Green Man, Ely Cathedral, *c.*1335

TREES, WOODS & THE GREEN MAN

FEW THINGS HAVE THE ABILITY TO TRANSFORM AND SUSTAIN PLACES AS TREES. We have a long cultural and utilitarian relationship with trees, using them for building, energy and warmth, paper, food and much more, but also to beautify our cities and to enhance landscapes. For most cultures particular trees are laden with symbolism and may carry something of the sacred. Trees are landmarks, woodlands have long been community spaces. They came before us and we have used, abused and loved them for thousands of years. They have provided us with sustenance, shelter, medicine and fresh air to breathe. They are our history and our future. Yet we take them for granted. We cut them down without thinking. We are obsessed with planting but forget to plant thoughtfully and care for them once they are planted. Loss of tree cover has also made us vulnerable to wind and flood, and at a time when such things are on the rise. We need to rebuild our relations with the living landscapes around us now, so that we can thrive together. Our culture is rich with trees, woods and green men, from pollards and timber barns to paintings and poetry, from the Green Knight and Robin Hood to Constable and Elgar.

Since 1986, Common Ground's project Trees, Woods and the Green Man has explored the natural and cultural value of trees, and worked to deepen popular concern and practical caring for trees in town and country. From 1986 to 1989 we worked with many artists, sculptors, illustrators, poets, cartoonists, playwrights and writers; we initiated touring exhibitions – 'The Tree of Life' with the South Bank Centre, 'Out of the Wood' with the Crafts Council, as well as Andy Goldsworthy's 'Leaves' at the Natural History Museum. We also wrote and published the books *In a Nutshell,* a practical guide to tree care, and *Trees be Company*, an anthology of poetry, *PULP!*, a newspaper all about trees, and a range of postcards. In 1990 we started Apple Day, a campaign to celebrate apple varieties and our shared apple heritage, which was also intent on saving orchards from becoming building plots and encouraging the national spread of Community Orchards around the country. Alongside, we started Tree Dressing Day, which, from 1990 has inspired hundreds of events across the country – even as far afield as Finland and Japan. The project continues with our Community Woodlands project.

Andy Goldsworthy working on Hampstead Heath

'I don't know for certain that the work can be made – if I knew for sure it would loose a great deal of its energy excitement and meaning.'

ANDY GOLDSWORTHY: VISUAL DIARIES

by Jos Smith

IN THE WINTER OF 1985-6 A YOUNG ANDY GOLDSWORTHY CAME TO LONDON from his home in Cumbria to work with his hands in the ice and snow on Hampstead Heath. For six weeks, using only the materials to hand – twigs, leaves, feathers, stones, and the ice and snow itself – he created a series of ephemeral sculptures while locals or visitors to the Heath watched. This unusual artist's residency had been arranged and funded by Common Ground in association with Artangel and was one of the first undertakings for both organisations. Common Ground had only recently been launched a year earlier with a series of public events at the ICA intended to 're-open the debate about our relationship with the land and with nature'. These were subjects of 'practical and philosophical concern for us all,' they felt, not just for professionals with a specialist interest. Andy Goldsworthy's residency was a way of drawing people into subjects that they felt everyone should be invested in, a way of opening people's eyes to the wild nature on their doorstep and showing that 'inspiration is to be found in everyday places and materials'.

Since the late 1960s, Land Art in Britain had been moving the focus of sculpture away from the object in the gallery. Richard Long's famous *A Line Made by Walking* (1967) had seen the artist photograph an area of grass in a field on the outskirts of London that he had flattened by walking up and down repeatedly. The gesture of leaving the city on foot, of interacting with an ordinary, semi-rural landscape, and of producing no object that might be easily turned into a commodity, were all part a new generation's break with the metropolitan art world in which they had trained and which seemed to hold all the power. While aware of Long's ground-breaking work, in Andy Goldsworthy's Hampstead Heath residency there was something

