its life the tree had become imbued with stories told through a variety of media:

"We might not have felt the bite of the saw, or sensed the shuddering crash as that colossal mass of timber smashed into the ground. But how many people cried out in pain when they saw the news that the Sycamore Gap tree had been felled?"

"In its first century that remarkable tree probably grew quite unremarked. In its second, it became a local landmark, and in its third, so much more. Through the media of photography, film, visual art, this lonely specimen became an icon to millions beyond those who'd pilgrimaged to a dip in the ancient wall – the tree as much of a draw as the archaeology it attended. Some came to picnic, some to propose, some to scatter ashes, some just sit a while and be able to say they'd been."

Through her work, Amy weaves stories of connection and loss, of belonging and severance – and in the moment when the news broke, many of these themes seemed to come together. Amy was immediately asked to write a response piece for The Great Outdoors magazine – capturing the wider public's feelings – and so began to bring together the initial mournful outcry with the need for greater cultural learning and ecological restoration.

"I was far from the only one to lament the ecological and social disconnection I imagined must have contributed to this appalling act of destruction. That poor stump seemed a fitting and damning metaphor for the state of nature in Britain."

"We cut down hundreds or thousands of trees a day in Britain. Some for forestry, others are felled wantonly by developers and local councils and private individuals, for convenience or profit, occasionally for safety. Some of them will be at least as old as the sycamore in the gap. But none will be so mourned. We loved this tree beyond reason. Partly because it was photogenic, of course. Also because it was an individual – a solitary survivor against the odds. Perhaps we can relate to that – aspire to such resilience even."

As well as being an author, Amy campaigns for greater public access to land in England. For Amy, the loss of the Sycamore Gap tree represented more than simply the loss of one tree, but also the ongoing loss of connection to the countryside experienced increasingly by the British population.

“In the absence of opportunity to build meaningful personal relationships with wild places it’s not so surprising that we adopted this one tree as a sort of proxy. In losing it, we’re reliving older hurts and wider losses – the needless felling of street trees in Sheffield and Plymouth, the ravages of HS2, perhaps. We might also notice for the first time that the Sycamore Gap tree stood in a landscape otherwise shockingly denuded of trees and ask why. We might ask why we are excluded from so many local places that could inspire similar feelings of awe, familiarity and belonging. These are good questions. We need a revolution in our relationship with non-human nature, and it starts with opportunities to meet it firsthand and in real life.”



Sycamore Gap tree in the distance. Credit: Amy-Jane Beer.



Sycamore Gap Tree with Amy and Lochy. Credit: Amy-Jane Beer.

Nick Hayes

Nick Hayes lives in Berkshire on a boat on the river Thames. He makes his living as an illustrator and sculptor. Nick explains how he came to enjoy the art of drawing as a practice of being in – and with – the natural world.

“I remember my art teacher saying, ‘why don’t you try drawing what you see rather than what you expect to see?’ This huge veil just dropped at that moment from my eyes because every single tree is an individual in it’s own right. I don’t say that in order to apply some kind of latterly learnt understanding of kinship and personhood onto trees – I say it because when you have a pen and a bit of paper it allows you to looking at a tree and see it’s shape- the way that its boughs curve and so on. It’s individuality comes through. Then through doing that, you recognize the different patterns that are accorded to its species. For example, an oak tree’s boughs corkscrew while an ash’s are almost like river reeds - very slender, but only if they’re in a forest.”

For Nick, trees take on the character of their surrounding environment, so much so that understanding the histories of trees runs far deeper than simply their ecology. This also entails a deep understanding of their cultural heritage.

“All of this fascination with trees lead me into a bigger question, ‘well, what the hell is a tree?’ And then that lead me into the cultural stories. But it was by being there and being out and about in nature - that that was my first gateway.”



Artwork by Nick Hayes hung on the wall of his boat.
Credit: Nick Hayes.



Traditional carved walking sticks by Nick Hayes.
Credit: Nick Hayes.

Beyond the drawing which first attracted Nick to explore the deeper, culturally entangled history of trees, carving sticks has offered another form of relationship with species of tree.

"I'm sort of obsessed with this kind of old countryman traditional craft. I let the stick season for a year and then I've built this big steam machine that I put the sticks in for a couple of hours, to bend them straight and then I can start carving different patterns or different heads into them. And that's a whole new way into wood because blackthorn behaves very differently to ash. The cambium of a willow is very different to the bark and cambium of an oak."

