

# **MA in Special Education**

## **Practical Skills Transformative Learning**

Master's Thesis

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How might the co-creation of a situated working woodland begin to address some of the major pedagogical challenges of our time?

2016 - 2019



# Abstract

This thesis was written alongside the practical realisation of a new working woodland provision for young adults with special educational needs (SEN) in the West Midlands of the United Kingdom. The thesis traces the journey of the '*responsible*' through the three-year design and implementation process in the hope that his experiences may offer insight into whether and how the co-creation of and co-operation of a working woodland may be of pedagogical value in these times.

The essay sets out by defining just what is meant by 'these/our times', examining the current educational context, and considering current patterns and consequences of human orientation and activity on the planet, looking at depth into our relationship with nature and craft. Next, the author offers an auto-ethnographical account of his journey 'here', describing his experience through the modern education system, and his journey 'into the woods'.

Finally, the thesis outlines the nature of a 'working woodland', and examines the extent to which such a venture may begin to tackle the challenges described earlier in the report.



**For Fionn...**

*May you dance the rhythm of your soul with gentle courage  
With your toes in the soil and your gaze to the stars  
May your heart drum meet harmony with the song of the source  
May you play, and may peace play with you*



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# Introduction

I will begin with a passage from one of my favourite books - 'The Alchemist', by Paulo Coelho (1988/2009, p. 83 - 87)...

They were strange books, they spoke about mercury, salt, dragons, and kings, and he didn't understand any of it. But there was one idea that seemed to repeat itself throughout all the books: all things are the manifestation of one thing only.

In one of the books he learned that the most important text in the literature of alchemy contained only a few lines, and had been inscribed on the surface of an emerald.

"It's the Emerald Tablet," said the Englishman, proud that he might teach something to the boy.

"Well, then, why do we need all these books?" the boy asked.

"So that we can understand those few lines," the Englishman answered, without appearing really to believe what he has said.

The book that most interested the boy told the stories of the famous alchemists. They were men who had dedicated their entire lives to the purification of metals in their laboratories; they believed that, if a metal were heated for many years, it would free itself of all its individual properties, and what was left would be the Soul of the World. This Soul of the World allowed them to understand anything on the face of the earth, because it was the language with which all things communicated. They called that discovery the Master Work - it was part liquid and part solid.

"Can't you just observe men and omens in order to understand the language?" the boy asked.

"You have a mania for simplifying everything," answered the Englishman, irritated. "Alchemy is a serious discipline. Every step has to be followed exactly as it was followed by the masters."

The boy learned that the liquid part of the Master Work was called the Elixir of Life, and that it cured all illnesses; it also kept the alchemist from growing old. And the solid part was called the Philosopher's Stone.

“It’s not easy to find the Philosopher’s Stone,” said the Englishman. “The alchemists spent years in their laboratories, observing the fire that purified the metals. They spent so much time close to the fire that gradually they gave up the vanities of the world. They discovered that the purification of the metals had led to a purification of themselves.”

The boy thought about the crystal merchant. He had said that it was a good thing for the boy to clean the crystal pieces, so that he could free himself from negative thoughts. The boy was becoming more and more convinced that alchemy could be learned in one’s daily life.

“Also,” said the Englishman, “the Philosopher’s Stone has a fascinating property. A small sliver of the stone can transform large quantities of metal into gold.”

Having heard that, the boy became even more interested in alchemy. He thought that, with some patience, he’d be able to transform everything into gold. He read the lives of the various people who had succeeded in doing so: Helvéticus, Elias, Fulcanelli, and Geber. They were fascinating stories: each of them lived out his destiny to the end. They travelled, spoke with wise men, performed miracles for the incredulous, and owned the Philosopher’s Stone and the Elixir of Life.

But when the boy wanted to learn how to achieve the Master Work, he became completely lost. There were just drawings, coded instructions, and obscure texts.

“Why do they make things so complicated?” he asked the Englishman one night. The boy had noticed that the Englishman was irritable, and missed his books.

“So that those who have the responsibility for understanding can understand,” he said. “Imagine if everyone went around transforming lead into gold. Gold would lose its value.

“It’s only those who are persistent, and willing to study things deeply, who achieve the Master Work. That’s why I’m here in the middle of the desert. I’m seeking a true alchemist who will help me to decipher the codes.”

“When were these books written?” the boy asked.

“Many centuries ago.”

“They didn’t have the printing press in those days,” the boy argued. “There was no way for everybody to know about alchemy. Why did they use such strange language, with so many drawings?”

The Englishman didn't answer him directly. He said that for the past few days he had been paying attention to how the caravan operated, but that he hadn't learned anything new. The only thing he had noticed was that talk of war was becoming more frequent.

Then one day the boy returned the books to the Englishman. "Did you learn anything?" the Englishman asked, eager to hear what it might be. He needed someone to talk to so as to avoid thinking about the possibility of war.

"I learned that the world has a soul, and that whoever understands that soul can also understand the language of things. I learned that many alchemists realised their destinies, and wound up discovering the Soul of the World, the Philosopher's Stone, and the Elixir of Life.

"But, above all, I learned that these things are all so simple that they could be written on the surface of an emerald."

This MA course - *Special Education: Practical Skills Transformative Learning* - endeavours to investigate the relationship between practical skills and human development. From the outset, I feel it necessary to acknowledge a paradox, perhaps hinted at through the passage above. People learn in different ways, but surely one of those ways is through the direct and individual experience of the world. Practical skills may be thought of as the tools we develop to enable us to best move between and learn from these experiences. In my opinion, such 'knowledge' is less learned through the head, and rather felt through the body and intuition. I wonder how truly possible it is to write of, intellectualise and adequately quantify such 'knowledge'. And I doubt whether it is a noble act to do so. What I am certain of is that full human potential may only be realised through a unity of *head, heart* and *hand*, and that we are in great danger of forgetting how to nurture this *feeling* through the world in this time.



I was born in 1983, and like many of my generation, I completed compulsory state education up to the age of 16, and then remained in education through to degree level. After completing two degrees - a Bachelor's Degree in *French & Economics* and a Master's Degree in *Conflict, Security & International Development* - I worked in a number of roles - as a primary school English language teacher in France, as Operations Manager for a small London-based charity working in Africa, as a Driver and Outreach Worker for a charity for the homeless, as a care-worker, a warehouse operative, a barman, and a fundraiser.

I discovered Green Woodwork in 2010, at a time where I felt my life lacked direction or purpose. In many ways, Green Woodwork saved me. I rediscovered the joy of creating something useful through my own humble industry. I developed meaning and connection with my local natural environment. I met wonderful people who mentored me along my journey.

In 2014 I began working as a *Green Woodwork Tutor* at a college for young adults with special educational needs (SEN) in the West Midlands of the United Kingdom. Each day I encounter wonderful young people with a range of diagnoses, ranging from autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Asperger's syndrome,

learning disabilities, mental health issues and challenging behaviour. Alongside their 'profiles', many of these young people also arrive with a negative experience of education - recounting stories of segregation, disruption, misunderstanding, misdiagnosis, intolerance and institutionalisation - which the Trust hopes to redress.

With the vision *"that each individual has the potential to shape their own future through experiencing meaningful relationships with universe, earth and people"*, the Trust aims to *"provide students with holistic learning by role modelling positive relationships in the fields of arts, crafts, commerce, agriculture, nutrition, living skills and the environment."*

Via a method of *Practical Skills Therapeutic Education (PSTE)* inspired by Rudolf Steiner (1861 - 1925), John Ruskin (1819 - 1900) and William Morris (1834 - 1896), the Trust *"works with hand, head, heart and place to provide students with the tools to transform material and in doing so transform themselves. In this way students come to recognise themselves and others, they develop self and social awareness and are empowered to achieve and make positive contributions to society at large, giving back in a self-directed, productive and enjoyable way."*

Source: *Ruskin Mill Trust Website (www.rmt.org)*

After struggling to find little shared outlook in my previous employment, I was greatly inspired and attracted by the apparent ethos and method advocated by Ruskin Mill Trust (RMT). Yet in the five years I have worked with the Trust, I have encountered a number of issues...

- (i) A mismatch between theory and practice
- (ii) A varied depth of understanding of the RMT method and terminology amongst those expected to deliver it
- (iii) Increasing demand for quantifiable learner outcomes and difficulties in measuring them
- (iv) Often poor communication and integration between different areas of the Trust
- (v) External pressures and compliance demands
- (vi) Confusion between whether we are therapeutic or educational
- (vii) The dangers to both practitioners and learners of experiences within a Ruskin Mill Trust 'bubble'
- (viii) A de-valuing of craft and *'modern-apprenticeships'* in favour of *'Skills for Life'* qualifications, Maths, English and ICT

In 2016, we began a new woodland provision, which coincided with the beginning of this MA course. Thus, I was presented with an opportunity to begin tackling some of these issues with a blank canvas, and to trace the process through this MA thesis - to design and to endeavour to co-create a learning environment conducive to the PSTE 'seed-to-table' method as advocated by Ruskin Mill Trust, alongside my own understanding and experience.

