

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

THIS LAND

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FREE



Photo: Chris Hornby

COMMON LANDS: *THIS LAND*

National Lottery Heritage Fund award supports new project.

Thanks to funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, b-side are delighted to launch *This Land* – a project taking a closer look at the Portland environment and what makes the island such a special place. Through research, workshops and discussion events we will host open conversations on topics that affect us both locally and globally. Exploring land use and access, land and property rights, biodiversity and climate change, this project aims to gather and share knowledge to help protect and enhance the environment and character of Portland.

Portland is a curious island – intensive quarrying having drastically changed what was once a land of open pasture and grazing sheep. A land where enclosure came late – fiercely resisted by the people here. The remnants of some of this agricultural past remain in the landscape below the village of Southwell. In coming weeks we will be studying this area at the far south of the island, with a particular focus on the distinct ecology relating to its limestone geology with habitats supporting rare plant species and wildlife.

As part of the project our researcher, Dr Jeanie Sinclair, has been working with residents investigating the history of a ruined Tudor cottage on the seafront at Chiswell,

revealing fascinating stories of the lives of the people that lived there. This property is owned by Dorset Council and one of the project objectives is to consult with residents on the future of this site. The aim being to bring it back into Portland ownership and used in a way that preserves heritage for the benefit of residents and the well-being of the island – with continued use as fishing stores very much part of the plan. .

We are joined in this ongoing research by artists Emily Tracy, Knead, Wildworks and Heinrich & Palmer who will be creating artworks in response to this land – all to be shared at next years b-side festival.

Meet Jeanie Sinclair



Dr Jeanie Sinclair is our project researcher – she has been working with us over the past few months working with residents, leading sessions on how to undertake research, recording oral histories, using online research tools and supporting individual research.

Currently focussed on the Brandy Row site Jeanie will be leading further sessions exploring the past, present and future of the Portland Bill landscape in September and October this year. **Interested to join us?** Please get in touch – catherine@b-side.org.uk

Jeanie is a feminist historian whose work focuses on community, place and heritage as activism, and is particularly interested in how histories of community and place are important in the present. Having worked as a researcher, lecturer and curator, her research uses oral histories to look at how place makes community and how community makes place. She is interested in ordinary people's extraordinary stories, uncovering hidden and alternative histories, and looking at how history can be used to talk about community issues in the present and imagine different futures.

She has worked as a researcher on theatre projects and for The National Archives and Bristol Festivals, taught at Falmouth University and the University of Exeter. Most recently she was Research Fellow at St Ives Archive, and worked as a curator at Tate St Ives.

Tales of Brandy Row Smuggling, Fishing, & Retribution

A Poem by Vicky Marshall

Hush, my little one, don't you say a word,
Your pa will be back soon, safely returned,
With armfuls of velvet, and brandy and tea,
The tide will soon turn, we'll be smiling with glee.

But the drub, drub, drub of Dead Man's Bay,
Told a different story on that fateful day.

Don't you fear the footsteps and loud angry shouts,
Don't you fash yerself 'bout the revenue men about,
Your brothers are all stealthy, they know just where to hide,
The good folks and tunnels, will let them there abide.

But the drub, drub, drub of Dead Man's Bay,
Foretold of a death, before the close of day.

"Stop! who goes there, desist, come into the light!
Raise your lantern near your face, you have no right,
Lay down your smugglers' spoils, hid under your grimy clothes,
Dorchester gaol beckons, as thou well nighest knows."

And the drub, drub, drub of Dead Man's Bay,
Said one would not go home, but in the gutter lay.

So underneath the nose of the preventive men,
The cargo was alighted, thank the Lord, "Amen",
The decoys did their job, they lured them off the scene,
But nipper Stone was wounded,
By King's Lancer John McClean.

And the drub, drub, drub of Dead Man's Bay,
Hid the awful screams of a young man being slayed.

Hush, my little one, don't you say a word,
Now we'll have good cheer for the coming New Year,
Our cellars can be filled with fineries and food,
Ma Stone will be comforted by her large, close brood.

But the drub, drub, drub of Dead Man's Bay,
Warned those scavenging souls,
Of the price they might pay.



WHO LIVED IN A HOUSE LIKE THIS?

Researching Brandy Row

Dr Jeanie Sinclair

Ordinary people have extraordinary stories, and the research so far on Brandy Row has started to reveal the extraordinary stories of Portlanders who lived in the area over the last 200 years.

Starting a new research project is always an adventure and there's never a guarantee that it will go in the direction that you think it will. The research on the seventeenth century house in Brandy Row so far has been no different. There have, of course, been the expected, but nonetheless exciting stories of smuggling. But there have also been very real tales of poverty and hard work, of migration and tragedy.

