



Little Ouse Headwaters Project

# News from the Ouse

## Special Edition - The Creative Group

SAINSBURY  
CENTRE  
for Visual Arts



Beautiful exhibitions at three village halls



Items turned from local wood by Ken Hatton



Anagram made on a visit to Francis Cupiss Ltd Printers, Diss

**Conservation and creativity make a powerful partnership. Two organisations - each a leader in their field - worked together for 18 months. This is the story.**

When we were awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund grant in 2010 one of our aims was to introduce more people to the natural heritage of the river valley and the work we are doing here. We knew that there was a wealth of creative talent in the area and we had often talked about holding an art exhibition. The HLF grant helped us realise this ambition by developing a partnership with the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts. Using their experience and expertise, our Creative Group was established in 2012. Members of the group were able to learn about the wildlife, habitats and history of the LOHP area and use this new knowledge to inspire art, craft, photography, writing, music and dance.

The group's exhibitions, held in village halls in the Lophams, Thelnetham and Blo' Norton last October, were a great success, enjoyed by many visitors over two weekends. We are grateful to all the participants for the time and talent they invested in the project and hope that, although the HLF funded work has ended, the participants will continue to be inspired by this very special part of the countryside.

Jo Pitt, LOHP Chair.

The LOHP Creative Group project followed on from the Sainsbury Centre's HLF project *The Culture of the Countryside*, working throughout East Anglia

with local people and heritage. We started the LOHP work using our world art collections, but the project developed, gathered its own momentum and changed direction completely, which was exactly right. Between us all, the photographers, textile artists, painters, writers, carvers and musicians gradually shared more and more ideas about how to intensify our scrutiny of the area and make wonderful art works in response to the Little Ouse headwaters. Mike Harding led excellent wildlife and landscape walks on the LOHP sites. Tim Holt Wilson brought in a pair of venerable, gnarled marshman's leather waders, along with some exquisite damask table linen made for Redgrave Hall. This range, from the rough skills of managing the land to the highly refined country house table-ware, inspired us to make use of the land's resources. People made delicate papers from plants and felt creatures from local sheep's wool, paintings from bird's nests and sweeping vistas of fens and woods.

When all the works were brought together for the exhibitions in the village halls at Lopham, Thelnetham and Blo' Norton, the extent, variety and quality of work made by professional and amateur artists alike became apparent. [Veronica Sekules](#), creative project curator, Deputy director and head of education and research SCVA

This newsletter can only give a tiny glimpse of the breadth and depth of the creative group's work. For more detail get a copy of 'Sources' - see back page.

## New ideas, new experiences, new ways of working

Background work over 18 months for the Creative Group included expert guided walks, talks, visits, demonstrations and workshops as well as discussions of the group members' own work as it progressed. Photos by Liz Ballard



Sheila's painting, used for the exhibition poster



Examining a hand-printed linen curtain



Paper-making workshop

## Sheila Tilmouth

I became involved in this project following a residency at Redgrave Fen and Lopham Fen with the Fen Raft Spider, working with Helen Smith. I relished the opportunity to work artistically with a group of people sharing skills, experience and local knowledge.

Group meetings had already begun when I came on board. The SCVA broadened the project and put it in context within a wider view of the world: stimulating and facilitating talks, workshops, walks and museum visits. These covered areas as diverse as textiles, thatching, papermaking, natural dyes, linen production and photography, and also looked at other people's responses to their environment from around the world.



The regular show and tell sessions made us realize that our small contributions grew in relevance when seen within the groups' activities and wove a rich and varied response to the Little Ouse Headwaters. Later on special interest groups formed and ran their own workshops. I was very keen on papermaking which I'd never done before. There were fantastic diverse results as everyone sourced their own materials.

The exhibition was a wonder ... an example of small contributions coming together to make something larger than the parts and the experience SCVA brought to how it was displayed really lifted it.

I enjoyed the creative project enormously and very much hope the group can continue with it for a while.



## Reflections on the exhibitions

It's great to see a project being run by enthusiastic, energetic people, which is not just conserving wild places but bringing people and communities together, bringing in artists and looking at the countryside through a whole new set of eyes.

**Phil Rothwell, Heritage Lottery Fund**

It's amazing to get such a rich variety of work in a local village hall exhibition.

