

# **Flora & Fauna Field Notes**

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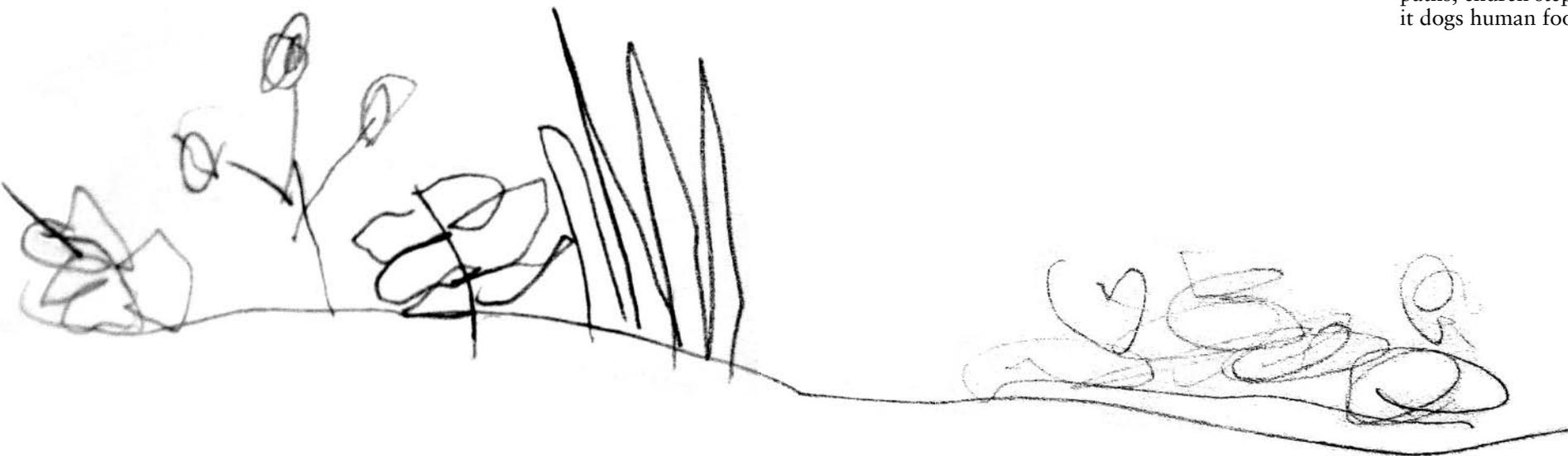
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Field Notes**

HELEN STRATFORD

## Synopsis

Flora & Fauna Field Notes is a record of an urban ramble that took place over 3 hours in the Castlegate area of Sheffield on Sunday 21st June 2015. Urban Botanist Christine Thuring joined a shifting group of walkers and myself, looking in detail at wild spaces and domesticated species, exotic and native, ornamental and blown in. Anthropologist Tim Neal took field notes of the group as an urban species while we wandered around the periphery of the regeneration area down Snig Hill (past the Black Swan or Mucky Duck while thinking about the Snig Elephant), into Love Square (uncovering the medicinal secrets of plantain growing alongside ominous Buddleia) we walked alongside the greenway and the River Don to Blonk Street bridge, (looking at horse head height windows and getting very excited about Ivy-leaved Toadflax).

We gathered evidence, made notes and talked about regeneration, rough sleepers, maintained wildness, wild maintenance, the native and the exotic, reconsidered weeds and how these terms might be reviewed in relation to the city and human inhabitation. With this in mind a recurring quote, which Christine beautifully recounted, was that of Richard Mabey from his book 'Weeds,' specifically Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), "the mother of worts", "defined by its habit and habitat. It thrives in roadways, field-paths, church steps. In the most literal sense, it dogs human footsteps."



Flora & Fauna Field Notes was supported by Yorkshire Artspace/AHRC Microgrant and developed for Castlegate Festival, Sheffield 21st/22nd June 2015. In this publication the black text is a transcript of a sound recording of conversations during part of the walk. The red text is a collection of field notes of the group's actions and interactions taken by Tim Neal.



Do you want to direct?

We could talk a little bit about this space. We'll move on quite quickly because the rest of the group were here for a quite a while. I didn't know much about this place. It's called Love Square. It's a triangle.

(Laughter).

When we were here earlier we were talking about how it appears. What are the words we might use to describe it in terms of how it currently is? Some people said it was like a wasteland. Some people said it was nature. We also observed the fact that someone is sleeping rough over there. Where is the position of this in relation to the city, and what will it become? We also talked about the fact that people have been walking through, and that this isn't an actual maintained route. This is just a route that people take, and it's developed through people's paths, their daily routines to get somewhere. Then to learn that this place has been identified as a space that will be developed into a meanwhile use. I think Christine could give a bit more informed information. Where that sits within the regeneration plans in the city. Is it just a space that will be temporarily on the way to then becoming a completely maintained or completely urbanised space? We looked at just one patch of ground.

We looked at the values of different plants within that, and there actually exists quite a lot of diversity here at the moment, but how to maintain that? I think a lot of things are coming out. How values are put on certain plants.

We could draw more out. What if we all looked over this way?

(Footsteps).

Everyone pick a word or up to three words to describe what you perceive.

Buddleia.

What was that, sorry?

Buddleia. I'm using that in a negative context.

I've just spotted – did anyone see this? It's a really tender little-, I think it's a hemp nettle. I'd have to identify it. It's not your typical weed, really, is it? I just spotted that now. I think the word that comes for me in a place like this is dynamic.

Any other inspired utterances?

It's semi-natural.

Scruffy. Really scruffy.



I take the bus down from Pitsmoor and get off at the Wicker walking towards what are now the "old" Castle Markets. As I walk along I wonder who actually knows what is going on today? I walk up towards Castlegate where I think I am supposed to meet Helen under the old sign at the top of the hill. I get there, look around but don't recognise anybody.

I wonder where all the old shoppers have gone? I stand around waiting and in the distance, at the top of the hill near the tramlines, I hear a metallic voice and wonder if that is some sort of guided tour taking place? I walk back up but the voice is that of the pedestrian crossing announcing to those crossing the road to beware of "two-way traffic". I stand a little longer and a man comes up to me looking at me and offering to help asks me if I am lost? I'm quietly resentful at the thought that I might look lost somewhere that I believe I belong.

A text exchange leads me to the correct place in Castle house. Inside what was once the old Post Office there is what appears to be an art event taking place. People are setting up small workshops and towards the back of the room I see one of my friends displaying his ray guns. I recognise Helen from the photographs I saw on the University webpages and we introduce ourselves. Helen is anxious, well I don't know if she is anxious, but I know that she has "lost the Birdman", somebody who was supposed to be accompanying the walk. But it's okay because Helen is with an urban ecologist. Cheryl is there too. I'm introduced to her as she waits for the tour to leave.

