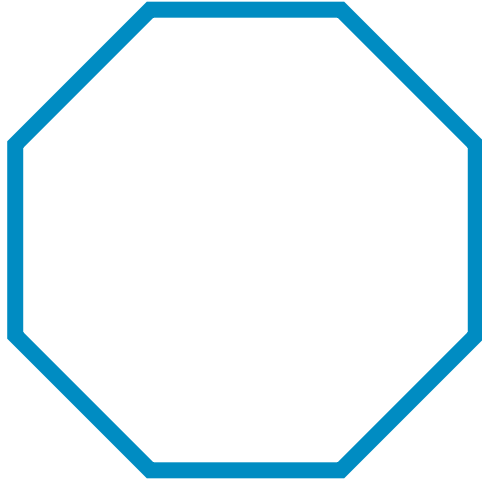


**Little
Ouse**



**Headwaters
Project**

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Little Ouse Headwaters Project

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Little Ouse Headwaters Project Creative Group Visions from the Little Ouse

This is a collection of writings which has been put together as part of a project which celebrates the landscape, flora and fauna of the Little Ouse valley, along the Norfolk-Suffolk border. It is an initiative for the Little Ouse Headwaters project, a local volunteer-run charity, which is caring for the internationally important fenlands and commons which remain from previous eras when this land was not so intensively used. Over a year from September 2012 to October 2013, more than 30 artists, including writers and musicians, have been meeting and joining in events and workshops as part of a creative programme funded by the Heritage Lottery fund. During this time we have tried to set the project in a wider context as a way to understand better what is unique and special about the area. We have looks at arts and river projects from other cultures, as well as exploring the deeper history in this region, of linen cultivation and weaving, sedge-cutting, thatching.

The writings here, some of which are extracts from longer works separately published, reflect on the landscape, give us new insights into the beautiful and subtle surroundings, the quiet atmosphere of the fens, the source of the river, its history and folklore. This project has been organised by the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, invited on account of their programming and curatorial experience through another Heritage Lottery funded project, The Culture of the Countryside.

We are grateful to all the contributors and would like to record our indebtedness to Mike Harding, project manager for the Little Ouse Headwaters project for his unfailing support and encouragement.

Liz Ballard and Veronica Sekules,
Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, creative project curators

University of East Anglia, October 2013

Sources

Water has been slowly spelling out the shape of the Little Ouse valley for thousands of years—very slowly for hundreds of thousands. It writes in beds of clay, sand, soil, gravel and peat, and in the liquors of living things. Water is the source of it.

‘Ouse’ has its source in ancient words for water¹, whence no man knows the roots of them run; we guess Indo-European, so at least as old as the Bronze Age.² Perhaps it shares a root with ‘wosan’, meaning juice or ooze.³ No doubt the sound has rounded over time, like the slopes of a valley side as it softens, more gently contoured, under the influence of rain and frost, but it remains the same sinusoidal, curving frontier between Earth and Heaven.

Water is a noun: it is a fluid mineral with mass. It seeks low places where it insists darkly and mirrors the sky. It fills valley floors and, deeper still, invests the jointed chalk bedrock to create a prodigious aquifer, a blessing to the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk. It joins soil fissures and pores, runnels and rivulets, land-drains and ditches, brooks and streams, plants and animals in a three-dimensional web of fluid thought.

Water acts as a verb: a process, a catalyst. It is the yeast that makes peat bogs rise; it dissolves minerals and bodily carries them off; takes spiritual form as mist and fog; breathes on earth as dew. Water freezes and splits flint; it doodles frosty ferns on stones and windows, beguiles the imaginative into thinking someone called Jack may have something to say. Like energy, water in the landscape is infinite becoming, neither created nor destroyed: just shifting form. One never steps into the same river twice—nor rainfall nor fog for that matter.⁴

The headwaters of the Little Ouse are infinitely many, and its several valleys are their collecting place: the sumps into which they seep, trickle and flow, a starting circumstance on

their way to Ocean. Little Ouse is twinned with Waveney. The low col of Lopham Ford is a dendritic, coronal suture where their heads are joined. Their thoughts are water, and, collected, they create two nameable rivers.

Drainage has deprived the valley of its most elaborate thoughts. An intricate and diverse flora has become increasingly narrowed into tedious probabilities; river channelisation has simplified these thoughts and made them controllable; pollution has made many of them uncouth; drainage has shrivelled the memory. Peat shrinks from the roots of alder trees; yellow ochre flares in pools and ditches; nettle and hemlock overwhelm the river banks. A latter-day William Blake might well observe that the precious, wild imagination of the Holocene valley has been handed over for brutal schooling in the Anthropocene.⁵ Thankfully, ecological restoration is reflooding the valley's innermost thinking.

Excerpted from 'Sources: Words and Images from the Headwaters of the Little Ouse', Tim Holt-Wilson

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3. *The Online Etymological Dictionary*. www.etymonline.com (accessed November 2012).
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"Upon those that step into the same rivers different and different waters flow... It scatters and ... gathers ... it comes together and flows away... approaches and departs"
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Ivan Clark



Little Ouse Headwaters Project

A celebration of the Little Ouse Headwaters Project, its mission and purpose, in a miscellany, a potpourri, a melange, even, of poetic forms. It could even be a cornucopia.

The Kenning

This Old English and Norse poetic form describes something without referring to its name, usually about one subject, two words per line, ending in 'er', a riddle! ere are three; one scientific, requiring footnotes! Children love writing 'em. I used them as a vehicle to word explanation, usage and exploration in primary schools.

