

Found

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MA Contemporary Dialogues (Glass)

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Preface

This project is very personal; it is about the things I do in my life; nature is the healer and has the answers, we need to pay closer attention to what is happening in this fragile world. Consuming less, slowing down, being more at one with nature.

Introduction

To fully understand *Found*, you may wish to go to the appendix and read the 7-day diary of Miss Ann Thrope. She is my alter ego, the forager, the mudlarker, the collector of things. The cabinet and its contents are all in the diary and will explain what you are looking at. Part shrine, part home, part vitrine. All brought together to form the basis of this project. Nature is at the heart of it all and experimentation in glass and pottery were the materials used the most. The report is presented as an interview, an aid to cover the breadth of subjects within the report.

What is collecting?

Behind every collection there is a story of the person, about the objects, the reasons why they collected these items and where these collections started. You can define the concept of **collecting as, bringing something together from various places**. Walter Benjamin clearly understood that collecting is a highly personal and an often solitary activity. “Ownership is the most intimate relationship one can have to objects,” he noted “Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them.” (Benjamin, 1978). Objects can hold emotional resonance for their owner.

There are many types of collections, and each collection is undertaken for many varied reasons. Botanists and explorers bring back all manner of flora and fauna from all over the world to study. In times of war throughout the ages great artefacts were plundered and added to the collections and museums of other countries. There are antique and art collectors trading items for money, on occasion commanding large sums.

Sometimes selling a key piece from their own collection, to be able to purchase something of higher value or kudos for themselves. There are the people that collect train sets or tea sets. Some are completists, some just do it for the thrill of the find.

Hoarders however will collect anything and everything but quite often newspapers and magazine articles or clippings. Kept in vast piles around the house or in carrier bags, unable to throw any of it away without causing stress and anxiety to the individual concerned.

The original mudlarkers are collectors splashing around in the muddy shallow water of rivers, looking for scraps of coal (for the fire) rags or anything dropped from boats or passersby; gems, metal anything they could sell, out of necessity rather than the thrill. Also, the beachcombers and the detectorists, are looking for that treasure, that amazing find or something better than the last item they found, to add to their collection. Some artists are collectors that make their assemblages, installations, collages all from collections of found objects. Everything from seashells, driftwood, twisted metal, stones, and sea-glass, which has become extremely popular more recently.

Certain traits of human behaviour, at first glance, seem unimpressive, unexceptional, but look more closely at a collector and you might notice the often obsessive person that can never stop searching for the next object to add to the never-ending collection; a recent discovery or another purchase may quench the thirst for now, but it never fully satisfies it. Is it an obsession? An addiction? Is it a passion or urge, or maybe the need to hold, to own, to accumulate?

Possibly, the first ever collection was that of Noah; two of every living thing of flesh creeping on the earth. Anything not collected in time will be lost forever to the flood. Noah achieved the ultimate complete set, or so we are led to believe!

What some people see as mundane everyday packaging, Robert Opie sees as a collection of household ephemera. He has made a living from his collecting, which has

not only filled his entire house, but also includes a warehouse, a museum in Notting Hill, London, several exhibitions and a series of books; requests for props to be rented out for film and tv, are also a regular feature in Opie's everyday business/collection. For this reason, there are multiples of many items, so as nothing is removed from the museum and that the same item, can be seen in two places in different parts of the world at any one time. Even Opie's holidays are spent visiting places to pick up more packaging of the everyday ephemera.

I do take holidays. I've been to China, Japan, and Hong Kong this year. That was partly work. I was doing an exhibition out there. I love the packaging in Japan. They're still using the Codd bottle out there, the one with the marble inside the top (Elsner and Cardinal 1997).

In Amsterdam alone, just under 100 private cabinets of curiosities were recorded between 1600 and 1740, testament to the great prestige collections had acquired and to the availability of objects to fill, according to inclination and purse, individual drawers, and entire rooms. The cabinets became an integral part of the Dutch interior (Blom, 2004).

It did not stop there, drawing rooms were opulently decorated with carpets, fine furniture, and paintings all defining their owner's wealth and status and of course, their admirably good taste. Cabinets had smaller precious objects that formed tiny microcosms of interest to the viewer but still seen as impressive as the whole carefully curated room.

Sir John Soane's Museum is an incredibly special case of the private house that, with its collections intact, is memorialised in situ as museum. It thus embodies and freezes for posterity the moment at which collecting (and redeploying a

collection) cases, the moment when the museum begins (Elsner and Cardinal 1997).

