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This proposal shall explore the key terms that I have selected as a starting point for my research, within the context of investigating landscape as a refuge and comfort in hard times, and the importance of documenting place through art.

The terms that I have selected are 'landscape', 'the picturesque' and 'heritage / folklore & customs'. I have a long-standing interest in using art as a means of documenting places and experiences, and it is something that intersects with the ongoing revival of interest in British folklore and its surrounding issues, in a way that I find interesting, and particularly important. 'In the past 20 years, there has been a surge of interest in documenting, documentation, and archiving as art practices' (Berger and Santone, 2016). Documenting through art is something I enjoy, as I feel it can capture something of that moment in time that words can't, and creating a body of work that can evoke a very specific time or memory is a pretty powerful thing. British folklore is relatively unknown amongst the general public, particularly younger generations, people are more likely to know Greek or Norse myths than our own, and the customs that have survived or been revived tend to happen on a smaller, more local scale. Documenting and archiving these stories and practices through art is not only a way of preserving them, but also a means of introducing them to a new audience, contributing to

the continuation of 'a living breathing folk tradition, where new customs and stories sit alongside those handed down the centuries' (Edge, 2024, p.5).

Landscape

In the words of McClelland, an architectural historian specialising in the preservation of historic landscapes, 'landscape is a palimpsest, revealing traces of past events, actions, and ideas. It is simultaneously a valuable source of information about culture, past and present, and a reflection of cultural history as we understand it' (McClelland, 1991). This coexistence of the past and present is rarely more palpable than at one of the ancient sites that exist across the British Isles. They provide not only a connection to the land itself, but also all of the people who have come before us. That these sites have survived to this day is a testament to that connection. They also offer us a fascinating glimpse into the prehistory of this country, and some of our earliest customs and rituals.

In recent years there has been a renewed interest in rediscovering those connections, and there has been a corresponding rise in creative works; books, zines, and artwork to reflect that. One such zine, *Weird Walk*, which is comprised predominantly of articles about ancient sites, rituals, and rambling, proposes that this is driven by a desire for 'a sense of perspective' (Myers, 2019, p. 8) and 'a fear that what's there might soon be lost. Something that's been reflected, I think, in the amount of new 'nature writing' published - almost as an act of environmental preservation ' (Hurley, 2020, p.26). The concept of creative works as environmental preservation is nothing new and can add a more personal and engaging element to the topic than relying solely on straightforward archiving. In Amy Jeffs writing, specifically her book *Wild* (2022), she brings together her work as an artist and art historian, weaving her own experiences in the modern British countryside with Anglo Saxon poetry and wood engravings. It breathes new life into the poems, and it draws them out into landscapes

that we recognise, bringing a new level of understanding to then poems that can be missed otherwise.



Figure 1 : The Vale of the White Horse (Ravilious, 1939)

Artistically, Ravilious's *The Vale of the White Horse* is perhaps one of my favourite instances of archival artwork. In the late summer of 1939, with war on the horizon, what started as a collection of paintings for a children's book became Ravilious's own imitation of 'the state-sponsored recording Britain project to which many of his friends contributed, a project that aimed at preserving in paint the beauty of the English countryside for fear of bombing or invasion' (Love, 2021).

This painting in particular stands out from that collection, while a lot of his watercolour work followed a loose set of rules, and can be viewed as rather pastoral, there is a hard deviation from that in this painting.

'[it] stands alone among the white horses for its ferocity and vitality, conveyed by Ravilious's departure from the conventional viewpoints evidenced in these other works ... there is no sign of human life here, and we are stranded upon the hilltop in the driving rain. The Uffington white horse itself is curiously diminutive, a visual trick Ravilious also employed when depicting the chalk giants, and its naturally abstracted form here is pushed close to the point of pictorial illegibility.' (Love, 2021).

The hill itself seems to overwhelm the painting, it rises up like a wave, the colours are harsher and more vibrant, and it lacks the modern foil for the landscape that is present in almost all of his other works. The 'driving rain' (Love, 2021) is also present in other works in the series, given that these figures were being covered and painted to 'deter enemy navigators from using them as landmarks' (Russell, 2015) this overcast sky serves then as a reminder of the threat from overhead. The landscape which had served as a refuge and escape for those returning from the first war, becomes something almost intimidating here in the face of the second.

In the 6th issue of *Weird Walk*, 'man.in.the.woods' an otherwise anonymous artist, gives an interview about his ongoing project, in which he is documenting his slow exploration of the countryside as he walks it, saying 'The countryside is full of beauty and sadness: something lost and something eternal. I want to consume and be consumed by the countryside. And I feel sort of protected by knowing that I'm part of something greater than the temporary and sometimes upsetting human world' (2023).

The Picturesque

The concept of the picturesque comes from the writings of William Gilpin in the late 18th century, across a series of publications. In his essay *on prints* he defines the picturesque as 'a term expressive of that peculiar kind of beauty which is agreeable in a picture' (Gilpin, 1768). In the second essay of his publication *Three essays: on picturesque beauty*;

on picturesque travel; and on sketching landscape: to which is added a poem, on landscape painting he goes on to write,

'This great object we pursue through the scenery of nature; and examine it by the rules of painting. We seek it among all the ingredients of landscape—trees—rocks—broken-ground—woods—rivers—lakes—plains—vallies—mountains—and distances. These objects in themselves produce infinite variety. No two rocks, or trees are exactly the same. They are varied, a second time, by combination; and almost as much, a third time, by different lights, and shades, and other aerial effects.'

(Gilpin, 1792, p.42).

