

Arnside & Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

KEEPER TO KENT

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Journal of the Landscape Trust



The second of two articles about a creative exploration of 'Beautiful End' by Constance Holme.

Nurturing a Creative Project in the Landscape of the Kent Estuary

by Carran Waterfield

If you read the last edition of Keer to Kent you will have seen my article 'Rooting a Creative Project in the Landscape of the Kent Estuary' about conceiving the performance and workshop programme Beautiful End based on the novel of the same title by local Westmorland writer, Constance Holme (1880-1955).

Summer 2018 came. It was a hundred years since the novel's first publication. Our company of performing artists moved from the protective potting shed (our workshop for explorations with the residents of Stonecross Manor and the young people from Wings School in Milnthorpe). We ventured out into the Kent estuary landscape in search of the story's pulse. With the sap of Holme's language running through our veins we journeyed in the footsteps of old man Kit, the central character in the novel. We played, sang, moved and read from the novel casting land, sky, river, flower, shrub, bird and occasional dwelling as animators of our experiment. Conjuring up the spirit of the novel we sensed its feelings and heart, willing the project into fruition, knowing we were still only at the seedling stage with a long gestation ahead.

Our creative journey began on Park Road at the children's playground in Milnthorpe opposite 'Marget's house'. Here we recreated Kit's memory of inciting childish excitement when he played his fiddle for all the local children who participated in a 'turn' of 'London Bridge is Broken Down' beneath the chestnut trees. This small political act of defiance cost Kit dearly because after his 'turn' Marget, his daughter-in-law confiscated his fiddle confining him to his room and the landscape of his memory.



Following Holme's script we crossed the River Bela at the old bridge and swept up through the Dallam Estate taking what was the old road before the B5282 existed, now a public footpath.

The river still ran by them on the left and beyond it was the climbing sweep of the park with the belts of wood binding it east and west... At the foot of the wood was the long, clean-coloured house, with its pillars and flat windows and wide stately steps...¹



We paused to play-act a little scene about landowners and tenants (pics above and below).



After a short diversion to the timber yard (now Hanafin's) referred to in the novel, we moved down to the bridge before the turn that is Marsh Road.



The green road ran out from between its hedges, and seemed to be lost in an open stretch of field. It looked like the rest of the old man's span of life, as it ran smoothly to the end, yet all the while the river lay between field and road.



When we processed down the Marsh Road towards Beautiful End, now known as Waterside Fold, the text in the novel really began to work its magic.



There was a breeze stirring the shore-grasses that in all their lives never know what it is to be really still; and on the top of the bank others quivered and bent and quivered again. Bending again they looked like delicate strokes of a slanting pen, slashed on the golden page of the open west.



At our journey's end, as chance would have it, Clive, the owner of Waterside Fold and proprietor of Yew Tree Barn Antiques was home doing a spot of decorating. He made us tea while we played out Kit's arrival at Agnes' freshly refurbished cottage; a scene she had prepared with all the tender kindness she could muster for her father-in-law's final days. But she might as well have refurbished it with stock from IKEA, for nothing was as it had been in Kit's eyes. He just couldn't settle in the new place. So we left it there...will he stay or will he go? Those of you familiar with the novel know the rest of the story.



For us a similar question remains: will we stay in the estuary or will we go? Like all seedlings potted in the warmth then risked outside, there is a danger they won't thrive. Our creative will to find a way to mature this project and the financial challenges of arts funding during austere times promises a long wait and dry seasons but we are hopeful of a harvest.



Beautiful End is conceived by Carran Waterfield in collaboration with Luke Crookes, Carolyn Francis and Audrey Steeley.

All photos: Darren Andrews

All quotes from Holme, C. Beautiful End (1918) Oxford Classics.

¹ The reference to the Dallam estate is tangible.

Levens
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13th October, Chester Cathedral
Faure Requiem

9th December, St Mary's Church,
Allithwaite
Star of the Sea: Songs for Mary

15th December, Kendal Shopping Centre
Carol singing

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