It is questionable, at what stage does a collection become a museum? Sir John Soane's Museum became so at his passing to preserve the house forever as an exceptional collection of items. The same happened with Dennis Severe's house (mentioned later in this article); on his passing the trustees that originally sold him the house, took possession of the collection and made the house a museum. Is this the case with all museums; are they merely other people's collections, preserved after death?

An interview with Sylvee aka Miss Ann Thrope,
artist and collector.

Why do you collect? What appeals to you about collecting?

Collections such as Edmund De Waal's *The hare with amber eyes* and his Nutsuke collections have been handed down through the centuries, demonstrating an intrinsic and personal link with the objects within the collections. I in turn have collected all my life but cannot explain why I collect. I suppose it is a myriad of hobbies all put together in an exceptionally large vitrine which is also my home. Much like the cabinet is home to Florence, Melvin and Ursula! The 7-day diary is included in the appendix if you want to know the fuller story behind the cabinet.

Perhaps my collecting has come about because I have no personal history so, subconsciously I might be building my own. Being adopted means I have no real family history, and therefore no family heirlooms. I am collecting the forgotten and discarded objects of other people's history. The one thing I do know is that when I find an intact clay pipe on the foreshore of the river Thames, I have picked up something that was held by its previous owner fifty to five hundred years ago and between then and now, there is nothing separating us except time. The silt has preserved these objects, waiting for its next owner to pick it up and take it home. There is a feeling of connection to the past; it makes me wonder if this will happen to my lost objects in the future. Something I lost could be placed in a display cabinet, in an exhibition, featured as part of a WI lecture, or

added to somebodies' artwork. Who knows what things will interest people in years to come.

When mudlarking, just the process of the search is stimulating enough, without the need for caffeine. Being outdoors in the fresh air, life carrying on around me, whilst I am usually wellie deep in water or mud watching the wildlife around me, going about their daily rituals, whilst I go about mine. Collecting plays quite an important part in my life; the enjoyment it gives me when I find that next item, that was either better than the last or is something from my list that I have been hoping to find. I am always on the lookout for that lovely piece of pottery or glass with letters on it, or that shard of pottery with an attractive motif that will help reveal its provenance; this makes the research part of the discovery even more interesting than just the visual aesthetic. Although I will contradict myself here and say that sometimes it is purely the colour or motif that I find appealing, and I will keep objects to use later; I am currently amassing an enormous collection of blue and white china shards for an outdoor mosaic.

I have collected many things throughout my life. Starting at an early age I collected shells, flowers for pressing, beads, and gemstones. My dad once instead of taking money for repairing a tv, (the customer did not have enough to pay) he accepted a cabinet full of tiny ornaments from around the world and gave it to me. I kept this cabinet until I left home and I sold it as a complete collection, I did not add to or take away from the cabinet, it was as perfect as it could be, in my eyes. Once living away from home and working, I had money of my own to spend, I discovered everything Mid Century Modern, pottery, glassware, furniture and clothes, this expanded to me

collecting vintage fabrics, as I made my own curtains, cushions and clothes to match the décor. The list goes on. As I travelled around the world my collections increased exponentially. In Mexico I had to send boxes home via post as I accumulated so many beautifully crafted objects from papier-mâché life size brightly painted skulls to brightly coloured tin plate Christmas tree decorations, sugar skulls, and pottery.

As an artist and collector, I have recently realised this is the direction in which I shall head in. Not merely assembling the existing pieces I own, but I also want to look at what has been discarded by others, the saying ‘one man’s trash is another man’s treasure’ comes to mind. I started with what I found on the local beaches, glass, plastic, shells, be it from boats or beach visitors.

What appeals to you about Mudlarking?

Partly it is the peace and quiet, the “me time”, being in the here and now. Any problems, worries, big decisions can be put aside and left behind up on the walkway. Once I descend that ladder or down those stairs, I go straight into search mode, immediately look left and right to assess which looks best, where there are obvious dips, clusters of detritus or obvious areas to avoid, like sludgy, silt filled muddy areas, often deceptively deep. Then eyes down and the hunt begins, as mudlarkers we refer to it as “getting your eye in”. From there on, until the tide turns, nothing else is important, mostly people leave you alone, especially other mudlarkers. Suddenly you travel back in time. Modernity does not exist on the foreshore. It is the one place where ancient litter outnumbered the contemporary.