One

Invertebrate cherisher
Dragonfly nourisher
Naturalist thriller
Plant diversifier
Carnivore dweller
Mayflyer
Myriad swimmers
Bird breeder
Reflective rippler
Winter freezer
Spring budder
Summer scorcher
Autumn decayer
River giver

Seaward flower
Kingfisher
Frog croaker
Snail whorler
Misty riser
Caterpillar crawler
Larvae changer
Proboscis sucker
Tussock nester
Camouflage confuser
Contact caller
Caddis flier
Moth flitter
Spore spreader
Trill pitcher
Bank nestler
Species multiplier
Silvery darter
Covert preener
Pupae rester
Lucky visitor!

Two

Edge slipper
Ankle tripper
Welly splodger
Twig snapper
Sedge clumper
Migrant usurper
Fishes watcher
Determined rambler
Map reader
Walk discoverer
Divine environmentler

**Science Kenning
for LOHP, (with lots of footnotes!)**

Snail whorler
Rhizome encourager
Viviparous witnesser
Chrysalis emerger
Antenna waver
Fluttery aviator
Eight-legged hunter
Gill mover
Dorsal shielder
Cocoon protector
Abdomen laster
Crepuscular flapper
Metamorphosis witnesser
Hermaphrodite breeder
Axil angler
Barbel whisker
Prothorax firster
Thorax middler
Sinistral viewer
Parthenogenesis witnesser
Serpentine meanderer
Avian lander
Passerine gripper
Awn protector
Carapace shielder
Cilicate edger
Clitellum saddler
Nidicolous lamenter
Nidifugous celebrator
Mandibular gaper
Lepus capensis leaper
Mucus secretor

Calyces joiner
Sepal outer
Scutellum triangular
Marsh fern inveigler
Sporangia invader
Diurnal carapacer
Palmate arranger
Norplus former
Lumbricidae burrower
Gestation timer
Headwaters WOW-er!

≈

Footnotes

Whorl An arrangement of similar parts, as in a leaf; or spiral, as in a shell

Rhizome Thick underground horizontal stem whose buds develop into new growth

Viviparous Most mammals giving birth to live offspring that developed within the uterus of the mother

Crepuscular Creatures active at twilight or before dawn

Metamorphosis Complete change of physical form or substance

Hermaphrodite Animal or flower having both male and female reproductive organs

Axil Upper angle between branch or leaf stem from which it grows

Barbel Slender tactile spines or bristles hanging from certain fishes

Prothorax Front segment of an insect's thorax

Thorax Middle region of an arthropod's body in which powerful muscles, legs and wings are found. In four-limbed vertebrates, the thorax is the chest

Sinistral Situated on the left side. Shells of certain molluscs

spiral from right to left

Parthenogenesis An egg cell developing into a young animal without having to be fertilised, common in invertebrates genetically identical to the parent. In animals that have separate sexes, the young are always female

Serpentine Twisting, winding, serpent-like

Avian Relating to birds

Passerine Birds that perch

Awn Bristles growing from certain grasses or cereals

Carapace Hard shield on the back of an animal's body

Cilicate Threads projecting from the surface of a cell whose rhythmic beating cause movement

Clitellum Thickened glandular section in earthworms

Nidicolous Remaining in the nest after hatching

Nidifugous Leaving the nest after hatching

Mandibular Paired jaws of an arthropod, or lower jaws in vertebrates

Lepus capensis The hare

Calyces Glands that join to form kidney function in animals

Sepal Any of the separate parts of the calyx of a flower

Scutellum Triangular shield behind pronotum in many insects

Diurnal Happening daily

Palmate Shaped like an open hand, spreading from a common point

Norplius A substance that enhances night vision in nocturnal animals

Lumbricidae Heavy, powerful

≈

What a fearful magician is Spring,
You can't really teach her a thing,
She sneaks in on a breeze,
Drawing boughs from the trees,
Just as Winter thought he was King!

≈

Luscious habitat
Indescribably gorgeous
There gushes sublimity
Tranquil, primeval,
Lucky are we, privileged,
Excitement of discovery,
Our lives enriched
Understanding nature,
Silently on her business,
Earth in partnership
 With conservationists.

≈

Headwaters Project.
Do all the creatures know
What we are doing?

≈

Hey! Mind that divot!
Too late! Tom tumbled
 over
Landing on damp earth.
Mum's now got to wash
 Tom's clothes!
Go carefully next time,
 Eh?

Paying homage

I pay homage to the Little Ouse Headwaters Project, the fens waters and life forms that flourish here. Each day the Amazon discharges 20% of our Earth's fresh water into the Atlantic at the equator. At the other edge of this scale, the Little Ouse is no less important in our Earth's well being.

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Our Earth has environments which may seem extreme, unfavourable to life: polar icecaps, dry tropical deserts, pressurised ocean depths, ascending to mountains with little oxygen and damaging levels of ultraviolet radiation.

≈

However, compared with other planets which also receive solar energy, our Earth enjoys a unique combination of conditions promoting evolution of life, singly within our solar system. 4000 million years of evolution have produced a truly stunning diversity of plants and animals.

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Our Earth's vitality is due to our atmosphere and abundant water. Our thick and gas-rich atmosphere allows most of our Earth's water to exist in a liquid state at the surface, without which the vast majority of living organisms couldn't survive.

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Since our Earth's earliest history, our atmosphere has evolved, constantly. 78% nitrogen, 21% oxygen, which is produced of biological origin. The atmosphere includes water vapour, contributing to our weather systems. Other gases, methane and carbon dioxide (greenhouse gases), absorb and re-radiate heat from our Earth's surface, preventing loss of solar energy. This action raises our atmospheric temperature.

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For decades this balance has been shifting. Burning hydrocarbons releases carbon dioxide gas causing global warming. Mountain glaciers retreat, Antarctic ice shelves break up, leading to a global rise of the sea level. This threatens much of the fertile wet lands on our Earth.