**Amanda Geitner, Chief Curator of the Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts**

Like weavers, the Sainsbury Centre team have woven dozens of us into the mix, contributing their creativity and their commitment.

**Tim Holt Wilson, Creative group member**

I heard about the project through two friends and it sounded interesting. I've met new people and had a go at new crafts. I've learnt an awful lot about butterflies and moths which I didn't know before.

**Mary Watkins, Creative group member**

## From the visitors' books

Making me see the fens in a new way. The range of species is amazing.

Very uplifting exhibition, about a very special place in the world.

Really interesting to see actual photos and then artwork related to the project area.

A fascinatingly informative as well as inspirational exhibition.

So beautiful - we could not leave!

It's very impressive on both counts - the vision of the LOHP Trustees to conceive it and the SCVA for actually making it happen.

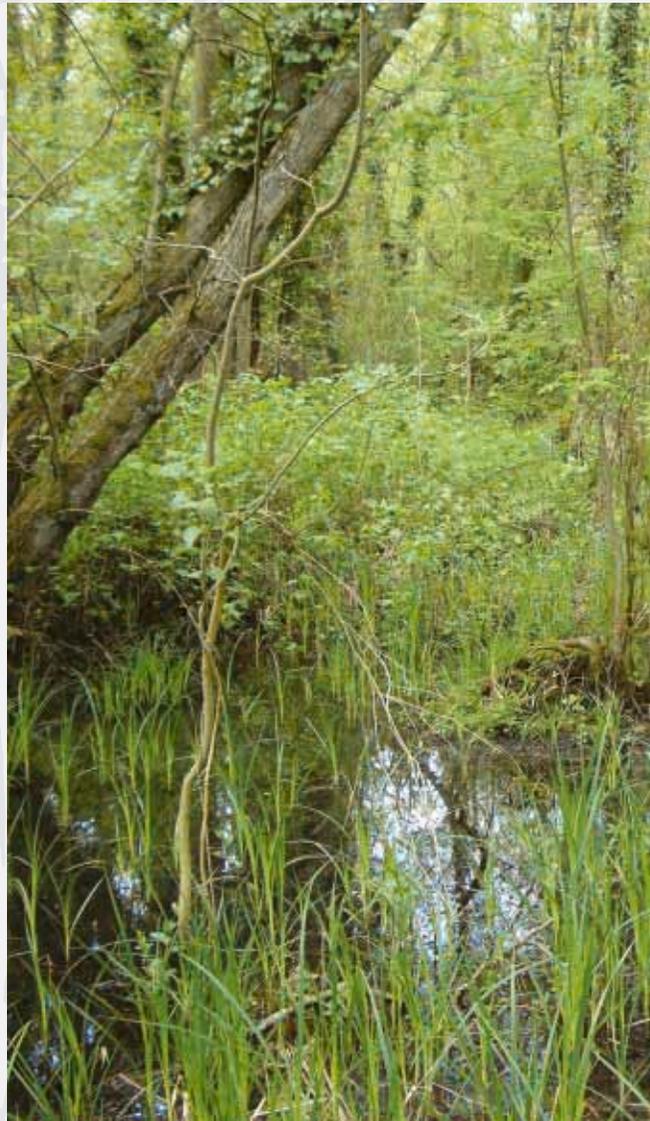
Gives such an intimate glimpse into the creative heart of this community - makes you wish you were a part of it.

Wonderful to see such an impressive interaction between nature and art...

## Becky Whatley

I went on the photography course and took some pictures of Blo' Norton Fen, then made an oil painting of the panoramic view from floor to tree tops. On another LOHP outing - to Francis Cupiss Ltd printers in Diss - I did a type-setting of the words (see below) to go with the painting. I made a woodcut of part of the view in the painting, and printed that at Cupiss.

**Blo' Norton Fen, May 25th, 2013, mid-day**  
**gentle, moist, calm, greening Spring**



The creative group included several writers in prose and verse, some of whom performed at the end of exhibition party.

## A Norfolk Church

At Lopham South an ancient church with Norman tower so very old description now in shortened verse wax lyrical at Eastertide.

How majestic are the yews the Irish kind with berries red which grow along a narrow path leading to a lichened gate.

Ah, history!...what tales can tell of worshippers and vicars too her crumbling stones in need repair from ravages of seasoned time.