There is so much history just sitting there waiting to be discovered, and me hoping that it is my lucky day. There are thousands of clay pipe stems to find, my collection is vast, eventually they will be repurposed into the most delicate wind-chimes. But when you find that clay pipe, with an intact bowl and stem, you realise that it had been held by no one except the person who dropped it in the river up to two hundred years ago. Just your hands and their hands, and nothing between, just sitting there preserved in the silt for all that time; how wonderful is that.

Why include a cabinet as part of the show and how is it relevant?

I am currently furnishing my home, buying second hand furniture to do this as the quality and design is far better than what is available to a modest budget. This led to another idea as I need storage for my many collected items. I am building a wall of cupboards, drawers and cabinets all joined together to form a wall of interesting shapes and colours, that will also be practical as well as aesthetically pleasing. Then I found a cabinet, dark wood and not in keeping with my project at home, but a great find. This cabinet sparked the seed of an idea. Firstly I thought what a great bureau for my books and files, then I thought what a lovely piece of display furniture, to house all my finds, such as objects from the beaches, rivers, and streets in my local area and beyond. The cabinet has direct parallels with the doll's house, which has been a fascination of mine since I can remember. Telling a story through a miniature world, making quilts for the beds, cutting out tiny rectangles to make floorboards, wallpapering the rooms, adding furniture, expressing my aesthetic on a tiny scale, what fun. (I have always wanted to

recreate a house I live in as a dolls house, with everything in its place, in miniature; this will happen one day, no house so far has been *the house* yet!) Within the cabinet I created a space on each shelf for my characters to live their individual way; this is their dolls house.

Can you explain the materials used and some of your techniques?

Why have these been chosen?

Glass was always my preferred choice for making the artwork as I wanted to show the fragility of nature through its use. Our world is losing so much flora and fauna due to man's destruction of the planet so the glass panels are a direct reflection on nature's vulnerability. I also wanted to preserve the essence of the plants and did this through making clay moulds of the flowers and leaves I found and pressing them into clay. These were then fired in a kiln, batt wash added and fired for a second time; slumped glass sheets and some use of glass frit was placed into the mould to form a 2D reproduction of the plants. There were many samples produced to experiment with the different outcomes, (some of the samples that were mistakes, are actually really interesting and are being further perfected as techniques in a controlled way). I only picked where there was an abundance of flowers and leaves or used broken stems from weather damaged plants, being careful to not disrupt nature.

I also wanted to emulate aspects of my mud lark finds, so I used the same method to get imprints from precious old bottles; many people thought I had melted down bottles

to produce this effect. What I did was to roll a bottle across a clay slab to create an impression of the bottle's surface, then follow through with the rest of the directions from the earlier description. The bottles were recreated in new glass in a colour of my choosing; I also added frit to some samples to see what effect this would have and added patina to age the pieces.

One aspect of glass making I wanted to try was Lampworking (glassblowing in miniature); this was a less successful addition to my menagerie! The hermit crab was created by Lampworking. This came together very last minute as I was awaiting a tinted glass screen to view the glass making through, as the glasses were too big and heavy for my face. Assembly is both very precise and tricky, the glass must remain evenly heated on all surfaces throughout. The screen arrived with very little time left for me to make the crab, so my experience was limited and the outcome was not as I had hoped. A few months of experimenting, rather than just a couple of days, could have produced far better and more interesting results.

Another choice for the menagerie was clay. The vase was made using a technique called kippering. The main idea was to showcase all the techniques learnt in the past two years, from glass slumping, painting to lost wax casting. Glass making was intrinsic to my practice and formed a basis for many elements such as the glass panels of the cabinet and the hanging glass panels; even Ursula was created of glass. The glass slumping method (explained earlier in the text) was used on a variety of themes ranging from:

Glass bottles rolled onto damp clay

Nature finds pressed into damp clay using a rolling pin

The bases of glass bottles pressed into damp clay

Fusing and other techniques combined:

Glass shards full fused together, then sticky backed vinyl used to block out areas before sandblasting, adding more shards or frit, full fuse again, more vinyl added and sandblasted again.

Full Fusing two layers of glass with both copper and tin foil in between the layers.

Full fusing and then tack fusing the results onto a back sheet of glass.

Full fusing a design and once out of the kiln, painting into the design with a quill.