As a framework for my thesis, I will adapt Ruskin Mill Trust's *Three Stage Process Assessment Framework*, which the Trust uses to track student progress as follows:

### ***Stage 1 - Overcoming barriers to learning***

*Through our apprenticeship model, students are helped to identify and work through their barriers to learning and other authority issues.*

*By supporting them to engage with practical skills and communicate both challenges and achievement, young people learn the first steps in following instructions, respecting social boundaries and observing safety protocols.*

### ***Stage 2 - Becoming skilled***

*As confidence and self-respect grow through practical and social achievement, levels of support are reduced according to need while simultaneously offering new challenges to widen their skill-base.*

*This includes a variety of internal work experience, accreditation and qualification opportunities to support their goals to future work and independent living.*

### ***Stage 3 - Contributing to community***

*This stage is focussed on outward-facing social and vocational enterprises and opportunities offered through both the day and residential programmes.*

*External work experience, social enterprises, leisure programmes, living skills, cultural and social activities are all tied into their goals and pathways through college and transition out into their communities.*

Source: Ruskin Mill Trust Website ([www.rmt.org](http://www.rmt.org))

I will adapt these learning stages for the purpose of this thesis as follows...

### **Section 1: Overcoming Barriers to Learning...**

In the first section I hope to set the scene - to define the current educational and social context within which the new woodland provision sits, looking in particular at the origins of and arguments for a practical skills-based approach to education, alongside the call for more environmentally-conscious schooling.

### **Section 2: Becoming Skilled...**

In the second section, I will examine the case for a '*working woodland*' as a site for learning, through the lens of Otto Salomon's '*Educational Sloyd*' framework and Rudolf Steiner's three-fold human development model. I will consider my own journey into the woods, and offer insights from the literature of several contemporary master woodsmen including Mike Abbott, Ben Law and Barn the Spoon - about their experience of living, working and teaching in the woods.

### **Section 3: Contributing to Community...**

Finally, I will trace the process of designing and co-creating a new woodland provision for Ruskin Mill Trust - reflecting on the extent to which the new provision may begin to address some of these educational challenges.



## Section 1: Overcoming Barriers to Learning...

The title of this MA program - *Special Education: Practical Skills Transformative Learning* - suggests some relationship between practical skills and personal transformation - one which is of benefit for the education of learners with special educational needs (SEN).

I will begin by considering the current educational context of 'our time', and next endeavour to investigate the origins and potential of a practical skills approach toward human development.

### ***Education in Crisis?***

For at least the last century, educationalists have deliberated over the purpose, direction and motivation of our formal education system. In his damning opening chapter of '*Deschooling Society*' (1970, p. 1), Ivan Illich claims...

“The pupil is thereby “schooled” to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new. His imagination is “schooled” to accept service in place of value. Medical treatment is mistaken for healthcare, social work for the improvement of community life, police protection for safety, military poise for national security, the rat race for productive work.”

Now nearly fifty years on, after largely disregarding such warnings, good teachers are leaving the profession daily and children are more anxious and depressed than ever before through the stress of exams and a qualification-obsessed school culture. Increasing numbers of students are being diagnosed with '*special educational needs*' and being prescribed drugs to keep them sufficiently sedentary - forced to sit back and memorise endless 'facts' and abstract classroom-based concepts, otherwise being segregated through their 'special' categorisation and conveniently wiped-off the resource-dependent school performance charts.

Gert Biesta (2013, p. 4) argues for a radical upheaval of this “misguided impatience that pushes education into a direction where teachers' salaries and even their jobs are made dependent upon their alleged ability to increase their students' exam scores. It is this misguided impatience that has resulted in the medicalization of education, where children

are being made fit for the educational system, rather than that we ask where the causes of this misfit lie and who, therefore, needs treatment most: the child or society.” Biesta (2013, p. 3 - 4) argues instead that it is precisely “the weakness of education - the fact that there will never be a perfect match between educational “input” and “output” (...) that makes education possible.” Biesta (2013, p.140) advocates a new paradigm with this ‘*Beautiful Risk of Education*’ as its core, “if we are genuinely interested in education as a process that has an interest in the coming into the world of free subjects, not in the production of docile objects.”

This brings us on to the question of the contemporary purpose of education. After the mass industrialisation of at least the western world over the last century, materialism has perhaps filled the void left by the growing rejection of organised religion, which formerly oversaw much of western schooling. Unprecedented technological innovation has enabled humankind to extract and transform finite planetary resources in vast quantities and astonishing speeds, giving rise to a perhaps unconscious consumerist mentality that has grown used to getting what it wants, now, and wherein intellectual scientific ‘know-how’ has become the most prized educational asset. Education is generally thought in terms of ‘*education for the market*’, with school-based ‘*careers advisers*’ asking ‘what do you want to be when you grow up?’, and then aiming schooling toward that end.

Philosophical enquiries investigating why and how we learn, what is reality? What is ‘good’? - have become ‘old-fashioned’ in schools, as have the more creative and practical subjects, in favour of maths, English and science, leaving perhaps in their wake a spiritual and physical-practical skills vacuum.

## ***The Learning Environment***

This technological revolution is not without consequence. Talk of a climate in crisis is everywhere growing. In this internet age of social networking, we are perhaps more socially awkward and isolated than ever before.

“Everywhere we look there are glaring signs of political systems and social structures that propel us toward unsustainability and extinction. In this historical moment, the planet faces some of the most horrendous forms of “man-made” devastation ever known to humankind. Cataclysmic “natural disasters” in the last decade have sung the environmental hymns of planetary imbalance and reckless environmental disregard.”

Source: *Professor Antonia Darder in Preface to Kahn, R., 2010, p. x - xi*

Since 2010, Polly Higgins - the self-proclaimed 'earth lawyer', has championed the case for 'ecocide' to become internationally recognisable as crimes committed against the environment, prosecutable through the International Criminal Court as the fifth international Crime against peace.

Higgins (2010, p. 63) defines ecocide as...

*"The extensive destruction, damage to or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory, whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an extent that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been severely diminished."*

Though recently deceased, Polly's message lives on, perhaps nowhere more so than through the words and actions of children, who, led by sixteen year old Greta Thunberg and her "skolstrejk för klimatet" (school strike for climate), have recently taken to the streets during school time to protest against the apathy and disregard of the international community...

"Adults keep saying: "We owe it to the young people to give them hope." But I don't want your hope. I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act.

I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if our house is on fire. Because it is.

Some say I should be in school. But why should any young person be made to study for a future when no one is doing enough to save that future? What is the point of learning facts when the most important facts given by the finest scientists are ignored by politicians?"

Source: *Thunberg, G. in her speech at Davos, January 2019*

Perhaps the time has come for a new education paradigm, which places nature and a more holistic child development at its heart.

The remaining pages of this thesis will now seek to investigate how a more practical skills and woodland-based approach to learning may begin to address some of these challenges.

## ***The Origins of Practical Skills Education***

Questions of human development - of how we orientate ourselves in relation to each other and our surroundings; of how and why we acquire knowledge; of the nature of our being and of our ultimate purpose - have occupied lines of philosophical enquiry since records began. The first colleges were devised in Ancient Greece, where students of Socrates and Plato deliberated over the nature of our existence and becoming - citing virtue and a quest for 'the good life' as our reason for being. For Socrates, the road to such virtue was through the pursuit of knowledge, paved with questioning and argument. For Plato, there existed a perfect world of 'Ideal Forms' beyond the material world perceptible through our senses, accessible only through the careful training of our intellect (Magee, B., 2000, p. 20 - 31).

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to offer a history of the theory of education, suffice to say that this original and perhaps noble intention of 'learning for learning's sake' has somewhat changed, via the rise of organised religion through the advent of capitalism and the free market.

I will however turn briefly back to the work of Aristotle as perhaps the first advocate for an experience and practical skills-based education, before considering the works of more contemporary educational theorists, as I seek to provide a critique of modern-day education trends, and an argument for something different.

Contrary to Plato his mentor, Aristotle dismissed the notion of 'the real world beyond', turning solely to the tangible world of experience as our source of knowledge and understanding. Much like Socrates and Plato, Aristotle proposed that humans should seek a full and happy life above all else - via the development and exercise of our capacities to the extent that is compatible with society. Through his 'golden mean', Aristotle defined virtue as the midpoint between two extremes - or 'vices' - such that generosity lies between profligacy and meanness, or courage between foolhardiness and cowardice - thus proposing a fair and just society could be achieved through the collective realisation of such virtues via the pursuit of knowledge through experience (Magee, B., 2000, p. 38 - 39).

Aristotle separates knowledge into three areas - *episteme*, *techné*, and *phronesis* - owing to the different purposes - or *telos* - they serve.

- (i) *Episteme* may be thought of as theoretical knowledge - the pursuit of truth through contemplation to gain knowledge for its own sake.

- (ii) *Techné* concerns the development of the creative and productive faculties through the act of making something.
- (iii) *Phronesis* may be regarded as practical wisdom - knowledge achieved through the experience of human interaction and making ethical and political judgements.

Source: Smith, M. K. (1999). 'Aristotle on knowledge', *the encyclopaedia of informal education*. [<http://infed.org/mobi/aristotle-on-knowledge/>. Retrieved: 24<sup>th</sup> April 2019].

Whilst like Socrates and Plato, Aristotle attributes utmost importance to the cultivation of the intellect - *Episteme*, this for him occurs only through time and experience - through interaction with and contemplation of the phenomena of the natural world, and not through Plato's deliberation over abstract notions of 'Ideal Forms' in an ulterior reality.

Alongside his devotion to the intellect and the theoretical, Aristotle acknowledges the productive and creative impulses through *Techné* as the kind of technical knowledge required by craftspeople, engineers and artisans to create artefacts.

Finally, Aristotle introduces practical wisdom - *Phronesis* - perhaps as a synthesis of theoretical and productive knowledge towards *Praxis* as informed practical action by which the individual may most fully engage with society for the common good and flourishing of all its citizens (Smith, M. K., 1999).