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The Paleozoic era (543 million years ago) saw the development of land plants, and abundant early life forms; the subsequent Silurian (443~418 m.y.a.), Devonian (418~354 m.y.a.) and Carboniferous (354~290 m.y.a.) periods saw our Earth grow green and develop, nurturing life.

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Invertebrates, the immense majority of our animal species on our Earth, are the tiniest forms of life. Without them, ecological links would be disrupted, causing dynamic instability.

≈

When balanced, the River Little Ouse produces algae forming the first link in a complex food chain allowing myriads of diverse species to live in eutrophic waters: zoo plankton and Cyclops (Cyclops vicinus, Cyclops hyalinus), for instance. Above water level, pond skaters, beetles, tiny crustaceans, leeches, snails, water bugs, water fleas, water boatmen, dragonflies, mayflies and midges all play (as if rejoicing!) whilst below their carnivorous nymphs live out the first stage of their complex lives.

It's a fact that on our Earth, more animals live among the plants of rivers than away from them. Humankind always venerated and honoured water. Some of the earliest peoples had river guardians and spirits whom they believed sustained their societies and maintained fertility, healing and growth. The word 'frith' is Old English from the 13th century, originally 'Fyrhth', sparse woodland, and it is the fount of our Little Ouse.

≈

It wouldn't be too much to presume that the earliest human settlers near the Little Ouse deemed it sacred. Our relatives near the Ganges, Nile, Tigris, Euphrates, Amazon and Mississippi knew the Aegir, the protection, the guardian. Water is life: without it we can't survive. An ancient local belief of the grid of nine determining psychic forces in the locality, describes an enclosure, protecting a sacred spring called a 'Frithyard', charging the water for good.

≈

"Karrinder! In the name of the old ones, into this water I direct my might. That it will be pure and clean, in their service. Ka!" The Little Ouse is eutrophic (eutrophus: well-fed), rich in organic and mineral nutrients supporting an abundant plant life. Rivers can be mesotrophic (meso: middle), 'twixt eutrophic and oligotrophic, (oligo: few, little), poor in nutrients and plant life.

≈

Evolution, Exploitation, Extinction. During the post-glacial period, valleys of rivers draining our area of East Anglia became waterlogged as sea levels rose, causing a cover of fen and peat. This richness begat humankind's greedy intrusion, through agriculture and industries. Small invertebrates perish with algae, nitrates, sewage, and chemicals. This destroys and changes our rivers and ecology.

≈

“Indigenous peoples venerated and respected rivers and nature. The wind that gave me my first breath receives my last sigh. Keep our Earth sacred, the rivers that nurture us with their sweetness. The rivers are brothers, give to them the kindness you would give to any brother. It is the blood of your grandfathers grandfather, each reflection in its clear waters tells of memories.” Chief Seattle’s words, and those of Black Elk and Red Cloud, these observations gave rise to the philosophy of Greenpeace, that to destroy and alter nature and its wonders is to destroy life.



We are merely a strand in the web of life. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. What befalls our Earth, befalls all upon it. To destroy and exploit means to end of living, and the beginning of survival. Those that love a people’s legends speak in tones to rivers that are plain and childlike.

Learn of nature and our past.

Love our Earth as we use to love a mother’s heartbeat when newborn.

22 September 2013

The cyan cow

Rationale

One day, at this summer's glorious height, Anne-Marie and me resolved to 'do' all the fens making up the Little Ouse Headwaters Project in one go—intrepid or what, as they say.

Starting at The Frith, we saw both sheep and cattle as we entered. The sky was a gorgeous cerulean blue, cyan in places, and as cattle sought shade, the shadows cast upon them were a deep cyan, tending towards indigo. Cyan is a fundamental hue in colour processing, both in print or film.

The struggle

Fashioning a poem
concerning cattle,
to understate, a perplexing battle.
Scansion, syntax,
interrogative, morpheme,
scarcely enter into the creative scheme.
Dun coloured, golden, oxide red, Friesian,
grammatical trauma, poetic lesion.
So, phylum chordate, bovidae, cattle,
cyan hued, ruminative tum,
...what prattle!

The Poem

I never saw a cyan cow,
I never hope to see one.
But, I can tell you any how,
I'd rather see than be one.

22 September 2013

Summing up

Example

Divide 50,000 amphibians by the run off of agricultural fertilisers and increased waste products = almost nothing left.

Now, try these three for yourself.

1. Divide unspoilt river environments and accessible beauty by unscrupulous developers and ineffectual planning regulations =

1. Divide fragile and delicate life forms and aquatic areas by increasing emissions of carbon dioxide, methane and chlorofluorocarbons =

1. Divide one extraordinarily beautiful planet, our Earth, by one greedy species =

2 September 2013



Gill Farlam



Hemp and Linen in the Lopham area

Participants in the Little Ouse Headwaters Project have had two opportunities to examine textiles made from spun hemp or flax, some of them woven locally.

Our first visit was to the Castle Museum in Norwich to examine cloths and shepherds' smocks. The second chance to hear about Lopham weaving came with the Blo Norton local history group's evening with Jenny Vere. To illustrate her talk she brought some exquisite tablecloths, woven for Queen Victoria, with the national emblems included in their intricate designs. The width of the cloth surprised us—my knowledge of Jacquard looms, for instance, suggested a narrower weaving width. Initially they seemed too fine to be woven from hemp, but fine hemp was produced by spinners in the Lopham area according to Eric Pursehouse's article 'Wavney Valley Studies'.

For centuries hemp was grown in South Norfolk and North Suffolk where the soil was good for the crop. In Tudor and Elizabethan times farmers were ordered to grow at least one acre of hemp if they had 60 acres of land. The fines for failure were quite hefty. Shrouds for the dead also had to be made from hempen cloth until the 17th century when the wool industry was supported and shrouds were woollen. Hemp was a profitable crop until some time later when the price of wheat rose causing a reduction in hemp-growing.