Andy Goldsworthy ICE ARCH

SECOND NATURE

ARTISTS AND THEIR SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LAND AND THE NATURAL WORLD

AN EXHIBITION MOUNTED BY NEWLYN ORION AND COMMON GROUND

Subsidised by the Arts Council of Great Britain

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A VISUAL DIARY

ANDY GOLDSWORTHY ON HAMPSTEAD HEATH

In association with Common Ground
45 Shelton Street, London WC2H 9HJ

TREES, WOODS & THE GREEN MAN · COMMON GROUND

IMAGE BY BEN NICHOLSON

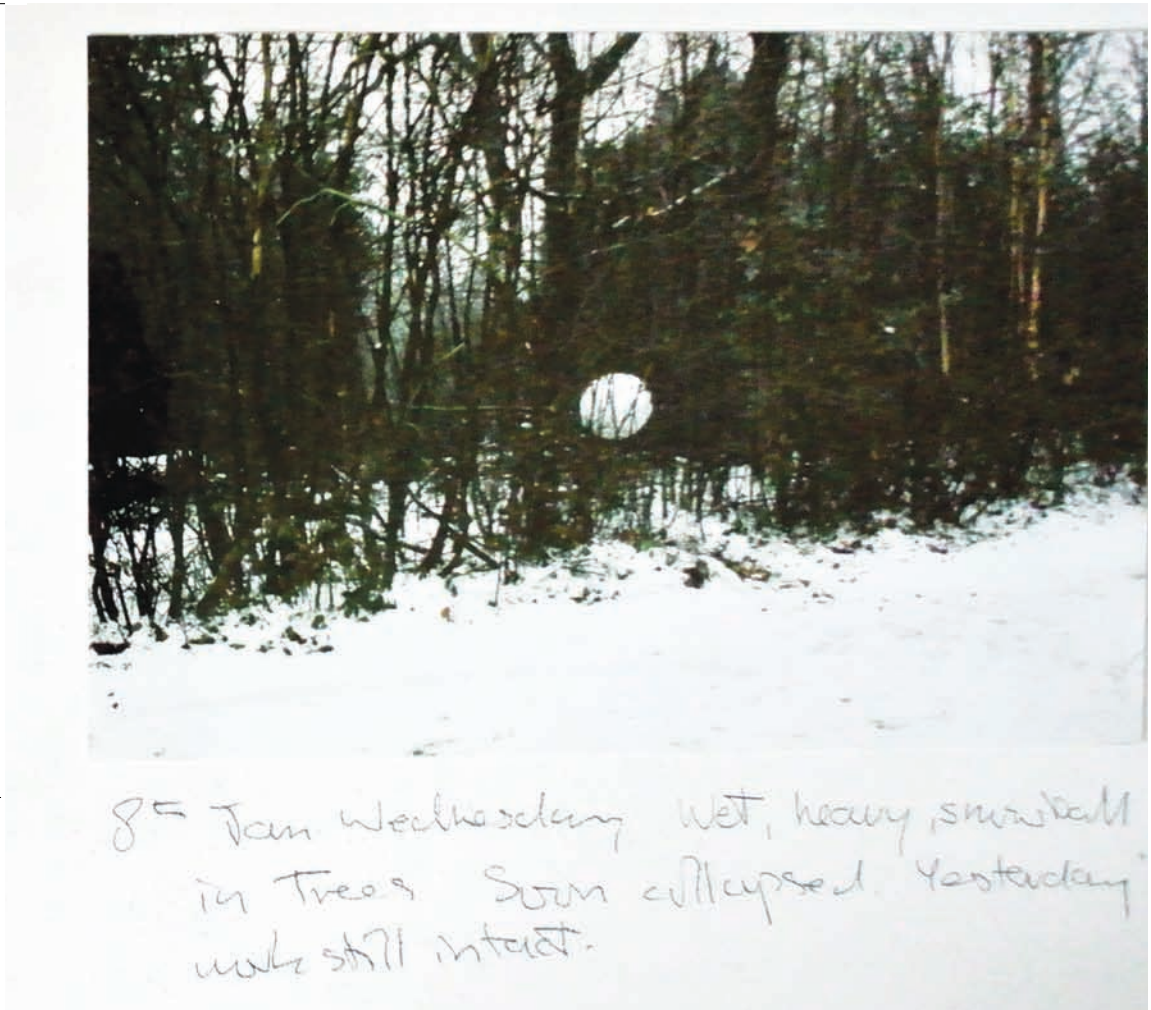
30th Dec Sunday - Ice workshop
Made arch over a pile of sticks -
waited for it to freeze - temperature
going up & down - thawing then
freezing - managed to pull out most
of the sticks - last attempt for
a moment - all sticks loose but
somehow knocked arch and caused it's
collapse. Not really frozen enough. So close
Photograph of the arch collapsing by my wife
Judith - I am underneath the falling ice.

slightly different at play. Here was an artist who had developed his distinctive working method in art schools in Bradford and Preston, who had, more importantly, refined his idiosyncratic method alone for long periods of time on the large flat sands of Morecambe Bay. Common Ground had invited this artist – used to working in remote and rural locations – to come and try his hand in the heart of the capital city, overlooking the blue misted skyline of Thatcher's London, studded with spires and cranes.

