

ADAA7000 Coexistent Perspectives Module

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**Ecological Myths in Stained Glass: Envisioning
Regenerative Tree Relationships through Contemporary
Art and Craft.**

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Abstract

This essay investigates how contemporary stained glass and woodcraft can operate as visual research methods for articulating ecological loss and renewal within woodland contexts. Situated within Welsh Atlantic forest ecologies, the study brings together mythology, heritage craft, and image-making to examine how material practices can register grief associated with forest degradation while offering speculative frameworks for regenerative futures. Drawing on theoretical discourse around ecological grief, mythic thinking, and craft knowledge, the discussion positions stained glass as a temporally layered medium capable of holding narrative, memory, and environmental reverence simultaneously. Case studies of contemporary glass practitioners are examined to establish stained glass as both a storytelling device and a contemplative intervention. The essay culminates in a practice-based methodology that integrates drawing, glass, and woodcraft to produce visual artefacts that document woodland stewardship and multispecies coexistence, framing artistic production as a means of commemorating loss while supporting imaginative reorientation toward tree care and renewal.

"Ecological Myths in Stained Glass: Envisioning Regenerative Tree Relationships through Contemporary Art and Craft."

Research Question

Can ecological mythology created through stained-glass and wood-craft practices share the histories of forests and inspire regenerative human-tree relationships?

Introduction

This research explores the creation of ecological lore through contemporary stained glass and woodcraft. The project is grounded in the Atlantic woodlands of Wales, with a particular focus on the Gower Peninsula. Using myth as a lens, the research examines ecological grief within the context of human–tree mutualism, proposing that meaningful engagement with trees involves acknowledging and commemorating the loss of old-growth trees and forests. It further explores how woodland craft can be documented through stained glass and translated into contemporary sculptural companions to stained glass, visualizing the dynamic, mythic, and life-sustaining relationships between humans and trees.

Trees have long held symbolic significance across cultures, serving as avatars of connection and adaptability. In Wales, where folklore intertwines with ancient forests, trees shape identities, stories, and crafts (Deakin, 2007). The loss of public forests threatens the deep, contemplative ties individuals have with old-growth woodlands. *'Dod yn ôl at fy nghoed'*—*'To Return to My Tree'*—reflects this affinity: the longing to reconnect the mind with an environment in an organic process. This inquiry will explore how ecological mythology, expressed through visual art and craft, can address ecological grief and foster transformative relationships with both existing trees and reforestation efforts.

The research will focus on the Atlantic Oakwood Forests, also known as Celtic Forests, encompassing the lost Celtic rainforest zones (Figure 2, Owen, 2023), their remaining fragments (Figure 3, Owen, 2023), and potential green corridors (Shrubsole, 2022). Images, as an artistic methodology, provides a way to recontextualize climate change, offering an alternative form of knowledge-sharing (Powers, 2018). Ellecock (2024) emphasizes that images create space for both internal and external reflection, slowing the pace and fostering detailed observation.

Through drawing the interconnected networks of forests and human systems, and translating these images into painted stained glass panels, I will seek to create a time capsule in glass that documents how communities sustain woodlands through woodcraft, while also tracing the wider spiritual condition that emerges through coexistence with, and loss of, old-growth trees.