Author Sheila Mazey gave a talk at our event in June, and not only did a great reading from her book Brandy Row, but also gave an insight into her research process. Her novel was based on the stories that her father told her about her family who lived in Brandy Row, and she used these stories as a starting point to write her historical fiction. Similarly, Vicky Marshall has used the romance and tragedy she has uncovered in her family history research to write a poem telling the story of Brandy Row in the nineteenth century.

Existing stories suggested that the property we have been looking at had been derelict and uninhabited since the end of the nineteenth century, and photographic evidence of its poor state supported this idea. It was both unexpected

and exciting to discover that this property, known as 'Entry' because of its passageway, led to a courtyard containing five dwellings that were still inhabited well into the twentieth century, right up until the slum clearances shortly before the Second World War. The housing was poor quality, and conditions for the families living there were hard.

Several of our researchers have family connections to Brandy Row, and have been uncovering their histories. Some of our researchers are finding links with each other, with connections between their families going back generations. Ann Lynham and Pam Oswald's family history research has revealed stories that would otherwise have remained hidden, and a vital thread of the history of Brandy Row. Although the seventeenth century cottage that is the focus of the investigations appearing to be derelict by the end of the nineteenth century, our researchers have revealed that the house and the area behind was inhabited in the early part of the twentieth century.

Pam and Ann also discovered a connection between their families from this period by chatting through the b-side *This Land* Facebook group. Pam's grandparents, Alf Matthews and Grace Osborne moved to Entry with their two daughters in 1920, with Pam's mother Phoebe born in 1922, and her younger sister in 1925. Ann writes,

"Her grandfather was Thomas Robert White and was 21 when he joined the other 13 men from Chesil to assist in the recovery of the 12 survivors from the ship the Forest. Thomas died in 1933, and the Dorset Echo of the day reported on the funeral of being "the last of the Avalanche Heroes."

These stories are just the beginning. We're looking forward to telling the tales of Brandy Row, and its importance in the history not just for Portland, but as a unique story of British History.

Join the mailing list or the This Land project Facebook group for project news, opportunities and updates on the research.



REPORTS FROM OUR RESEARCHERS

Entry

Mark Samworth

Having moved to Portland last year I was keen to become involved with island life and joined up with the This Land research group. Our attention has focused upon Brandy Row, Chiswell; here are some initial observations and findings. Originally a row of cottages dating from the 17th century, the area is now semi-derelict with one building standing at the southern end with roofless garages and workshops leading northwards to occupied properties.

The Entry, the last standing 'cottage' of the row at the southern end, led to four dwellings to the rear and beyond that a flat piece of land below what is now Cove Cottages. At one point this area was a farm, a perfume factory and later a workshop for fabricating kayaks and canoes.

A development of nine houses and one conversion has been built on part of this land, at least three of which are holiday lets if not more. This development is called Chesil Beach Mews and could well be the first gated



Image courtesy of Dorset History Centre

community on Portland and as such highlights areas of concern for the islanders – the number of second homes/holiday cottages and the threat to open access

Local residents of Cove Cottages recollect that the site was referred to as the Bulling, there was a barn and it is believed that farming took place there until around 1900. There is also a memory of a German aircraft crashing there in the Second World War, damaging a wall of Portland stone that was repaired with breeze blocks. Records show that a Junkers 88 was shot down by anti-aircraft fire, crashing at Davis's Timber Yard, Chesilton in 1942. Chesilton, as listed in John Marius Wilson's Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales, 1870-72, was one of the names given to what is now known as Chiswell.

The tithe map of 1841 shows plots 382 and 382a listed as a green close (a meadow) or farm, with a house and garden belonging to Abraham Mills positioned behind Entry. There is a record of the admission of Abraham Mills aged 73, a Fortuneswell baker, to Harrison Hospital, Dorchester in October 1855. The hospital was previously known as Dorset County Lunatic Asylum from 1832-1919, and later, Dorset County Mental Hospital 1920-1940. Closed in 1992, some of the remaining parts of the building are now flats.



Research... so what is it?

Jess Chambers

I heard about the B-Side research project into the Brandy Row dwelling and the land at Portland Bill through Social Media, and thought that it sounded an interesting thing to get involved in. I'm local and also a bit of a history nerd on a purely amateur level so was immediately drawn to this.

At the first meeting I attended I was a little overawed at the amazing talent that other people brought to the table, and I probably talked way too much with nervous energy! Everyone has something unique to contribute to the project, be it graduate level expertise or local family connections to the area. It's a perfect mix.