Defining the picturesque as something found not in the perfection or 'smoothness' of the subject of a painting but in natural textures and the variation of them in a landscape, and how light plays off those textures in a painting. He promoted finding the beauty of wild, natural scenery, without the influence of urbanisation.

Prior to this point, the Grand Tour had been an experience for the elite in society, but due to the ongoing conflict in Europe, which made extended travel risky and rather unpatriotic, there was a pivot, and attention was focused on Britain, turning to places such as the Lake District, or Wye Valley to occupy themselves.

'What was lacking was an explicit link between such locations and high art. All the revered masters of landscape painting of the period had chosen continental subjects, many redolent of the influence of the Classical World. How could the 'correct' artistic sensibility and taste be nurtured in a countryside as different as England's?' (Savage, 2018)

Gilpin writes of looking at the landscape with 'a painter's eye' (1792) and recommends the pursuit of the picturesque in the form of landscape sketching as a pastime for men of business, while the art of painting the picturesque is referred to as 'a science and an art' (Gilpin, 1792, p.87) in which few people can dedicate the time to attain perfection. To appreciate nature with 'a painter's eye' (1792) required time and was an 'attribute and expression of social class. No one who had to earn their livelihood, whether in trade,

commerce or industry, would have the free time available to cultivate such a refined aesthetic sense.' (Savage, 2018). Townsend (1997) links the development of an appreciation for the picturesque with a development of emotional distance from the landscape itself, which becomes necessary so that the landscape may be evaluated properly. Townsend goes on to argue that it is this distance and disconnect with the realities of the landscape which go on to support the domination of the romantic movement later on.

Heritage / Folklore & Customs

Heritage, folklore, and customs are at their core just means of connection. Passed down through generations they provide connection to people, and to places. According to Ben Edge, an artist who travels to witness and document the seasonal customs taking place all over the UK, the customs themselves are secondary to what they represent, writing 'It's the actual act of celebrating the wheel of the year, your regional identity and connecting with your landscape that's important, not whether the mask you used goes back to pagan times, or to 1754 when there was the first mention of it or whatever; it's the fact that people have always done these things since the dawn of humanity and are continuing to align themselves with nature, the cosmos and the timeless act of celebrating being alive that fascinates me as an artist' (Edge, 2024, p.18-23)



Figure 2: The Vale of the White Horse (Edge, 2022)

His painting *The Vale of the White Horse* differs greatly from Ravilious's painting of the same name. It lacks the depth, texture, and light present in figure one, and instead feels rather flat, and the colours in the upper third almost childlike. In terms of composition, it feels unnatural and although the symmetry draws the eye through the painting nicely, the layers of the image feel detached from one another. The appeal of the painting lies in that simplicity however, the subject here is the stories behind each element of the picture rather than the picture itself. This series of works, referred to by Edge as 'Stonelore' comes from his visiting ancient sites on his travels around the country, and the ensuing fascination with the -

'Energy and power that their presence holds. The fact that they encourage people to get out into the countryside, to immerse themselves in local history and storytelling, and also just to have some time to do something for yourself and reflect upon your own life really inspired me. When I first started visiting such sites, i also started

reading the associated folk tales on the information boards...it got me thinking about the power of storytelling and how these mythologies keep these sites important and relevant to new generations of people and are part of the reason that they are still there and have somehow survived thousands of years' (Edge, 2024, p.26).

His works are one of, if not the first, to document local festivals in the way that he does, and he incorporates the stories behind the subject in a really interesting way. This painting for example depicts the Uffington White Horse, and the site known as Wayland's smithy. It is said that if your horse loses a shoe while travelling you can leave it overnight at Wayland's with some money and it shall be shod and healed come morning, which is shown in the ghostly scene to the left of the painting. A separate tale claims that when the Uffington horse isn't visible (under snow for example), it is because he has thrown a shoe, and gone to visit the smith for a new one.

The ideas explored here through the themes of 'landscape' and 'heritage/ folklore and customs' are remarkably similar, they both come down to a very human desire for connection and community. I am still unsure of the exact wording of my question, but I would like to explore in more depth the ways in which illustration can be used to document the landscape and its stories, and how that can be presented to a new audience.

The very first issue of weird walk opens with the line 'for us, walking is an active engagement with the British landscape and its lore' (Weird Walk, 2019). This concept forms part of the starting point for my accompanying art project, for which I intend to maintain an art journal, documenting my own explorations over the coming summer through various mediums. From that work I would like to make either a series of prints or a couple of zines in the style of *Lore of the Land*, a series of illustrated walking guides of the Yorkshire moors. They follow a route

planned to link up various sites of interest and include an illustrated walking map and small write ups of the history and lore of each site.

Another artist whose work I want to draw upon for this project is 'man.in.the.woods' an otherwise anonymous artist, who gives an interview about his ongoing project in the 6th issue of *Weird Walk*. He is documenting his slow exploration of the countryside as he walks it through various mediums including ink, paint, and embroidery. In the interview he explains his motivation as, 'The countryside is full of beauty and sadness: something lost and something eternal. I want to consume and be consumed by the countryside. And I feel sort of protected by knowing that I'm part of something greater than the temporary and sometimes upsetting human world' (2023). That grounding sense of being a part of something bigger is something that I like about the countryside, and I enjoy the way he finds that, in the mundane, in his pieces.

List of Figures

Figure 1: Ravilious, E (1939) The vale of the White Horse [watercolour painting]. The Tate. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/ravilious-the-vale-of-the-white-horse-n05164> (Accessed: 16 April 2024)

Figure 2: Edge, B (2022) The vale of the White Horse [Oil and chalk painting]. Available at: <https://www.benedge.co.uk/latest-paintings-2021-2022> (Accessed: 16 April 2024)

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