This trilogy of the different forms of human knowledge is perhaps echoed through the later work of Rudolf Steiner (1861 - 1925), upon whose theories of human phasic development the Ruskin Mill Trust *Practical Skills Therapeutic Education* method is founded. Steiner proposed the human soul is made manifest through the body in three main areas - the nerve *thinking* system, the rhythmic breathing *feeling* system, and the metabolic-limb *willing* system - through the *head*, *heart*, and *hands* in other words.

In these terms, we may perhaps equate the *hands* with Aristotle's *techne*, the *head* with Aristotle's *episteme*, and the *heart* as the rivers of *phronesis* and *praxis* that flow between them.

Taking Aristotle's lead that all human knowledge comes through direct interaction and experience with the world, later advocates of practical skills-based learning - Johann Amos Comenius (1592 - 1671), John Locke (1632 - 1704), Jean Jacques Rousseau, Johann Heinrich

Pestalozzi (1746 - 1827), Friedrich Froebel (1782 - 1852) - all sought to develop their approach as formal education began to take shape through the ages.

“If, instead of chaining a child to his books, I occupy him in a workshop, his hands labour to the profit of his spirit, he becomes a philosopher, though he thinks he is only a workman. Now, of all occupations which serve to furnish subsistence to man, that which brings him back to Nature again most closely is the work of the hands.”

Source: Rousseau, J. J., *‘Emile’ - Book III*, in Salomon, O. A., 1892, p. 130

In his book *‘Experience & Education (1938)’*, John Dewey picks up where Aristotle left off - arguing for an experience-driven theory of education, whereby those responsible for facilitating learning are charged with possessing the practical wisdom of which Aristotle speaks to deliver such circumstances which ignite in their learners a thirst for knowledge and virtue.

Likewise, Gert Biesta (2016) advocates a *‘World-Centred Education’*, whereby learners are called to act in the world in a grown-up way - much like the ideas posed in Aristotle’s *Phronesis*.

Writing over eighty years ago, John Dewey raises the issue of humankind’s inclination to think in opposites - highlighting in particular the division between *traditional* and *progressive* education philosophies of the time, whereby...

- (i) For Traditional Schools, “the main purpose or objective is to prepare the young for future responsibilities and for success in life, by means of acquisition of the organised bodies of information and prepared forms of skill which comprehend the material of instruction. Since the subject-matter as well as standards of proper conduct are handed down from the past, the attitude of pupils must, upon the whole, be one of docility, receptivity, and obedience. Books, especially textbooks, are the chief representatives of the lore and wisdom of the past, while teachers are the organs through which pupils are brought into effective connection with the material. Teachers are the agents through which knowledge and skills are communicated and rules of conduct enforced.”

Source: John Dewey, *Experience & Education (1938)*, p.18

Dewey (1938, p. 18) proposes that the ‘*new education and progressive schools*’ of the era arose directly out of discontent with this perceived “imposition from above and from outside”, which subjected the young to “the cultural product of societies that assumed the future would be much like the past, and yet it is used as educational food in a society where change is the rule, not the exception” (Dewey, J., 1938, p.19). Thus, the ‘*new education*’ sought to reverse the key principles of the old approach...

- (ii) “To imposition from above is opposed expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and teachers, learning through experience; to acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill, is opposed acquisition of them as means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal; to preparation for a more or less remote future is opposed making the most of opportunities of present life; to static aims and materials is opposed acquaintance with a changing world.”

Source: *John Dewey, Experience & Education (1938), p. 19-20*

Whilst Dewey (1938, p. 20) agrees that the “general philosophy of the new education may be sound”, he warns of the danger of counter-philosophies in getting too bogged down in rejecting and opposing the former status-quo, to the extent that they develop upon negative and unconstructive premises. Regarding Education as the example, Dewey considers the nature of experience, freedom, social control, subject matter and purpose that may be conducive to more effective opportunities for learning. He states:

“Unless experience is so conceived that the result is a plan for deciding upon subject-matter, upon methods of instruction and discipline, and upon material equipment and social organization of the school, it is wholly in the air. (...)

Just because traditional education was a matter of routine in which the plans and programs were handed down from the past, it does not follow that progressive education is a matter of planless improvisation.”

Source: *John Dewey, Experience & Education (1938), p. 28*

Dewey echoes Aristotle in his recognition that practical wisdom - *Phronesis* - can only be achieved through experience and time. Dewey notes the responsibility of those who have achieved such wisdom in organising and differentiating opportunities for learning:

“He must, if he is an educator, be able to judge what attitudes are actually conducive to continued growth and what are detrimental. He must, in addition,



have that sympathetic understanding of individuals as individuals which gives him an idea of what is actually going on in the minds of those who are learning.”

Source: *John Dewey, Experience & Education (1938), p. 39*

Dewey acknowledges any favourable reception of the ‘*new school philosophy*’ may reside in its humane and democratic values, compared to the former autocratic system.

“Does not the principle of regard for individual freedom and for decency and kindness of human relations come back in the end to the conviction that these things are tributary to a higher quality of experience on the part of a greater number than are methods of repression and coercion or force?”

Source: *John Dewey, Experience & Education (1938), p. 34*

In this sense too, his approach mirrors that of Aristotle’s quest for knowledge to further human flourishing. Dewey (1938, p. 30) notes however that whilst this ‘*new education*’ towards such human flourishing might be simpler in principle than the old system - founded on artificial and now institutionalised arrangements of subjects and methods, “to discover what is really simple and to act upon the discovery is an exceedingly difficult task.”

Rather than blindly adhering to the ‘*old school*’ patterns of memorisation and obedience, Dewey (1938, p. 39) charges parents and educators with this task of developing “a system of education based upon living experience”...

“A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. Above all, they should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worth while.”

Source: *John Dewey, Experience & Education (1938), p. 40*

Dewey recognises the high demands of this new approach, which places great responsibility at the feet of those endeavouring to facilitate learning. This mirrors Biesta’s ‘*Beautiful Risk of Education*’ (2013, p. 132-134), whereby he acknowledges that whilst teachers need to be capable of transmitting the kind of productive technical knowledge that makes for “good citizens, skilful professionals, (and) knowledgeable human beings” (Aristotle’s *Techné*), an ‘*educationally wise*’ teacher will supplant such knowledge with the capacity of exercising wise judgements on every step of the journey.

Likewise, in warning against society's trend towards equating education with scientific 'know-how' in the 1970s, E. F. Schumacher (*Small is Beautiful*, 1973, p. 62) also recognised the need of such wisdom amongst educators:

“The task of education would be, first and foremost, the transmission of ideas of value, of what to do with our lives. There is no doubt also the need to transmit know-how but this must take second place, for it is obviously somewhat foolhardy to put great powers into the hands of people without making sure that they have a reasonable idea what to do with them.”

Source: E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, 1973, p. 62

### ***In Summary...***

In consolidating the literature surrounding the argument for a practical-skills based approach to education alongside the current social context, I have identified the following threads as perhaps general counsel towards a new paradigm for education:

(i) ***Experience...***

Experience-based education does not mean that we should think of any and all experiences as growth-fostering. Whilst each proponent advocates a wide and varied breadth of experience, they place ultimate responsibility for the nature of such experiences at the feet of educators - whom they charge to possess the virtuosity and practical wisdom to make wise judgements towards the development, emancipation and appearance of their learners. This of course entails a great degree of risk, particularly on the part of educators, as they run the risk that their judgements may be wrong.

(ii) ***Freedom...***

Such education towards development, emancipation and appearance does not dissolve the requirement for structure and organisation in schools. Again, it is up to educators to keep finding the balance between freedom and form, in the hope that such conditions under which learners are able to hone their capacity of self-control arise.

(iii) ***Democracy...***

True learning hinges on the committed interaction and co-sharing of direction and design between teachers and learners, that acknowledges we are all at once teachers and learners together. There is always a risk involved because true learning can never be definitively arranged for or enforced. It rather appears through a combined striving towards creating conditions which make its appearance possible. Whilst the willing of the individual to freely appear is of course part of its intention, Biesta's '*World Centred Education*' acknowledges also how that appearance always coincides with the inevitable appearance of others, thus necessitating a political educational aspect.

(iv) ***Environment...***

With this democratic aspect in mind, and given the truth of our time, perhaps now is the moment for us to orientate all of our planetary activity, starting with education, with our planet earth at its heart.

## Section 2: Becoming Skilled...

“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.”

Source: *Thoreau, H. D., 1854/1995, p. 59*

I will now consider the extent to which the crafts of green woodwork and coppicing, undertaken within a ‘working woodland’ setting, may begin to address some of the issues identified in the previous section.

I will begin by introducing green woodwork and coppicing and defining what may constitute a ‘working woodland’. Next, I will examine literature to investigate the nature of the relationship between practical woodland work and education - particularly through the lens of Otto Salomon’s *‘Theory of Educational Sloyd’* (1892) and Rudolf Steiner’s three-fold model of human development. I will endeavour to weave my own experiences and understanding all along the way.

### ***Green Woodwork and Coppicing in a ‘Working Woodland’***

In short, green woodwork describes any tool-work performed on wood while it is still fresh, unseasoned, and ‘green’. Typically, a log from a felled tree with its bark intact will remain green for up to sixth months. Green wood is much softer and therefore much easier to work with hand-tools. As it dries, green wood will often warp and shrink - a property which the diligent ‘bodger’ can use to their advantage to create extremely strong joints without the need for adhesives.