As much as Land Art would come to influence Goldsworthy, he had, earlier in life, been fascinated with the performance art of Yves Klein. Goldsworthy had come to see his own work as something to be performed rather than something to be made, produced, or finished, like a sculpture. This was less about the theatrics of performance art as such, however, than it was about the sense that the meaning resided in the act of performing work, something that chimed with his memories of work as an agricultural labourer in his younger years when he learned a range of traditional crafts and techniques. He recalls Klein's influential reflection on his monochrome paintings: 'They are the left-overs from my creative process, the ashes.' The emphasis on process rather than product was also something in which he endeavoured to engage with real, natural processes as well. It was a way of emulating the creativity of the natural world itself. Describing his fascination with the form of a tree in the early 1990s, he suggests that 'more than its own material, it is a window into the process of life, growth and decay – an expression of the energy that flows through all nature and a binding of time, seasons, earth, air and water.' Working closely with the materials to hand, he began to look for this 'process of life, growth and decay' and to weave his own creative process into it. Nicholas Alfrey has described Goldsworthy's work as 'enacting an investigative process' and this is very much the case with the work on Hampstead Heath. It is a dialogue between fingers and thoughts and the processes that form snow and leaf and ice and bark.

Hampstead Heath itself was an important choice of site for this residency as well, not just because it brought this artist of the rural edges into the heart of the city. The poor soil quality in the area meant that it had long been common land where traditionally, and well into the nineteenth century, laundry was hung, donkeys were grazed, and sand was dug for small-scale building. However, it would not have remained common land had it not been fought for over the years. Hampstead Heath had been the subject of at least two high profile conservation battles, the earliest of which is generally

considered to be one of the first successful battles of its kind. In 1829, Sir Thomas Maryon Wilson, the Lord of the Manor of Hampstead, saw the potential to make some fast money through developing the land and building new properties in what was becoming a very desirable area. Opposition was strong though, especially from those wealthy house owners who lived nearby, and his plans were thwarted. Later, at the end of the nineteenth century, public outcry was heard again – though nationwide this time – when a, perhaps well-intentioned, London County Council began to 'tidy up' and 'parkify' the Heath in the name of 'improvement'. They began cutting and burning its gorse bushes, filling in hollows and bogs and planting hundreds of saplings. But popular protest brought these developments to a halt as well,



defending what is one of London's most cherished areas of common land.

The choice of such a popularly defended area as Hampstead Heath for this residency by an artist whose working practice represented such a dignified dialogue between a human being and his environment seems today like no coincidence. The relationship between people and place is an ongoing process of discovery wherever we are. Often what we discover is a feeling for a place such that we may be moved to protect it as a living part of our neighbourhood. Goldsworthy's Hampstead Heath residency showed that no landscape can be too familiar or too close to home to inspire fresh perspectives on our relationship to the Earth.

DR JOS SMITH is a British Academy post-doctoral research fellow undertaking a project that explores the history of the literary and visual arts communities connected with Common Ground. He is also a visiting tutor at the Architectural Association in Hooke Park.

ANDY GOLDSWORTHY AT HOOKE PARK

THE COMMONPLACE AND FAMILIAR ASPECTS OF LOCAL SURROUNDINGS ARE often overlooked or taken for granted, but have great emotional value for the people who know them well. By recognising and sharing their feelings about their place, communities begin to take an active part in caring for their locality. Common Ground's New Milestones project in Dorset during the late 1980s encouraged a new generation of town, village and countryside sculptures. It aimed to stimulate the creation of small scale works of the imagination which express our sense of history, our love of place and of the natural world. It involved people in commissioning sculptors and craftspeople to help celebrate their place, with sculptures which will be valued and enduring features in the present and future life of the whole community – anyone could initiate the commissioning of a sculpture, a parish council, a local history or environmental group, a primary school, landholders or farmers. The artists commissioned included Peter Randall-Page, John Maine, Simon Thomas and Andy Goldsworthy.

> *'I wanted the form to come out of the material and place. I looked for a material that would mould into the entrance space – the way that a roadside tree forms an arch.'*

In 1984, Common Ground wrote to John Makepeace, furniture maker and Director of the Parnham Trust, because of his interest in finding new uses for woodlands and for small roundwood thinnings. He proved enthusiastic to collaborate with Common Ground and commission a sculpture to mark the new entrance into the Working Woodland at Hooke Park in Dorset.