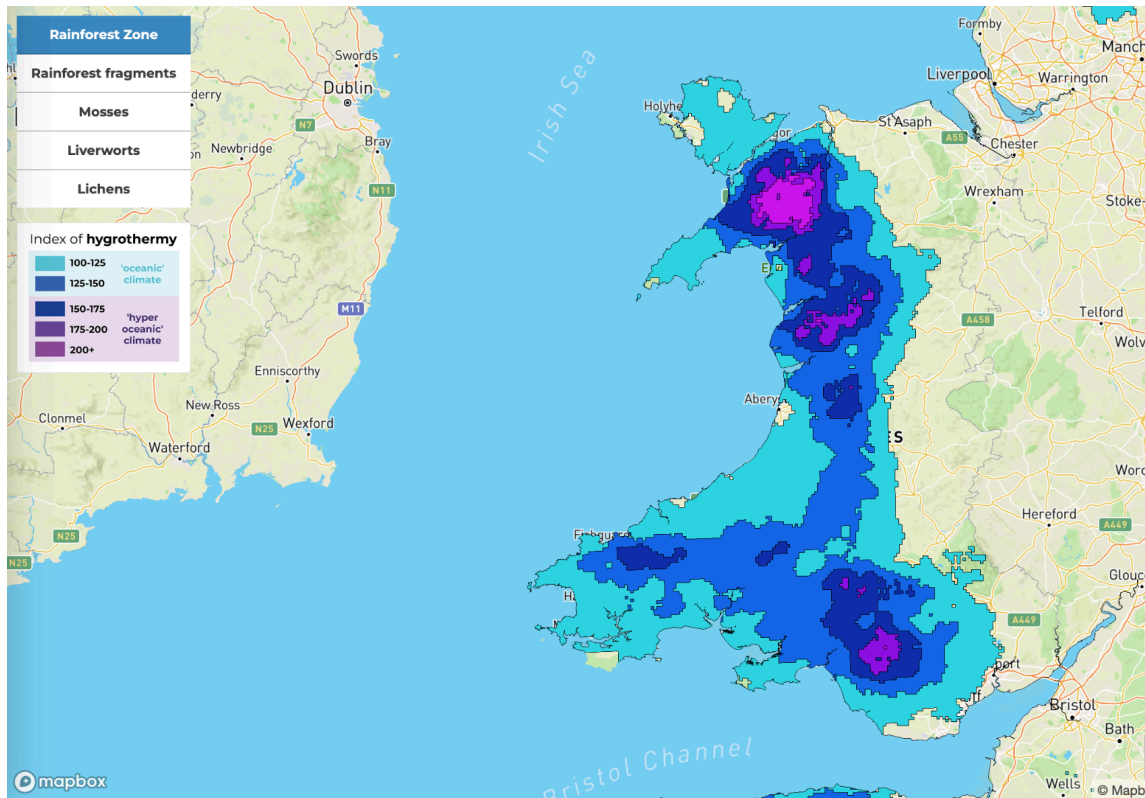


Figure 2: The Lost Rainforests of Britain, Community Mapping (Owen, 2023)