In his book 'Green Woodwork' (1989, p. 11), Mike Abbott notes that most green woodworking projects can be carried out without powered machinery, suggesting that "this liberation from the noise, the cost and the danger of such equipment gives rise to the other interpretation of 'green woodwork': it is energy-efficient, non-polluting and unbelievably fulfilling." (Abbott, M., 1989, p. 11)

The staple tools of the green woodworker are the shave-horse and the pole-lathe. The shave-horse is a foot-operated vice, which enables the woodworker to hold and quickly rotate and reposition a work-piece while shaping it with a drawknife in a pull-action. The pole-lathe is a treadle-powered lathe, upon which the woodworker uses chisels to turn lengths of wood into items such as chair-legs, rolling pins and candlesticks.

Originally, green woodwork arose as a way of processing felled trees with hand tools before the industrial revolution. Forests of native British hardwoods such as Oak, Ash, Beech and Hazel were 'coppiced' on regular felling rotations - whereby a selected species within an area of the woodland would essentially be clear-felled with axes and handsaws between leaf-fall and spring. This rendered a large quantity of small-diameter timber to be quickly converted into useful items such as cooking utensils, bowls, gardening props, farm tools and furniture - often in a clearing on the very same site. The sale of these items then provided the coppice-workers and 'bodgers' (chair-leg turners generally associated with the Chiltern Hills of the UK) with an income on which to live, whilst the extra sunlight increased the biodiversity of the woodland and enabled the trees to regenerate - offering the woodlander a renewable resource and thus a sustainable, though often meagre, livelihood.

Over the past 20-30 years, green woodwork has enjoyed somewhat of a renaissance, amidst perhaps a wider turn away from consumerism and capitalism towards a slower, more autonomous, more environmentally conscious calling. Several other traditional 'cottage crafts' - pottery, knitting and crochet, willow-weaving, wool-spinning, home-brewing, vegetable growing - have likewise begun to flourish again.

In the case of Green Woodwork, this is at least partly due to pioneers like the Swedish carver Willie Sundqvist and green wood chair-maker Mike Abbott who have re-invigorated the old traditions - popularising them again through 'how-to' books and videos, training courses, and public appearances on TV shows like '*Mastercrafts*' and '*Grand Designs*'. Humble organisations like the '*Association of Pole-Lathe Turners and Green Woodworkers*' (APTGW) and the '*National Coppice Federation*' (NCFed) have likewise kept the torch aflame - often through the hard work of dedicated volunteers, alongside the recognition and protection of larger umbrella groups - UNESCO, the Woodland and National Trusts, and the Heritage Crafts Association.

Green Woodwork is now practiced as a hobby and often as a sustainable livelihood all over the world - either as a therapeutic distraction from the 'rat race', or as a viable alternative to it. 'Barn the Spoon' can be seen through the window of his London Hackney shop - mindfully carving spoons with axes and knives which he sells for £50 apiece. Robin Wood has made a career from turning wooden bowls on a foot-powered lathe. Ben Orford smiths and sells unique green woodworking tools all over the world. Ben Law has developed a whole lifestyle and training program around sweet-chestnut coppicing and round-wood timber framing at his 'Prickly Nut Wood' in Sussex.

There are now a whole host of festivals and training courses springing up throughout the UK - 'Spoon Fest', the 'Bodgers Ball', 'Northern Bowl' - all dedicated to the practice and development of woodland skills, and giving rise to what Barn the Spoon has coined '*the new wood culture*'.

In Education, the Forest Schools movement is helping to bring woodlands back into the culture and consciousness of children through outdoor play, whilst in Health there is a growing trend towards prescribing 'Green Care' to mental health patients. Alongside the growth in 'eco-tourism', whereby 'glamping' in a woodland yurt may be accompanied with an 'introduction to spoon-carving' course, such trends are all encouraging us to spend more time outdoors, gently getting to know and use our woodlands again.

As an emblem for the needs of our time, the tree offers much. Trees convert carbon dioxide - much of which being created by industrial human activity through the burning of fossil fuels - into oxygen - allowing us to breathe. Trees also sequester carbon in their fibres - nourishing soils, invertebrates and fungi as they die. They provide food and habitat for a wide range of animals, and their roots hold soils together to help prevent erosion. The tropical rainforests help to regulate the climate, and offer some of the most rich and biodiverse ecosystems on the planet.

In some eastern cultures, wood is considered the fifth element - supporting life on the planet through these global processes, and offering humans an invaluable resource to meet our basic needs of shelter, warmth, food and tools for millennia. As Barn the Spoon notes in the opening pages of his book '*Spōn*' (2017, p.33):

“We evolved from apes that swung in trees to apes that swung axes at trees, and virtually all of us are descended from woodworking cultures.”

We probably fashioned our first tools with wood, just as we lit our first fires. We have used wood to build our shelters throughout history - whether simple lean-tos or elaborate cathedrals. Our utensils, toys, transport and furniture have all been made from wood at

one time or another. We rely on wood to heat our homes and to cook our food; we fill our pots with the fruits and nuts we find on trees. As Ben Law notes in his book 'Woodland Craft' (2015, p. 13):

“Wood, a material from trees, grown by the energy of the sun, is the beginning of all crafts and trades. Without wood the blacksmith could not have forged tools, or have handles to hold the tools by. Potters, tanners and glassmakers all needed wood or wood products for their trades.”

Yet our close relationship with woodlands has all but been forgotten in this technological age.

“Our world relied on wood and its uses until the Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth century. The arrival of coke and, in particular, plastics in the 1950s led to the demise of many woodland crafts - their role was now outdated. Why carve a bowl out of wood when one can be moulded in plastic every five seconds on a production line? Our oil-based economy has led us blindly towards a faster, more sterile world where individuality and creativity has been bulldozed for rapid production and economic gain with little consideration for the long-term environmental impact.”

Source: Law, B., *Woodland Craft*, 2015, p. 13

Jackie Morris and Robert Macfarlane likewise raise concern through their book '*The Lost Words*' (2017). Through beautifully illustrated 'spells', the pair recall some forty words - including acorn, bluebell, fern, and dandelion - which were removed from a new version of the Oxford Junior Dictionary in 2007 to be replaced by words such as blog, broadband, voice-mail and bullet-point. A telling symbol of our time, in which more than 50% of species are in decline, and nearly 20% of rainforests have been destroyed in the last twenty years.

A 'working woodland' endeavours to reverse this trend. To return small overgrown woodlands to coppice and sensitive sustainable management through human hands. To get people connecting with trees again by working with them - cutting areas of underwood each winter, and creating beautiful functional items - spoons, chairs, tools and shelters - with the harvest.

“Coppicing is the term used to describe the successional cutting of broadleaf woodland during the dormant winter period. In spring, when the sap rises, the stump (known as the stool) sends up new shoots, which are grown on for a number of years until they reach the desired size. They are then cut again during winter and the



process repeats itself. The wood cut from coppice is known as underwood and has for centuries supplied a variety of products and supported a large workforce, from the cutter to coppice merchant to craftsman to purchaser.

Coppiced wood is a valuable crop and when managed well can sustain more people per acre than any of the modern forestry alternatives. It is also a sustainable pattern of management, rarely needing any replanting, so the soil is not disturbed and therefore not subject to the risk of erosion. Nutrients are returned mainly through the annual leaf fall.

Coppicing creates a cyclical habitat and a unique ecosystem, and is one of the few patterns of symbiosis known in nature where humans are an important part of the relationship.”

Source: Law, B., 2015, *Woodland Craft*, p. 15

A working woodland, then, is defined as sustainable enterprise in a woodland environment - creating useful and beautiful items from the coppice and sensitive management of the trees, thus ensuring a renewable timber resource and a healthy and biodiverse ecosystem. The woodlander must adhere to the natural rhythms and cycles of the woodland - cutting only after leaf-fall until the buds begin to burst again in spring. Much of the work can be carried out by hand - offering lots of healthy physical felling work through the cold winter months, which is best conducted in small groups. The species of the harvest dictates the nature of the items to be produced from it...

- **Hazel** (*Corylus avellana*) lends itself well to gardening props and weaving projects - hedging stakes, bean poles, pea-sticks, wattle hurdles and baskets.
- Left to grow slightly bigger, **Sweet Chestnut** (*Castanea sativa*) makes for excellent fencing and building material - splitting and cleaving nicely along the grain to create strong hedging stakes and paling, and surviving well outdoors to form durable round-wood timber frames and cladding.
- The flexibility and consistency of **Ash** (*Fraxinus excelsior*) makes it a wonderful wood for furniture and tool handles.
- **Sycamore** (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) is often sought after for bowls and cutlery because of its natural antiseptic properties.
- **Willow** (*Salix viminalis*) is the preferred option for weaving - whether for ornamental garden structures and fencing, or for baskets and furniture.

For millennia, coppicing has run hand-in-hand with charcoal making, offering woodlanders a means of converting any of their ‘waste’ from the harvest into another useful resource.

Through the bronze and iron ages, charcoal was used to heat-up metal to be forged into tools and weapons. A handful of traditional toolmakers continue the same practice to this day, although charcoal is more sought after for barbecues, bio-char and art activities. (Law, B., 2015, p. 88).

Virtually any wood can be converted into good charcoal when seasoned - rendering the production of charcoal a viable component of any woodland enterprise. Once converted, hardwood charcoal burns hotter, and is thus better suited to tool-making and barbecuing.

Thus, a typical 'working woodland' may constitute a cyclical combination of winter coppicing, greenwood crafts through the spring and summer, and charcoal making into the autumn - all held together by the hands and creative, industrious and communal activity of willing human folk.