So what I am doing today, the events in which I am participating, is part of something where I know many people already. My friend from Pitsmoor, Steve also living in Pitsmoor, the organisers themselves, other participants, figures

from the University and the arts world. The question comes to me about what it is that we all share? I step outside and a man and a woman are singing and playing the guitar. Pigeons land on the pavement and I wonder what we share with them too?

A small group of us gathers together inside the building and Helen introduces herself and introduces me as somebody recording with fieldnotes the trip, the tour. The urban ecologist is introduced, Christine, both an ecologist and an artist. I had asked her if she was a scientist, if she cut things up? A sort of scientist yes she says. But I don't like to cut things up, what it is, she says, is that "each spring I say hello to the flowers as they come up again, I say that I know you and, oh yes, that's the butterfly that likes you".

We walked down the hill and gather together on a patch of scrub land called love square. We group together, gathered in, Helen and Christine say





That's really interesting. An acceptable degree of wildness. What is acceptable? It's about how it's managed, in a way, which sounds-

Managed wildness.

Like it could be destructive, but it's, I suppose, achieving a balance between the wildness and then what people expect, and the blurring between the two. I was involved in one point with this campaign to try and get road verges left to grow wild. You know, grass just gets mowed and all the bonuses people are paid for grass cutting, that drives it as well. If you mow an edge, it's amazing how you can have a wild area. If you have a mown edge, that has a very powerful effect on people's perceptions of what that space is. They know it's being managed, and somehow that-

Makes it all right.

Yes. Transforms the way people do things.

We talked earlier about maintained derelict areas, or having plants that somehow can look after themselves. It's really interesting, within the context of the city, that the maintenance costs often come into play. How expensive is it to have a green wild area?

It's an area where people don't know how to behave.

Disorienting.

I'd also say green. Again, in a negative sense, like Nigel was saying the other day. Greens should be colourful. Not green. Green is bad, actually.

Just grass.

Grass or other verdant stuff. People don't see it as something to be treasured, if it's just green. If it's colourful, jewel-like colours, people treasure it.

It's reasonably diverse, isn't it? Quite a diverse set of plants.

There are, but if you squint at it's generally just green. That's how people passing through it would perceive it, as opposed to a planted landscape.

It's an urban common, isn't it? But whether or not an urban common is the right thing for this particular space-, it seems very quiet now, during the week there are thousands of people working around here, coming to the courts, families coming to the family courts, people coming out of the hotels, and the degree of wildness is not quite right for this space. It feels a bit threatening, actually.

I think that is really interesting as well. How do you have something that can maintain itself, but then at the same time, is it threatening?

You're maintaining something, but it is evolving all the time. What you see here is just a transition, in ecological terms. Although the botany and the ecology has a value in its own right, it's just something that will change and evolve. Whatever you're doing management wise, this will evolve to a certain extent and change. It's so dynamic.

But how managed will a space like this be already at the moment?

Not at all.

So this is just left, this is as is?

This is a piece of private land. It's actually owned by a bank at the moment who haven't got the slightest interest in its maintenance. This path is just where people walk to get their sandwiches. Someone's dumped a mattress, no one is going to take it away. There's probably field mice living in it now.

Something will be.

(Laughter).

There's no money at all in this space. Right, I see.

Why do the bank own it? Do they want to build on it?

It was previously owned by a developer who went bust in 2008. All their assets were claimed by the bank. It's taken seven years for another developer to get the land back off the bank, which they're in the process of doing now.

That's really interesting. So in those seven years, this has grown up.

Well, probably longer than seven years, actually. It was a bus station originally.

Yes, you'll notice, in terms of the vegetation, some of the plants are quite ornamental. You can do forensics, ecological forensics, 'Oh, this is cotoneaster, and that is very typical potted outside of businesses.' You get a sense of how it has evolved in that way too.

You can see a bit of history with that concrete bollard there. That's from a former life for the area. It must be.

There's a whole row of them.

something about where we are. Christine takes the lead. There is a perimeter to this small piece of scrub land. It's full of plants that have self seeded. Some that are left over from previous plantings. Excavations have revealed the traces of the old tramline. The square was once a part of a bus exchange. It's been allowed to return to nature. The tracks crossing it are not maintained but are the results of regular journeys. Somebody says it's the solicitors going from their offices up to the courts. Love square has a perimeter. We wonder what animals might live here? We hear that the tour is about having an open conversation. One of the group wonders "how long" the tour will last? An hour we hear. I notice that some people have brightly coloured clothes. We hear that we are in "a dynamic time in Sheffield". We wonder about the nature of nature itself? About what distinguishes the native and exotic? If we learn nothing else today, at least we

might identify some new plants. One person is talking. The rest of us remain quiet and listen. We are 11 people, 6 women and 5 men. We are offered the opportunity to introduce ourselves: \_Karen is an environmental management person. \_Cheryl I hear is a friend of Karen's. \_Frank, an older man, comes from Doncaster that wants to move to Sheffield, to live near trees and birds. \_Jim is an artist invited by Helen. \_A younger man is Helen's partner who was brought up in the country. \_Rachel works with Yorkshire Artspace on grants and has supported this tour. \_Chris starts to introduce himself but then recognises somebody going past on a bicycle, people laugh, Chris is from Rotherham, he is interested in secrets. \_Margaret is from Sheffield, she was born and bred here. She's seen it change a lot. \_Ian is from Rotherham.

\_Tim, that's me, from London 15 years in Sheffield. \_Christine the urban ecologist. \_Helen. Before we arrive at love square we stop on Snig Hill next to a triangle of ground covered in a thick wood bark mulch. We look over the wall and Christine asks us to wonder where the plants come from. One of the men takes photographs and people look at each other. I certainly look at other people in the reflections of the office buildings behind. But I don't catch anybody else doing the same. That's one of our skills isn't it? One person talks at a time. There is laughter, nodding, smiles, and hand gestures. Helen mentions Stephen Walker, somebody else I know from the University, she mentions that there had been an elephant during the war moving up and down this hill doing work. This knowledge comes from the Fairground

archive. Somewhere else I know.

We carry on. Helen takes an opportunity to say "come on everyone" and we walked down to Mill Sands, to Love Street. How would you describe it? Asks Christine as we gather. We notice that somebody has been sleeping here in the bushes. It is said it is an asylum seeker. The paths are not maintained. It is a meanwhile space. My eyes look down a lot of the time. Keeping notes encourages this. And what I see more than the square is a footwear display. Someone talks and we listen someone asks a question. There are hand gestures.

Rachel asks a question: she uses her hands. Someone else a question, their arms crossed, no hands. Someone else another question and as they ask it their hands are freed.

Questions asked about meanwhile space? How long will it last, how does this relate to power and ownership?

We have gathered in this shape:

FFFM  
F F  
MMMM

F - main speaker

We hear the ground is nutrient rich, that there has been disturbance of the soil, I hear something about Berlin, about a PhD. The book 'Weeds' by Richard Mabey is mentioned, then ideas of sympathetic medicine. It's now 1.30 and it's time to get back, so I follow Helen back to Castle House whilst the others remain in love square "doing some botanising"

We walk back into Castle House and somebody at the reception desk, a rather informal arrangement of the table, says that "I've got some people for you".