Lost wax casting

Sculpting in clay using various techniques

Kipperring; using Crank clay, roll out a slab, quite thick around 5cm, put grog onto a flat surface, cut scores into the clay, only 0.5mm deep, lift clay with both hands on one side and swing gently to stretch the clay, then slap it flat into the flat surface, do this a few times. The clay begins to resemble rock or bark.

Hand sculpted slab building, making pinch pots, glazing, producing plaster and clay moulds.

Renovation and adaptation of the cabinet.

Repairs, reinforcements, removing parts of cabinet back and replacing with glass, adding new handles from found objects, aging, and adding patina to a frame, gold leafing said frame and a candle sconce.

The original idea was to remove the cabinet doors and replace the glass with the two nature panels I had made, but they looked too clumsy and heavy for the cabinet. The decision was taken to frame the panels and hang them each side of the cabinet, like open doors. I removed the doors from the cabinet and replaced the glass, with the addition of pressed flowers, seaweed, feathers, and butterfly wings, these are sandwiched between two layers of glass and taped, to prevent dust from entering the cavities. Once the cabinet was in situ, and everything assembled, I sealed the doors shut to stop anything from being displaced.

Spot welding was also used in the project; three nests were made, only one was clearly visible and this had a hook hanging over it with a glass ball suspended from a hook, within the glass ball. I encapsulated a flying blackbird within the glass ball, achieved by lampworking a half circle, letting it cool down, then painting a blackbird onto the flat base, firing this and then lamp-working the rest of the circle onto the top of the bird and finishing off with a hook.

**Tell me about the artists that have influenced you
and why.**

Last summer (2025), I decided to spend a week back in my hometown London, so I could catch up with friends, go to as many galleries as I could fit in and go mudlarking

on the Thames for one more time before my mudlark licence expired. I had booked tickets with a friend to go to the latest Grayson Perry show *Delusions of Grandeur* at the Wallace Collection. I am intrigued by and very much admire his aesthetic and relate to his storytelling. But this exhibition at the Wallace Collection was something that I related to. Perry has created a fictional persona, Shirley Smith. After a delirious episode, she exclaimed that she is the rightful heir to all that is Hertford House and the Wallace Collection. Perry produced a new collection of artworks inspired by existing pieces in the collection and in that process, he has produced an amazing array of ancestral portraits, old masters, ceramics, tapestries, drawings, prints, clothing and much more for the show, all based around his Shirley Smith character and the art chosen to use from the Wallace Collection. This collection combined with Perry's alter ego and his never-ending inspiration all make for a fantasy world like no other. The friend that came along to the show with me said "I've never heard of Shirley Smith, who was this woman, was she part of the Aristocracy they kept out the way, because she was a little unhinged?" She thought that this was a true story discovered by Perry. "I look at Artefacts from the past, fall in love with them and try to make my own versions" (Perry, 2025). This exhibition really struck a chord with me and Shirley Smith is the inspiration for my own alter ego Miss Ann Thrope.

Another influential show was from **Ai Weiwei** at the Design Museum in 2023. Weiwei collected vast amounts of axes, cannonballs, teapot spouts from Beijing markets with the intention of saving some of the history that had been destroyed over the years during the communist rule. After Maos death a lot of construction was suddenly taking place and this digging unearthed long buried artefacts, which now found their way onto the market stalls.

From the start, Ai's collecting habits were quirky. Back in the 90's, he recalled, 'dealers found me perplexing, for I followed no prevailing tastes or conventional wisdom. Furthermore, 'my stone axes are too early, they're not interesting enough; most people want something prettier, something more conventionally expensive-looking' (McGuirk, 2023).

Weiwei is deeply invested in history; so much of his work is about the devaluation of history by a dictator, hell bent on wiping it out by modernising and flattening everything in its path to develop the industrial side of China to take it into the future. His exhibition encompassed an entire gallery space, the floor covered with neat lines of Neolithic axe-heads, chisels and many other tools, and a deep pile of tea pot spouts neatly arranged into a square. For me, the most amusing, and at the same time shocking was a Han dynasty (206 BCE-220CE) urn, painted with the corporate logo of Coca Cola. There are so many questions and answers posed in this space, it is very inspiring and challenging all at once. The fact that Weiwei often uses historical artefacts in his work, draws a direct connection with my own artwork and philosophy which is why I am drawn to his work. The actual materials used are pieces of art in themselves in my eyes, not just the art he creates using them.