### ***The Educational Case for Woodwork***

“We have such a brief opportunity to pass on to our children our love for this Earth, and to tell our stories. These are the moments when the world is made whole.”

Source: Louv, R., 2005, p. 310

As discussed in *Section 1*, education has comprised some practical physical aspect since philosophers first debated the concept in Ancient Greece. Originally to prepare citizens for war and predominantly manual occupations, theorists from Aristotle to Rousseau have since argued the case for a physical and practical pedagogy to run alongside moral and intellectual development to best realise the dormant potential within each human being.

### ***Sloyd***

The first murmurings of a comprehensive theory of educational handcraft appeared in Scandinavia in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. In Finland, Uno Cygnaeus (1810 - 1888) synthesised the teachings of Pestalozzi and Froebel to propose '*Sloyd*' as...

“...such kinds of handwork as have for their aim the training of the hand, the development of the sense of form and of the aesthetic feeling, and help young men to a general practical dexterity, which shall be useful in every walk of life. Such works are simple joinery, turnery, basket-making &c. But all these kinds of work

must not be conducted like a trade, but always with strict reference to the universal educational aim, and as a means of formal education.”

Source: *Cygnaeus, U., in Salomon, O. A., The Theory of Educational Sloyd, 1892, p. 143*

By 1866, ‘*Sloyd*’ was a compulsory component of the Finnish elementary school curriculum. For a few hours each week, children would practice traditional crafts - *woodwork, pottery, needlework, basket weaving, papermaking, drawing, embroidery* - with simple tools - *carving knives, knitting needles, pencils* - solely for their educational benefit. ‘*Sloyd*’ has remained an integral part of the Finnish school curriculum ever since.

Inspired by Cygnaeus in Sweden, Otto Aron Salomon (1849 - 1907) further developed the pedagogical theory of ‘*Sloyd*’ through his teacher-training schools at Nääs in the 1870s and 1880s. Under pressure from the government, who suspected the general appetite for school ‘*Sloyd*’ was going backward amidst industrialisation and more reading and writing in the new elementary schools, Salomon decided to concentrate his attentions on ‘*wood-sloyd*’ “because it has been found by experience, based on the employment of various kinds of materials, that there is nothing that so well serves the purposes of education as wood does.” (Salomon, O. A., 1892, p. 2)

Through his writings and lectures, Salomon added form to Cygnaeus’ ideas, training over 1,500 educators from all over the world in his new ‘*Sloyd*’ method, whose purpose was “not to turn out carpenters, but to develop the mental, moral and physical powers of children.” (Salomon, O. A., 1892, p. 1)

Salomon believed ‘*Sloyd*’ to be a universally accessible and beneficial element of a ‘general education’, comprising both formative and utilitarian aims (Salomon, O. A., 1892, p. 7).

The Formative aims are:

1. To instil a taste for, and a love of, labour in general.
2. To inspire respect for rough, honest, bodily labour.
3. To develop independence and self-reliance.
4. To train in habits of order, exactness, cleanliness, and neatness.
5. To train the eye and sense of form. To give a general dexterity of hand, and to develop touch.
6. To accustom to attention, industry, perseverance, and patience.
7. To promote the development of the physical powers.

The Utilitarian aims are:

1. To directly give dexterity in the use of tools.

2. To execute exact work.

These aims were to be governed by six 'general' and three 'special' principles (*Salomon, O. A., 1892, p. 9 - 10*)...

*General.*

1. The instruction must go from easy to difficult.
2. The instruction must go from simple to complex.
3. The instruction must go from the known to the unknown.
4. The teaching must lay a good foundation.
5. The teacher should possess educational tact.
6. The teaching should be interesting in character.

*Special.*

7. The instruction should be intuitive in its character, i.e., it should be given as far as possible through the Senses, especially touch and sight.
8. The teaching should be individual in character.
9. The instructor should be a teacher and not an artisan.

Salomon goes on to describe in depth the motivation behind these aims and principles, before proposing a series of fifty models for the student to progressively move through to best realise the educational potential of 'Sloyd'. Salomon goes into great detail - prescribing the exact amount and type of wood needed for each project, and describing which tools and techniques will be required to complete it. He then systematically introduces new tools and techniques with each new project to reinforce and develop learning.

### ***A 'Working Woodland'***

The 'Sloyd' method grew from a recognition of the developmental potential of the practice of traditional handcrafts like green woodwork. However, I would argue that Salomon's 'wood-sloyd' describes but a small part of green woodwork, and green woodwork an integral though not exclusive component of what may be deemed a 'working woodland'. Thus, I suspect there may be an even greater educational potential when we consider this wider woodland context.

***(i) Green Woodwork***

In my experience, most green woodwork tends to take place outdoors. This instantly sets it apart from the 'Sloyd' approach of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which generally went on inside a schoolroom. Considering my first acquaintance with green woodwork, it was just as much about the setting as it was about the craft that got me hooked. I remember walking around the woods with Bob the tutor as he described the different trees and fungi, the sounds of the birds all around us, the smell of wood smoke in the air, every bit as much as I recall the deep pleasure of feeling the first ribbons of wood gliding off my chisel as I first met the pole-lathe. Still now, it is the opportunity to work outside in all seasons amongst the trees that provide the shelter, the clean air, the warmth, the material for making; beside the call of the cuckoo, the coo of the owl, the flutter of the robin and the wren, which keeps me so in love with green woodwork.

Siting woodwork in the woods presents a unique and wonderful opportunity to foster a connection with our local natural environment that is so at risk in these times. How can it be that I - a 26 year old 'educated' human - had no idea what the different tree species were that first time Bob walked us through the woods?

Working next to the trees helps us to build a relationship with them. We begin to understand something of their essence only a fragment of which would be possible were the activity to be conducted outside of the woods. We learn where the wood for our projects comes from. We learn to recognise shapes in the trees that lend themselves to different uses - branches for hooks, crooks for spoons, arcs for chair legs, forks for rake handles. We learn where to find snappy sticks to light our fire. We learn how different woods dry. We learn how our 'waste' can be useful - shavings for kindling, bark for weaving and dyeing, sap for drinking. We learn about life and death and time - how slowly trees grow, how long they can live, and how quickly they can be cut down. We see and hear and smell and feel all the life the woodland harbours - birdsong, badger scents, bluebells.

This opportunity for real experience and connection has great implications for students who may struggle to grasp abstract concepts about where the wood for their project comes from were they confined to crafting in a classroom. Here they can help select and fell a tree, and then use part of it to create a useful item, all the while being immersed in the space and constancy of nature. Likewise, the diversity of the woodland environment can appeal to a range of dispositions. It offers boundless scope for free imaginative play, for problem solving and calculated risk taking.

It is little wonder that so much of the great literature - William Shakespeare's '*A Midsummer Night's Dream*', Thomas Hardy's '*The Woodlanders*', Enid Blyton's '*The Far Away Tree*' - are all set in and aspire to capture something of the magic of the woods.

The great expanse of the sky and far-off horizons are complemented by the gentle caress of the trees - inducing a sense of being held by the forest, but never contained.

“When I’m in the woods, I feel like I’m in my mother’s shoes. It’s so peaceful out there and the air smells so good. ... It’s like you’re free when you go out there. It’s your own time. Sometimes I go there and I’m mad - and then, just with the peacefulness, I’m better. I can come back home happy, and my mom doesn’t even know why.

I had a place. There was a big waterfall and a creek on one side of it. I’d dug a big hole there, and sometimes I’d take a tent there, or a blanket, and just lie down in the hole, and look up at the trees and sky. Sometimes I’d fall asleep back in there. I just felt free; it was like my place, and I could do what I wanted, with no body to stop me. I used to go down there almost every day.

And then they just cut the woods down. It was like they cut down part of me.”

*Source: A fifth-grade aspirational poet, in Louv, R., 2005, p. 13 - 14*

Green Woodwork in the UK has experienced something of a resurgence in the last twenty years. One of its greatest exponents is Barn ‘the Spoon’ Carder, who left a job in teaching to carve spoons for a living - sleeping under canvas in the woods by night and peddling his spoons on the streets of Oxford and Bristol by day.

“I travelled alone for three years and it was a completely transformative journey for me. Walking for days along old ways and canal towpaths gave me time to think. I experienced life increasingly on a natural timescale, moving around on foot and stopping to gather wood for a fire, upon which I would make a cup of tea.

The most perfect time within this period was when I was living in a wood just outside Oxford, when I was able to develop a beautiful relationship with nature. After selling spoons on the city’s streets I would go back to the woods. Walking through the trees at the end of the day I would find a piece of dead standing wood, or maybe a fallen branch hanging in a tree, set my tarp between branches and unravel my bed roll. This became my living room for the evening. I really had everything I needed. I’d take my shoes and socks off and sit cross-legged on my bed, then begin to process my firewood for the evening. I’d saw off nice straight bits to split into kindling, and then shave them down into feathersticks. I would light a little fire, which brought a great amount of warmth as I was so close to it

and to the ground, and once the fire was really going I would reach into my pack for my metal canteen cup and water flask. I would balance the cup on the firewood, being careful not to squish the embers, and after boiling I would put a spoonful of loose leaf Earl Grey tea into it. ... I garnered a huge sense of peace in being home from a day's work. When the time came for sleep I'd pull the burning coals apart ready for the morning, and would just have to lie back to be in bed. I would sit for hours just staring into the flames. If you do this as the night encroaches your world gets smaller and smaller, finally leaving you alone under the dark canopy with only what is lit by the fire."