After initially looking at the Tithe Apportionment Map

we realised that there were a couple of family names that were of most interest to our research project with regard to the Brandy Row property, and so I offered to cross-reference the Census Information against these names to try to establish a pattern, and show a history and provenance relating to this particular area. I detailed my findings on a basic Excel spreadsheet, adding in the final column any anomalies and further areas that need to be researched. My next step is to research archives to check birth/death/marriage certificates to see if the family connections that we think we have uncovered can be backed up by historical evidence.

So what have I learnt about research? Well, it's a lot less glamorous than one would think. It's a lot of scrolling through very old documents (either online or in the Dorset Archives in Dorchester), and every now and then something comes up that can send you down several other routes, which may or may not yield results. Oh, and there's also coffee and cake with the research team!

Finding John Way!

The search for John Way's notebook

Catherine Bennett

The Mystery began when using the excellent J. Bettey's *The Island and Royal Manor of Portland* published in 1970, for research into the story of Portland's Common Land. Bettey mentions a diary kept by a John Way who recorded the response of inhabitants resistant to the enclosure of the island's common and parish land. This sounded like an intriguing document. At that time the notebook was in the safe keeping of the Portland Congregational Church in Chiswell. The thing is – where was it now?

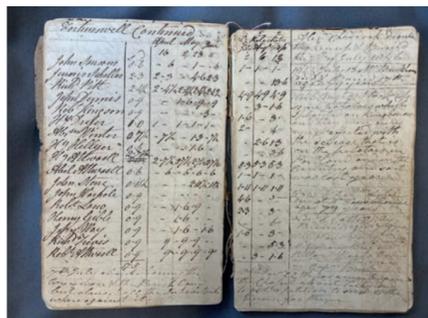
We made enquires with Portland Museum and with the Dorset History Centre, but neither had it registered in their archives. We had been told anecdotally it was in a museum but which museum? We were not having any luck in finding it. We also didn't really know what it looked like. Another person had told us that her mum used to have the notebook, but had lent it to someone, and had never got it back. It seemed tantalizingly close, but we didn't have any recent information as to its whereabouts. Had it been lost? Was it lying somewhere unrecognised for its significance?

We took to social media using the new This Land group page asking for help to solve the mystery of John Way's notebook and then spread the net wider on all the main Portland pages. This led to a note being posted through my door by my neighbour's mum and inside the envelope was a letter written by the Revd. B.G Prior dated the 27th June

2001. We were getting more up-to-date, and it showed that its importance was recognized.

"Should it be misappropriated by any individual there is a danger that it could be lost to the church and the Island".

At this point it was in the safe in the vestry, but the church was now a private house. The notes at the top of the letter mentioned a reference to The Portland History Trust and a note that the notebook was now at the Dorchester Archives. The problem was that Dorset History Centre did not have it in their catalogue and the Portland History Trust had only ever had the letter from Revd. Prior and not the book itself.



We needed to check with Dorset History Centre ourselves and see if it could have been catalogued under a different name. Several inquiries and comments on social media had suggested this was a possibility. This was further confirmed when Stuart Morris got in touch with a very faint photocopy of a notebook he had once borrowed from Bob Wollage for use in his research. This notebook was known as William Pearce's Collecting Book. Were they connected? Were they one and the same thing?

We arranged a trip to the archives at Dorset History Centre with some of our local researchers working on the This Land heritage project with Dr Jeanie Sinclair. The trail was hot and it seemed like we had nearly tracked the notebook down.

It was there – fantastic – and it was indeed catalogued under William Pearce. The booklet listed the amounts collected from inhabitants towards funding the building and upkeep of the new United Reform Church in Chiswell, founded in 1828 by William Pearce, Rebecca Stone and John Way. In the margins were notes on all sorts of events in Portland's history in the 1800s – including entries describing how the church was attacked in the night on a number of occasions by people throwing stones at the door! Had William's Collecting Book been repurposed and these notes added later by John Way or was it just kept safe by his family. The booklet seems to have passed through many hands before eventually finding its way to the Dorset History Centre, and we have asked for the cataloguing to be updated so it will be easier to locate in future. It is tricky to read in parts, but well worth the effort and the blue marbled inside cover is beautiful.

So who was John Way and what part did he play in the story? He was a Brandy Row local and a man who has helped us understand some of the key events relating to our common land. He provides a link between the two project themes and sites and his history is very much intrinsic to This Land. Follow the project as we uncover more of this story including links to the Avalanche shipwreck in 1877.