Kurt Schwitters was a maverick in the field of collage, he did not discriminate against what items he picked up, he went to the extreme of collecting the items that even the bin men would not bother with, choosing discarded remnants and scraps of broken, unusable rubbish. Schwitters once spoke of his art as a campaign to combat chaos by salvaging the broken pieces left after the Great War.

Out of frugality, I drew on what came to hand, for we were a poverty-stricken country. One can still cry out by way of bits of rubbish, and that is what I did, by glueing or nailing them together. This is called Merz...Nothing was left intact

anyway, and the thing was to build something new out of the broken pieces (Elsner and Cardinal. 1997).

Although many placed him under the banner of Dadaism, he created Merz as a symbol of his singularity (Elsner and Cardinal, 1997). Again, I draw a direct comparison with Schwitters work, picking up the detritus from the riverbanks, as he did from the war-torn street; these items again have little or no value to most people, but to me it is potential inspiration for the next project.

Edward Kienholz was a sculptor and installation artist, he never went to art school, so he is labelled as an ‘outsider artist’. He practised various crafts, including carpentry, which came into play in his works. Kienholz was a collector at flea markets and junkyards using many everyday items within his work.

The Beanery is one of my favourite works of art. When I visit Amsterdam, I always go to see this wonderful installation at the Stedelijk Museum. I think I have seen this installation five times so far. Kienholz painstakingly reproduced his favourite bar on Santa Monica Boulevard in LA, even capturing the smell, which is present within the space, a combination of beer, urine, mothballs, rancid fat, and cigarette ash. There is also the sound of laughter and chatter within the space. This was an original recording made at the bar, the detailing is minute, from the tunes on the jukebox, to the newspaper on the bar with the Vietnam war coverage on the front page. Every bottle, and cigarette package is from the correct time (1964), he even reproduced the offensive ‘fagots stay out!’ sign that sat prominently on a shelf behind the bar, misspelled as was the original.

The Beanery is a psychical space that has an atmosphere of its own, it feels like a microclimate. The old furniture and all the original ephemera used in this installation all help to create the feeling. The cabinet I have used is creating a small microclimate in response to the large white room it is display within. As well as the artists themselves, museums have also been inspirational to me.

Dennis Severs house is one of those hidden gems. It is a treasure trove of Edwardian/Victorian living, recreated in a state of crumbling, dishevelled nostalgia for the Dickensian era. It feels to me like a life size dolls house. He essentially took the shell of a building that was going to be pulled down as slum clearance, and refurbished the entire building with original features and returned to its former glory. It is so well executed it appears to be a stage or film set, much like a dolls house. Severs devised a story about a fictional family with the surname Jervais, whom were Huguenot silk weavers, and he lived alongside them. Again, drawing parallels with my character Ann. The house shows the wealth accumulated by the family through their successes in the weaving industry. Upon arrival to the property, you are asked to keep your voice low once you enter the building and for conversation to be kept to a minimum inside the house; the creaking floorboards, ticking grandfather clock and general background noise from outside on the street all add to the atmosphere of the place. Denis Severs bought the house in 1977 from the Spitalfields Historical Buildings Trust, with the agreement that he was to restore the building back to its former glory, as this area at the time was considered a slum and many buildings were being saved by the trust. The

house is decorated with clothing and hats, hanging from the walls and walking canes propped up in corners, old fireplaces, and correct period cooking ranges put back into each room. Four-poster beds not properly made with clothes thrown on them and dark wood furniture. The dinner table laid with plates holding crumbs of food and a glass of wine and cutlery left as if someone has just gotten up to open the front door to a visitor. It feels like someone is living there and they are just ahead of you in another room. On the second floor there is a fireplace with a distinctive delft tile surround. Simon Pettet made these, he was Severs housemate (once partner). The tiles feature the history of the area including many of the trades, and their neighbours Gilbert and George, who still live there today, just around the corner.

Tring Museum in Hertfordshire houses the most wonderful and eccentric examples of Victorian taxidermy. The museum has previously had a huge bear or polar bear, stood on its hind legs as you enter the building. The museum houses beautifully crafted wooden drawers and cabinets with brass handles and rotating bell jars, that reveal collections of spiders, butterflies, eggs, and a magnified slide of two fleas dressed in traditional Mexican outfits! Tring Museum is very atmospheric because of the original cabinetry and the exhibits, very much something I wanted to capture in my cabinet.

Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford city centre is a place of awe and wonder; nobody could enter this place without being amazed by the sheer number of artefacts that are held here, from all over the world. From an Inuit eel skin waterproof coat to a Canadian totem pole that reaches the roof, oil lamps fashioned from Coca Cola cans, mussel shells, and puffer fish. Silver amulets, and bejewelled crucifixes to African tribal masks and

weaver's looms from India. Everything you might ever imagine seeing from everywhere in the world. This is a place you could never get bored of in a lifetime. One could spend a week in that museum and still not take it all in. This too is so atmospheric, even with hundreds of tourists traipsing around, it feels very intimate, it pulls you into the past.

I have yet to visit the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic, in Boscastle, Cornwall. As I write, I am planning a trip for this Autumn 2026. It will probably make it onto the ever-growing list. The three that have been featured above, is by no means *the* complete list, that is just a brief glimpse of the highlights. Collecting is what I do, and I love to look at other people's collections too. Collecting is an inexhaustible topic, with a fascination that will never cease to exist within any generation.

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Appendix

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF MISS ANN THROPE (AND FRIENDS)

Monday

I sent Melvin out foraging for our dinner. I knew he was hungry and would be the right creature for the job, also it's a good excuse for him to go out on the lookout for a new lady friend. He's been restless since his last lady flew the nest, so off he goes on two missions. It's always nice to have a surprise for dinner, even if I am the only one that cooks. Melvin got back before lunch with lots of wild garlic. Where he got the bag from and how he managed to fly home with it I do not know, and I'm not about to ask.

We have an abundance of wild garlic and I know exactly what to do with it all. Unfortunately, though, I now have to go into town briefly, in buy of pine nuts and parmesan cheese.

Note to self: When out in public and surveying the situation around you, if caught by the gaze of a child, DO NOT, I repeat DO NOT be tempted to poke out your tongue. This generally makes the child laugh and want to interact further! Try to remember this fact and under no circumstances engage with said child. Children are so draining and such a bore. I didn't like them when I was a child, why would I want to interact with them now!!

In this situation do one of the following

- a) Move away and look interested in a nearby shop window*
- b) Stare at somebody in the crowd and pull a face like they are doing something disgusting. When the child looks away then walk away quickly.*
- c) Pretend your phone is ringing and walk away talking into it*

On returning from town, I managed to avoid the children as they were in school, which was fortuitous, so I set about making a stash of pesto for the fridge. Once put into small jars and sealed with a layer of olive oil, these little pots last for ages. And my little friends only eat tiny amounts, so they share a small plate between them, I'll have enough pesto for the rest of this year. Thank you, Melvin.

Wild Garlic Pesto recipe

One large bag of washed wild garlic

One basil plant picked from the garden

Plenty of pine nuts measured by eye and consistency when mixing

Plenty of olive oil

A block of parmesan cheese, measured by eye

In a large mortar and pestle crush the wild garlic into a paste adding as much basil as desired.

Add pine nuts, a small handful at a time, alternated with a drizzle of olive oil until the ingredients are combined to form the desired texture, (slightly coarse) but dropping off the pestle with ease.

When the texture is to your liking, add grated parmesan cheese by the tablespoon and add small amounts of olive oil. Stir with a spoon until the consistency is to your liking.

In small jars spoon in the pesto within 1cm of the neck, then fill 5mm with olive oil. Screw lids onto the jars and keep in the fridge for months.

Tuesday, Today's foraging list

Florence's list

Daisies

Calendula

Nettle tips

Mushrooms

Ursulas list

Hag stones

Seaweed

Melvin's list

Feathers

Lichen

All the friends will go out today in different directions with their own list of items to find for me; all from the trees, the earth, and the water.

I eagerly await their return and prepare pots and pans, vessels for storing and I tidy the kitchen.

I need to make some charms and some balms. I need to preserve the seasons abundance of food, and I want to make a remedy for hay fever season which is coming soon.

Whilst the weather is wet and damp and there are mushrooms a plenty, I will preserve them in jars for the lean months.

Calendula and daisy balm made for the skin, soothing for dry working hands and on the face in wintry weather.

Daisy and Calendula Balm recipe

20 Daisy heads

20 Calendula heads

Carrier oil

Beeswax

20ml metal screw top containers

In a large jar pinch out stalks of all the flowers and put them into the jar along with the carrier oil, let this steep for 24 hours

Strain the flowers from the oil into a saucepan and discard the flowers.