I keep wondering who it is that is actually here? There are 3 new people.

An academic, a woman, Simon who I know. We walk back down to love square. Helen talks about me being involved in looking at the human as a species. That there is someone taking photos. That there are questions about nature? We hear about the presence of animals visible in a swan high up on a building. Simon says it was once called the lucky duck. The elephant had worked for a coal merchant, Snig Hill is so named because wood was placed under the wheels to get vehicles up the hill and these bits of wood were called snigs.

We arrived back at love square. We gather again. This is our shape:

C H W W W  
M M M  
M M M M M

C - Christine  
H - Helen

I feel I should mention Oliver Gilbert here, just as a bit of remembrance for him, because he was such a brilliant man from Sheffield University. An urban ecologist. He talked about the value of urban commons. He wrote the first book, really. The first English book on urban ecology. He was from Sheffield. Worked here all his life, I think. It's quite good to be stood here talking about this site with him in mind.

Shall we do make sure everyone knows what Love Square is all about before we move on?

(Car engine starts).

That would be great, yes.

Is everyone aware of Love Square?

Yes. Me and my team were involved in it.

I've been involved in it through the students.

What's going to happen now that the funds weren't won through the competition?

There are a couple of creative funding arrangements that have since effervesced. We got some runner up money. The University of Sheffield have dedicated a sum. The City Council has matched that. Isn't the developer providing some as well?

Yes. So put that all together. One of my colleagues in the department has just won a grant to do a very special dyers' garden.

Oh, great.

Did you know about that?

I didn't, no.

Yes. So that is quite a special proposal, you know, bringing in very specific plant landscape design, but touching on the heritage of the place. Not dire as in killing, but dyer as in textiles. Is that clear? I never got it. So there are lots of different pots of money that are coming together. That's going to allow the vision for this place to manifest. Maybe you can speak about it, Simon. I wasn't sure how committed the developer actually was. Are they really into it? The idea is to create a meanwhile space, because there are plans to at some point develop this space. In the meantime, it's going to be turned into a meanwhile place. It's obviously highly used. This is just footfall. This is not maintained. There's going to be a café just in a container, so pretty low impact. Just at the top of the hill there. It's going to be very naturalistic, but perhaps a bit tamer than it is now. There is a strong emphasis on flood alleviation as well, so any water that is coming off Snig Hill or off the road there, there is a low

point down here and there will probably be a wetland or swale of some sort to catch the water. That's the vision, to shine a bit brighter than it has been. Anything I've missed?

I would just add to distinguish between the bank, who have no interest at all, and the developer, who is quite an intelligent developer, who can see that actually doing something like this makes a good reputation for this area, which is a bit off-pitch to the city centre. For them, it's actually quite positive. I can well imagine that they might end up being persuaded to leave this. If they manage to develop the rest of the site then maybe they leave this if it becomes a successful public space. Maybe there ends up being a permanent cafe or something here.

You have to recognise what has happened to the planning system over the last ten years. Quite a lot of it has been dismantled by the last government. The emphasis is now on development. There's an assumption in favour of development. The council has got to have a strong reason for refusing something. When it goes to appeal, Pickles or whoever it is will overturn it and the council ends up paying costs. But on a scheme like this, it's a bit different, because there has been a whole history of consultation and planning of this site.

So there is quite a strong idea of what happens to this site, and green space, public space, is a part of that.

It's fascinating, I think, just a discussion of this space that we've been stood in for about half an hour. It really is about how a developer can somehow see a garden development as an asset, and how they just want it to make money for them, basically. How you can take what is essentially a wild space and somehow translate it into a monetary benefit.

Yeah. I'm quite interested in what a successful public space is, as well. That it needs a café.

It's worth saying that the origin of this idea, Love Square, came from consultation meetings with the businesses and residents round here about three years ago when the council asked people what it was that they wanted to see changed. They said that they wanted to feel like part of the city centre, and they wanted something doing with this space because it felt threatening and uncared for, and like they were forgotten. That's where it came from.

So it became a barrier to them, really.

We are invited once again to introduce ourselves briefly for the newcomers.  
\_A young woman, perhaps Beth, is nervous, she doesn't say that, I do.  
\_The man from Doncaster speaks and people laugh.  
\_I speak quickly I think I make people laugh.  
\_A man says that he is interested in pictorial meadows, working with Dunnnett in the architecture department.  
\_Hugh - the academic - is from the University. He doesn't mention that he's actually involved in some sort of evaluation. Indeed that he too is engaged in some sort of ethnographic practice on behalf of another academic.  
\_Simon, originally a Lancastrian, 40 years of work with the council, a real commitment to nature as something vital to the development of the city.  
\_Catherine is interested in Sheffield history.  
\_A young woman called Jo, has been

involved in town and regional planning, there is some laughter.  
\_Joanna, there is some laughter, involved with the Yorkshire wildlife trust. She starts with her hands crossed and then begins to gesticulate very expressively.  
Helen says we are at love square, explains that the paths are not maintained, that it is a meanwhile space and says what we did and talked about earlier. She uses her hands and wears a very big ring. Christine uses the word dynamic.  
Simon talks about urban commons and institutional responses, his hands very active. Two other people speak about things blurring and about green space and both use their hands to talk. When they stop talking they either crossed their arms or put them in their pockets. I look at myself and I too have my arms crossed, clutched to me. One of the participants who moves away

from the group at times talks with her hands - everybody else has their arms crossed or hands in pockets. Hugh asks a question and starts to use his hands. Simon answers using his hands and people laugh. Christine talks again with her hands moving and points. The person who moves away mentions Oliver Gilbert, once to remember him, a Sheffield-based urban ecologist of some renown. A woman asks a question uses her hands then crosses her arms.

This is our shape:

Ch M SO H W  
M W W  
Me M W

Simon tells us the bank owns the land. Hugh talks about banks in general, he talks with his hands. Simon has his hands in his pockets. Starts to talk using his left hand only, on which he wears a

watch and a ring. Others with their hands in their pockets. The person who moves away again moves away to look at plants. Helen talks with hands. Simon talks with his left hand. Then he starts to use expressive language and the words "dangerous" and "threatening" and both hands come into play. His left hand is very fixed and static in the way it moves, the right-hand appears more expressive with more finger movement. A man on the left talks and waves the paper and pen.

The woman who keeps moving away comes back, starts to talk with her arms crossed and then her hands. Christine asks if it is time to move on? Speaking with her hands she talks of policy, of cities, of plants as friends.

Negative comments about the Buddleia from a man - it is too vigorous, where does it come from, from China, someone says perhaps Tibet. Bristol is mentioned and there is laughter.





I don't know if you're aware, the Adsetts Centre over there, the old brewery, is a centre for various voluntary organisations and charities, one of which is Autism Plus who work with young autistic people and they are looking for opportunities for their clients to get outside and do work in the outdoors. So they are keen to be involved in it in terms of maintaining and looking after the garden. So there's quite a strong community element to this, as well.