UPDATE: *It transpires that a full transcription of the diary entries was made by Peter Trim and reproduced in The Free Portland News in 1989. It was good to know that if the original diary had gone astray at least the content had been recorded.*

COMMONING



THE COMMONS

Common land and the rather sad tale of the loss of the commons on Portland.

Catherine Bennett

My interest in land is having access to it to be able to grow food to eat and in having the freedom to roam. I have a photo of my 8-year-old running full pelt down over Verne Hill towards the harbour and it is this sense of space and being able to really free yourself that I want children (and adults) to experience. I want to sit and take in the view and he wants to just stretch every sinew.

What is common land?

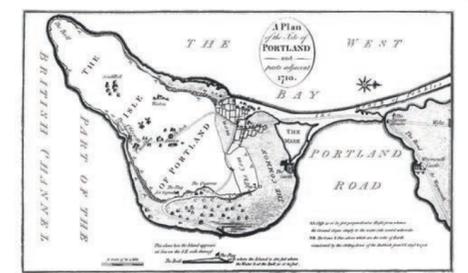
Common Land is privately owned land, but which we, as the commoners, have access to. The Foundation for Common Land provides some useful context: First enshrined in law in the Magna Carta in 1215, Common Land traditionally sustained the poorest people in rural communities who owned no land of their own, providing them with pasture for livestock and other rights to resources such as to gathering wood and fish from Chesil.

At one time nearly half of the land in Britain was Common Land, but from the 16th onwards the gentry excluded Commoners from land which could be 'improved' through agriculture or had other useful resources such as stone. That is why most Common Land is now found in areas with low agricultural potential, but areas which we know hold value for high conservation significance and natural beauty. Over one-third of England's moorland is common land.

Common Land now accounts for 3% of England, but this includes large tracts of our most well-loved and ecologically rich landscapes including Dartmoor, the Lake District, Yorkshire Dales and our very own Chesil Beach.

Commoning is an ancient land management practice that involves a group of farmers – from one or two to over 100 – having "commoners rights" to graze their animals (mostly sheep but also cattle, pigs, horses...and even ducks) on a shared piece of land – the common – without fences or boundaries between them. The sheep don't need fences, through flock memory passed down through the generations they stay on their patch of the common.

The sheep belong on their leas (patch). The commoners belong on their family farms, and the commoners' rights belong with the farm. The common itself belongs to a private individual or council or organisation. On Portland this would be Crown Land managed by The Court Leet or land managed by Dorset Council. In the past commons were the backbone and the rock (literally) of our civilisation, and the turn of these quiet sentinels has come again.



We must protect them, for their intrinsic value. This is our heritage; as commons provided for our ancestors so they can provide for our descendants, and once again we must work with our environment to shape and secure our future.

Commoners graze their livestock (sheep, cows, ponies) on Common Land. This use of land for pasture – without ploughing or planting – has protected landscapes for over 1,000 years. It has ensured the survival of thousands of ancient monuments and has enabled wildlife such as rare birds and butterflies to thrive, as grazing maintains the balance of the delicate ecosystems. Grazing, if on large enough areas of land, is intrinsic to our calcareous grasslands on Portland.

Commoning is also an ancient part of our history. Commoning families preserve traditions and practices

upheld since the Magna Carta unchanged for centuries. But the heritage of commons isn't just about commoners and livestock, it's about some of the UK's most spectacular landscapes, its most valuable biodiversity, its geology and pre-history, and its history of settlement and industry. Beyond that it's also about natural systems such as the water and carbon cycles, which shape and support our everyday lives locally, nationally and internationally.

Centuries' old farming practices on Commons are unexpectedly relevant to many of our 21st century challenges – physical and mental wellbeing, rural economic sustainability, food quality and security, flood management and climate change. However, these issues present challenges and risks for commons and commoning, but stakeholders in commons – owners, commoners and agencies – can work together to agree how to tackle them.

Working together as a 'Coalition of the Willing' is important, as commons have always been shared – and sometimes contested – spaces; relationships on some commons are comfortable and enabling whilst on others there is disagreement.

Commons encapsulate the many different aspects of decisions around land management – and agendas can be single issue and sometimes conflicting – the right to roam, the right to ride, the right to grow food, the need to protect nature, need for access, leisure and recreation and the the pressure on land use can be detrimental to the very environment we seek to conserve. An understanding of the ecology of a land and those differing is key.



The tale of Portland's common land and why enclosure never happened as it did on the mainland.