"And so, you learn just through a practical need to hold it in your hands and carve it, about the properties of these trees how they bend, how they respond, what colours they go after a year. Hazel turns from bone white into this vanilla, gorgeous, kind of creamy yellow kind of thing, even more so when you whack a load of oil or beeswax on to bring out the grain."

"I think this speaks to fundamentally a practical need to be creative with the outside world; to draw it, to observe it deeply, but then to hold it in your hands and shape it. And that then leads you into this realization that people have been doing that on this same plot of earth for thousands of years. And so, then you want to know what they said about it or what they thought about it. And when that happens, you enter to this this cathedral of mythology and experience and practically applicable knowledge about wood, that you're just like, well, this whole world would have been dead to me had I not just picked up a stick and thought I could carve that with my knife and just turn it into something nice."

Nick discovered a love for trees through drawing, and later through carving wood -and for him this represents a form of gateway into relationship with nature. Through his art, Nick has been able to learn about ecology, as well as myth and folklore. Nick is also a campaigner for land access in England, and while he extols the benefits of art as a way of knowing nature, he also remains aware of the limitations of access available to many people.

"If the only way of understanding or getting close to trees or nature to me was through biology lessons or was through photographs in books, there's no hope I would have found the mythology and the law and the customs associated with trees, plants and animals. People need their own autonomous, independent way into nature, and they need to be able to make those decisions for themselves."

"We need our own ways in, and mine was drawing. Really, it's just close observation - you feel almost like you're stroking the shape of the tree onto the page. It's quite loving as well, and you do feel like if you didn't have the drawing to do, you wouldn't have spent an hour and a half stood in front of that tree. Unless, of course, you were meditating or you were conducting a survey of what a moth larva you could find, that kind of thing. People have their different ways to stand in front of a tree for an hour."

"But really, all we're allowed to do in England at the moment is to pass and repass on small, thin strips of legitimacy, which we call rights of way. And that's not going to get you anywhere when it comes to going really deep into a sort of mythological, biological, cultural understanding of what these plants and flora and fauna are in this world that we share with them."

Miwa Nagato-Apthorp

Miwa is a folk musician, silversmith and artist who lives and works in the Scottish border town of Hawick. When Miwa moved to the borders at the age of seven, her school received a visit from two women who taught the children traditional Scots songs. She looks back on this as the moment when she became curious about folk tradition.

This interest in traditional music has led Miwa to write her own songs. Miwa discovered that the name 'Hawick' is potentially derived from Hawthorn and was drawn to write a song about these trees and their folklore and medicinal significance.

In writing the song, Miwa practiced what she calls 'fast-forwarded oral tradition'. She initially wrote the song, then passed it on to others to learn and then in turn teach to others:

"I'm interested in the way in which folk music travels and goes on a journey. I wrote this song with the intention of it having a traditional folk format which was easy to teach. I then taught it to a singing group, who taught it to another musician and then another and so on... it feels like a song which has emerged through the community".

There is an interesting thing about who gets to sing certain songs. I have called Scotland home for most of my life, but as a person of Japanese-English heritage I am very rarely perceived as Scottish. I think a lot about ideas of home and belonging and one of the

ways that I ground myself here is by singing Scottish songs, which feels like a direct way to connect to this land. In that sense, I have an open idea of where a song gets to go to-performing it with integrity seems to be the most important condition.

Hawthorns are acclaimed for their place in folk history for a variety of reasons: their blossoming in spring as harbingers of warmer months, the berries signalling the onset of autumn; they are said to stand watch over the entrance to the afterlife or underworld; and in other accounts are associated with the faire realm. For Miwa, the trees take on a particular significance.

"In Japan, trees, mountains, rivers and so on are believed to possess a spirit called a Kami. My exploration of my relationship with land through music and art ties together two sides of my heritage. Hawthorns have such a large presence in the history of this country and are associated with the spirit kingdom – as gatekeepers and boundary markers".

The idea of a tree possessing a spirit or some kind of power works to challenge the objectifying of trees is central to Miwa's writing of 'Hawthorn'. She hopes that by singing from the perspective of a tree will help to bridge the gap between humans and the rest of the natural world.

“I feel now more than ever that music and storytelling is a way to pass information between people and as a form of collective catharsis. A way to carry a message through feeling rather than necessarily through fact. The song was written about the hawthorn in Wellogate Cemetery in Hawick but the song could be about any Hawthorn, anywhere. I can imagine other people learning it and singing it about Hawthorns near to where they live. The themes of magic, and edges, boundaries and the wisdom of nature is something I think a lot of people will relate to.”