Wow. Such a small place.

I hope you're right, what you think, anyway.

So do I.

Sometimes I think to myself, 'Am I kidding myself about this?' But when you look at what's happening in cities now, not just Sheffield but across the country and across the world, really, there is a growing appreciation of the value of green, natural environments and that cities need to respect people's access to those things. Even if they are highly managed and not so naturalistic, necessarily, they're still happening more on these pockets of land. Otherwise cities just become places that people don't really want to be in and enjoy. Ultimately that affects the commercial investment. It does seem to be happening. A bit more enlightened, although there is still a long way to go.

It's just such a contested area, isn't it? It's go so much projected on it already.

Can I ask, have you done a species list for the site?

Yes, we have. Yes. It's quite diverse. It would be interesting to see that, actually. Just looking around, there's all sorts in here. Some lovely plants. Really interesting. Plants with big stories behind them as well.

We've been talking about policy and cities and town and regional planning for a bit. I'm a botanist, so I love plants. I consider them my friends. They all have names and they all have characters.

Not nettles, surely.

Nettles have something. They're not my best friends. Put it that way.

(Laughter)

There used to be 'love nettle week'.

There could be a 'love buddleia' one.

I love buddleia because it's so tenacious. Even when humans are dead, there will still be buddleia.

Which one's buddleia?



It's the purple one. It grows out of the side of-,

On train tracks.

Tracks and stuff.

On top of buildings. That's my trouble with it.

In the middle of a bridge.

It ruins the buildings.

You think, 'Where the hell are the roots?'

Butterflies love it.

It does need maintaining as well.

Bees. Some buddleia.

If all the bad things happen and we become extinct, it will still be there and it will still be making-,

The world will still be purple.

On the Castle Market side, the first thing I saw growing was this buddleia out of the top. We'll walk past it.

It's out of the top of thousands of building in Sheffield. Ruining them all.

Let's go to that buddleia right now and take a closer look at it, shall we?

(Footsteps).

They're actually quite small buddleias as well, aren't they?

Everybody gather round it. Everybody get a point of access.

It smells so nice. And the butterflies need it.

I didn't realise it was so hated.

I should say, I've got about four or five buddleias in my garden. I'm not that anti-it. Some of my best friends are buddleias.

Why is it seen-,

That's buddleia down there. Is this a buddleia?

This is a buddleia, yes.

Why is it so evil?

Just because it's so pernicious. Its roots are really ruining a lot of the old buildings. They get in the gutters and in any tiny crack, or in any railway infrastructure. Buildings, they really make a mess of it. But you also have to chop it down.

You can chop it down to the ground and it will be back up to that height in a season. Some of mine are up there in a season. They're massive.

Based on that habit, does anyone have any thoughts on where buddleia perhaps originates? I just want to get your ecology minds thinking now.

Chinese, isn't it?

No, actually.

Isn't it?

Wait. I think you're right. The Tibetan-Chinese border.

I was thinking Himalayas, yes.

Mountains?

What I meant to say was more to get you thinking of what kind of habitat. What kind of habitat do you think this is from that makes it such a great, tenacious urban weed? Why is it found on rail sidings? Why is it found on walls?

Is it because it's on rocky terrain?

And slopes? If it's on buildings, it's vertical.

Yes. Any others? What about the quality of that habitat?

It's dry.

Dry.

Disturbance prone.

Low in nutrients.

Yes. Himalayan, scree slopes, very frequent disturbance, and of course the place that buddleia really started, apparently Bristol is the UK capital for buddleia.

Oh, wow.

(Laughter).

I don't know if that was the point of access. Maybe that's the first place that it was introduced into a garden. Then it got onto the rail line, and the rail basically carried it everywhere. So the point of access has been rail transport. The walls and the tops of walls, that's why they're so good there.

(Police siren).

I think that relationship between human inhabitation and plants is something that is coming out through the walk, you know.





You talked about it. You used a really nice phrase, that weeds are on our-

They dog the footsteps of humans. They dog our footsteps.

They follow humans. It's the disturbances that humans cause that causes weeds, the things that we don't want to grow. I've also done quite a bit of research into pigeons and cities. They were also attracted to buildings, banks, quite stone-faced architecture, because they normally reside on cliffs, apparently. That is their natural habitat. I was told by a bird deterrent expert that that was the case. I think, yes, you find similarities in urban environments and natural environments.

I think that domestic pigeons are descended from rock pigeons, which live on the cliffs in a few parts. There are very few populations of wild rock pigeons left, because they have crossed them with domestic ones.

I remember seeing my first flock of wild pigeons in Canada. They were resting on a cliff face. It really took me-, it was almost like a paradigm shift. It was like, 'Wild... wild...' It wouldn't sink in. That's a wild animal, but it's a pigeon. So weird. I wanted to make contact with at least one plant. Did we want to stay here for a bit?

We'll probably move on, actually. We could spend all day here but we'll carry on along.

The last thing I'll say, while we're all together and it's quiet, if there are any plants that you want to know what they are, I've got all my plant books. We can give it a go. I'm better with native plants. I'm not good with ornamentals, but I can try.

That would be great, if you see anything en route.

So if we can come away with one plant that we didn't know what it was before. It's only by knowing the other organisms in our world, that opens a floodgate of curiosity. What do we share this world with? I think that's really important. I think that may be the antidote to this increasingly urbanised planet. More than 50% of the world's population live in cities. I think it's really important that we make an effort to restore out appreciation for the natural world. So we can start today. Because it's the solstice. If only for that reason.

This has covered so many of my favourites. Pigeons, trains, buddleia, Sheffield.

(Footsteps).

We'll walk down here and along past Castlegate.





Nature!

(Laughter).

They missed a trick not calling in Love Triangle, since it's triangle shaped.

I think that's got a different meaning, though, hasn't it? Love Triangle.

I quite like that. Three corners arguing over the space.

If you could give it a scorned lover.

'No, it's mine!'

There's a guy sleeping rough here. Apparently he's seeking asylum. It's interesting what is acceptable and what is not acceptable within a city. Obviously, if the permission goes ahead, or the money comes to transfer this, what will happen to him? Although of course it's not a great environment to sleep. It's probably quite unsafe for him.

Asylum seekers are essentially declared stateless whilst that process is going, isn't it? There's no one you can turn to. I suppose what's good with Sheffield is that they were one of the first cities who said, 'We are a city of sanctuary.' It's not great to hear that he's sleeping with all the buddleias.

You could weave yourself a little dome out of the buddleia.

There's some pigeons. I don't know what that is. Perhaps one of our experts can tell us. Do you know what that is?

That's buddleia. There's a bit more of it up there as well. All the way along the top. This is all buddleia, apparently, up here.

Baby buddleia. There's some up there as well.

You'll see it everywhere. I don't know what that is. That's not buddleia. That's something else.

In one of the meetings that we had about Love Square, an idea was proposed to make a green wall on this building.

(Police siren).

But there is one growing already.

(Laughter),

We'll carry on walking slowly this way. They can catch us up.