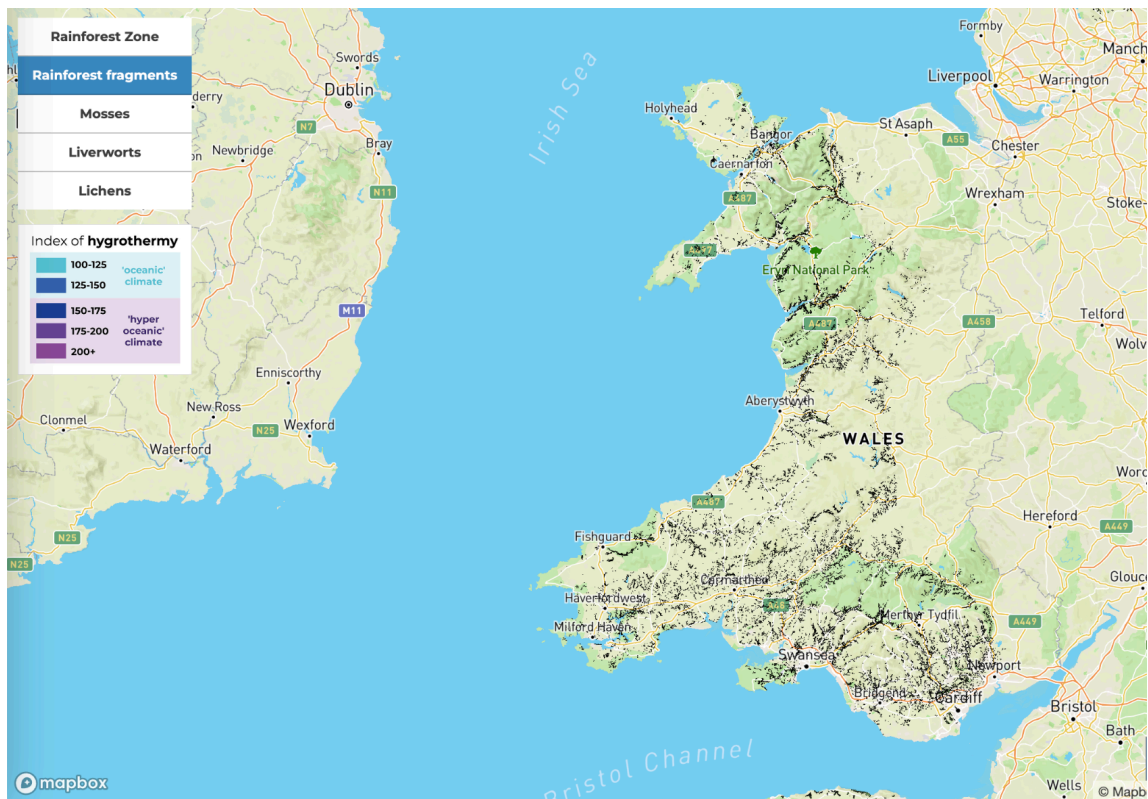


Figure 3: The Lost Rainforests of Britain, Community Mapping (Owen, 2023)

I will first examine intertwining theoretical perspectives on mythology, ecological grief, and heritage craft. Particular attention will be given to how craft-based processes can hold, process, and articulate experiences of ecological grief, while also contributing to regenerative ways of thinking about forest ecologies and human responsibility within them. Through this, the discussion will foreground the role of narrative, material, and mythic thinking in shaping contemporary forms of ecological storytelling through contemporary glass.

I will then review the work of two stained glass artists; Thomas Denny and Pinkie Maclure, examining how each utilizes stained glass as an inherently mythic medium to transmit ideas of ecological belonging and spiritual ecology. Their practices will be examined in relation to symbolism, ecological storytelling, and the capacity of stained glass to function simultaneously as a narrative medium and a form of existential intervention.



Figure 3: *Gerald Finzi Windows*, Gloucester Cathedral. Stained glass. (Denny, Thomas)

Lastly, I will set out the methodologies and potential outcomes of my own practice, outlining how the research frameworks and artistic precedents discussed above will inform my approach to making. Inspired by the symbolic and practical roles of trees, the resulting work will examine the significance of the oak, yew, and scots pine within mythology, history, and craft, drawing upon established narratives to explore multi-species relationships.

This section will articulate how stained glass and wood craft processes may function as research tools, generating visual narratives that respond to ecological grief while proposing alternative, regenerative relationships with woodland environments. This developing practice will further investigate ecological grief as a catalyst for environmental renewal. Artistic interventions will be explored as tools for transitioning from grief to regeneration.

Mythology and Conservation

Trees have long symbolized adaptability and resilience across cultures, holding particular significance in Wales, where ancient woodlands, language and folklore are deeply intertwined. Sacred trees were believed to house intrinsic unseen qualities, their presence intertwined with legends that reflect multispecies connection and foretell consequences of environmental degradation. The oak, yew, and scots pine appear prominently in mythology, reflecting multi-species entanglement and the relationship between lore and sustainability (Beresford-Kroeger, 2014; Gantz, 1976; Hemming, 2012). These mythologies are in continuous reciprocal exchange with craft traditions, providing narrative foundations that connect cultural heritage to ecological understanding.

Legends such as Angelystor, a supernatural being beneath a 3,000-year-old yew, Rhys and Meinir's love story tied to an ancient oak, and the Ogham Script illustrate trees' mythic and ecological roles (Beresford-Kroeger, 2014; Gantz, 1976). As proposed by Hemming (2012) and illuminated by Ellcock (2019), mythology, when intersecting with environmental themes, provides a rich source of narrative and symbolism, infusing specific locations with images and creative properties.

Rhys and Meinir legend, *Nant Gwrtheyrn* history:

“One night, when he was out on the slopes of Yr Eifl, a storm blew in and he sheltered under the hollow oak tree that they had played under as children together. Lightning struck the oak tree, and it split open to reveal Meinir's skeleton inside, still in her wedding dress”



Figure 4: *Apollo and Daphne*. Oil on wood. (Pollaiuolo, P. del c.1470–1480)

The author and teacher Joseph Campbell who specialized in researching and compiling the world's great mythic traditions understands myth as a symbolic system that helps individuals endure loss and existential uncertainty by perceiving personal suffering within larger, recurring patterns of meaning. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, he defines myth as “the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation” (Campbell, 1949).