Portland with its fallow year and long period when commoners could graze their sheep was seen to have old-fashioned and inefficient farming methods. It was felt that crops could be grown every year on all the land and that enclosure would ensure that efficiency improved this however, that would of course mean that grazing rights would end. The wrangling went on over many years with petitions, meetings and letters by the larger landowners at the time, such as Thomas Heath, but still resulted in no resolution to the matter. The reason why all attempts to enclose the land failed is due to 'the narrow strips not being worth the expense of enclosure, and from some being more valuable, thereby making any exchange of lands impracticable'. On the 29th May, 1846 the Court Leet made an attempt to get some agreement about enclosure and asked the Court Steward to convene a meeting on the 7th July 1846. We find out what happened from a diary written at the time (John Way's notebook) in which it mentions,

"There were a public meeting about sharing the common & parish land, but almost all the inhabitants were against it". The open fields survived here unlike elsewhere because of the large number of freehold tenants of the manor, and partly in the potential value of the land, which made the expense of enclosure intolerable. Although the larger landowners were in favour the great majority of tenants on small areas of land were not prepared to give up their grazing rights in favour of more efficient agriculture. Also, the value of quarrying in small areas of land meant that compensation could not be arranged like it was elsewhere. Therefore, the commons remained until the whole pattern

of farming and eventually, the whole landscape changed by the naval defence establishment and quarrying.

The loss of Verne Common

The next part of the story is the land taken by the building of The Verne and prison that in large part took away Girt Common for grazing rights. A sum of £20,000 was paid by the government of the time.

In 1797 a quarter of the Island (some 725 acres) was common land. The 1874 return gives 629 acres of common. That 1874 return would have taken account of the large area of the Verne Common taken for War Department purposes under the Defence Act 1860, in 1862, 1863 and 1867 when £20,000 was paid to the Commoners for the loss of their rights on that area. Much of this War Department land was enclosed and subsequently developed. But although common rights were extinguished on all of the Verne, some of the land was never used for government purposes, and remains open and unenclosed to this day. This was the main reason for attempted registrations so some could be officially common land again.

The enormous impact quarrying and the stone industry has had on Portland and how drastically it changed/es the landscape.

The Islander's relationship with quarrying is a complicated one as to what it has given and what it has taken. The possible value of the land due to possible quarrying certainly played a part in keeping the commons for much longer, but it also ultimately, took away most of the land and has left us with the small amount of common land Portland has today. However, it did also give some people great wealth and it did provide the Stone Grant Fund that did spend a lot of money for the benefit of the inhabitants through the Court Leet. One such expense ironically, was legal costs fighting John Penn when he 'enclosed' land including Rufus Castle and access to St. Andrew's in the building of his new castellated abode. Eventually, compensation was paid, but he kept the land. Also, it was mainly women that brought in the crops because the men could earn too much quarrying to stay on the land. Another difference between Portland and much of the mainland.

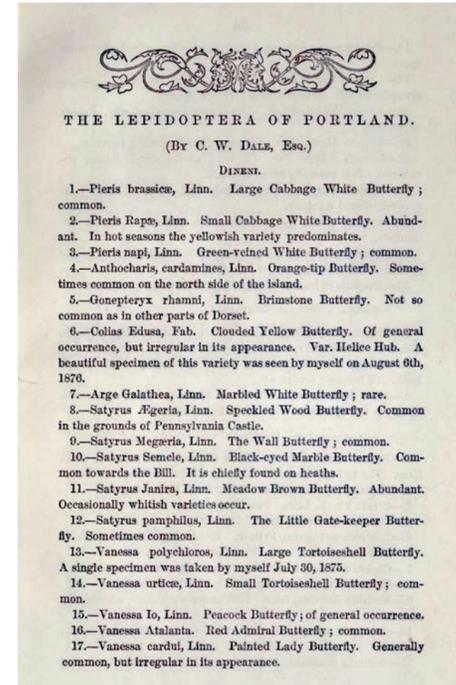
The last battle began with the Commons Registration Act in 1965. Stuart Morris took it upon himself to make sure that all the ancient commons left were registered. However, he probably didn't realise that it was something that would take so much time and patience and would continue into the late 80s with various wrangles. The story is part of our research and some of the documentation from the 60s and beyond will be exhibited at the b-side festival at The Pulpit. Many areas that Portlanders would have traditionally seen as commons were eventually excluded from the register including most of the roadside verges and the coastal areas of West and East Weares. The area of Portland that were confirmed in that registration were Stert Common (The Bill), Weston Greens, Royal (above Fortuneswell and below Yeates), quarry land near Blacknor, the whole of Chesil Beach, including the grasslands by Beach Road, Church Ope Cove beach and cliffs. These areas are inviolate. Crown Common land is Chesil Beach between Chesil Cove and The Bound Stone, Hamm Common, Victoria Gardens, Weston's two village greens and several access ways, Gooseberry field and recreation ground opposite the Royal Exchange. The existing common land is mainly owned by the Crown or Dorset Council, but they have no right to develop the land or deny access to the public on foot. Common land has always been protected. However, the Commons Act 2006 affords common land with better protection than previous legislation. The Act contains provisions relating to consent for works and fencing on common land. It also protects common land from being abused and protects against encroachment and unauthorised developments.