Miwa is encouraging people to learn her song, to adapt it, make it relevant to the Hawthorns that are important to other people, and to pass it on.

“Please adapt the song, and if you do – send it back to me because I’d love to hear it”.



Miwa playing her song 'Hawthorn' under a hawthorn tree in Hawick cemetery. Credit: Lewis Winks.

HAWTHORN

By Miwa Nagato-Apthorp

Many the bonnie children have come
Many the bonnie children said she
They come to gather flowers
In the evening hours
And for shade on a warm summer's day.

Many the mournful, mournful ones have
come
Many the mournful, mournful ones said she
They're telling tales of loss
And though they know love's cost
They're happy just to have a place to cry.

Many the noble, noble ones have come
Many the noble, noble ones said she
They plant my kin in lines
They made up in their minds
To tell the land that it's no longer free

Many the cruel hearted ones have come
Many the cruel hearted ones said she
They come with a wicked plan
To cut me where I stand
And they never will be seen from again.

Many the wise, wise ones have come
Many the wise, wise ones said she
I give to them a cure
With which they may restore
The hearts of those with faith enough to try.

I give to them a cure
With which they may restore
The hearts of those with faith enough to try.

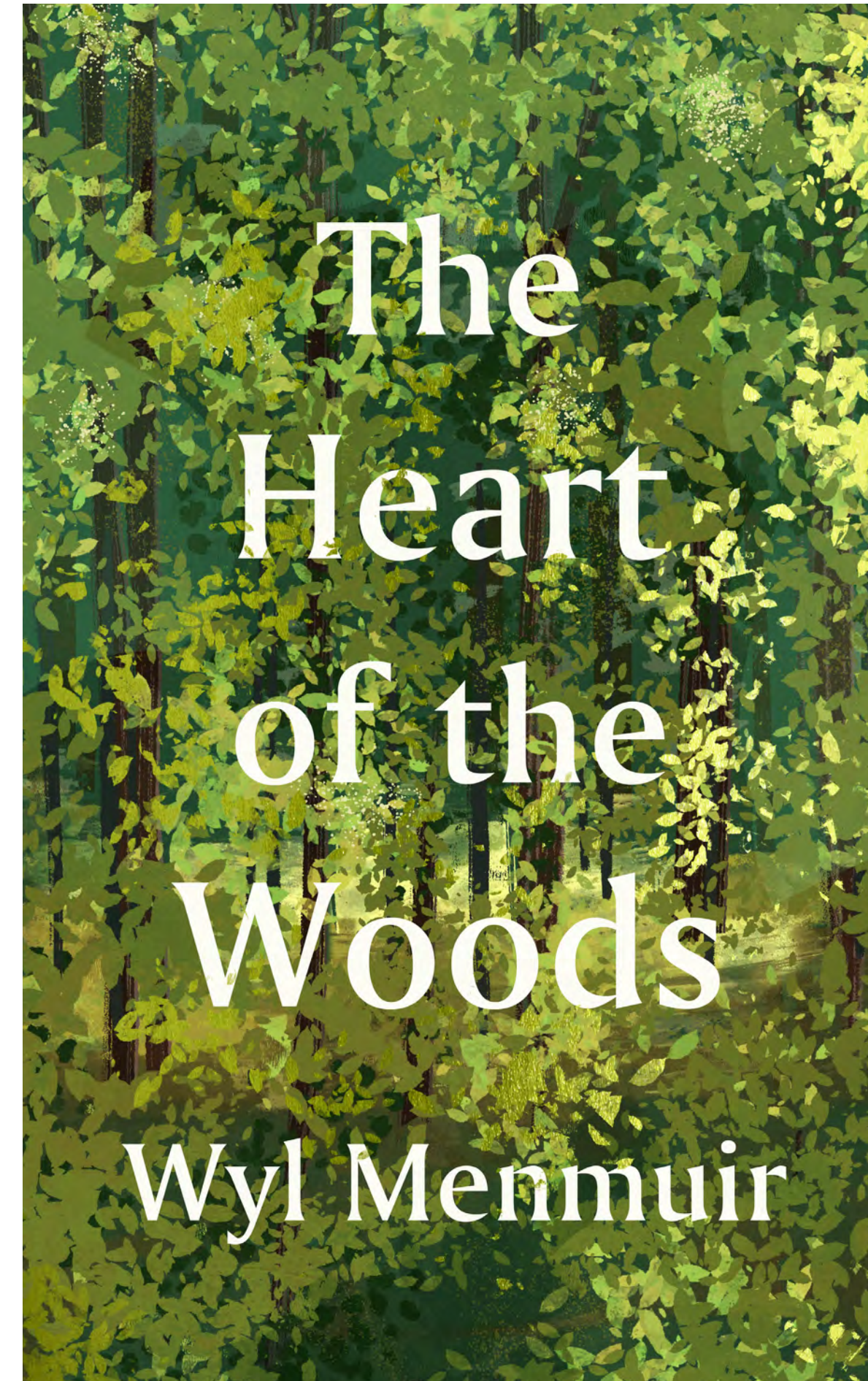
Wyl Menmuir

Wyl Menmuir is an author of fiction and nonfiction. He writes novels, short fiction, and long and short form nonfiction and has done professionally since 2016. Wyl's research practice is a listening and walking one and the focus of his writing in recent years has been the relationship between people and the natural world.

"I have been researching trees both in and outside woodland for the past year and a half, as part of researching a book that is about the relationships people have with woods, trees, and wood as a material. The starting point for any of these projects, for me, is always personal, so I begin by exploring my own relationship with trees."

The Sycamore Gap, featuring a lone tree set against the backdrop of Hadrian's Wall, is one of the most iconic and photographed landscapes in the British countryside. This bold sycamore was a tree from which Wyl took much inspiration, the cutting down of which in September 2023 was to many a devastating occurrence and a representation of the ongoing assault on nature in the UK.

"One of the things I've discovered through writing my book is the number of people who have a favourite tree. Often, it's a tree that person passes on the way to work or school, a tree they have known their whole lives, which has been a constant in their lives. Most often, these are trees outside of woodland, trees that stand alone in the landscape.



Cover image of Wyl Menmuir's forthcoming book, *The Heart of The Woods* out on Aurum Press in May 2024. Credit: Aurum Press.