The Working Woodland was a pioneering project to start a School of Woodland Industry where new technologies and designs could be developed for using small roundwood, both in furniture making and in buildings. The project was established in Hooke Park, where a prototype house with a roundwood structure was constructed and an educational programme started, teaching forestry and woodworking skills to local trainees.

The idea behind the Working Woodland was to re-establish the economic viability of woodland managed as a renewable resource. Andy Poore, the

forester of Hooke Park at the time, began introducing additional areas of broadleaved trees into the 330 acres of former Forestry Commission wood, systematically thinning rather than clear-felling, producing a continuous supply of roundwood timber and creating space for trees to mature. The roundwood thinnings, instead of being pulped or burned, became the raw material on which furniture products were to be based. The public bridleway that crosses the wood and the Parnham Trust encouraged walkers to use the woodland for pleasure and to see the work happening there. The aim was to combine design innovation, the development of future countryside employment, and community access that gave local people the opportunity to become aware of the ecological and human value of Hooke Park.

'The hole/arch was my immediate response to the commission – initially, taking its curve from the steep banks – a single sunken ring through which cars and people would pass.'

Andy Goldsworthy was chosen for the commission for his delicate handling and understanding of natural materials, his proven ability to make large permanent works, and the philosophical concord between himself, Common Ground and the Working Woodland. He visited Parnham House in November 1985 to meet with John and Jenny Makepeace. The weekend was spent discussing the project and walking in the woods to watch the forestry work and become more attuned to the life of the place. During the months after his first visit, Andy Goldsworthy gave much thought to the notion of creating an invitation, a threshold or entrance, and had made drawings of a large arch from roundwood stripped of its bark spanning the track. However, the engineering problems of making an arch of over twenty-foot span was too daunting, and he decided to make the sculpture from trees which had grown with a natural curve to the trunk, complementing the ideas of the Working Woodland, and finding a use for uneconomic small timber.

'The site demanded something smaller. The work became two separate rings at either side of the road, on the more intimate scale of the walker or horse rider. I enjoy the seductiveness of a hole which always makes me want to explore the space inside or beyond – a window, opening, invitation, entrance.'

The construction of the Entrance took place over four weeks in July 1986. Andy invited students Samantha Rudd, Lynette Charters, John Ogden and Justin Underhill to work with him on the project.

Andy found an area in the wood where soil slippage had caused the trees, mainly Douglas fir, to compensate by growing in natural curves towards the light; and Andy Poore approved their use. Two weeks of labouring work, felling, trimming, sawing and dragging the logs bodily to the forest track followed to produce enough timber for the rings. The foresters transported the wood to the drive entrance where the bark was manually stripped by Andy and the students to expose the sappy wood beneath.

Each ring was first laid out on the ground as a circle of overlapping trunks, then fixed together with one inch diameter pegs turned out of greenheart in John Makepeace's workshop. The rigid ring was then lifted, (on the first occasion with a tractor grab, on the second with a hand winch anchored to a tree), and pegged to slanting timbers sunk into six foot foundations filled with preserved timber and concrete. Trunks to build up the skeleton rings were selected from the stock of prepared timber and added individually, each being hauled into position with ropes, drilled and pegged securely in at least two places. Further trunks were chosen and fixed until Andy was satisfied that the right balance and effect had been achieved.

The fifteen foot barriers which operate on the drop bar principle were the final part of the work to be constructed. The slim, gently curving trunks were designed to cross in the centre of the drive, preventing cars entering when the woods are closed, without deterring walkers or obscuring the lure of the woods beyond. When raised, they lifted back and disappeared into the structure of the rings to complete the sculpture, visible only as longer spars extending above the others. Counterbalances of hollowed logs weighted with molten lead were added in January 1987, after the wood had dried out for several months – the barriers could be easily lifted by one person, fulfilling the functional requirement of the commission brief.

The building of the sculpture was very much a team exercise. The student helpers contributed energy and enthusiasm, despite the torrential rain and the usual problems of damaged, broken or inadequate tools and equipment. Young holly bushes were later planted at either side of the gateway, to grow against the rings and soften their junction with the bank, so the work would become part of the place, not something separate. The inner edges of the rings were purposely set at different heights, so that one created a three

foot step, while the other rested on the ground with a levelled path beyond enabling walkers with prams, wheelchairs and pushchairs to enter the wood when the barriers are closed.