The last landscape

The area of land at the Southern tip of the island is vital because it is the last of the agricultural landscape that was Portland, within it is one of the last bits of common land that made up the vast fields where the commoners of Portland could graze their animals.

Lepidoptera of Portland

Extract from the first edition of *Proceedings of The Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club*. Edited by Professor James Buckman and published in 1877.



One of the joys of searching archives is finding intriguing records from the past. This eleven page list of butterflies and moths compiled in 1876 includes anecdotal comments from the 'collector'. It would be fascinating to compare this list with what can be seen today. Anyone fancy giving it a go?



Melanargia galathea. Marbled White Butterfly. Photographed by Wayne Copperthwaite



This Land newspaper is published by b-side – we welcome articles and images for our next edition. Please contact Project Director Amanda Wallwork on amanda@b-side.org.uk or call 07816 224015

PORTLAND SAGO

Steve Christmas

Portland was once the 'home of a curious industry' and it wasn't quarrying. This industry was the production of a substitute for arrowroot made from the roots of a plant common on the island.

It was said that enough was made to send to London; it was sold under the name of Portland Sago. By 1857 there were believed to be only two people remaining who made it and the process by which it was made became lost in time. Or so we thought; the account below has recently been found. The extract from a manuscript dated 1824 was reproduced in *The Island and Royal Manor of Portland: Notes on its History, Laws and Customs*. J.W., Warren, 1939. Published on the order of the Court Leet and Court of the Manor, and reproduced here.

"Many bushels of hemlock or hellebore are procured in Portland every year; and a plant from which Arrowroot is made and starch extracted; it is called Starchmoor by the natives. In the Island the roots are dug up in large quantities and when made into powder, many hundredweights of which are sold in Weymouth for starch and nourishment for invalids, and it is also used in pastry, soups, pudding etc. The following is a particular account of the various uses, properties, names and preparation of this herb: Arum maculatum, otherwise Arrow Root, Wake-robin, Cuckow-pint, Lords and Ladies, Cows and Calves."



Directions for making Arum into Powder

In July or August dig up the roots and carefully separate them from the offsets (which should be replanted in good earth). Wash the roots thoroughly clean, and rub off the fibres and skin, and when perfectly white put them into a marble or stone mortar and pound them until they become a pulp. Put the pulp into a sieve and pour water over it till all that will pass through is gone through; what remains in the sieve to be pounded again. After it has stood for 24 hours in an earthen pan six inches under water, fresh water is put to it for the same number of hours. Then throw away the water (which like potato water, is poisonous) and dry it in dishes for use: when quite dry it should be kept in paper bags in a dry place. No kind of metal should be used in the preparation of the Arum Root"

It is still possible to find old stone or marble mortars, some of great size in Portland, maybe lurking somewhere in your garden? They probably originate from this bygone industry. Let us know if you find one!

From the Memoirs of Elizabeth Pearce b1782

10th December 1799

"Mother has a shocking bad cold, and is very feverish. She can't take beef tea, gruel nor treacle posset; and we were out of arrowroot. So it came about that I had to go on the hill to fetch some; for we always have it from M.H. as hers is the best even where all is good. They need to understand the making well; for it might be poisonous if not properly managed. One or two top hill families have made it for generations so it stands to reason theirs must be best."

There are two species of Arum on the island to which this process is relevant: In addition to Arum maculatum above, which is not threatened, but seems to occur in considerably less numbers than previously. It is listed in the Vascular Plants Red Data Book as of 'Least Concern'.

There is also Arum italicum, Italian Lords-and-Ladies. This latter species of which the sub-species neglectum occurs here is listed as Nationally Scarce and in the the UK Red Data Book as 'Near Threatened'.

PLEASE NOTE THAT BOTH PLANTS ARE TOXIC WHEN HANDLED OR INGESTED.

One man's fight for Portland's Common Land

Extracts from an interview with Stuart Morris

Dr Jeanie Sinclair

The Commons Registration Act 1965 was introduced by the government for the registration of commons and town or village greens and ownership of and rights over them. The Act's introduction led to much common land and rights of access to that land being lost. Despite having a full time job as a civil engineer and a busy young family, Stuart Morris recognised the risk of Portland's common land being lost, and embarked on a 'late night hobby' that would go on to keep him busy for the next thirty years.