Therefore, perhaps, the strength of the public outpouring of grief about the tree felled at Sycamore Gap; trees in urban settings offer a kind of touchstone. This finding chimes with my own experience - I have had trees I look out for, for which I have particular affection, throughout my life, trees to which I have confided secrets, had one-sided discussions, or simply felt comfortable in their presence in a way that I find difficult in other places, protected beneath a canopy, sheltered from the rain, a small calm space in an otherwise hectic world.”

Wyl’s work has been influenced by ecologists, campaigners, and foresters, those who plant trees, those who fell them, and those who work with wood. It is precisely this range of viewpoints that interests him as a writer, and the same with trees both in woodland and outside.

“The whole focus of my written work is to help readers to consider their own relationship to trees, woods, and wood as a material. We all have experiences of trees, yet we overlook them and often do not value them highly until they are under threat or are taken down - I am thinking here about the recent campaigns in Sheffield and Plymouth about trees in cities. These events reveal a lot about the ways in which we think about trees, the ways in which we value them and the relationships we have with them.”

Annie Tindley

Annie Tindley is an academic and researcher, who works mainly in archival collections and more recently in oral histories as well. Within her academic field of British and Irish rural history, Annie works mainly in archival collections and, more recently, also in oral histories. Influences that she draws on include Christopher Smout's work on Scottish Woodlands, and Sara Maitland's 'Gossip from the Forest', which weaves history with imaginative fiction and nature writing.

Through her work, Annie identifies multiple values associated with trees, and *Trees Outside of Woodlands* in particular, as they "allow us to think outside human lifespans... to think along much longer timescales than we might know...they also act as a really good way to engage local communities. Trees, especially outside of woodland, have really strong symbolic value for folks, including local legends and folklore...and this enables us to think about people and place very differently."

Annie's work within the Connected Treescapes project exemplifies the value of engaging with trees in this way. This project explores the value of trees, including the benefits for people's wellbeing, cultural heritage, and wildlife, and has a geographical focus on urban-rural thresholds. The main aim of the project is to develop a toolkit that landowners, managers and communities can use to support planning for future woodland management and planting projects. The toolkit considers historical, cultural and wellbeing value, alongside biodiversity, and climate issues.



The team undertaking walking interviews for Connected Treescapes in the Mersey Forest April 2023. Credit: Dr Andrew Phemister.