This was my own grounding in wood culture, an idiosyncratic and self-served apprenticeship. It taught me that it is possible to make my way in the world by selling spoons. It's a very affirming thing to make a spoon in the morning and sell it in the afternoon. It gave me an enormous sense of self respect that I could go out there with just an axe and a knife, and make a living."

Source: *Barn the Spoon*, 2017, p. 21 - 22

Living and working this way, Barn soon became an excellent spoon carver, not to mention something of a celebrity following television and radio appearances. Following his wanderings, Barn moved to London to carve and sell spoons from a shop on the Hackney Road where he can still be found today. He also hosts a range of woodcraft courses at Hackney City Farm as part of '*The Green Wood Guild*', alongside his annual international spoon carving celebration '*SpoonFest*', which he founded with renowned bowl-turner Robin Wood.

In 2017 Barn released his first book '*Spön - A guide to spoon carving and the new wood culture*', offering readers a detailed introduction to woodlands, knife work and spoon carving. The book culminates with sixteen spoon designs for readers to have a go at. Barn's second book '*Wood Craft*' (2019) seeks to give a broader and more systematic introduction to green woodwork, adopting a more prescriptive approach similar perhaps to Salomon's '*Sloyd*'.

Barn defines three areas of green woodwork - *knifework*, *axework* and *turning* - and then proposes a series of projects to develop each technique; listing precisely the tools, equipment, materials, and knife grips that will be required, and stating which skills will need to be recalled or newly learned to complete each item.



In designing and developing green woodwork as part of a 'working woodland' for Ruskin Mill Trust, I intend to propose a similar series of projects for students to systematically move through. First though, I will attempt to consider the educational rationale for doing so.

In my experience, and particularly after having delivered green woodwork sessions to young adults with a range of special educational needs for over six years, I have developed an insight into which tools, techniques, and exercises best lend themselves to learning. My sessions generally comprise a handful of techniques - sawing, splitting and shaving, cleaving, carving and turning. There is huge scope for refinement within each procedure, but broadly speaking I regard sawing, splitting, and shaving as entry level techniques, and cleaving, carving and turning the more advanced aspects of the craft. I will endeavour to examine why this may be the case through the lens of the Ruskin Mill Trust *Practical Skills Therapeutic Education* (PSTE) method.

Founded on the theories of human development proposed by Rudolf Steiner, the Trust aspires to 're-imagine the potential' of learners through *Seven Fields of Practice...*

- *Genius Loci (Spirit of Place)*
- *Practical Skills*
- *Biodynamic Ecology*
- *Therapeutic Education*
- *Holistic Support and Care*
- *Holistic Medicine*
- *Transformative Leadership and Management*

...which seek to develop Steiner's *Seven Life Processes* through *Seven Care Qualities...*

- *Breathing*, by attending to *Rhythm*
- *Warming*, by attending to *Warmth*
- *Nourishing*, by attending to *Nourishment*
- *Secreting*, by attending to *Trust*
- *Maintaining*, by attending to *Constancy*
- *Growing*, by attending to *Culture*
- *Reproducing*, by attending to *Recreation*

To these ends, the Trust employs an 'integrated student-centred curriculum', whereby the twelve senses identified by Steiner...

- Touch
- Life

- Movement
- Balance
- Smell
- Taste
- Sight
- Warmth
- Hearing
- Speech
- Thought
- Ego

...are to be integrated and refined through the crafts and practical activities the Trust advocates.

Source: *Ruskin Mill Trust Publicity Card, 2017*

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully investigate the origins of this approach, but I will now consider green woodwork as a component of it.

### ***Rhythm***

Perhaps more than anything else, green woodwork has to do with rhythm. All of the tools and processes embody something of rhythm - the back and forth of the saw, the steady drum of the axe parting and shaping logs, the long repetitive strokes of the drawknife, the gentle motion of the pole-lathe. Just wander into any green woodwork setting and you will instantly be confronted by a range of sounds and activities which everywhere ooze rhythm. Add to that the meta-rhythms of nature and a 'working woodland' - the seasons, the rise and fall of sap, the long summer nights and the cold winter days, the blossom, the coming and going of different flowers and animal calls, the coppice cycle, the season-led activity, the stacking and drying of firewood - and you may get some sense of the profound relationship between rhythm and the woods.

As a space for healing and learning, these woodland rhythms offer students the opportunity to step in toe with a healthy and natural beat. Students who may often have a distorted sense of rhythm - borne perhaps of a life lived amongst artificial light, of broken sleep, of the imposition of the modern human notion of time, of a lack of physical activity, of an unhealthy and unnatural diet.

Rudolf Steiner (1861 - 1925) surmised that the human soul is essentially governed through the body via three systems - the nerve system, which he equated with *thinking - the head*; the rhythmic breathing system, which he equated with *feeling - the heart*; and the metabolic-limb system, which he equated with *willing - the hand*.

Steiner proposed three seven-year phases through his '*Waldorf Education*' model...

- Years 0 - 7 are primarily concerned with developing the *will* and the imagination of the child, through direct contact with and experience of the world, often through the hands. Classes may comprise activities which encourage movement to foster control over the limbs and develop a healthy metabolism; a balanced diet to provide the energy for the will to act and to help build a robust digestive system; and lots of opportunities for 'free play' to harness imagination, creativity, imitation and sympathy for 'the other'. *Willing* embodies movement, towards the future.
- Years 7 - 14 focus on training the *feeling* capacity - the mediator between conscious thought and unconscious will. *Feeling* then can be thought of as emotional intelligence or intuition - the dream-like state that moves in us between sleeping and waking. During these years, '*Steiner-Waldorf*' models advocate rhythmical physical activities alongside storytelling, art, poetry and creative writing towards achieving balance and growing moral fibre. Children may begin to differentiate between fantasy and reality, developing empathy as they begin to feel something of 'the other's' experience. *Feeling*, like breathing, is at once motion and rest, whose rhythmical artistic movement never tires, and whose heartfelt experience is always here and now.
- The final phase, 14 - 21, seeks to develop the *thinking* realm, through more rigorous intellectual activity - problem solving, moral dilemma, debate, philosophy. Students may reveal antipathy as they endeavour to make sense of the world in their transition from adolescent towards a self-aware, freely choosing adult individual. *Thinking* is bound to the past. As with the organs of the head, *thinking* necessitates stillness.

Source: Harwood, A. C., *The Way of a Child*, 1997, p. 1 - 9

In his synopsis of Steiner's theory of education, Harwood (1997, p. 7) criticises modern civilisation's "complete preoccupation with the intellectual consciousness of the head-nerve system", and points to a fundamental neglect of *feeling* in our school systems, stating:

“In education, we find that intellectual work tires the children, and then, to give them relief, we exercise the opposite pole of the body by introducing violent games and sports, which exhaust them in another way. But we do not have the imagination to think that if we taught them artistically and with feeling, that is rhythmically, they would not become so tired in the first place, and so would not need violent outlets for their energies in another direction in the second.”

Source: Harwood, A. C. 1997, p. 8

Perhaps the rhythmical nature of woodland work may help redress the balance. Many of the students who attend Ruskin Mill Trust often arrive with diagnoses implying their mental faculties are several years younger than their true age. Thus, it is little wonder that many have struggled to respond to an educational situation whose focus is predominantly toward the intellect, towards a later phase of Steiner’s child development which many students are not yet ready for.

The method advocated by the Trust presents such students with an opportunity to re-step elements of these early phases. Clearly, the affordance of woodwork towards rhythmical, repetitive, physical activity, and the affordance of woodlands towards free movement, imagination and play, represent interesting vehicles.

To Steiner’s three-fold human development model, Karl Koenig (1983, p. 45) added, “our compass consists of the trinity, the stages of incarnation, namely the trinity of focusing, grasping, and stepping”, equating *willing* with *focus*, *feeling* with *grasp*, and *thinking* with *step*. In these terms, it is perhaps easier to consider where and how such aspects become manifest through woodwork.

- *Focus* is everywhere trained in the woods - noticing the different leaves on the trees, considering where to place the next step on uneven ground, choosing which part of a log to use, deciding where next to position the tool. Activities that are most likely to introduce *focus*, and therefore begin to train the *will* may include splitting logs, measuring and sawing lengths of wood, stacking firewood, removing bark with a drawknife, and selecting trees and branches for felling and coppicing.

“Part of the beauty of wood as a chaotic material is that it certainly isn’t ever perfectly symmetrical, on the level of the grain, and that this gives the artist something to work with, or against. Whether it is a slight bend in the grain or a wiggle around a knot, these variables inspire sympathy in the spoon

maker and an intimate relationship with their material, which is more spiritually rewarding than creating a perfect straight line or a circle.”