With the historic protests like the mass trespass of Kinder Scout of 1932 in the news recently, issues around public access to land, like the right to roam, as well as the protection of important ecological heritage for future generations, have been brought into mainstream conversations. That these issues are still so relevant in the present highlight the importance of the work Stuart began in the mid-1960s.

'I knew there was a lot of common land in Portland traditionally, and I then delved into it'. Stuart's research skills, that would later make him well-known as a historian

of Portland, were key to discovering the history of Portland's common lands, that would provide important evidence for an inquiry in the mid-1970s that decided which land in Portland was common land.

'The more I looked into it the more interested I got. The thing that surprised me was that nobody else seemed interested in doing the registration.' Despite Portland's active Court Leet and its links to the Crown, who owned most of the common land on Portland, no one was taking action to register these spaces and places under the Act, so Stuart decided to take on the challenge himself.

Building on his interest in local history and the local environment, 'it didn't take much investigation to find out that a lot had been written about Portland's commons, and a lot of maps and document that showed where Portland's commons were'. Decades before the advent of the internet would make this kind of research easier, Stuart's painstaking gathering of evidence was vital to the enquiry that ensured the registration of the common land that remains accessible to Portlanders today.

It is only through Stuart's historic research into Portland's common lands, and his quiet activism, that we know where these spaces are, without which Portlanders rights to their own land would have been quietly and gradually eroded. Even so, there are areas of Portland that were historically common land that were lost as Stuart was not able to provide evidence at the time, or because he faced strong objections from land owners.

As Stuart says, the issue of access to common land is 'as important now as it ever was'.

It is thanks to Stuart's dedication and research that common land in Portland remains accessible and open to Portlanders and its visitors. However, these

rights are hard won and easily lost through complacency and lack of action, and as Stuart says, there is much work still to be done.



Future Portland

As the urgent need for economic growth and the impact of climate emergencies collide, the opportunities to develop sustainable communities and environments are increasingly challenging.

With the island's extraordinary landscapes increasingly 'discovered' by visitors, and whilst we want to celebrate and share this wonderful place the pressure on these precious island environments is being felt. This small island has limited space and resources for residential and industrial expansion. What opportunities are there for an island to develop a way forward that benefits local economies while also respecting our environment and communities?

Join the conversation

Over coming months This Land discussion events will host open conversations on topics that affect us both locally and globally. Looking at environmental threats and protections, tourism and industry, planning and environment, land access, land use and community growing. We aim to celebrate Portland and work with residents to support a positive future for the island.

If you want to know more please get in touch: amanda@b-side.org.uk / www.b-side.org.uk

INTRODUCING TWO OF OUR PARTNERS



The Portland Association - keeping Portland unique

The Portland Association is a community organisation focused on the environment, ecology and heritage of the Isle of Portland Dorset. We formed in early 2020, in response to growing concerns about the increasing threats to Portland's unique environment. We are a Constituted Group run by volunteers with no paid staff. The aims of the This Land project complement our ambitions to preserve, enhance and celebrate the best of Portland's character and help foster good Planning and Conservation to safeguard our unique environment.

A broader range of involvement will generate new ideas, heighten the sense of community ownership and help safeguard the island's heritage for future generations. We have recently set up a sub group with a focus on Portland's biodiversity and have a Facebook group to share information and ideas.

www.portlandassociation.co.uk

- The Portland Association
- Portland Biodiversity Group

The Portland Building Preservation Trust

The Portland Buildings Preservation Trust was set up to help save Portland's built heritage through developing restoration and regeneration projects. We have recently collated and submitted a number of nominations in response to the call from Dorset Council to let them know about special places on Portland as part of a consultation on local heritage.

"Residents across the whole of Dorset are being asked to nominate locally important buildings, structures, designed landscapes, sites and places to be considered on new Local Heritage Lists. This heritage is a big part of what makes our county so special. The Local Heritage Lists will provide a free publicly accessible record of non-designated heritage assets, whose conservation will then be a material consideration in planning decisions." Dorset Council

- Portland Buildings Preservation Trust

Can you help?

Both organisations are currently seeking support with skills to help develop and manage the groups, with research and communications. Please get in touch with Amanda or Catherine @b-side.org.uk if you are interested and can offer support.



THIS LAND EVENTS

AT B-SIDE FESTIVAL 08 - 11 SEPT 2022

This Land runs over the next twelve months with a programme of workshops, talks and discussions, and specially commissioned artworks to be shown at b-side 2022.

Look out for these This Land related artworks, activities and events during this year's festival.