Industrialisation and the arrival of the railways in the 19th century also affected the hemp trade. Flax was brought in and then cotton, the latter being cheaper.

The railways meant people could bring in goods not available locally. Flax came from Ireland at first; and later on, as plant material, from Lincolnshire. The stems were scutched or processed in factories in Eye and Scole. Railways and horse-drawn vans replaced donkeys as means of transport and weavers sought markets further afield in Diss, Bury St Edmunds and London. Jacquard looms were brought from Scotland with an instructor. The Lophams were not the only centres of weaving: Thelnetham also had many weavers.

Today the Lophams and Thelnetham are relatively quiet villages and it is hard to imagine the bustle and smells there must have been as a result of the weaving industry in the 19th century and earlier. North Lopham had a mere for retting the hemp and that alone must have added to the smells in the village.

At both events with the Little Ouse Headwaters Project we admired the fine cloths, and at the Castle Museum the smocking on the shepherds' smocks impressed us. However, the smocks were not produced locally, though I expect shepherds in this area would have worn similar clothing. Apart from the beautiful tablecloths, Jenny Vere showed us an altar cloth and an embroidered sheet. At both places we were able to examine the examples closely and handle some of them, which added to our enjoyment.

2013



Sally Mills



Woad

Woad is the name of the blue dye produced from the leaves of the plant (*isatis tinctoria*). It has been cultivated throughout Europe since the stone age and has a long association with East Anglia, notably with Boudica and the Iceni tribe who used woad to colour their faces before going into battle.

It is used to dye fabric and wool and as a paint. In Tudor times woad balls became six times more expensive than corn, as it was the only source of the colour blue. The vats were usually banned from the towns because of the smell from the urine used to ferment the woad.



Steve Glason



Poems

Rural Suffolk

To Thelnetham... came one day
(via lonely lanes near Hinderclay)
and lo! I spied her village hall
I felt it right to pay a call.

Victorian, a certain charm
one can imagine strict schoolma'am
who ruled the classroom with a cane
ivy tapping window pane.

Went on to pause... St Mary's Well
a sacred spot in hollow dell
lime-rich waters for the sight
it really was just sheer delight.

I followed paths, criss-crossing fen
stopping briefly, as and when
to capture landscape for the muse
through the fen I thus enthuse.

My walking boots were waterlogged
caked in mud, as I slogged
fording puddles, from the rains
long standing visit now remains.

Her windmill, silent and restored
cherished dearly, so adored
Henry Bryant springs to mind
what a lot of corn to grind!

I returned to jot things down
in my flat, within a town
on the borders, hard to miss
beyond The Lophams, ancient Diss!

16 February 2013

A Norfolk Church

At Lopham South an ancient church
with Norman tower so very old
description now in shortened verse
wax lyrical at Eastertide.

How majestic are the yews
the Irish kind with berries red
which grow along a narrow path
leading to a lichened gate.

Ah, history!...what tales can tell
of worshippers and vicars, too
her crumbling stones in need repair
from ravages of seasoned time.

Thus we leave this hallowed place
with daffodils in April sun
to catch a glimpse of Arcady
Blo Norton and Garboldisham.

20 July 2008

A Dream – Brazilian style

On the banks of Little Ouse
I closed my eyes and had a snooze
the Amazon of Hinderclay?
that would make my summer day.

In amongst Queen Anne Lace
(Garboldisham, the nearest place)
warriors came up by stealth
bows and arrows, what a wealth!

Yes, they were in such a rush
through undergrowth, so green and lush
Blo Norton village, straight ahead
fishing there perhaps instead?

Redgrave and South Lopham Fen
home to these quiet, gentle, men
clearings could be a trifle damp
better than a forest camp.

I awoke with sudden start
was I struck by poisoned dart?
not a bit, here poet lies
surrounded by the dragonflies.

2nd February 2013



Rosemary Humphries



Me, the Little Ouse Headwaters Project and Art

I feel strongly that art has a role in our chaotic world to respond to and record our surroundings.

In a world of cyber- and computer-recording, painting has an ability to record not only something, but also how one feels about that something. We can then leave that record for future generations long after cyberspace has possibly succumbed to its fragility.

Records of past times and places are vital. This is 'now'. It will soon become past. We need to get something down for future generations to know our time.

Places change. Man's influences come, change, and also go, claimed back by nature.

The Little Ouse headwaters areas for me are an example of past and present, man and nature, the wonders of the natural world, an encapsulation of life all around us.

www.rosemaryhumphries.co.uk



Anne-Marie Clark



Hares

The image of the ‘three hares symbol’ has appeared across the world for at least thirteen hundred years. Surprisingly, it uniquely embraces many different cultures and religions. In China it’s found painted on ceilings of Buddhist cave temples; and it is portrayed in Christianity, Islam and Judaism. It is thought the design may have originated in Persia, and from there spread through use on precious textiles such as silk, around the world.



The Church of the Holy Trinity in Long Melford has a medieval stained glass window depicting the three hares symbol, but you’ll need binoculars to catch sight of it!



In Britain both Celts and Saxons honoured hares as sacred symbols of the goddess, rebirth, fertility, transformation, healing, intuition and luck. Closely associated with the moon and the Saxon Goddess Eostre – from whence the word oestrogen is derived – it is also a symbol of sunrise in the east, and brighter warmer days.



Hares sleep in open ‘forms’, looking remarkably like lapwings’ nests. In spring, nests are filled with eggs—and to earlier cultures, it may have seemed as if the hares had made them magically appear; a link with Easter eggs perhaps, and hunting for them.



Many hares or hare figurines have been found in ritual burial pits, symbolising the power of the goddess to bring rebirth and immortality.

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The Celts had a taboo on eating hares, except at certain sacred celebrations. In Kerry it was said 'To eat a hare was to eat one's own grandmother.'