Where are you heading for?

We're just going to head towards Blonk Street Bridge in the end, but up past Castle Market. The remains of.

(Police siren).

When I walked past here recently, I went down into that car park. There's a plant pot with something in it. I walked up to it to have a look, and then instantly one of the security guards came out to ask what I was doing. I just wanted to see if it was real or not, the plant. It was plastic.

Oh, no. Was he okay with your answer?

Yes.

You should have done a three-hour tour.

Well, it will be, I guess. You're very welcome to stay on. It's fine.

(Traffic).

What's your plan?

There's a little area up there that's quite green. I wondered if we could just pop in and have a look.

Yes, let's do it.

We're just going to go this way.

WOW! They are really taking it down

(Vehicles passing).

It's just here. It's just this area next to the courts and the police station. We'll just have to have a quick look. There's not much greenery here. I wanted to point out the pigeons, and also that the façade is completely covered with bird deterrents. One of the things that interests me is the hierarchy of placement of bird deterrents. What buildings are protected and what aren't. In Castle Market in particular, things weren't protected from pigeons before it got demolished. They started to take over that whole area. Also, I think that relationship between humans. It's inevitably where the buildings are that humans gather, that is where these kinds of deterrents are placed. So that's one thing I wanted to point out here about this space. I was also drawn to this area of green, but I think it's not a very valuable area, from what I can gather.

There's elderflower, isn't there? You could probably get enough to make a good couple of litres of elderflower syrup. I did that two years ago. It was great. It doesn't really take that much. You just soak them and boil it. And a load of sugar.





It's a real failed space, this. It's obviously been designed as a public space, but the way it's managed by the courts and the police, they do everything to discourage people. There's nowhere to sit.

I only came across it the other day as I was walking past here.

It's a wind tunnel.

It's a through route, isn't it? You can get through.

The police are paranoid about people hanging around here, because they say they would then be able to intimidate witnesses. They do everything they can to discourage people from spending any time here.

It's really forbidding, isn't it?

The only time I've ever seen this space full was during the poll tax campaign. There was a queue all the way through here of people waiting to be taken to court.

No way.

I've never seen it full of people, ever.

We walked all along that bridge earlier. It felt like we were breaking the law or something, just to take a picture.

Beyond the group I catch sight of people walking on the road below looking up at us. Looking and wondering what we are doing? Who we are, why? We are asked if "we want to stay here?" To identify plants, do we know any species?

We move on in three loose groups, one walking ahead, one on the roadside talking, one looking at flowers.

We walk and police cars roared by on the road.

Very noisy. I see ACT sprayed on a wall. Several times. All city taggers. A well-known Sheffield graffiti crew.

We stand besides a small patch of wasteland next to the old courts opposite the old markets. A scruffy little spot. A through lane that leads up to the courts and Police headquarters

Helen has to call people up to join us as they are caught talking below. At first they don't arrive but soon they join us.

That's how they want you to feel, I think. We've tried to persuade them to put benches up there and they won't have it.

So you try to persuade people to populate?

Yes.

How strange. There are some things growing, aren't there?

(Pigeon wings flap)

Some weeds, I guess, in between the cracks in the paving.

It's a product of its time, as well as that problem of the fear of witnesses being intimidated, isn't it? There are so many buildings of this period that are like this, that are really uninviting in terms of public space. Quite anti-human, you could say. Just look at the façade. If someone threw you against that, you'd be all cut up.

There's no buddleia here, is there? It's not managed to get control either.

Isn't there one just round the back, on the other side of the elderflower?

Yes.

(Heavy vehicles passing).

We'll carry on round. There's some of the bark that you mentioned earlier. We talked about how some owners of buildings decide to put down this bark mulch because it stops everything growing.

There is an anti-life theme I'm getting round here.

The buddleia is there going, 'No, I will be alive! I will survive!'

(Vehicles passing).

Hi welcome back! We're going to carry on. We've decided to do one three-hour tour.

So where have you just been?

We just popped into that space there because it was just green, but there's nothing of value.

Yet..

We'll cross over to the river.

(Cars passing).

(Bicycle spokes rattling).

(Keys jangling).

I just wanted to point out the building opposite. I don't know if any of you know its history, or how true this is. It used to be a horse hospital.

Stables.

Yes.

You're the expert. I'm quite interested in how this very grand façade has been made for sick horses. How such a grand building can be used to house animals, or perhaps to hide them in a city context.

It was built by a vet. Henry Brides, who was a vet. This was the area where all the railway goods yards were, which all had the big fleets of horse-drawn drays. So he got the contract to look after the dray horses for all the railway companies, and they slept in this multi-story building here. It was deluxe accommodation, really. His surgery was in this little building here, which is why it's got the medical coat of arms over it. He was obviously a bit of a property developer, so he also built some apartments and some shops and a bank over there. It was all a part of the same development. Why he chose this bizarre kind of Bruges style, it's got something to do with the influence of the castle, I think. Everyone seems to want to medieval-ise around here.

This is our shape:

SO M W M  
H W  
Me W W W

Simon talks about the police not liking people staying there because of the fear of intimidating witnesses. Talking gradually comes to a close and Helen takes the chance to say "let's move on". Helen leads us over the road. Simon talks about history and horses that were stabled in a building over the River, talking with his right hand. His histories are exotic ones themselves. Camels. The birthplace of mushy peas.

Christine looks down to the river and shows us the bright colouring of the monkey flower growing on gravel banks in the river. The ice age, introduced plants, exotic plants. Something about plants that came in since Columbus went to America.



Apparently there are huge ramps inside, is that right?

There are. In this bit, yes. This is where Lizzie the elephant lived, along with two dromedaries during the First World War.

Who lived? Who?

Lizzie the Elephant.

I didn't know her name was Lizzie.

Is that the one that went up and down Snig Hill?

Well, she didn't just go up and down Snig Hill, but yes. She was basically a heavy goods vehicle for a coal merchant. So she pulled a big cart of coal around Sheffield along with the two dromedaries.

The what, sorry?

Two dromedaries.

Dromedaries?

Camels.

Oh my God.

They were short of horses. All the horses were called up to the army.

That's the first time I've heard about camels.

Look on Picture Sheffield and you'll see some pictures of them.