Grief, within this framework, is not an instability but a threshold moment, it is an initiation that mirrors the hero's journey, a mythic descent, ordeal, and return.

In interviews compiled in *The Power of Myth*, Campbell clarifies that myth addresses lived experience rather than abstract belief: "People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive... so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality" (Campbell, 1988). Myth therefore provides a ritual and narrative language through which grief becomes understandable through the experience of it being bearable and shareable.

Campbell writes about the collapse of shared cosmologies that once framed human–nature relations. Without living myths that acknowledge reciprocity with the more-than-human world, ecological loss remains psychologically unresolved, and ecological grief cannot be understood through the experience of it being "bearable and shareable." Using Campbell's understanding of myth, mythic storytelling offers a container for environmental grief by transforming it into a shared meaning-bearing utility, rather than an isolated despair.

In addition to the rich legacy of Welsh mythology and the potential load-bearing resource of mythology, current grassroots efforts in Wales are reimagining the Celtic rainforests' future. Collaborative initiatives like Elwy Working Woods are not only preserving the forests but also intertwining traditional knowledge with contemporary ecological practices. The National Trust has been actively involved in conserving and restoring Wales' Celtic rainforests, focusing on propagating endangered native tree species, linking fragmented rainforest habitats, and expanding green corridors (National Trust, 2023). These efforts are grounded in the understanding that the recovery of these ancient woodlands requires not only ecological restoration but also recognition of their cultural and symbolic significance, becoming rejuvenated landscapes that can shape shared mythologies.

Through my involvement at Elwy Working Woods, I have seen firsthand how traditional woodcrafts such as coppicing, spoon carving, and basket weaving are integrated into ecological conservation practices. These initiatives, among others, approach ecological restoration through heritage craft, offering a multifaceted strategy that addresses both the ecological and emotional needs of the forest and its people (Everill & Burnell, 2022). By integrating environmental restoration with the preservation of traditional knowledge, grassroots initiatives encourage communities to see the forests as living entities.

The concept of the Atlantic woodlands as both ecological and cultural landscapes is vital for understanding how these woodlands serve as repositories of natural and symbolic wealth (Owen, 2023; Berry, 1995). Current small and large-scale conservation efforts, such as those led by Dr. Fitzgerald and the National Trust,

focus on restoring and conserving these ancient forests through habitat restoration and the propagation of endangered native species (National Trust, 2023). Berry highlights the importance of small-scale, locally managed logging and wood product industries as essential for sustainable forest stewardship. He critiques colonial capitalist practices for failing to establish systems that reflect the complexity and value of forest ecosystems, advocating instead for responsible use and care of woodlands.

Guided by Berry, Colchester and Dr. Marion's advocacy for indigenous forest relationships, a healthy forest economy would emphasize knowledge of local ecology, natural history, and cultural traditions, including mythology, folklore and craft. The integration of heritage crafts into conservation offers a tangible means of ecological and emotional restoration (Langlands, 2024). Practices such as coppicing, spoon carving, and basket weaving, illustrate how traditional crafts sustain cultural ties while supporting woodland regeneration (Everill & Burnell, 2022). This holistic approach emphasises the importance of maintaining cultural ties to the land and offers a means of environmental and emotional restoration, rooted in globally-minded ancestral time.

To conclude, positioning conservation within the active making and remaking of myth offers a critical pathway for addressing ecological grief without collapsing into pessimism. Welsh tree mythology demonstrates that stories have long functioned as moral, emotional, and ecological frameworks, encoding consequences, care, and continuity across generations. When contemporary conservation practices are understood not only as scientific interventions but as participatory myth-making, enacted through craft, stewardship, and place-based labour, they can regain symbolic force and emotional resonance.

Initiatives such as coppicing, woodland management, and heritage craft do more than restore habitats; they reanimate narratives of reciprocity, resilience, and responsibility that allow people to situate environmental loss within cycles of renewal rather than terminal decline. In Campbell's terms, conservation becomes part of the mythic return: a responsive action following descent and grief.