≈

Many people still repeat the phrases, 'White hares or White rabbits', on the first day of every month, for luck.

≈

The mountain hare is our only native hare. Its coat changes from brown to white in winter, unlike the European brown hare. East Anglia is one of the last strongholds of the European brown hare.

Witches

Until the 19th century, many people believed witches were able to 'shape shift,' often appearing as hares, allegedly stealing milk from domestic sheep or cows. They could only be caught by a black greyhound, shot with a silver bullet or an arrow barbed with silver.

Stories abound of wounded hares returning home, transforming once more into human form, bearing wounds or broken limbs inflicted by their pursuers. Witches reputedly chanted the following old rhyme:

'Hare, hare, God send thee care,
I am in hare's likeness now;
But I shall be a woman even now.
Hare, hare, God send thee care.'

Boudica

Boudica, Queen of the Iceni, was believed to be a priestess of Andraste, a Celtic warrior goddess, her token animal a hare.

On the eve of major battles, it was thought Boudica released a hare from the folds of her cloak. Depending on which direction or course it ran, it foretold either victory or defeat.

Centuries after Boudica's death, many places in Britain laid claim to her burial site, which is still unknown. Some believe her warriors carried her body home. Three Norfolk villages are strong contenders: Thetford, her headquarters, where remains of an enormous Romano British temple complex were discovered in the 20th century at Gallows Hill; Garboldisham, where a large round barrow, known as Soldier's Hill, lies between Home Covert and Devil's Dyke; and Quidenham, which also has a round barrow, the village sign depicting Boudica riding her chariot, although maps refer to the barrow as Viking's Mound.

Perhaps we shall never know where her warriors chose to bury her, unless, as in the recent discovery of King Richard III in 2013, whose bones lay beneath a municipal car park, we excavate these barrows. Her spirit, however, will always live on in legend.

Robins, wrens—kings!

Yule, thought to originate from the Saxon or Norse word for wheel, once referred to the sun turning the wheel of the year. The midwinter solstice on the shortest day, the darkest time of year, witnessed celebratory gatherings anticipating the returning light and warmth of the sun.

There arose a number of curious customs and traditions which are still celebrated in certain towns and villages around Britain. A folktale concerning a battle betwixt two kings at the midwinter and summer solstices for the hand of the Maiden of Spring, features these two characters, not mortal kings, but from the kingdom of nature; spirits of the greenwood.

The Battle: Oak King versus Holly King

During the midwinter solstice, Oak King represents the new year, returning sun, warmth and fertility to the land with the return of light. His twin, Holly King, symbolises the waning, dark half, from midsummer to midwinter. Naturally, Oak always wins the Maiden's hand at midwinter leading to the spring and summer months. Triumphant at midsummer, Holly completes the two halves of Earth's yearly cycle.

Totem birds

Each tree has one! Robin, adorned with flaming red breast, is claimed to have brought Earth fire's gift. His tree, the oak, has links to Jupiter, Thor, Odin and Taranis, all fire gods.

Holly chose the wren, king of birds (but that's a story for another time). Shy, reclusive; heard but rarely seen; foraging in secret, shadowy, places: thick hedges, nooks and crannies, within stones and rocks; coverts; hence its Latin name, *Troglodytes*, a rock or cave dweller.

A victim of a cruel hunt

King Wren, represented the dying winter king, hunted by 'Wren Boys' on Boxing Day. Killed and placed in a box or within a ball of holly and ivy, it was decorated with ribbons then paraded through the village. In return for gifts, the boys gave a 'lucky' wren's feather... not so lucky for the wren, however. Supposedly, it ensured fertility, celebrating the sun's return and new beginnings for everyone. The Cornish attribute it to a saying 'Hunt a robin or a wren, never prosper, man or boy.'

Guising, mumming and plays

Guising and mumming plays, based on the old myths whose origins are lost in the mists of time, are still performed. Within recent years The Old Glory Molly Dancers stage 'The Cutty Wren' ceremony on Boxing Day ('cutty' means small) at Middleton, Suffolk, near Dunwich. Dancers parade through crowded streets at nightfall, to the slow beat of a solitary drum, illuminated by blazing torches, carrying a long pole upon which a carved effigy of a wren is surrounded by holly and ivy. Supposedly it's the only village in England where it's performed.

Sanity returns

Thankfully these little birds are hunted no longer, loved and revered as garden visitors, gracing Yuletide cards with the gregarious robin: two common birds with far from common mythical and royal connections.

For further information, The Old Glory Molly Dancers website features wonderful pictures — www.old-glory.org.uk



Lyn Bennett



As part of the LOHP Creative Project, we organised a series of workshops for the group exploring local plants to make paper and textile products. Using what she had learnt and noted during these sessions, Lyn Bennett has written instructions on making paper from plants and preparations for dyeing with woad. She has also written a text based on her own research and experimentation with nettles to make fibre.

Stinging Nettle Fibre

First, a story about a princess' quest to rescue her brothers who had been turned into swans by their evil stepmother. To rescue them, the princess had to collect nettle, spin it into yarn and knit jackets, all the while remaining silent. She had many adventures while she worked, mainly due to the fact that she could not speak. Eventually she was accused of being a witch, and just as she was about to be dragged to the village green to be burnt at the stake, some swans flew over on their spring return to the north and circled her. She threw the jackets up to them and they turned back into handsome princes and saved her. One brother had feathers instead of fingers on his left hand because his sister did not have quite enough nettle to finish the sleeve of his jacket. (Hans Christian Andersen, 'The Wild Swans')

Now, some facts:

Nettle fibre has been used for 2,000 years for clothing and fine linen. Scotch cloth was believed to be originally made from nettle fibre. Nettle fibre only went into decline with the production of cotton.