Thus we leave this hallowed place with daffodils in April sun to catch a glimpse of Arcady Blo'Norton and Garboldisham.

Stephen Glason



Gill Farlem made a study of a birch log on paper with pastels and watercolour pens, then created a soft, felt version with multicoloured wools.

## Dancing in the Little Ouse Headwaters - Kenninghall Morris



It all began when Anne Marie Clark turned up at our weekly Morris practice. She hadn't come to swell our numbers but instead to invite us to join in with the LOHP Creative Group. Most of us were familiar with the work of the LOHP (and Suffolk Wildlife Trust) and one of our musicians is an LOHP trustee, so it wasn't that we didn't want to be involved - more that we weren't sure how we could be 'creative'.

It was winter: the time most Morris sides try to learn new dances and we needed to expand our repertoire. So, with the project in mind, we set about making up a dance of our own. Within a week or two, the music had been chosen - a traditional Morris tune called 'The Bear Dance' - and we had the beginnings of the chorus. The chorus is critical since it comes between every figure so the audience has to look at it repeatedly and this of all the elements of the dance had to reflect the LOHP and the Little Ouse River itself.



Our chorus represents the motion of the river itself, from source to sea. Another creative aspect of the development of the dance, which surprised us a bit, was the use of video. In order to help my husband practise at home, I recorded the dance on video. As I watched the playback, I realised just how useful it was to have a visual reminder of what we'd been creating. Once we overcame our embarrassment at watching ourselves, it proved more than just an aide memoire and became food for thought for further developments.

Our inaugural performance was at the Kenninghall Midsummer revels. The full dance was later filmed outside Bardwell Mill and can be seen on Youtube. It has now become part of our regular repertoire and we danced it in North Lopham, Thelnetam and Attleborough before taking it 'home' and performing at the SWT Apple Day and, of course, at the LOHP Creative Group Exhibition.

Sue Brooks

## Aqua vita - Divine Water

I, Spirit of the West, element of water, bequeath to you, sparkling streams, babbling brooks, wide meandering rivers.

Cascading waterfalls, shimmering, iridescent ribbons of rainbow light,

Oceans, seas, abundant, effulgent, brimming with life.

All creatures of sea and shore, from flashing fish swimming in silvery shoals, wildly leaping salmon. Dolphin dancers, leviathan whales, navigating my deepest depths. All come under my protection.

Behold my spirit shines from the very heights to the very depths.

Visit my sacred springs, my healing wells, once hallowed, venerated, revered, honoured. Many travelled the ancient tracks. Over thousands of years they came to pay homage, for without me no life would be.

Water - cleansing, purifying, nurturing. Creating abundance, creating chaos, creating destruction. An indestructible force am I.

Rivers, your life's blood. Living arteries, veins sinuously gliding, sliding through labyrinthine landscapes. Desecrate, despoil, destroy these - and death will dance upon your shrunken, shrivelled skins!

For I am the tide of life! In my waters all life began. The ebb and flow of my currents are one with the moon.

My gifts? Those of fertility, compassion, healing. Tears of grief or joy, despair or happiness, all emotions flow through my element.

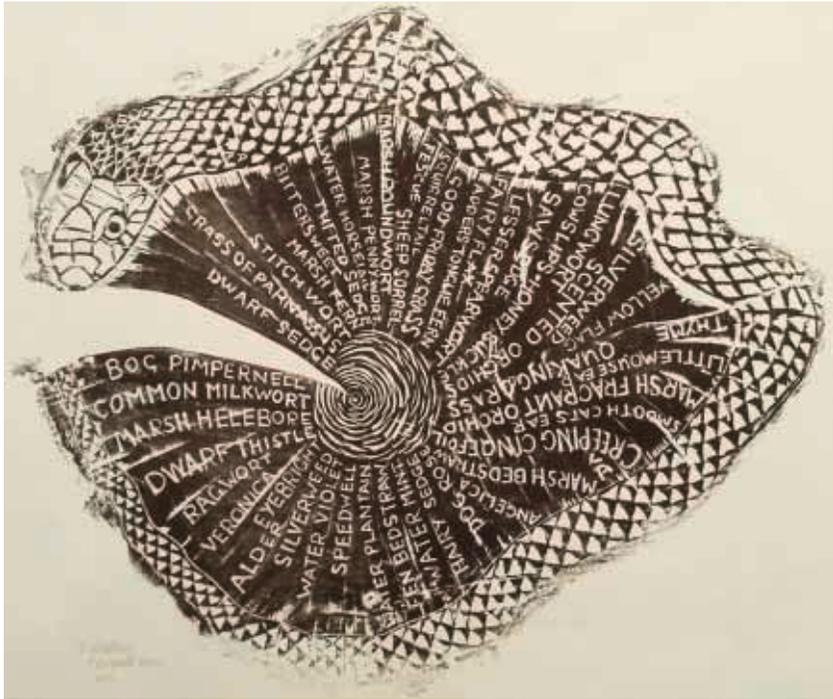
I am the Spirit of the West, element of water. Eternally seek my greatest gifts - inner wisdom, mysteries of the unconscious mind, gifts of intuition, dreams, compassionate love for one another and all sentient beings.