For full details and bookings drop in to the festival hub at St George's Centre - open every day during the festival, or visit the festival website at b-side.org.uk

EXHIBITIONS

BRANDY ROW - WHO LIVED HERE?

Thurs - Sat 11am - 6pm | Sun 11am - 4pm

Girt Hall, St Georges Centre, Reforne

Exhibition revealing the research on the Brandy Row site at Chiswell.

THE LAST LANDSCAPE

Thurs - Sat 11am - 6pm | Sun 11am - 4pm

The Pulpit Inn, Portland Bill

Exhibition of photographs, documents and information about the last area of original Portland landscape. Help us build a multi-layered history of the land by adding to a giant map.

ARTWORKS & EVENTS

OUR COMMON TOOLS

Katie Surridge

Thurs - Sat 11am - 6pm | Sun 11am - 4pm

Sweet Hill Farm, Sweet Hill Road, Southwell

Katie Surridge returns to Portland with her giant sculptural digging tools - referencing Portland's agricultural past, and the coming together of people to work the land.

LOOKOUT Emily Tracy

Fri & Sat 11am - 5pm

The Portland Bird Observatory bookshop.

Explore the world of searching, observing, collecting and recording with artist Emily Tracy - commissioned by the This Land project to make work in response to the landscape of the Portland Bill area.

HERE TO STAY

Leni Dothan

The Old Higher Lighthouse, Portland Bill

Sculptural installation - a final resting place for the stones from the Portland Stone Rehabilitation Centre.

BIODIVERSITY BINGO

Alistair Gentry

Fri 6.30 - 7.30pm

BOOKING RECOMMENDED

The George Inn, Reforne

Do you know your Phantom Crane from your Night Earhusband? Join The Portland Office of Imaginary History's Ranger Alistair Gentry for a game of Biodiversity Bingo. Suitable for children aged up to 150 years old.

INACCURATE RECORDINGS: MAPPING PORTLAND'S LANDSCAPE USING PRINT AND SOUND

Kneid

Sat 11am - 5pm | Drop in

Chiswell Walled Garden, Chiswell

Drop-in laboratory - Explore the weird and wonderful landscape of Portland using PRINT and SOUND, focusing on a route between Chiswell Walled Garden and Brandy Row.

CAMPFIRE CONVERSATION: THIS LAND, YOUR LAND, MY LAND, WHOSE LAND?

Sat 6 - 7.45pm

Common land - Join us around the campfire for a conversation exploring our relationship with land and the importance of green spaces.

FIELD WALKS & TOURS

BOOKING RECOMMENDED

THE LAST LANDSCAPE 'FROM FORAGE TO POT'

Paul Burkhardt

Thur 2pm

Meet at The Pulpit Inn, Portland Bill

Learn about foraging, wildlife and enjoying the outdoors.

THE LAST LANDSCAPE 'WILDLIFE WALK'

Bob Ford

Fri 11am

Meet at The Pulpit Inn, Portland Bill

Explore the wildlife of the last landscape.

THE LAST LANDSCAPE 'SCRATCHING THE SURFACE'

Jo Tyler

Sat 2pm

Meet at The Pulpit Inn, Portland Bill

A gentle sound stroll discovering the unique sounds and nature of The Last Landscape, including learning basic field recording techniques.

TWILIGHT WALK

Sat 8pm

Meet at 7.45pm at Sweet Hill Farm, Sweet Hill Road, Southwell

Join an evening walk along the coast from Sweethill Farm to Pulpit Rock and view a film screening by Babar Suleman. Free transport available for return.

WHO LIVED IN A HOUSE LIKE THIS?

Dr Jeanie Sinclair & James Barker

(Portland Buildings Preservation Trust)

Sat 11am

Meet at Chiswell Walled Garden, Chiswell, DT5 1AW

A gentle wander exploring the historic buildings of Chiswell and who lived in them.

ACCESS ALL AREAS, THE PORTLAND OFFICE FOR IMAGINARY HISTORY: PART 3!

Alistair Gentry

Fri 11.30am

Starts St. George's Centre

An off-road expedition to explore and map Portland's wildlife and wild places. Designed with and for users of mobility aids, scooters or trampers. Bring your own scooter or hire one from us.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ALL EVENTS AND TO BOOK PLACES FOR WALKS & TOURS PLEASE VISIT B-SIDE.ORG.UK

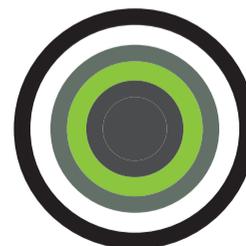


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b-side
SEPT 08-11 2022
PORTLAND, DORSET

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

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

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