Add beeswax to the saucepan and heat slowly until melted, stirring occasionally.

Line up your small metal containers and pour in the mixture into each container until all has been used.

Screw lids on and leave to set.

Wednesday

Today we will use the lovely fairy hair seaweed Ursula bought home. It has been drying out over night after a thorough wash and will have a brief time in the oven this morning to make sure it's thoroughly dry and crispy, before putting into storage jars ready to use instead of salt in many recipes.

What I will make today is seaweed flapjacks, such a lovely snack, sweet and salty mixed to perfection for the tastebuds.

Seaweed Flapjack recipe

Butter 150g

Brown sugar 75g

Black treacle/Golden syrup 75g

Porridge Oats 225g

Dried seaweed (fairy hair is best) 10g

Melt the butter, sugar and treacle in a pan. Mix in the oats and seaweed and stir until all the porridge is coated. Press into a 20cm square tin, cook at 190C for 20-30 minutes or until golden brown. Mark into portions whilst still warm and leave to cool on a wire rack. When completely cool press a sharp knife down onto the marks to divide portions and keep in an airtight container or freeze.

Thursday

Damn it my boiler has broken! And I cannot figure out what is wrong with it. Good excuse to not wash today, always a silver lining somewhere. I must call an engineer out to take a look. For this task I will assume the guise of Mason. Mason calls the gas man out to take a look at the problem and to also do a gas safety check whilst he's here, then hopefully we will not need him again for a year or more.

I don't like strangers in the house. It upsets the energy and disturbs the resting spirits.

The gas man has been. The boiler is working again and has been serviced. Mason was shown what the problem was and how to deal with the pressure dropping in case it happens again. Miss Ann would have been dealt with very differently, and I am sure would not have had the problem explained to her or how to fix it!

At least the problem has been sorted and hopefully that's the end of it.

I sent the friends out for the day, so as they weren't getting under our feet, whilst the engineer was here. Humans find it strange to have animals in the home that aren't cats and dogs; I think it's strange that they see a difference. Keeping sparrows, squirrels and a hermit crab is considered a little odd to some.

Many humans think it is odd that I make my own remedies and lotions and that I always cook from scratch. They are the weird ones.

I don't want to eat microwave food from a plastic box wrapped in a cardboard box listing ingredients I wouldn't ever have in my kitchen!

Humans also like to look at the internet and pick brightly coloured plastic pots and bottles full of chemicals that I can't pronounce or know what they are. They like to use these on the body, face and hair too! Yuck!!

Whilst Flo was out, she kindly collected lots of pinecones and needles for me. She also found elderberries. Now I can make Vitamin C syrup, cough syrup, and lozenges ready for the winter season which will help keep colds and sore throats at bay.

The pinecones are already steeping in a jar with sugar. Over the coming weeks the sugar will turn to brown pine scented syrup and then I can make cough mixture.

Friday

With some pine needles from Florence's stash, I fashioned 3 small brooms for my friends, then they can keep their shelves clean and tidy. The needles are especially good at getting the dust out of the corners of the shelves.

Ursula is cleaning her shelf and rearranging her old homes. She has kept every single shell and object she has ever used as a home. Now they are all proudly displayed on her shelf, her own private collection of real estate. Some of the most bizarre and interesting vessels she has called home.

Now every house is in its place Ursula is heading out to the seashore. She is off to catch up with friends and once the tide has gone out, she will wander around the rock pools looking for treasure.

I am hoping she will bring back an assortment of seaweed then I can preserve it in jars in the larder. This can last for years, but it usually only lasts for one. Seaweed is so versatile. The list is endless. The other wonderful thing is that there is no seaweed around the coast of Great Britain that is not edible. That doesn't mean you want to eat them all, but you can eat them without any fatalities.

Replacement for salt in any dish:

Added to salad

Garlic butter

Flapjacks

Savoury scones

Pasta

Pancakes

Fritters

Wrapped around fish before frying

Ursula returns from her day trip with only a small amount of seaweed because the water has been polluted with sewage from the local water company. They have been pumping the overflow into the sea, hoping nobody would notice, but Ursula talks with her friends, they are tell her how bad it is right now. She ended up going a lot further than usual to find any usable seaweed.