Source: *Barn the Spoon*, 2017, p. 15

- *Grasp* and *feeling* are developed through rhythm and routine - learning to ‘let the tool do the work’. Through repetition of familiar woodland tasks - splitting, sawing, cleaving, shaving - the body develops muscle-memory and learns to work in a more efficient way. Students may adopt a different posture as they begin to ‘feel’ the motion of a tool as it moves through the wood, recognising the point at which their minimum exertion can achieve the required result, and fostering a deeper relationship with the material. During my apprenticeship in 2011, Mike Abbott would often exclaim, “It’s all about the balance between strength and sensitivity!” How fitting a statement to capture the essence of this *feeling* quality. In my opinion, all good woodcraft comes through this *feeling* realm. Mike used to speak of the four levels of competence - *unconscious incompetence*, *conscious incompetence*, *conscious competence*, and *unconscious competence*, suggesting almost a fourth dimension to Steiner’s three-fold model, wherein once intellectualised, we must aspire to forget it all again and return to the *feeling* realm to get back in ‘the zone’.
- This is perhaps a good point at which to bring in *step*, as perhaps this ‘*elixir*’ moment when we become aware of the consequences of our actions in the craft - a truly delicate moment, wherein if we stay in our mind too long or allow it to wander too far, we fall out of the present and perhaps ruin our work - leading inevitably to the appearance of antipathy. Any woodwork activities performed to a high standard require at least some inclusion of conscious thought in action - constantly making on-the-spot decisions to make subtle changes when operating a pole-lathe, carving a spoon or assembling a chair. Indeed, ‘Barn the Spoon’ (2017, p. 25) recounts, “When I make a spoon I am also chasing a feeling, or rather trying to communicate or prompt an emotion in a person when they pick it up.” The *thinking* capacity is also necessary in reflection - a vital aspect of any truly transformative craft process as we look to internalise our actions and decisions so we can make better-informed responses next time.

### ***The Four Lower Senses***

Steiner believed that once wholly developed and integrated, the twelve senses together constitute an order, or *cosmos*, through which we may best perceive of the world. However, interruptions and traumas throughout our development may often impair or distort our sensory integration, and thus our experience of the world.

Source: Soesman, A., 1990, p. 9

Ruskin Mill Trust endeavours to enable students to '*re-step*' the '*typical*' phases of human development through providing students with a broad range of practical and craft-based opportunities which appeal to their senses in the hope that their development maybe renewed.

Of the twelve senses he identifies, Steiner proposes four '*lower*' senses of *Touch*, *Life*, *Movement* and *Balance* as the foundations of our sensory experience, which Ruskin Mill Trust seeks to de-dress through craft. I wish now to investigate these four senses in relation to green woodwork.

(i) *Touch*

In these times we are perhaps touch-deficient - existing often indoors, seated, tapping at artificial buttons and screens, unaware perhaps of our deep longing and need for healthy, physical touch.

Through touch we derive our meaning and we define our boundaries. Woodland based activity offers us an opportunity to touch life at work - the wet sap oozing from a tree cut in early spring, the pleasing smooth facets left on a length of green wood with a sharp knife.

In a modern learning environment largely void of *feeling*, woodlands are full of healthy outlets to develop our *touch* sense - the different textures of bark, of split logs and peeled poles; the touch of a sharp tool-edge on wood which feels as if it has become an extension of our very self.

(ii) *Life*

Again, through our largely sedentary modern-day experience, from where do we derive our sense of *Life*? Our life sense is most extremely experienced through pain. How do we feel the moment we wake up, how are our energy levels, how do we experience physical exertion, how do we approach the day ahead of us. Trees have been found to emit positive energy. Woodlands everywhere exclaim vibrant, green life. How can the gentle chirp and flutter of birds, the dance of

leaves in the breeze, the profound pleasure of experiencing a sharp axe parting a big log - not stir in us the sensation that we are alive!? Through the concentration of predominantly rhythmical processes in the woods to which I have already eluded, the expansion-contraction motion of our whole inner being is revitalised. Add to this the opportunity to experience pain through a risk miscalculated - the slip of a sharp knife, a missed step when climbing a tree - and we begin to realise the opportunity to move from pain through conscience to compassion in a woodland setting.

(iii) *Movement*

Likewise, our sense of *movement* is everywhere stimulated working in the woods. The sense of the sway of trees in the wind, the motion of the tools, the scurry of squirrels. All craft demands movement. When woodworking, we must learn how best to position our body to most effectively use a tool. I remember my first woodwork teacher, Bob Shaw, recounting how his Grandad used to exclaim, "Imagine you're the teeth of the saw boy!" True craft work is like this - the tool becomes us. As students practice the repetitive actions of the woods, sporadic involuntary movements become trained towards purposeful motion - the saw and the drawknife most excellent vehicles.

(iv) *Balance*

As our gaze becomes focus and our motion becomes decisive, we move through grasp to step - necessitating *balance* as we work in three planes of space. To this end, the tools of green woodwork are well suited - the shave-horse and pole-lathe employing foot, hand and eye in unison across the different planes. The level of attention required to successfully master the pole-lathe requiring of the operator that impeccable balance only through which the discovery of that inner sense of flow and absolute presence is possible.

## Section 3: Contributing to the Community...

In September 2016, after some six years of living, working and teaching in the woods, I was tasked with devising and heading up a new woodland provision for Ruskin Mill Trust in the West Midlands, at just the same moment as I set out on this MA journey. After some thirty years of experiencing and growing through the world, this was my '*tabula rasa*' upon which to carve a space for others' learning - a moment to assert that self-mastery I was perhaps challenged and perhaps ready to assume.

"A revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice *co-intentional* education. Teacher and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators. In this way, the presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement."

Source: Illich, I., '*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*', 1970, p. 43

### ***Intentions...***

Setting out, I had a handful of intentions. First, I wished to capture some essence of the beauty and spirit I met in the Herefordshire woodlands I had trained and lived in, which had so transformed me. I aimed in particular to attend to and recreate...

- *The aesthetic of the tools, furniture and structures, which looked so at home in the woods.*
- *How each 'working woodland' was only made possible through the close communication, cooperation and innovation of lots of people.*
- *A welcoming and social environment, aimed at connecting staff, students and local organisations and people through a common affinity with woodlands.*
- *The feeling of 'being with' nature and working outdoors.*
- *A conscious striving to use resources efficiently and ecologically to best sustain the local environment alongside human activity.*
- *Having a fire as a focal point for gatherings and for cooking on.*



- *Well-defined areas for different activities (workshop, kitchen, break-area) and clear and obvious systems (for tools, waste, firewood, etc.).*
- *A culture of communal reflection and innovation, through regular group check-ins to support training, research and development.*

In many ways, several of these intentions are deeply embedded within the wider Ruskin Mill Trust *Practical Skills Therapeutic Education* (PSTE) approach, which I wished to embrace and embody as far as possible through the new woodland provision...

- (i) *Genius Loci, or Spirit of Place* is a term the Trust uses to describe how the physical, historical, and cultural make-up - the essence of a place - may inform how we choose to interact with it now. In devising the new workspace, I sought not to rush - but instead to allow space for phenomena to appear, to investigate the local flora and fauna, to feel the direction of the wind and the presence of the sun. We considered the local resources and topography, how we might best integrate with the adjoining farm and local organisations for mutual benefit, the affects our activity might have on the local environment.
- (ii) These considerations would hopefully give rise to the design and nature of our intended infrastructure and activity - *Practical Skills, Biodynamic Ecology and Therapeutic Education*. A thorough investigation towards a truer perception of the '*spirit*' of Day's Wood would best determine which practical woodland skills would best suit the space and the ecology - allowing us to develop a therapeutic woodland curriculum which feels as if it belongs with Day's Wood.
- (iii) The opportunity of '*being*' in a symbiotic relationship with nature was perhaps what drew me most to working in the woods. I hoped to incorporate as far as possible the Trust's '*seed-to-table*' philosophy through our work in Day's Wood - offering students the real experience of nurturing and harvesting trees through winter coppicing, before converting them into beautiful functional items - *tool handles, hay rakes, gate-hurdles, furniture, kitchenware* - to be used in their homes and the adjoining farm and garden.
- (iv) Finally, through experience, observation, insight and reflection, I hope to develop a '*working woodland*' curriculum for Day's Wood - proposing activities and processes according to our unique situation which best address the theories

of human development put forward by the Trust and considered through this thesis.

### ***Lessons...***

I will now summarise my experience and endeavour to share something of my learning through the three years thus far we have worked in Day's Wood.

### ***...Co-creation...***

We began working in Day's Wood in summer 2016. To begin with, we erected temporary shelters under canvas and built a kitchen shack and a tool store from materials salvaged from the previous woodland project. Following some three years assisting with the build of a friend's woodland barn, I had little doubt over the transformative and bond-forming potential of building by hand. Students rarely engaged in other sessions soon found their niches in the group process of taking down old structures to raise them anew - removing nails, cooking sausages, splitting firewood, fetching water, peeling poles, pushing wheelbarrows, digging holes. Each Friday a team of 10-20 staff and students combined to form '*The Woodland Sanctuary Project*' - whose name, intentions, form and ground-rules we collectively agreed upon.

In the spring of the following year - May 2017 - we demolished the previous hut in Day's Wood and began preparing the site for the new build. Momentum from the salvaging work continued, as the same group - often itinerant in other areas of the college - returned week on week to 'raise the roundhouse'. By mid-July we had the frame raised - with students demonstrating team-work, problem solving, functional skills, risk management, initiative and devotion - often appearing galvanised by the responsibility of having a hand in the creation of their own workspace.

After the summer break the cladding arrived on site, and a wonderfully collaborative day comprising tractors, trailers, staff and students culminated in some two hundred boards making the journey up the hill to settle neatly stacked just metres away from the roundhouse frame which they would eventually cover. Months of handling, measuring and cutting by hand ensued as the roof and walls took shape - with almost every new student arrival to the woods keen to be involved in the process. Whenever visitors appeared,

students were proud to share of their experiences - pointing to the parts they had contributed, and demonstrating processes to help instruct peers.

Now complete, there is a great story to the workshop - which we have all shared in and can tell of together. Mistakes made by both staff and students all learning along the way live on in wonky walls and rooves, only adding to the collaborative feel and character of the woodland, and revealing to us the beauty of imperfection and human fallibility - '*wabi-sabi*' in Japanese.