Annie is leading the exploration of the cultural values of trees: combining archival research with oral histories to explore how these treescapes have shifted and changed over time, and how people's stories and connections with these trees have evolved in tandem with this. Her work is uncovering the rich cultural heritage and value of these trees to local people. Eliciting their stories is also helping to engage them in wider issues and debates (including climate change and biodiversity loss) which can be complex and overwhelming: "Trees are like a safe space, not politicised; people relate one-to-one with a tree... Trying to engage people with graphs about invertebrates is hard. It's absolutely vital, but it's hard. So, the history can be like an opening."

Working with local trees helps make things relatable, and at a scale that people can understand. This provides a way to discuss larger-scale and bigger issues of landscape management, change and future stewardship. Through listening to, capturing, and highlighting people's stories, Annie also hopes to challenge power dynamics and conventions around knowledge and expertise regarding planning and decision-making around the future of these treescapes:

"...what I'm trying to do is give confidence to the expertise and input that these communities and people have in their own history, and that that is of equal importance in the discussions about what happens in the future to these places. It's kind of like citizen science, but it's citizen history."

Annie's approach has been very welcomed and valued by the Connected Treescapes partnership:

"To work with historians looking back to 300 years has been really insightful. It has furthered our understanding of the cultural historic landscape...shining a light on those who's work has gone before to shape our landscape and lives today."

- Clare Olver, Programmes Manager, Mersey Forest – Connected Treescapes partner.



Working on the archives of Mourne Park at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. Credit: Sarah Collins.

Biographies

Joe Webster

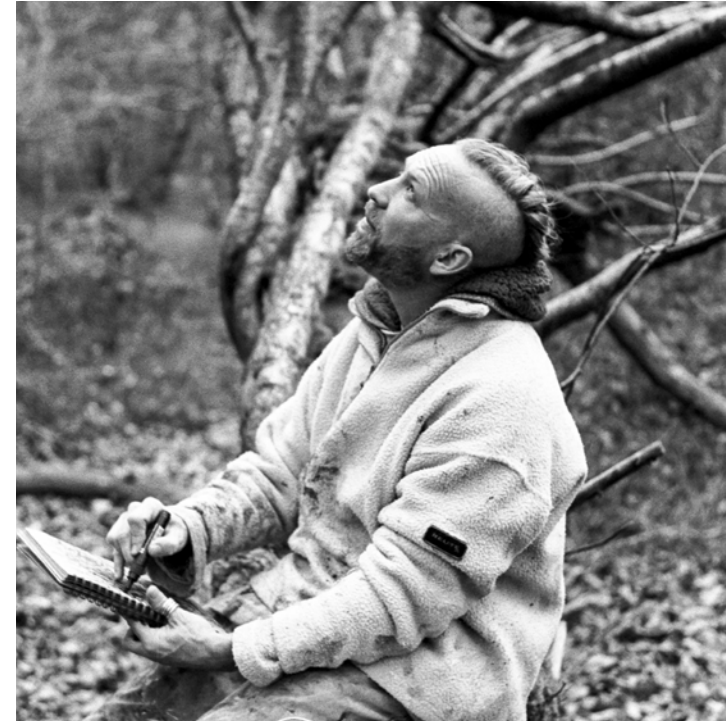
Artist Joe Webster works plein-air juxtaposing traditional painterly techniques with modern graffiti handstyles to examine our contemporary landscape in the context of humanities' relationship to the planet.

Born Weymouth 1978, Joe grew up in north Cornwall where he trained with artist Carole Vincent for ten years. He studied at Falmouth College of Arts, gained his degree in Contemporary Art at Nottingham Trent University and his Postgraduate Certificate in Art from Exeter University. Webster however, jokes that he is ultimately a 'student of the great outdoors'.

Not being a 'fair-weather' painter, Joe's 'landscape-graffiti' paintings incorporate acrylics often in driving rain, mist or hail. He layers water-resistant and water-soluble materials to playfully enable weather conditions to direct the outcome of the work. His works explore balances of power whilst ultimately conveying a joyful celebration of mankind and nature, drawing attention to the timeless resilience of wildlife amidst environmental destruction.

Joe exhibited in Portugal in his early career and is represented by galleries in the UK, Australia and Singapore. His artworks are held in private collections in 13 countries.

Joe Webster works and lives in Devon, UK.



Credit: Simon Comerford.

Website: joewebsterart.com

Instagram: [instagram.com/joewebsterart](https://www.instagram.com/joewebsterart)

Subscribe: joewebsterart.com/contact

Bryony Benge-Abbott

Bryony Benge-Abbott is an interdisciplinary artist of British-Trinidadian heritage. Her work explores human-nature relationships at the intersection of science and spirituality.