Instead of bringing an abundance of seaweed home, she brought back:

Copper coin

Sea glass brown, green and clear

A piece of a stoneware jar from Llanelli

A piece of blue and white china

A bag of minute plastic shards in many colours

Ursula really likes the pottery shards, as they can be traced back to a certain time and place in history. She likes knowing that someone once would have bought that pot, plate, jar and that person could have lived hundreds of years ago or even 50 years is impressive. Her other favourite is sea glass; those pastel shades of matte glass rounded by the sea's waves over time. Melvin is also a fan and persuades Ursula to give some to him for his nest. Occasionally Ursula and Melvin go beach combing together and they can help each other find the things they want. Melvin can spot glass shining from above and Ursula can see the tiny things others don't notice. Most people don't notice the pair on the beach, but if you are an observant human, you may be surprised at the things you might see!

Melvin likes to decorate his nest with sea glass, and shiny coins, as he hopes it will attract the ladies. He has also lined the nest with sheep's wool for comfort and warmth, and his friend a Bantum Cockrel, was unfortunately eaten recently by a fox, leaving behind the most beautiful feathers for Melvin, in his Will. He knew that Melvin would put them to effective use. This all makes for one mighty fine, luxurious nest.

Florence on the other hand likes nothing more than finding bits of discarded lint, wool, linen, silk and cotton threads, tangling them together to make a very comfy bed for one. Flo will not be sharing her bed with anyone or anything other than her stash of acorns. She is content knowing that her acorns are safely tucked up in bed with her. Flo took a shine to an old handbag recently and decided to make it into her stash bag for her acorns, but after a long day of filling the bag and nibbling on acorns throughout that day, she became quite tired and ended up curling up in the bag, as it was quite comfy, she now sleeps in there every night. When they are in season, she has so many acorns in her bed it is like the many mattresses of the Princess and the Pea. She climbs on top of the bag to go to bed in Autumn, and by summer she is sleeping in the bottom of the bag. She doesn't need all those acorns, but she's got to have them. After being chased from the forest by the larger great squirrels, she was starving when I found her and bought her home. I fed her and nursed her back to health, and she has never gone hungry again and never will.

Saturday

Today I need to take a trip into town. Yuck! I'll walk in then I don't have to deal with people on the bus. And I'll assume the guise of Miss Ann, then people will mostly ignore me. Firstly, I go to the market to buy fruit and vegetables I cannot forage or get from my own garden. I won't be buying much. Then onto the supermarket for tinned and dried goods such as beans and pulses to top up my larder. Then I decide to have a look in the charity shops. I always look out for trousers and coats for the coming season, as they are the most difficult things to make. Also coats from the high street shops are often made from synthetic fabrics by poorly paid workers. Why would I want to buy something like that! There are some amazing clothes waiting to be found in charity shops, you just need the time and patience to look. A bit like foraging really. No coat or trousers today, so I walk back home.

When I arrive a pot of tea is ready for me and we all sit down for a cuppa and a nibble on a flapjack.

Sunday

We have decided to go on a trip out today to the mountains. A very early rise for us, we hit the road at 4am heading towards Brecon. Once we arrive, I'll put everyone in my rucksack ready for the walk up the mountain. Most people will head up Pen Y Fan, but we are not most people! We arrive in the dark and start our ascent. It's at least an hour's walk to the top, so the friends will stay in my bag for this part, as we need to get to the top before dawn.

Just before sunrise Melvin appears on my shoulder and starts chattering with the local birds about where to get the best breakfast, and where the foxes and cats hang out locally! After making some new friends, he hops back in the bag to warm up a bit.

On arrival at the summit, I set out a blanket with a flask of tea and flapjacks, and Flo and Melvin jump out of the bag to enjoy the sunrise. As the sun peeps out over the mountain top we watch the mist gradually burning off of the valley floor to reveal the wonderful countryside around the Brecon Beacons and way beyond, whilst enjoying our breakfast feast.

Once I've had a bit of a rest, we descend the mountain. Flo runs around and tumbles in the grass enjoying the cool dewy grass, Melvins soars into the sky and glides on the wind and Ursula enjoys a ride in a jar of sea water, she is far too slow to be out wandering.

We drive home via a local beach and sit for another snack and let Ursula go for a wander through the rock pools to catch up with friends. She'll be back when she's tired or has found too much to carry home. She is always on the lookout for a new home, sea glass or pottery. Meanwhile, the rest of us that have had an energetic day so far, sit and snooze in the sunshine and nibble on flapjacks, until Ursula decides it's time to head back home.