This is the nature of my element ..... Aqua Vita.

Anne-Marie Clark

# Fostering Young Talent at Hopton Primary School

## What the children did and thought....



### David Whatley

Following the talk at the Sainsbury Centre about the Amazonian Indians and their vibrant culture, myths and symbolic imagery, I reflected on what equivalents we might have in our own culture. During the late Spring I discovered a large Grass Snake in a field, and decided to represent Urorobus, the snake, as a spirit guarding one of the fenland sites with some names of the wild flowering plants as its habitat. Water is at the centre, welling up. The task of maintaining the balance of the wetland habitat is a delicate one. The printing block was made from a slice of a willow tree felled in January 2013.

The block was planed and sanded smooth and the snake design was drawn on the surface before there were any splits. The design represents Urorobus, a symbol of eternity; a snake devouring its own tail. Subsequently, through drying out, the block split into its present form; remarkably conveniently for the integrity of the image avoiding a break in the snake except at the tip of its tail.

Providential?



Photos by Rosemary Humphries and Kate Jones

Willow Class (Reception & Year One) made winter trees on warm or cold tissue backgrounds

"My Mummy was at the Share Day". Ryan aged 4

"The best bit was sticking the backgrounds. All blue colours." George aged 4.

"I liked the sparkles because they were like frosty leaves." Isobel aged 5.

"The bit where I did the tree branch pointing down was best. It was starting to fall off in a storm." Finley aged 5.

"Mine was ice. I loved the whole thing. Everything!" David aged 5.



Oak Class enjoyed using just three colours to make vivid pictures

"I liked mixing the colours together and seeing what happens, and I liked looking at what the other classes were doing." Jessica Year 3

"I liked the Art day with the trees, when I saw them I was amazed!" Ben Year 3

"I liked painting trees with three unusual colours, it was a fantastic journey - colourful and creative" Cassie Year 4.



"I enjoyed experimenting with ink on a sharp stick - I had fun doing art portraits of trees" Gracie Year 4

"I learned that you only need 3 colours to make a masterpiece!" Kian Year 5

"I learnt that trees with leaves was easier, trees without leaves was harder" Paul Year 5



## Hopton School - visit and workshops

The school were very receptive to the suggestion that the LOHP could run workshops for them, and they took it on as a whole school project for the autumn. Artist Rosemary Humphries and LOHP volunteer Sue Lawrence worked with the children, staff and parents to introduce the sites and share ideas and approaches.

The children visited the central LOHP sites and made 'journey sticks' to help them record what they saw. A month later the whole school had a day of art workshops. Working with Rosemary and Sue, the older children took 'the trees' as a theme. They looked at simplifying shapes, using restricted colours and had fun using ink, water and twigs. Rosemary showed how to focus on one shape in the branches and start with that, building outwards. A tree looks complicated but isn't if tackled this way. Drawings developed in many wonderful individual ways. The children then used just three colours

from the colour wheel, learning that using fewer colours is not only easier but produces better, more harmonious results. No 'mud' here! Greys and browns came from their limited colour choices and therefore supported their bright colours. The children were free to express their own work, but without the bothersome questions of 'what colour should I use to get that?' Instead, they were asking 'what can these colours do for me?'