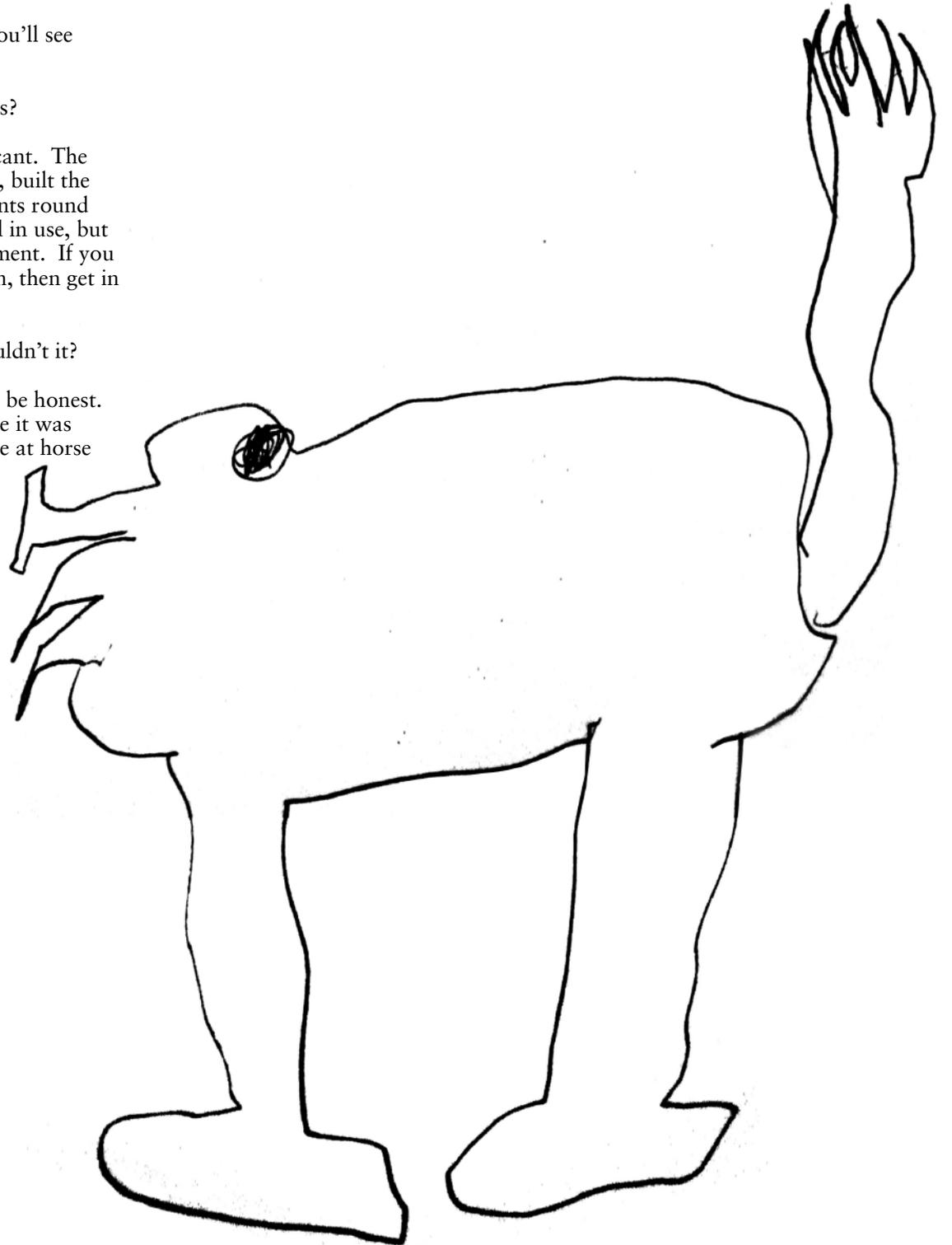
Is it all in use now as apartments?

No. The old stables are still vacant. The developer bought the whole site, built the block of flats, built the apartments round the back, these tenements are all in use, but the stables are empty at the moment. If you can think of a good use for them, then get in touch with the developer.

It could be a training centre, couldn't it?

It could be all sorts of things, to be honest. The one disadvantage is, because it was built for horses, the windows are at horse head height.

(Laughter).







Behind across the bridge two African people walk.