Bringing different cosmologies together through painting and public art, Benge-Abbott searches for expansive understandings of belonging and community in relation to the natural world. Through mediums such as painting, 'wild drawing', dance, music, poetry, film and sculpture, she reaches towards multi-dimensional and intersectional perspectives on the more-than-human world.

Rejecting notions of 'otherness' and illuminating instead the impossibility of not belonging in / to the natural world, Benge-Abbott unravels human-made boundaries through an embodied ecology philosophy and practice. The human body is celebrated as a site of transformation wherein lies the potential for healing human-nature disconnection - and the subsequent environmental / social impacts of this. Through somatic practice both in the studio and public realm, the self is explored and expressed as an experience that is fluid, organic, porous, and intimately connected to all living systems.

Website: bryonybengeabbott.com

Instagram: [instagram.com/bryonybengeabbott](https://www.instagram.com/bryonybengeabbott)

Substack: embodiedecology.substack.com



Credit: Bryony Benge-Abbott.

Stewart Taylor

Stewart has been a Printmaker for over 30 years and was recently selected for the 16th Graphica Creativa Print Triennale where the Jyväskylä Art Museum acquired his work from the exhibition. He also has works in the V&A Museum print collection, he has been selected for all 6 of the most recent Woolwich Contemporary Print Fairs, with recent appearances at the RA Summer Show and the National Original Print Show.



Credit: Stewart Taylor.

Stewart is continuing onwards with his Tree Portraits series from his Dartmouth studio, which started over three years ago in London. Initially inspired by the street trees of his neighbourhood, these moved outwards to the parks and the wilds nearby, becoming a conversation about our lack of connectivity with the natural world. There are now over 300 monoprints in this collection.

In the past twelve months he has printed Joshua Trees from the Mojave National Preserve that were destroyed by the Cima Dome wildfire of 2020; deciduous trees from the Avon Valley Woods under traditional husbandry management by The Woodland Trust; and also those from the banks of the Danube in Slovakia. This series will continue to help raise awareness for protecting our environment, including through donating prints for various progressive conservation/rewilding fundraisers.

Nicola Chester

Nicola Chester is a lifelong activist for nature. She is a columnist for the RSPB and Countryfile Magazine and is a Guardian Country Diarist. Her work appears in several anthologies, including *Women on Nature* (ed. Katharine Norbury) and her memoir, *On Gallows Down, Place, Protest and Belonging*, won the Richard Jefferies Prize and was runner-up for the Wainwright Prize. She lives with her family in a tenanted farmworkers cottage in the North Wessex Downs. You can find out more about her work at: nicolachester.wordpress.com



Credit: Nicola Chester.

Lisa Schneidau

Lisa Schneidau is a storyteller and environmentalist based in Devon. She seeks out, and shares, traditional stories about the land and our complex relationship with it and works with creative storytelling as a way of enabling better connection with nature and landscape.

Lisa tells stories for all ages at events, nature reserves, arts centres and schools, including performance storytelling and training for adults, storytelling and development within education, as well as helping to run South Devon Storytellers and Dartmoor Storytellers. She is the author of three books: *River Folk Tales of Britain and Ireland*, *Woodland Folk Tales of Britain and Ireland* and *Botanical Folk Tales of Britain and Ireland* (all History Press).



Credit: Lisa Schneidau.

Lisa's current projects include *A Voice to Tell Our Story*, working with 10 primary schools in North Devon on storytelling through different creative media; *Earth, Water, Fire!* - a new performance storytelling about climate change, working with communities in north Devon; and her next book, *English Folk Tales of Coast and Sea*, which will be out in 2024.

Lisa trained as an ecologist and has worked in British nature conservation for twenty-five years, in roles as diverse as farm advisor, lobbyist and conservation director. There's more information about Lisa's storytelling performances, projects and writing at: lischneidau.co.uk

Suzanne Iuppa

Suzanne Iuppa is a poet, conservationist and photographer, living and working in the Dyfi Valley, mid-Wales. Raised in the States, she came to the UK as a young person studying Modern British poetry and subsequently, Countryside Management. An award-winning social entrepreneur, Suzanne has worked in rare species conservation in Wales for over 25 years and now focuses on climate adaptation for people and wildlife. She is Writer-in-Residence at Climate.Cymru.



Credit: Suzanne Iuppa.