By embedding ecological restoration within culturally rooted stories, practices, and symbols, conservation offers a shared language through which mourning can be held, meaning negotiated, and hope sustained. Such myth-inflected conservation does not deny loss, but transforms grief into a relational practice. A practice that acknowledges damage while insisting on continued participation, shared hope and belief in the living story of the land that reverberates beyond individual human lifespans.



Figure 4: Willow Plant Support Workshop, Mandy Coates (Elwy Working Woods, 2024)

Ecological Grief and Regenerative Action

Ecological grief refers to the emotional and psychological responses to environmental loss, particularly the degradation of biodiverse environments (Lertzman, 2015). As communities confront losses such as deforestation, mourning becomes essential for acknowledging them and fostering renewal. Dutzi and Potter (2020) highlight ecological grief as a driver of positive environmental action. Donna Haraway's concept of "generative joy" offers a complementary perspective, encouraging collaborative creativity that transforms despair into hope and proactive care for multispecies relationships (Haraway, 2016). In art, this synergy is evident through visual play, where participatory and imaginative methods promote dialogue and critical engagement with ecological challenges.

Regenerative practices aim to enrich ecological and multispecies connections. This research will explore the shift from grief to regeneration as a result of artistic intervention. It will analyze regenerative methods within ecological art practices.

Mortimer-Sandilands (2019) argues that participation in art and craft communities serves both as a method of mourning and a facilitator of resilience and entanglement.

Wallen (2019) urges artists to:

“Create loci for the continuous work of memory so that the full brilliance of once-thriving ecosystems is not forgotten. By creating public rituals and revitalizing traditional forms of mourning, ecoartists can provide vital spaces for the recognition and expression of grief. As we move toward a future of increasing losses due to the climate and extinction crises, the capacity to mourn will allow us to retain our humanity” (p. 3).

The role of craft as a means of processing ecological grief through connections to native materials is explored through ongoing community-based heritage practices. Specifically, this study will investigate how creative engagements with heritage woodland crafts help individuals process ecological grief. Community-driven projects, like the restoration work at Craig Gwladus Country Park, Wales, show that heritage crafts not only revitalize physical environments but also foster emotional healing (Langlands, 2024). The involvement of local participants in the conservation of heritage sites through participatory craft has been linked to improved wellbeing through meaningful, physical engagement (Everill & Burnell, 2022).

Gablik (1991) frames ecological crisis as a consequence of a deeper psychological and cosmological rupture. She begins the 6th chapter, “THE ECOLOGICAL IMPERATIVE, A New Cultural Coding,” with a quote from psychologist Robert A. Johnson:

“All my experience as a psychologist leads me to the conclusion that a sense of reverence is necessary for psychological health. If a person has no sense of reverence, no feeling that there is anyone or anything that inspires awe, it cuts the conscious personality off completely from the nourishing springs of the unconscious. It is ironic, then, that so much of our modern culture is aimed at eradicating all reverence, all respect for the high truths and qualities that inspire a feeling of awe and worship in the human soul” (Johnson, 1991, p. 76).

Ecological grief can partially be perceived through the individualized consequence of this loss of reverence. Environmental destruction is experienced and magnified by an inability to mourn within meaningful symbolic frameworks.