This is our shape:

~~~~~ the river beyond

MMWMM  
WM WW  
M W

It's time again for the next group to join us and Helen leaves unannounced. I'm talking with a woman who wanders away. I break off the conversation to follow Helen back to Castle House.

Back by the river with the group and we talk about again Buddleia and what is native and non-native.

Everybody in the group is Caucasian.

It's a fantastic building. To me, it's crying out to be a bar or restaurant or something like that. It's also the birthplace of the mushy pea.

What!?

After the horses went after the First World War, it was bought by Batchelors.

Oh, Batchelors Peas?

The first production line for mushy peas.

(Laughter).

It's a Northern culinary shrine.

That's just not well enough known, is it?

I'm guessing we're probably running out of time, but before we wrap up this section of the tour I'd like to introduce you to a really nice plant down on the water. See the yellow? If you keep your eyes open for that, it's quite common along riversides. If you walk up the river, you can get a closer look. It's called monkey-flower. *Mimulus guttatus*. It's one of the few exotics-, I did a little walk the other day and identified loads of plants. Most of these plants are native.

Exotic native, native exotic? How does that category work?

Native being that they've been in the British Isles and Northwest Europe since the last Ice Age. Introduced or exotic being more recent. Since the 1500's. Basically since Columbus. Otherwise, most of the plants you see down there are actually native. I think it's really important to recognise, because that make challenge our conceptions of what is a weed. Right? I'd also challenge native and exotic. In this globalised world, that's perhaps not completely relevant anymore. Just drop that seed into your psyche and see what happens.

Do you know why there's an island there?

No.

Below every weir on the Don there's an island, because the sediment gets churned up by the weir.

(Car horn).

The river drops it a bit further down. These islands were one of the things that Ollie Gilbert first researched. He found, back in the 1980s, that they were some of the richest habitats in the whole city, because they are constantly swept by seed banks coming out from the Peak District. That's probably where the monkey-flower came from. They are a problem, because as they build up you get more and more plants. You get willows



growing. The willows fall over. You get supermarket trolleys and all the other crap people chuck in rivers. So they can get to be quite big islands. In 2007, that was one of the reasons that the flood was as serious as it was. All of the biomass was picked up and it blocked the bridges. So after 2007, the environment agency got rid of most of the islands. There's been a very long debate about how much vegetation you can allow in the river. How much of the islands can be kept. I think we've started to get to a better balance now. We've got a new thing with the River Stewardship Company now, that looks after the river on a 'little and often' basis. So you can have an island that size, not problem, but when it gets to be taking half the channel up, then that's a problem.

It's really interesting, isn't it? Something that's naturally occurring, how long you can allow it to happen before it becomes a problem. Then you need to maintain it but not completely destroy it. That balance.

(Motorcycle engine revving).

Absolutely. When the willows came back to the river, everyone was saying, 'Oh, fantastic, the river's coming back to life.' Then after twenty years, they realised that the willows had taken over too much. They've also found otter springs down here.

Whee!

Underneath that building there.

No way. Really?

When was that?

A couple of years ago.

(Traffic).

With the students at the Department of Landscape, we're now working on Castlegate. So, what was Castle Market will be demolished. We're allowing the students to speculate and to use dynamite in their designs.

Ooooooh

Yes, we are. We're encouraging students to work on designs that turn it into a flood alleviation park, to allow the river to actually expand out when it floods and create habitat. Obviously, amenities for residents, visitors and people using the high speed train, for example. The idea of bringing in wildlife, creating habitat for otters and so on, picking some target species, keystone species that are at the top of the food chain. If they can survive then loads of other things can. They are good indicators. Otters are a popular one.

I'm going to walk back up. What we've started to do now is one long tour, actually. That area was so rich that we just stayed there. Everyone is very welcome to stay. We'll carry on and meander along. I'm going to go and pick up any others that have booked.

It's like a Bob Dylan tour this, isn't it?

(Laughter).

(Traffic).

What will you do for the next part?

We're going to head down. We'll look at the buddleia at the top, then we'll walk down to Blonk Street Bridge.

There's quite a lot of diversity down there.

The new people:  
\_A woman, who is a friend of Christine's.  
\_A woman who is interested in the real and not real.  
\_Helen introduces Christine.  
Laughter. There is laughter.

Our shape:

M W W Mch W  
M M W  
M Me H Ch W M

Everybody has their hands crossed or holding their hands. We go through another round of brief introductions. I hear: I like Sheffield, native, notes, river, wind, plant, taking pictures, learning, enjoying, wind, film.

Christine wants us to walk up towards the bridge. There is laughter. To think about ecology.

By the bridge, a boy is drawing plants on paper. I follow the woman who keeps walking off and we go round the corner and are called back by Christine, (excuse me we are going to stay here).

Withstanding on a bridge over the sheaf. I hear the word "dynamite" this is followed by a sympathetic and loud Oooooh from the group.

Our shape:

W ch ? W Ch H  
M ch M W  
M M M W

Everyone is holding their hands together. The young woman talks. We are 7 women, 7 men and 2 children, both boys. 5 of the women are dressed in colourful clothes. All the men are wearing black and grey.

The children are both drawing, we meet some toad flax around the corner. We gather again, our shape:

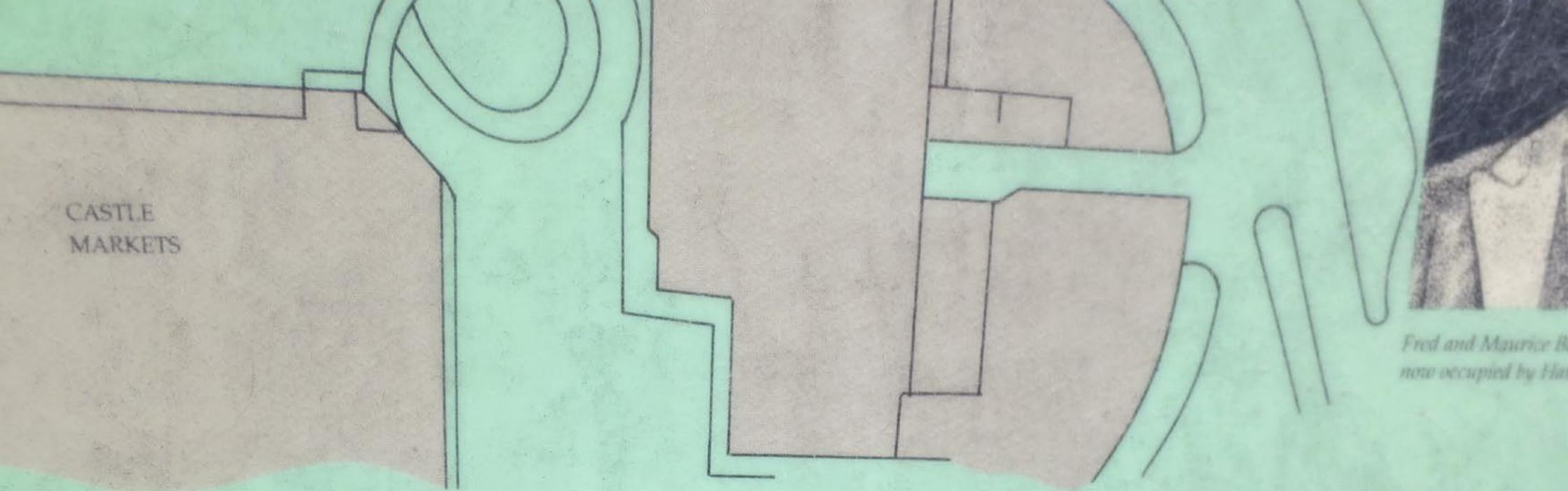
ch W W W M  
Ch W H  
M M W M ?

ch

We hear that the dandelion is a good plant for the soil. Deep roots. I look around at ages. Very hard of course.

20 25 30  
35 65 65 40 45 35 40

Someone walks across the other side of the road. A lot of traffic noise at times. That someone is shouting out very loud "Jesus is coming back".



CASTLE  
MARKETS

role to play in  
quality of water  
against flooding.

on that you see  
32 440191.

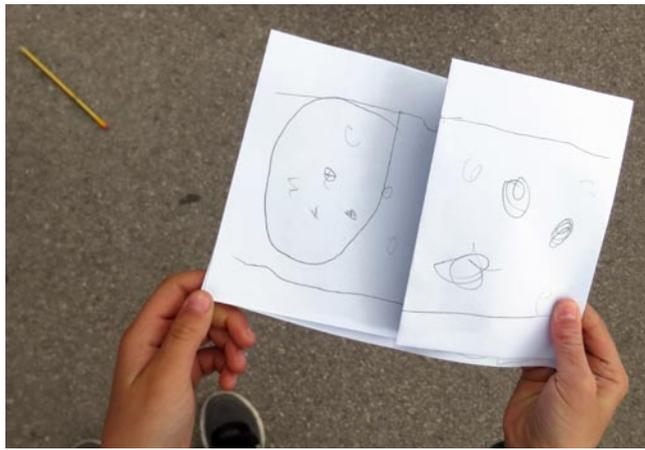
## *Wildlife*

Below Lady's Bridge a small island has formed where sediment, churned up by the action of the Weir, is deposited again. This in turn has allowed Willows to grow and create fantastic shapes as they are overturned and damaged by successive floods. Often these islands are havens for a host of plants and small animals.



*Fred and Maurice B  
now occupied by Ha*

**This Board was sponsored by**



Helen is directing with her left hand and talking about Castle Market. The new urban civic space. Christine speaks. Dynamite I hear. Vibrant. Laughter.

Our shape:

river

M Ch ch W W  
W M  
H W W M  
M M

There's a lot of car noise. We discuss the development on the sides, the water development, something about the greater green.

The HS2, will it arrive at Wicker arches? A man talks about the number of empty offices. This is a very serious note which is being struck. Helen gives along