During 1987, the sculpture was treated with preservative, masking the original golden colour of the wood and setting the rings back visually into the wood. Their shape made them distinct from the trees behind, the curving timber contrasting with the vertical growth of the living wood. In the thirty years since, the gates have become a local landmark. Andy Goldsworthy, on a subsequent visit to Hooke Park, was delighted to be accosted by a lorry driver asking the way, who showed him a scribbled map with 'The 2 Rings' shown as a waymark for finding his route.

> *'I have left a touch in a landscape steeped in associations between people and land. It is a social landmark – a passing through place that gives a sense of entering without blocking the way – an invitation. It is a signpost, gateway, boundary marker and milestone that celebrates the beginning of the wood . . .'*

By 2014, Andy Goldsworthy's now iconic work had reached the end of its life as a gateway. The Architectural Association, concerned for the safety of passers-by and people working in the woodland, began a project to dismantle the gate and construct something new, starting by reusing the timbers to form waymakers for a public footpath. The project is being led by Shin Egashira, an artist, architect and educator who has worked all over the world creating collaborative works that explore landscape and architecture. The project will last three years, and alongside this process Common Ground and the Architectural Association will begin a series of public events and artist residencies that continues the invitation to explore Hooke Park that Andy Goldsworthy's gates extended to the wider community thirty years ago.

COMMON GROUND: THE WOODLAND SESSIONS

COMMON GROUND AND THE ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION ARE STARTING a new collaboration at Hooke Park. This year, three decades after Andy Goldsworthy finished his work in the forest, we begin The Woodland Sessions: a series of cultural events, educational workshops and artist residencies which invite the public into Hooke Park to help us explore the history, economy, culture and ecology of the woodland. This will build towards a small arts festival each July – the same month that Andy Goldsworhy undertook his commission in 1986. The project will run for an intial three years, bringing a variety of people together – foresters, students, artists, storytellers, architects, musicians, scientists, film-makers, teachers, health-workers – to help us demonstrate how woodlands can become part of community life again.

No other landscape matches the complexity and variety of life in a woodland, both above and below ground. Woods are given names on maps, have shaped our language and have had books, poems, songs and artworks dedicated to them. Yet, woodlands have become neglected landscapes.

A century ago, when woodlands were at the heart of the parish economy, trees and hedgerows, copses, coppices and spinneys 'paid their way' by providing wood fuel, woodland-pasture for pigs and cattle, and wild harvests of nuts and fruit for the home. There was a thriving woodland culture of coppice crafts, charcoal-makers, bodgers, clay quarriers, wheelwrights, boat-builders, cloth dyers, all of which have their techniques and traditions rooted in prehistory. But the role of woodlands began to decline at the end of nineteenth century. The arrival of cheap coal, improved transport across the country, imported Scandinavian timber, and then the felling of whole, ancient woods during the First World War meant that by the 1920s the majority of woodlands were redundant to the village economy.

Woodlands have drifted further from our daily lives ever since, and many woodlands are now no longer managed or used. Neglected woods are not 'wild' sanctuaries for nature, they are impoverished habitats. Uneconomic and unused, there are now 600 ancient woodlands threatened by new road

developments or quarrying companies, while coppices and spinneys on the edges of town or villages are earmarked for building new houses.

Planting trees is one of life's pleasures, good for us, good for the planet. But why keep planting trees when we don't look after the ones we already have? It is managed woodlands that enrich communities and wildlife habitats, not neglected ones.

That's why Common Ground would like to demonstrate the good things that are happening in woodlands today, forming and documenting projects like The Woodland Sessions at Hooke Park to show just how these under-valued landscapes can become a vibrant part of our lives again – improving wildlife habitats as well us our own physical health, providing quality local wood fuel, timber for building homes and inspiration for design, becoming new community spaces for social gatherings and cultural events, offering primary school children and apprenticeship students outdoor classrooms.

There are lots of ways woodlands can be part of everyday life. The Woodland Sessions at Hooke Park are one way of experimenting with community projects, art and education to help us learn more about what woodlands can be to all of us in the twenty-first century.

Common Ground is a very small charity that works very hard to encourage new ways of engaging people with their local environment – the everyday places and the commonplace wildlife that means so much to us all but is so easily overlooked. We rely on charitable trusts, individuals and government agencies to fund our projects, as well as being nourished by the generosity of peoples' ideas and conversations. If you are able to support or are interested in getting involved with Common Ground's projects at Hooke Park or elsewhere, please write or call to let us know.

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