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The Germans in World War I used nettle fibre to produce uniforms because it was no longer possible to get cotton from the USA.

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Different types of nettles produce different amounts of fibre. The common British nettle (*urtica dioica*) is small and can only produce a little fibre.

Nettle fibre has fire retardant properties.



To make your own nettle fibre first, pick some nettles—but what you pick and when you pick them will make a difference:

“In every situation and different soil, the most productive nettles are found to be those which have the smoothest and more concave tubes, the largest joints, the fewest leaves and which produce the least quantity of seed.”

— Edward Smith, 1803

You tend to find these nettles in light shade. Nettles growing in full sun are covered with seed heads. Nettles growing in deep shade tend to grow tall with fewer leaves but the stems are too spindly. The best time to pick the nettles is from the beginning of July to the end of August, but if the weather is fine you could try picking them in September or October as well. If the weather changes in the later months, and you cannot ret the nettles (see below), you can leave them under cover to dry until the spring.



Once you have collected the nettles, snip the leaves off with a pair of scissors. If you pull them off they tend to pull some of the stem fibre off as well. Tie the stems into bundles and leave hanging to dry for a week. You will notice that the stems will shrivel a bit, particularly if it is very hot.



Next you need to ret (rot) the stems. To do this, put the stems in a container and cover them with water (preferably rainwater) and put something (I used a brick) in the container to hold the stems down.

“The time required for steeping them is from five to eight days, but it is better that they should remain rather too long in the water than too short a time, yet great care should be taken they are not underdone. When the fibre approaches to a pulp and will easily separate from the reed and the reed becomes brittle and assumes a white appearance, that operation is finished.’

—Edward Smith

I found that the stems still looked greenish after 8 days. However, take them out of the water (you may need a peg for your nose!), rinse them a little and leave them to rot a bit more on the grass. Put some netting below the nettles (to make turning easier) and more netting over the nettles (to stop the birds taking them for nest building) and turn them each day. Within a very short time you will notice that they have turned white and some fibre will be visible hanging from the stems.

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The next step is to separate the fibre from the rotted stems. One method is to wrap the nettles in muslin and put into a cool oven (80° C) for about an hour or until the nettles are brittle. Take the bundle out of the oven and put it onto a wooden board. Pound the bundle with a wooden meat tenderiser. When you have pounded it enough you will see, once you have undone the muslin, that the fibres have miraculously separated from the stem material. It takes some time to pick out the fibres but then you will have something to spin.

Paper-making with Charles Bran

In Britain, the monasteries were the first to experiment with making paper. The abbots used bramble leaves because these can be picked all year round and are easily stored, but paper can be made from all sorts of vegetable matter. Onions and shallots only need be cooked for 15 minutes to break down but you need a good cardboard box full to make one A3 sheet of paper. Shallots make a stunning paper. Seaweed is also a good base. Celery (leaves and stalks) make a see-through paper. We used pampas grass which gives similar results to the reeds found near the Little Ouse. 2kg makes about 100 A5 sheets of paper

To make paper:

Cut the dry plant material no smaller than 2 - 4 inches and put in a large cooking pot (about 20 litres) with an equal amount of water (but not too near the top of the pot) and bring to the boil. If in a hurry add caustic soda (about 100g; no more*) and stir in or use wood ash (sprinkle about 2-3 inches deep on the top and stir in), but cooking could take all day (12 hours). The caustic soda method takes 2 hours to break down the plant matter. Some salts such as sea salt can also be used.

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Once the cooking is finished, line a colander with muslin and pour the plant material in, allowing the cooking water to drain away. Rinse thoroughly with cold water or the paper will be lumpy and you need to get any black bits out. Then put it back in an empty pan, put in 2 kettles of boiling water and add rooml bleach (the amount is dependent on how pale a paper you require). Leave this for about 5 minutes, then put back into the muslin-lined colander and rinse in cold water and squeeze in the muslin to get rid of the bleach. (At this stage you can store the

cooked material in a container in the fridge. It will keep for up to 3 months. Reheat it in hot water before using.)

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Put a handful of the prepared plant material into a blender and fill the blender halfway with boiling water. Put a towel over the top and a towel underneath and blend for 5 seconds. If the plant material is small enough, it should not catch round the cutters—but watch out for this. Put the blended mixture into a coolbox to keep it hot and work through the rest of the material, blending a handful at the time until it has all been processed. Rinse the blender bowl between handfuls to get rid of any gunk. Once all the matter has been blended, empty the contents of the coolbox into a vat wide enough that size of the mould and deckle you plan to use can be laid flat into it. If there is any scum (which appears if you haven't rinsed properly!) take it off with a j-cloth.

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To make the paper, cover a table with newspaper or waterproof material. Then take a thin plastic board (such as a cutting board) slightly bigger than the paper size you are making and wrap around a well-wetted (with hot water) j-cloth pulling it tightly over the back to avoid creases. Then place another well-wetted j-cloth on top. Give the mixture a bit of a stir and let it settle just a bit. Hold the deckle with the net on the top and hold the mould over this. To pick up the mixture, put the mould and deckle at right angles to the water and bring it down on the farther side of the water. Bring them down flat with the mould on top and draw it towards you, then slant it and bring it up towards you. Some matter should have filled the mould. (If not, put it back, re-stir the mixture and have another go.)

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Once you are satisfied, take off the mould and push any stray bits into the paper shape. Let the paper drain over the

container for a while. Move the deckle and rest a long edge on the wetted j-cloths, paper facing away from you. With a smooth, steady movement, tip the paper the paper down flat onto the board. Use a damp cloth to pick up any excess water by wiping the netting above the paper, but don't let it get too dry.