Hmmmm. Makes me think there's something being held back. Something diplomatic being said.

There's a bit of politics. [Questions around regeneration, about how to maintain wildness in the city.] The Peace Gardens are mentioned by Helen [as an example of commodified open space].

There's an inquisitive energy from Helen and a positive energy from Christine. Is the man negative? Helen talks about seeing beyond. The talkers are using their hands. Otherwise everyone's got their hands crossed in their pockets.

Silence.

There is a strong but very brief silence. You can hear silences. You can hear them better than talking. You can hear everybody talking to each other but not understanding anything when it's silent.

Chat carries on. About a bar being built in the stables. Laughter. Talking with hands. A woman smiles. We hear about how strong Sheffield sense of community is. About the strong social history of Sheffield.

A loud silence.

Helen thanks everyone. Laughter Thanks from Christine. Christine talks about how she hopes we have a sense of the natural world. I feel [a bit] insecure. [I sense a didactic motivation.] Something about 'how to' guide? Something about wanting to teach. I remember suddenly that it is Ramadan. Helen talks a little. Big lorries and buses go by. Thanks again. Helen talks about the 5 weirs walk. There is still talking. I yawn. Thanks again to Helen. Christine talks, she speaks out, talking with her hands. Helen is standing on her toes. Christine starts to move.



I walk back to Castle House with Helen. We have what I've called a 'final chat.' I've not spoken very much. I've had my head to the ground. Looking at feet. Just watching people's hands moving and sometimes their mouths moving. Seeing the way people gather together.

But a talk. I speak about social cleansing. About the way the market has moved but people have stopped talking about it. How it is no longer discussed. About how there is the creation of new space. In line with the needs of capitalism. The notion that there is a drip down effect of wealth creation and in the enriching of civil life, or rather civic life. But it's a very Victorian concept. I talk about Fortress Sheffield. About Fortress Europe. We walk past a pub we had seen earlier on where we had noticed Buddleia growing from the stonework. I realise that the pub itself had not been discussed but just the plant.

horse hospital  
monkey flower.  
prickly  
Sour thistle.  
Sheep meets Dan  
Ivy leaved.  
Toad-flax



Some comment.

For me keeping the field notes today distracted me from direct engagement. I became conscious of people's physical movements. Of the way bodies move around each other. Of how women and men did tend to gather in clusters of women and men. Of how conversation was enlivened, motivated, by the movements of people's hands. Of how people shared bodily postures whilst talking and different ones whilst listening. I was aware of the pressures of staying still in one place. Of the difficulty of moving on. Of looking for gaps in conversations or feeling the discomfort of silence as a cue for movement of the change. I had a sense of in some way the secondary nature of the actual context of the conversation. Being a guide myself I had a continual sense of the tension between taking the stage, being the speaker, and at the same time

not wanting to hold the stage but giving space to other people. I was aware of the tight sets of relationships that were already in existence between the participants. How many people already knew each other. How many people had come along because there were other people there that they knew. Of how the context of the walk was formed by sets of relationships which existed outside the particular context. Of how perhaps the walk was some sort of repetition of something. Of how it was a practice. The practice of movement as a group held together by a comparatively fleeting context. Of how the walk skirted around the area of the old castle markets. Of how it sat within a context of art. Of how it brought together arts practitioners and academics. Of the comparative oddity of those of us who stood outside either of these fields. Of how men and women dressed differently. Of different colours. The children's engagement with drawing.

Perhaps that everybody had so much to say that they might have filled the whole space. Of how there are rules and regulations which generate interaction and how subtle these are. How difficult to map. How difficult to observe. How difficult in particular not to observe without making the event crash. Of how the discussion of native and non-native, of nature and the city, how these relate to people. Yet how people were not discussed. Nature as a cipher.

24

SGPZ



G250



## Urban flora

June, 2015

- Japanese Knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*) (p. 274)  
⊗ garden escape of Victorian era; estimated for clearing it from London Olympic site: £70 mio. (Maybey, p. 5)
- *Mimulus guttatus* (Monkey flower) (p. 301) (H)  
⊗ introd.
- *Cerastium ruber* (Red Valerian) (p. 316: C)  
⊗ introd.
- *Buddleia*
- *Viburnum*
- *Salix*
- *Senecio jacobea* (Common Ragwort) (362: A) (native)
- *Sonchus asper* (Prickly Sow-thistle) (400: I) (native)
- *Impatiens glandulifera* (Indian / Himalayan Balsam)  
⊗ introd.
- *Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum* (Water-cress) (p. 125)  
(native)
- *Myosotis*
- *Cardamine*
- *Cymbalaria muralis* (Lvy-lvd Toadflax) (300: C) (native)
- *Epilobium montanum* (Broad-lvd willowherb). Native (p. 223A)

- *Lychnis flos-cuculi* (Ragged Robin) (p. 146: I). Native
- *Plantago lanceolata* (Ribwort Plantain) (p. 336: A). Native to "wayside" = waybread + waybread Anglo-Saxon names. "The Mother of Worts" since the earliest Celtic Fire ceremonies... Maybey p. 77
- *Iris pseudoacorus* (Yellow Iris) (417: A). Native
- *Solidago canadensis* (Canadian Goldenrod) (366: G). Introd. ⊗
- *Rumex obtusifolius* (Broad-lvd Dock) (270: C). Native.
- *Urtica dioica* (Common Nettle) (226: E). Native to fertile, slightly disturbed ground, eg. nutrient-rich silt of river valleys (Maybey, p. 67)
- *Convolvulus arvensis* (Field Bindweed) (294: A). Native (A.k.a. "Devil's Guts") ⊕ base of unstable cliffs, can climb a 3' height. "probably evolved through part of thousand yrs of the agricultural era" (Maybey, p. 68)
- *Galium palustre* (Common Marsh-bedstraw) (p. 350 E) native
- Bittersweet (*Solanum dulcamara*) (295H) Native.
- *Hypericum perforatum*

### Weeds re-considered:

- dispersal: seeds, transport (vehicles (trucks, rivers) (#, mechanisms, eg. sticky), rooting habit)
- "global signatures of disturbance" (Maybey, p. 50)  
- trampling, nutrients,

## Notes

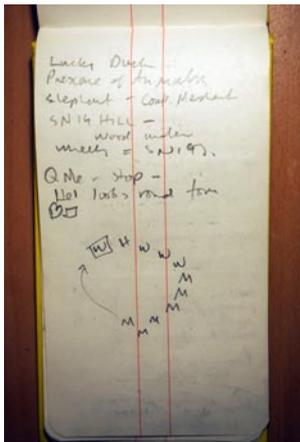
The quote from Richard Mabey in the Synopsis (page 3) is taken from Richard Mabey, *Weeds: The Story of Outlaw Plants*, Profile Books; Revised Edition (2012) p. 77.

The areas in square brackets of the field notes by Tim Neal indicate edited sections agreed in conversation with the artist.

Drawings on pages 2 - 3 and 30 - 31 are by walk participant Jimmy Baxter. Photos on pages 4 (top right), 13, 42 (bottom right) and 48 are by Tim Neal. Photos on page 18 are by the artist. Photos on pages 32 - 33 and 43 are by walk participant Ed Baxter. All remaining photos are by walk participant/photographer Nick Cheek.

The copies of written notes on pages on pages 46 - 47 are taken from Christine Thuring's sketchbook.

The transcript of the sound file was completed by Joel Blackledge using 'notes' rather than 'full'/verbatim accuracy and inclusion of incidental sounds.



HELEN STRATFORD  
2015