Recent poems can be found in: *The Ginkgo Prize Best Poem of Landscape*, *Bad Lilies*, *berlin lit*, *Poetry Wales*, *Finished Creatures*, *Natur Cymru* and *Ambit*. She has been a regular columnist for *Spelt Magazine*, contributing creative non-fiction on rural living. She is one of five Welsh writers included in *Gorwelion/Shared Horizons*, a climate futures anthology edited by Robert Minninnick. She is currently mentored by Photojournalism Hub, London to create photostories on

the intersectionality of climate action, government strategy, and climate justice. She is currently writing her first full poetry collection.

Nicola Davies

Nicola Davies is the author of more than 50 books for children: fiction, non-fiction and poetry. Her work has been published in more than 10 different languages and has won major awards in the UK, US, France, Italy and Germany. Nicola trained as a zoologist, taking a degree in Natural Sciences from King's College, Cambridge. She spent some years as a field biologist and studied humpback and sperm whales, and bats, before joining the BBC Natural History Unit as a researcher and then presenter.



Credit: Nicola Davies.

Following the start of her writing career, Nicola became a senior lecturer in creative writing at Bath Spa University. She has been writing full-time for over a decade and regularly runs workshops for children and adults to help them find their voices as writers and advocates for nature. In 2017, she was the first recipient of the SLA's award for Outstanding Contribution to Children's Non-fiction and in 2018, she had four picture books longlisted for the Greenaway Award.

Rose Ferraby

Rose Ferraby is an artist and archaeologist whose work often explores our relationships with landscape. She is interested in creating narratives of place that reflect the complexities of time and change, and is increasingly interested in how the archaeological imagination can inspire understandings of future change. Her work has been commissioned by the British Museum and numerous heritage and environmental projects around the UK, and ranges from printmaking, collage, painting, film and sound. She illustrates and designs books, including archaeological poetry books. She is a regular illustrator for Guillemot Press, and won the Michael Marks Award for Poetry Illustration in 2017. Rose writes and presents for BBC Radio 3 and Radio 4 on archaeology and landscape. You can find out more about her work at: roseferraby.com and [instagram.com/roseferraby](https://www.instagram.com/roseferraby)



Credit: Rose Ferraby.

Jackie Morris

Jackie Morris is a distinguished British writer and illustrator. She garnered acclaim for her illustrations in *"The Lost Words: A Book of Spells"* authored by Robert Macfarlane. Her artwork contributed to her winning the prestigious Kate Greenaway Medal in 2019, following a nomination in 2016. *"The Lost Words"* was hailed as the most beautiful book of 2016 by UK booksellers.



Credit: Jackie Morris.

Despite being told as a child that she couldn't become an artist, Jackie persevered and honed her painting skills. She pursued her education at Prince Henry's High School in Evesham and later attended the Bath Academy of Art. Jackie's career encompasses a wide range of creative endeavours. She initially worked in editorial roles, illustrating publications such as Radio Times, New Statesman, New Society, and Country Living. Her talent for illustration extended to numerous books. One of her notable works, *"Something About a Bear"*, earned her a spot on the shortlist for the Kate Greenaway Medal in 2016.

Residing in a quaint coastal home in Wales, Jackie continues to paint and write, surrounded by the inspiring beauty of nature.

Volkhardt Muller

Volkhardt Muller is a German-born multidisciplinary artist, curator and creative facilitator, based in Exeter, UK. His landscape practice is inspired by the politics of land use and ownership in Britain and Germany, rural-urban relationships, the pragmatics of land maintenance and the storying of landscape. His print and video work in response to the city of Exeter and surroundings has won national and international awards and exhibition prizes. Founder of the TOPOS art space in Exeter, Volkhardt has hosted residencies, exhibitions and conversation events with national and international artists between 2015-2019. Volkhardt works as a solo artist and a collaborator, he is a director member of the artist group Blind Ditch. He is currently an associate artist with Art Work Exeter on their cultural



Credit: Volkhardt Muller.

partnership with Exeter Custom House from 2023-2026. Volkhardt is the instigating artist on the AHRC-EPSRC funded national land art project the Common Line: thecommonline.uk