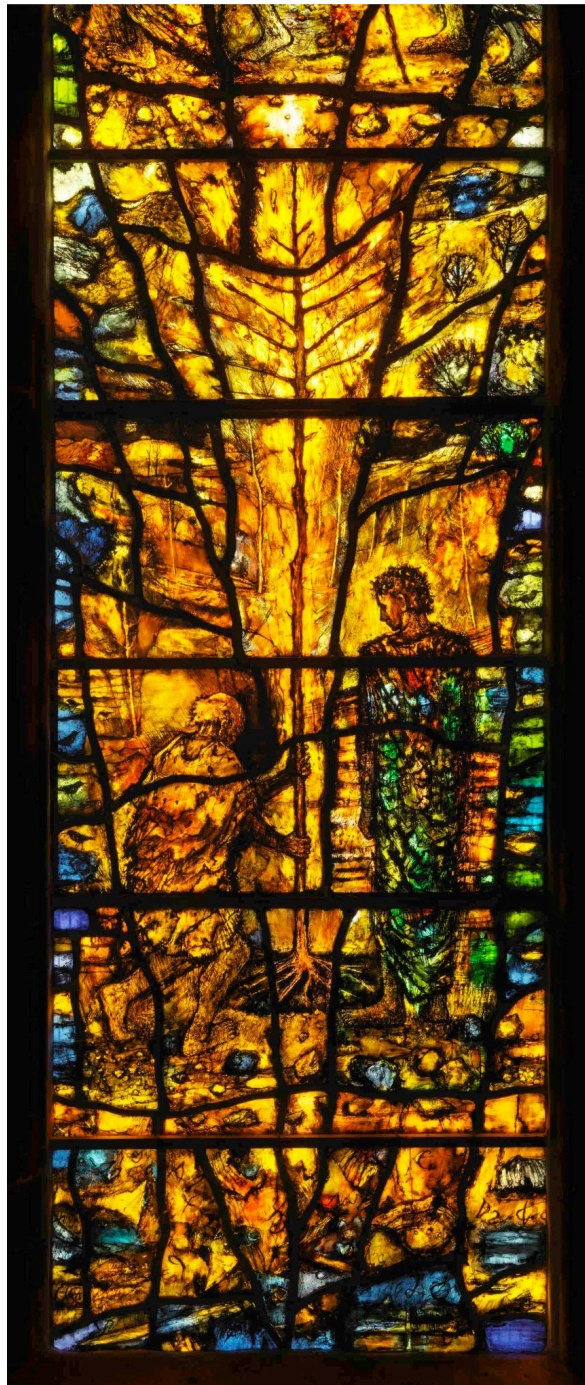


Figure 5: Tewkesbury Abbey. Stained glass. (Denny, Thomas)

Gablik (1991) further argues that ecological awareness must replace abstract metaphysics as the central organizing principle of contemporary culture: “What I wish to propose is that, the word ‘ecological’ will become the equivalent of the word ‘metaphysical,’ as the task of restoring awareness of our symbiotic relationship with nature becomes the most pressing spiritual and political need of our time” (p. 79). Stained glass, as an art form embedded with a history of reverence, can create an illuminated and reflective art experience that responds directly to this condition. Through light, wood, and labour, craft can situate making as a metaphysical act grounded in ecological reality.

The urgency of such practices becomes clearer when Gablik (1991) observes: “Our culture has failed to generate a living cosmology that would enable us to hold the sacredness and interconnectedness of life in mind. Because awareness of the whole escapes us, we devastate the land in greed” (p. 83). Heritage craft-based practices offer a counter-cosmology. They are slow, place-based, and reverent, allowing grief to be acknowledged without paralysis. As loci of memory and attention, stained glass and woodcraft create spaces where ecological loss is not abstracted but held, mourned, and reconfigured into hopeful momentum. Craft operates as an active form of reenchancement, restoring the symbolic and emotional conditions necessary for both ecological mourning and regenerative hope.



Figure 6: Self-Portrait Dreaming of Portavadie. Stained Glass. (Maclure, Pinkie)

Thomas Denny and Pinkie Maclure

Pinkie Maclure’s stained glass practice offers a compelling model for articulating ecological grief through myth, memory, and material transformation. Working at the intersection of personal narrative and environmental history, Maclure uses stained glass to solder together loss, beauty, and ethical witnessing. Her work addressing the destruction of the Scottish village Portavadie exemplifies how ecological grief is rooted not only in broad sweeping environmental decline but in lived, place-based severance. Reflecting on the site, Maclure on her personal website and in her online

talk for Ely Stained Glass Museum in 2023, described the stained glass piece through her memory of the place and its ecological destruction:

"Portavadie was an idyllic, unspoilt corner of Scotland. There was no electricity or running water, but it was his pride and joy and we all remembered those summers as the happiest times of our lives. In the 1970s, 110 acres of land around my grandad's cottage were completely transformed into a construction site and a concrete workers village was built to house hundreds of workers, costing £14 million of tax payers' money. The shallow bay we had loved to bathe in had explosives placed in it, to deepen it and turn it into a dry dock. The sandy beach became sheer cliffs. The whole area around it was devastated. But it quickly became apparent that there were too few orders for this type of platform and the site at Portavadie became obsolete before it was even completed. The company went bankrupt, leaving the government with an embarrassing mess to clean up. Portavadie was described in the press as the 'most expensive man-made hole in Europe.'"