Remove the deckle, and you should have a perfectly formed sheet of paper on the board. Put a fresh j-cloth over the paper and roll it with a rolling pin. Turn over the cloth and put it onto a fresh board. Tap the cloth and peel off the original dampened cloth. (At this stage you can add leaf skeletons, seeds, etc. onto the wet paper sheet).

Place a layer of 2-3 j-cloths over the piece of paper. Prepare other sheets of paper in the same way, gradually building up the pile of j-cloths and sheets of paper. Once all the sheets are finished put another board on top of the final 2-3 j-cloths and weight it. Refresh the j-cloths each day and replace the weights until the paper is completely dry.

Other Recipes

* N.B. If you use caustic soda either measure the amount of water added to cover the material and use one tablespoon per litre of water or weigh the plant material and add 10% of the weight in caustic soda. Use a stainless steel or enamel pan: caustic soda will eat aluminium.

Nettles Be very patient with this for good results. Strip leaves from stems and use the leaves. Use bleach to whiten paper if required and rinse well. The result is a soft and silky paper. Use for writing or decoration.

Brambles Use leaves only. Use bleach to whiten paper as required but needs more rinsing than other plants. Can be used for writing.

Celery Use chopped stalks and leaves. Just cover with water but keep some by to top up. Use less caustic soda—and there is no need to bleach. You can add cotton lint to bulk it out, but put it in the blender for 3 seconds only.

Seaweed Probably needs more boiling. Stir often. Just cover with water but keep some by with which to top up the mixture. Use bleach undiluted but rinse well.

Lavender Use heads and cuttings. Just cover with water but keep some by to top up. Stir often. Use bleach undiluted and rinse well. The result is very decorative.

Shallot Skins Peel one sack of shallots and use the skins only. They only need to cook for 20 minutes. Stir a lot. Use undiluted bleach but rinse twice. The result delivers rich colours and looks good under light.

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Barbara Burrows

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Medicinal plants ancient and modern

1. Chamomile (*Chamaemelum Nobile*) (= *Anthemis Nobilis*)

Ancient method A decoction of Chamomile takes away stitches and pains in the side. The flowers, beaten and made into balls, with oil drive away all sorts of agues. If the one grieved be anointed with that oil from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot and afterward laid to bed, he will sweat well. Bathing with a decoction of Chamomile taketh away weariness and easeth pains, particularly of the colic and stone and torments of the belly it gently provoketh urine.

Modern method It plays an important part of the modern herbal practice. The infusion is excellent for migraine and headache due to gastric disturbances will also regulate the menstrual periods. A tincture is suitable for highly-strung or hypersensitive individuals. Oil of Chamomile can be taken, three drops on lump sugar, as an alternative to the above.

2. Comfrey (*Symphytum Officinale*)

Ancient method Comfrey helpeth those that spit blood or make a bloody urine. The root boiled in wine or water and the decoction drunk helps all inward hurts and bruises, wounds and ulcers of the lungs and causes phlegm to be easily spit forth. The roots outwardly applied help wounds cuts and is good for broken bones and ruptures.

Modern method A valuable demulcent and healing herb, also known as Knitbone for its power to mend broken bones. Comfrey contains allantoin, which is used to encourage wound healing, and is an ingredient of skin preparations to treat psoriasis. A decoction of the root or tablets from herbalists is used for peptic ulcers, colitis, and hiatus hernia.

3. Eyebright (*Euphrasia Officinalis*)

Ancient method The juice or distilled water of Eyebright taken inwardly in white wine or broth, or dropped into the eyes helps all infirmities of the eyes that cause dimness of the sight. A conserve of the flowers has the same effect. It also helps a weak brain or memory.

Modern method An infusion of the herb strained is used as an eye lotion for inflammatory diseases, compressed and soaked in the lotion when cold can be applied to the eyes, it can be used for conjunctivitis and other eye infections. It is also useful for hay fever, catarrh and nasal congestions.

4. Sage (*Salvia Officinalis*)

Ancient method A decoction of the leaves and branches provokes the urine, bringing down woman's courses and expels the dead child. It stays bleeding of wounds, and can be used to cleanse foul ulcers or sores. Three spoonfuls of the juice taken fasting, with a little honey, stops the casting of blood in those with consumption. The juice taken in warm water helps hoarseness and the cough.

Modern method One of the best remedies for laryngitis, tonsillitis and sore throats. A teaspoon full of the dried leaves is infused in a cup of boiling water and the liquid used as a gargle. Honey can also be added.

5. Blackberry (*Rubus Fruticosus*)

Ancient method The buds, leaves and branches, while green are good for use in ulcers and putrid sores of the mouth and throat and for quinsy, and likewise to heal other fresh wounds and sores. The leaves and brambles can be used as a lotion for sores in the mouth and secret parts.

Modern method The root and leaves are used as stringent and toning. The root is more potent as an infusion and can be used for simple diarrhoea.

6. Dill (*Anethum Graveolens*)

Ancient method It is the seeds that are used. Boiled and drank they ease both swelling and pains. They stayeth the belly and stomach from casting. Women with pains and windiness will be helped if they sit in a decoction. Boiled in wine and ties in a cloth the seeds with stayeth hiccough if they are smelled. The roasted or fried seeds used in oils or plaisters drieth moist ulcers in fundament. An oil made of Dill is effectual to warm or dissolve humours or imposthumes, to ease pains and procure rest.

Modern method An excellent remedy for children with flatulence or digestive problems. A few drops can be taken on a lump of sugar, or Dill water can be made by adding drops of distilled water. The dose of water is one to eight teaspoonfuls. The seeds are used for flavouring cakes.

7. Elder (*Sambucus Nigra*)

Ancient method The bark, leaves, flowers and berries all have medicinal properties. The first shoots to appear, boiled like Asparagus, and also the young leaves and stalks boiled in fat broth, carry forth phlegm and choler. The middle

and inward bark boiled in water and given in drink works much more violently. The berries, either green or dry, expel the same humour. They are also given with good success to help the dropsy. The juice of the green leaves applied to hot inflammations of the eyes assuages them. The decoction of the berries in wine provokes urine.