You can find out more about his work at: volkhardtmueller.com

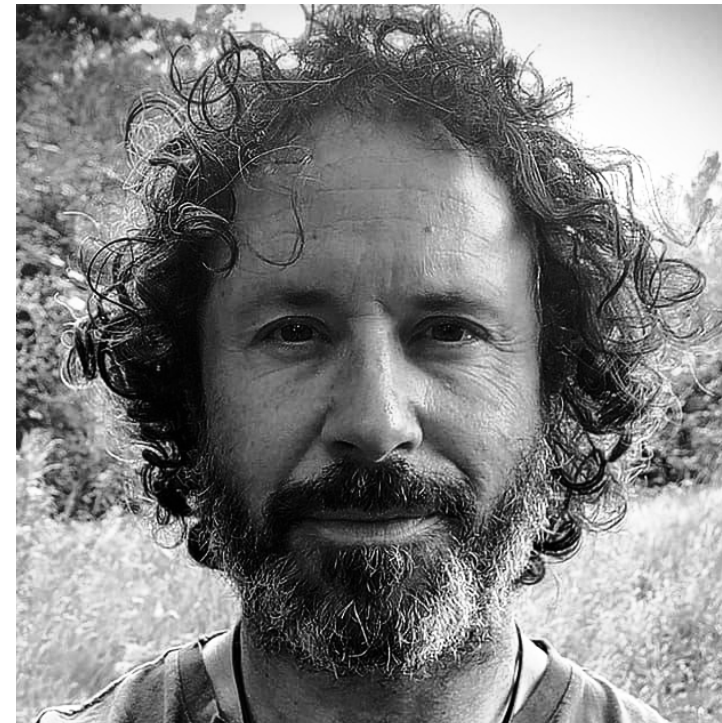
Tom Hirons

Tom Hirons is a writer and storyteller based in south Devon. He is the director of Feral Angels Press and chief editor of Clarion, the quarterly poetry magazine. His piece 'Sometimes a Wild God' is a subcultural poetry classic.

Tom runs fortnightly online poetry workshops as well as mentoring poets in a one-to-one role.

His latest collection is 'At the Orphans' Door', with 'The Queen of Heaven' due out in Autumn 2023.

tomhirons.com



Credit: Tom Hirons.

Amy-Jane Beer

Amy-Jane Beer is a naturalist, writer, and campaigner. Her books include *A Tree A Day*, and *The Flow: rivers water and wildness*, winner of the 2023 Wainwright Prize for nature writing.



Credit: Amy-Jane Beer.

Nick Hayes

Nick Hayes is a British writer, illustrator, and campaigner for land access with the organisation Right to Roam. He has written several graphic novels and a non-fiction book, *The Book of Trespass*. Nick lives on a boat on the River Thames in Berkshire.



Credit: Nick Hayes.

Miwa Nagato-Apthorp

Miwa Nagato-Apthorp is a British/Japanese Musician, Silversmith and Artist living and working in Hawick in the Scottish Borders. She employs slow processes and traditional skills, working in harmony with and inspired by the natural environment and is particularly interested in folk tradition, in particular; the inquiry into how, and by whom skills and stories are shared. As a person of mixed heritage she finds that working in ways which tie her to land, community and lineage to be the most grounding way to explore ideas of identity and home. Throughout her work there is a thread of personal performance art - choosing and enacting traditional, place-specific crafts as symbolic acts of belonging, drawing on folk traditions to explore multicultural understandings of history, climate and womanhood.



Credit: Miwa Nagato-Apthorp.

Wyl Menmuir

Wyl Menmuir is an award-winning author based in Cornwall. His 2016 debut novel, *The Many* was longlisted for the Man-Booker Award and was an Observer Best Fiction of the year pick. His second novel *Fox Fires* was published in 2021 and his short fiction has been published by Nightjar Press, Kneehigh Theatre and National Trust Books and appeared in Best British Short Stories. Wyl's first full-length nonfiction book, *The Draw*



Credit: Oli Udy.

of the Sea, won the Roger Deakin Award from the Society of Authors and is published in 2022. A former journalist, Wyl has written for Radio 4's Open Book, The Guardian and The Observer, and the journal Elementum. He is co-creator of the Cornish writing centre, [The Writers' Block](#) and lectures in creative writing at [Falmouth University](#).

Annie Tindley

Annie is Professor of British and Irish Rural History and, since November 2020, the Head of the School of History, Classics and Archaeology at Newcastle University. She researches the modern period (c. 1750-the present) with a focus on land issues - including landownership patterns, land management and use, environmental perspectives, land reform and its politics, and community empowerment. She has published on private landed estates including major estates in Scotland (Sutherland, Argyll, Atholl) and in Ireland (Clandeboyne, Co Down). She is interested in cultures of decision-making amongst landowners of all types. She also works in environmental history, having written on water and river management and more recently, on trees and woodlands.



Credit: Annie Tindley.

You can find out more about her work at:

uktreescapes.org/projects/connected-treescapes

ncl.ac.uk/hca/people/profile/annietindley