Pixie first frames the landscape as one shaped by intimacy, care, and inherited memory. The subsequent industrial devastation becomes a narrative of ecological and cultural dislocation. This narrative and memory of what Portavadie once was and what it could have been is memorialized inside Maclure's stained glass panel.

Through stained glass, Maclure reframes this history within a mythic register, using light, fragmentation, and transparency to acknowledge both damage and endurance. The medium's association with sacred storytelling allows environmental loss to be approached with reverence rather than abstraction, transforming grief into a visual cosmology. Her work creates a locus where ecological harm, familial memory, and mythic reflection converge, offering viewers a space to mourn environmental destruction while holding open the possibility of reflection, accountability, and regenerative imagination.

Thomas Denny's stained glass practice approaches ecological grief and myth obliquely, embedding environmental and emotional concerns within sacred, historical, and place-responsive narratives. Educated at Edinburgh College of Art and working largely within ecclesiastical settings, Denny operates inside long-established visual and material traditions, using stained glass as a slow, contemplative medium through which loss, endurance, and reconciliation are made visible (Denny, 2025).

While his themes are often scriptural, his work repeatedly situates human experience within specific landscapes, often forest landscapes, suggesting that grief, whether personal, cultural, or ecological, emerges through entanglement with place. Commissions such as the Gerald Finzi Windows (Figure 7) at Gloucester Cathedral draw attention to how land, memory, and psychic rupture intersect, presenting

“stories that emerge from an individual life” and allowing them to “become stories for all of us: loss, courage, redemption” (Denny, 2025).

Unlike more explicitly activist ecological art, Denny’s work addresses environmental grief through continuity rather than rupture. His adherence to materials and techniques “largely the same as those used in 14th century stained glass” establishes temporal depth, positioning contemporary concerns within extended cycles of making and care (Denny, 2025).

This historical continuity offers a counterpoint to ecological instability, suggesting that meaning persists through sustained attention to place, craft, and context. By insisting that stained glass must “always acknowledge its context,” Denny frames the window as a site of ethical responsiveness, where light, landscape, and memory converge (Denny, 2025). His work contributes to ecological reflection by creating a contemplative center in which grief is held within traditions of endurance, reverence, and shared cultural inheritance, offering a quieter but no less potent mythic response to environmental loss.

The stained glass practices of Maclure and Denny demonstrate how the medium can function as a setting for processing ecological grief through materially and mythically grounded forms of storytelling. While their approaches differ in tone and emphasis, both artists craft stained glass as a slow, reverent practice capable of holding complexity: light and damage, memory and renewal. Together, their work illustrates how stained glass can operate not only as an architectural or devotional art form, but as a contemporary myth-making practice through which ecological grief may be acknowledged, shared, and meaningfully transformed.



Figure 7: *Gerald Finzi Windows*, Gloucester Cathedral. Stained glass. (Denny, Thomas)

Methodologies and Potential Outcomes

Fieldwork will take place within the Atlantic woodlands of Wales, with a particular focus on the Celtic Forest fragments of the Gower Peninsula. Engagement with these landscapes will combine close observation, drawing, and photographic documentation, alongside the collection of botanical and ecological references. I will work to document the subtle variations in light, texture, and growth patterns that reveal the character of each tree and woodland.

Attention will focus on oak, yew, and scots pine trees, species deeply embedded in Welsh myth, folklore, and craft traditions. Woodland sites, restoration areas, and community-managed spaces will provide both inspiration and insight into human–tree relationships, ecological stewardship, and the ways communities process environmental loss. I hope to uncover the nuances of these relationships and how they inform local understandings of care and loss.

The artistic outcomes will centre on a series of stained glass panels that visualise ecological myths and the stories communities attach to trees. Each panel will be informed by field observation, local and individual myth tales, and participatory engagement with woodland communities, tracing narratives of tree loss, resilience, and regeneration.