In the afternoon the children graduated on to using Rosemary's favourite tool: sharpened twigs from the hedgerows - and they worked on heavier paper. They used the same themes but the freedom of not being able to fully control a twig resulted in wonderfully refreshing works, made often with broad smiles on their faces. Garden water sprayers (in adult hands!) were used to dampen some work, with paint added, to see the effects.



*Floods in Hinderclay Woods - Rosemary Humphries*

### An artist/teacher reflects

I feel strongly that art should respond to place and time. Since moving here three years ago, the LOHP areas have been a haven of inspiration for me. I like capturing 'moments in time', for instance the floods of early 2013. While sketching for this painting, my chair kept sinking and I got strange looks from passing walkers!

It was wonderful working with Hopton School. The children found their visit to the fens really exciting and I think that response shows in their paintings. The staff did a superb job of preparing the work for the exhibition.



*Photos by Kate Jones, Rosemary Humphries and Andy Crouch*

## Sources

Tim Holt Wilson describes the genesis of a beautiful book - born out of the creative group's work.

A pair of 19th century marshman's waders are a symbol of the centuries of labour which tamed the headwaters of the Little Ouse. Streams were reshaped and low-lying land was drained; water was considered a nuisance, best sent quickly seawards. Changes in the rural economy meant that peat and reeds were no longer cut, horses and cattle were no longer kept; water levels fell, peat wasted; trees and scrub grew; pollution entered the system. Many of the historic fens and damp meadows of the valley floor became neglected or reclaimed for agriculture.

'Sources' explores the ageless life of water in the valley and its tributaries, and its relationship to people, places, plants and animals. It is also a tribute to the ecological restoration and rewilding work of the LOHP in the five parishes.

'Sources' is a beautiful compilation of words and photographs available in hardback or paperback format.

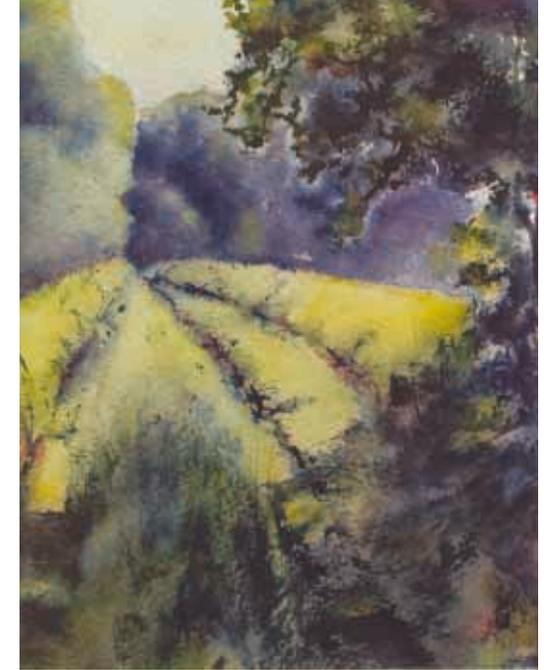
Contact Tim at [timholtwilson@onetel.com](mailto:timholtwilson@onetel.com) for more details.



Suffolk valleys from Hodskinsons map 1786



Sue Downie and other members of the Lopham Art group took enthusiastic part in making pieces for the species wall. Sue who has been an amateur artist for many years used this as an exercise, producing each piece in a completely different technique ranging from watercolour and ink, to mixed media. Sue's paintings also include landscapes such as this watercolour of Blo' Norton Fen. The title 'Indigo Green / Blo' Norton Fen' was inspired by a talk by Ian Howard and Sally Mills on the local production of indigo blue dye from woad. Sue used indigo to mix the green of the foliage. Locally sourced indigo is not used to make watercolour but the commercially available pigment has a similar colour.



Sally Mills, textile designer, was attracted to the project by reading about it in the Newsletter. She gains inspiration for her work from frequent walks on Blo' Norton Fen, and used blue from the plant, woad, to make this design of fish found in the Little Ouse: perch, stickleback, roach and chub. The best part of the project for her was meeting such a lot of nice and creative people.



## The Little Ouse Headwaters Project

Thanks to all the SCVA staff and volunteers, and to the LOHP volunteers who made this creative group project such a rip-roaring success.

To find out more about our conservation and restoration work and how you can get involved see [www.lohp.org.uk](http://www.lohp.org.uk)

Contact us: [enquiries@lohp.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@lohp.org.uk) or 07500 044587