Modern method A valuable remedy in modern herbal medicine. The bark, flowers and berries are all used and are available from herbalists. The berries rich in vitamin C are used to make wine or juice, either taken hot is a traditional remedy for colds. An ointment can be made and used for bruises, sprains and chilblains. An infusion of the bark is a laxative and diuretic. It is given in small doses over a period of time to purify the blood.

8. Feverfew (Tan acetum (= chrysanthemum) Parthenium)

Ancient method The decoction of the herb with sugar or honey helps the cough or stuffing of the chest due to colds. It also cleanses the veins and bladder and helps to expel the stone. It is effectual for all pains in the head coming of a cold cause, the herb being bruised and applied to the crown of the head. It will relieve vertigo.

Modern method One or two leaves of the Feverfew can be included in a sandwich and eaten to relieve headaches and migraine. Some people may be sensitive to Feverfew leaves and develop blisters in the mouth. The herbalists' method of using the herb in combination with other indicated herbs, like Chamomile, which it strongly resembles, is to be recommended, rather than to isolate and remove the active principles as has been suggested by some pharmacologist. A tincture applied locally relieves the pain and irritation of insect bites.

9. Garlic (*Allium Sativum*)

Ancient method It provokes urine and woman's courses, helps the biting of mad dogs, and other venomous creatures. Kills the worms in children, cuts and voids tough phlegm, purges the head, helps the lethargy, is a good preservative against and a good remedy for any plague or sore or foul ulcer.

Modern method Garlic is an antiseptic and the juice diluted with water can be applied direct to wounds. The plant contains a natural antibiotic substance and the oil obtained in capsule form is a popular method to taking it internally. The juice made into a syrup is given for coughs, colds and asthma because of its expectorant properties.

10. Thyme (*Thymus Vulgaris*)

Ancient method It strengthens the lungs and is a good remedy for chin-cough in children. It kills worms in the belly. It is also excellent for those with gout.

Modern method It is rich in thymol and relieves throat and bronchial irritation and the spasms of whooping cough. Can also relieve dyspepsia and gastritis.

11. Rosemary (*Rosemarinus Offinalis*)

Ancient method A decoction of Rosemary in wine helps cold diseases of the head and in such as giddiness and swimings, drowsiness or dullness, the dumb palsy loss of speech, the lethargy and falling-sickness. It is both drunk and the temples bathed with it.

Modern method As a remedy for headache due to gastric disturbance. It stimulates bile production of the liver. It is a tonic

to the scalp, is one of the ingredients of Eau-de-cologne and many over the counter shampoos and hair preparations. Can be used as a hair wash or rinse.

12. Periwinkle (great) (Vinca Major)

Ancient method It is a very good female medicine and may be used with advantage in hysteric or other fits. The young tops made into conserve are good to prevent nightmares.

Modern method Vinca Major is an astringent used to check heavy menstrual periods and haemorrhage, also for diarrhoea and bleeding piles.

Woad dyeing Shibori style with Sally Mills

Preparation day

We learnt various ways to prepare material for dyeing:

Simple Method Scrunch up a piece of fabric and tie it with string, elastic bands, raffia, or put in an orange net. The ball should be as tight as you can get it to prevent the dye from reaching some parts of the fabric.

Pinch Method Pinch out a piece of the fabric and tie it up. How you tie it makes a different pattern—and spacing it equally makes a better pattern. Do quite a few over the material. The more fabric you pinch out, the larger the white bands will be. You could also draw a circle on the fabric (drawing around the rim of a glass or something else). Sew round the item and draw the thread in as tightly as possible or sew across the circle and then tie up the stitching.

Doughnut Take a piece of material (about 16" x 16") and lay three overhanging lengths of thick thread or cotton across the bottom of the material. Roll the material up around the thread. Form the rolled-up material into a circle and pull the two threads gathering up the material as tightly as possible, making a doughnut shape. You can also pull out some material out of the doughnut which will dye and leave a margin at the bottom.

Drainpipe Take a piece of material large enough to wrap around a drainpipe. The drainpipe should have a hole at the top to tie some string into: wrap the tied string around the drainpipe in straight lines, not diagonally. Once you have tied the string tightly around the drainpipe, push the string and material to the end where the string is tied.

Concertina Take a piece of material and fold it into a small fold one way then turn to fold another giving a concertina effect. Tie off with threads at regular intervals and then tie them tightly.

Clamping Take a piece of fabric and fold it into squares, oblongs or triangles. Put two pieces of flat wood or heavy-duty plastic on either side of the folded fabric and clip the two together using clips, pegs or clamps. The middle of the fabric will remain white and anything else will dye blue.

Folded fabric Take a piece of fabric and fold it (as a concertina, or however you wish). Put pegs, bulldog clips, paper clips or any other clip along the edges of the fabric as a resist. The fabric will remain white where the clips are placed and in the shape of the clip.

Wood, driftwood or lavender stalks Soak new wood items thoroughly overnight before the dyeing day so that the dye goes right through the wood. Since driftwood has been in the sea, it should not therefore need such a long soak.

Stitch resist The Larch pattern is a series of circles, which can be drawn on the fabric with a compass. There are other patterns such as a flower pattern, semi circles or triangles. For the Larch pattern stitch first fold the circle in half, then stitch around the edge (using nylon or a strong thread) and pull the stitching as tightly as possible; and secure the thread. For the flower pattern, stitch across the middle and round the edges of the leaves (again, these can be folded in half to cut down on the sewing). For the semi-circles or triangles, stitch along the lines.

Knots Take a long piece of fabric and tie it into a series of knots.