To hold these glass works, I will create bespoke carved wooden frames, crafted from tree species referenced in the myths depicted in glass. These frames will function as more than frame supports; they will operate as sculptural companions, embedding an additional layer of symbolic, ecological, and mythic associations into the overall form. I will pay attention to how the materiality of the wood carries meaning alongside the glass. Together, the glass and wood will form layered, immersive narratives, where human and tree coexistence is both celebrated and interrogated.

Community engagement will be integral to the project. Workshops, interviews, and collaborative sessions will allow participants to share stories, reflect on ecological grief, and respond to preliminary visual interpretations. I hope these dialogues will reveal perspectives and experiences that might otherwise remain hidden, informing both the myth-making and design of the stained glass and woodcraft works.

Drawing, printmaking, and natural history illustration will function as both preparatory and research tools, helping me explore woodland forms, textures, and seasonal patterns in detail. Careful studies of trees, undergrowth, and forest structures will guide the design of carved frames. I will also capture people at work in heritage woodland crafts, recording the techniques that connect human activity to the natural world. Alongside these, I will include recorded and fabricated rituals, symbolic objects, and traditional practices in the glass panels to reveal the cultural and spiritual dimensions of woodland life.

The works will explore the capacity of contemporary craft to convey ecological myth, honor lost woodlands and trees, and suggest regenerative human–tree relationships. Through this process, stained glass and woodcraft will be explored as methods for both research and creative expression. By combining observation, storytelling, and material practice, I hope to demonstrate how ecological mythology can articulate grief, sustain memory, and envision alternative, regenerative relationships between humans and woodlands. Ultimately, it will explore how craft can act as both interpretive and restorative practice, transforming ecological grief into narrative, material, and communal engagement.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates how contemporary stained glass and woodcraft can articulate ecological mythology, offering a framework for processing environmental grief and envisioning regenerative human–tree relationships. Grounded in the Atlantic woodlands of Wales, particularly the Celtic Forest fragments of the Gower Peninsula, the project highlights the symbolic and ecological significance of oak, yew, and scots pine trees, whose presence is entwined with Welsh folklore, craft traditions, and multispecies narratives. By framing ecological grief through myth, environmental loss is situated within culturally and emotionally meaningful contexts, echoing Joseph Campbell’s insight that myth structures human experience and endurance.

The work of stained glass artists Thomas Denny and Pixie Maclure illustrates the medium’s capacity to hold complex narratives of ecological loss and renewal. Denny’s practice emphasizes continuity, employing historical techniques and sacred storytelling to situate grief within enduring temporal and cultural frameworks. Maclure foregrounds intimacy, memory, and site-specific environmental destruction, transforming loss into narrative, light, and material presence. Both artists demonstrate that stained glass can mediate human experience, ecological observation, and place-based memory, creating spaces where grief is acknowledged, shared, and reflected upon.

The methodology integrates fieldwork, drawing, printmaking, and natural history illustration with participatory engagement. Observations of trees, woodland structures, and ecological processes inform stained glass compositions, while collaboration with community organizations such as Elwy Working Woods documents how heritage crafts such as coppicing, carving, and basketry mediate grief, preserve cultural knowledge, and support forest stewardship.

Anticipated outcomes include a body of stained glass panels framed with bespoke carved timber, each panel drawing on mythic and ecological narratives observed in the field. These works translate grief into visual, tactile, and participatory stories,

where light, color, and materiality converge to convey regeneration, memory, and care. By embedding ecological mythology within craft practice, the project positions stained glass and woodcraft as methods of research, reflection, and action, tools through which loss can be acknowledged, cultural and ecological knowledge preserved, and regenerative human–tree relationships fostered.

Ultimately, this research explores and shows that myth, craft, and ecological reflection intersect to transform environmental grief into creative, ethical, and regenerative practice. By bridging folklore, heritage craft, and contemporary artistic processes, stained glass and woodcraft has the potential to sustain memory, invite reflection, and encourage engagement, offering meaningful paths from grief toward resilience, hope, and the continued regeneration of human–tree relationships.



Figure 8: Tree of Life and Death Scenarios. Stained Glass. (Maclure, Pinkie)

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