At open evenings, parents react with surprise when they learn that stories students have told them about helping to build the workshop are true. Students speak of building their own houses and sheds when they leave college, and many seem increasingly to be considering a future in construction, forestry and woodcraft.

### **...Community...**

Alongside student input, the workshop has also depended on the help of many friends. Serendipitous meetings and moments rendered important milestones possible: a great friend and mentor supplied the Perspex pyramid for the roof, which just so happened to fit within a couple of inches; another friend of a friend happened to be a master felt layer, finally and timely providing a solution for waterproofing the roof, which allowed us to declare the workshop fully operational in August 2018.

We have developed a good relationship with the neighbouring National Trust, who permit us to coppice sycamore stools and process fallen trees from their adjacent woodland. Their volunteer groups offer students an opportunity to delve further into forestry and conservation work after leaving the college, and their local visitor centre provides an outlet for the sale of our 'goods from the woods'. I hope this relationship will continue to flourish in the coming years - with Day's Wood perhaps offering green woodwork training courses for National Trust visitors and volunteers in exchange for more access to their wood resource, and perhaps presenting a model of a symbiotic relationship between Ruskin Mill and the National Trust for other woodlands to adopt. I also hope to open up the woods to local schools and community groups, to better bring woodlands into the local consciousness.

### **...Rhythm...**

As eluded to earlier in the thesis, opportunities for learning through '*rhythm*' and '*feeling*' are in these times perhaps one of the most neglected aspects of Steiner's human development model. With *Phase 1* of the '*working woodland*' - *developing infrastructure* - now near completion, I hope focus will next turn to fostering more rhythmical woodland learning through '*feeling*'. We are already in our second year of coppice rotation, which provides students with a warming and repetitive physical winter activity, and presents them with an opportunity to understand where wood comes from, before it fuels fires and becomes timber-frames and furniture.

Fine health stems from good rhythms - strong circulation, steady breathing, just enough sleep. The woods present an opportunity to move closer to this beat. Each of the inherent processes - sawing, splitting, stacking; cleaving, shaving, turning - foster more healthy, more natural rhythms. Indeed, as Barn the Spoon (2017, p. 14) recounts from his days living in the woods peddling spoons...

"I was living and working in the woods, cooking on an open fire each night, splitting and drying wood, and had the time and space to explore a new way of making. I was able to feel the weight of a felled tree hitting the ground and enjoy the exertion of moving tonnes of wood by hand."

A resurgent craft movement, recognising our need to make and do, is surely born out of the knowledge that we are not fulfilled by our sedentary, digital lives. On the fringes, people are beginning to remember the benefits of rural life, and well-made wooden spoons, like good studio pottery before it, suggests an alternative world away from that which we currently inhabit."

Research into woodland processes goes on, as we endeavour to develop a comprehensive situated woodland curriculum, which moves students from *focus* through *grasp* to *step*, via rhythmical craft processes in the creation of locally useful items.

### **...Reverence...**

In his 1973 book '*Small is Beautiful*' (p. 74) E. F. Schumacher asserts, "Education can only help us if it produces 'whole men'." He proposes that such wholeness only appears through a surety of core principles, which he calls '*the centre*'...

"He will be in no doubt about his basic convictions, about his view on the menacing and purpose of his life. He may not be able to explain these matters in words, but

the conduct of his life will have a certain sureness of touch which stems from his inner clarity.”

The question, then, is where and how to find this ‘*centre*’? Of course, it is a deeply personal and individual question, but I suspect its answer lies in where we find connection and derive meaning and purpose. For me, each moment I spend amidst the abundance and beauty of nature is testimony to the interconnectivity of all things. Once I learned of the gifts of the trees and of their social networks beneath the soil; once I touched and made use of their wood; once I felt the warmth of the sun and slept out with the stillness of night; I could not turn back. I cannot put a name or a faith to my convictions, nor do I wish to. I simply feel them to be true. It is my hope for all that, as it was for me, some gentle touch with nature, perhaps made possible through interaction with a ‘*working woodland*’, may stir the beginnings of their centre.

## **Closing Remarks...**

The process of co-creating a ‘*working woodland*’ has been one of deep personal transformation, the lessons of which I have endeavoured to here share.

I believe the biggest challenge we currently face lies first and foremost in the relationship we now choose to live out with our planet, our keeper.

I believe a new paradigm for education is necessary, and perhaps imminent - thanks to the efforts of selfless individuals like Polly Higgins, Greta Thunberg and Sir David Attenborough.

Such an education will only succeed in reversing the current trends towards climate calamity if it forms itself around a fuller integration of the whole human - mind, body and spirit.

I suspect, and I hope this thesis has offered some insight, that offering young people more physical, practical, creative and nature-based endeavours, which seek to involve the *hands* and the *heart* as well as the *head*, will offer at least some of the solution.

The greatest responsibility perhaps, lies at the feet of teachers, who are now challenged to find the courage, the wisdom, and the educational tact, to deliver the educational conditions best adapted to these ends.

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## Images

- All images were taken by and remain the property of Tom Dillon, the author of this thesis.



**Before...**



*28<sup>th</sup> October 2015 - Day's Wood before the new woodland provision*



*10<sup>th</sup> May 2016 - the old woodland hut, situated on the same site of the proposed re-build*





*5<sup>th</sup> October 2016 - initial woodland activities begin...*



*25<sup>th</sup> November 2016 - I fell my first oak tree*



## Raising the Roundhouse...



*June 2017 - building begins...*



*17<sup>th</sup> June 2017 - site levelled and all twelve uprights in place*





*26<sup>th</sup> June 2017 - fitting the first tie-beams to uprights...*



*...and securing them in place with a 'lap-joint' and an oak peg*





*1<sup>st</sup> July 2017 - the initial 'henge' nearing completion*



*7<sup>th</sup> July 2017 - floor-level reciprocal roof trial*





*7<sup>th</sup> July 2019 - detail on reciprocal roof joints, showing how sculpted poles locate with each other*



*8<sup>th</sup> July 2017 - view through the roof, now in place and secured with more oak pegs!*





*8<sup>th</sup> July 2017 - frame complete!*



*9<sup>th</sup> July 2017 - embers of the first fire, the morning after celebrating the frame-raise*





*9<sup>th</sup> October 2017 - roofing begins...*



*6<sup>th</sup> November 2017 - ...and continues...*





*...whilst more temporary shelters spring up to get us through the winter*



*12<sup>th</sup> December 2017 - the roof holds up despite the snow!*





*...pew!*



*...what a view!*





*A winter wonderland!*



*13<sup>th</sup> December 2017 - and then the thaw. How strong the sun's heat!*





*...until it sets again*



*14<sup>th</sup> December 2017 - the first stage of the roof complete...*





*...with firewood split and stacked to dry in the sun ready for next winter*



*16<sup>th</sup> December 2017 - climbing a tree to get a better view!*





*4<sup>th</sup> February 2018 - the first coppice cycle in full-flow*



*28<sup>th</sup> February 2018 - the first coppice area near completion*





*7<sup>th</sup> May 2018 - door and all windows fitted, along with a temporary tarpaulin, after a long cold winter*



*4<sup>th</sup> August 2018 - cutting the ends of the roof poles, ready for felting*





*9<sup>th</sup> August 2018 - felting in progress*



*14<sup>th</sup> August 2018 - the roundhouse is finished!*





*May 2019 - the log-store is updated and re-stacked*



*...and the woodland kitchen is renovated.*





*Last year's copse is full of colour and life!*



*...and this year's harvest is all processed and ready to be converted into rustic furniture, hurdles, handles and charcoal!*





*We've planted a tree nursery to bring on vulnerable trees...*



*...and we'll continue to push the boundaries!*



## Time-lapse...

...pictures taken from the exact same spot (reached by climbing a small oak tree!) periodically through the build...



*6<sup>th</sup> October 2017 - larch cladding arrives, just in time for my Birthday!*



*9<sup>th</sup> November 2017 - cladding develops...*





*4<sup>th</sup> February 2018 - first layer of roof complete and covered by waterproof tarpaulin*



*23<sup>rd</sup> February 2018 - big windows in!*





*4<sup>th</sup> August 2018 - roof cladding complete, chimney in place...*



*...and centre-piece fitted*





*9<sup>th</sup> August 2018 - felting begins!*



*10<sup>th</sup> August 2018 - and felting continues!*





*13<sup>th</sup> August 2018 - final layer of felt in situ*



*14<sup>th</sup> August 2018 - building complete, hours before I catch a ferry to Ireland!*



## The Making of Me...

...a selection of items made in the three years since embarking on this MA journey...



*Chairs and stools in my Grandad's garden - he was a lover of birds and gardening, and one of my greatest inspirations*



*A small pot made from willow bark*





*A small chair I made for my first nephew, born in 2016*



*A spoon carved on the shores of Pembrokeshire, Wales*



*Christmas Gnomes!*



*...and a Christmas tree!*





*A spoon carved beside a waterfall in Norway*



*A breakfast bowl, turned at 'Out of Nature' festival, 2017*



*A birch spoon I carved during lectures at Ruskin Mill Field Centre, Stroud*



*Another breakfast bowl*





*An 'Owl Bowl' I made for Jackie Morris, in return for a copy of her beautiful book 'The Lost Words'*



*An alder plate...*





*...and an alder bowl*



*A salad bowl and servers, made as a wedding commission*





*Three rowan bowls and a spoon*



*Three beech bowls, made for two good friends and their new son, for their wedding celebration in the woods*





*A child-size milking stool*



*A cherry spoon*