

Poetry Kernow



Dominic Power performing Shakespearean comedy at one of the Caravanserai Fireside Session. One of the many Poetry, Performance and Art in the Landscape events held at Treloan on the Roseland Peninsula

Our Poetry Editor got involved and inspired...

To some, the word 'caravan' means the summer is here and the roads are clogged with visitors trailing their homes down the A30 into Cornwall. But for the Caravanserai Project at Treloan Coastal Holidays on the Roseland, 'caravan' is used in its more historical meaning; that of a group of people or 'company of companions' that once travelled along ancient trade routes -like the 'Silk Road' between Asia and Europe. A 'Caravanserai' is a place where such 'companies of people' would meet – a place of exchange, rest and conviviality.

The Project developed in partnership between the Walker Family who run the Treloan campsite, and the artist Annie Lovejoy, with a bit of help from Cornwall's own Poetry Editor, Mac Dunlop. It evolved through lots of conversations and simple activities that literally 'prepared the ground' like starting an allotment on site. From this has grown an exploration of ways in which creative arts might highlight the importance of sustainability and engage with the environmental, social and cultural fabrics of the Roseland, and in Cornwall generally.

Having writers and artists in residence on site has triggered participation in workshops, poetry and artworks in the landscape - both on the caravan site and in the local village. A whole programme of activities has taken place, ranging from intimate fireside storytelling and music evenings, to bigger festive celebrations. There have been Caravan 'awning' film screenings, and local history talks around the campfire, wild food walks long the coastal path, and shared meals, along with hands on traditional skills sharing like willow coppicing and charcoal making, even raft building with Portscatho boat designer, Si Holman for Portscatho's Regatta day.

Si's partner Cat Holman is a young writer who took on the challenge of a Caravanserai residency in July.

'It felt as though I was about a hundred miles from home when

I woke up in the van. Despite sharing some of the same view of the sea, and a few familiar faces, the campsite feels very different from home. It's amazing how a new location can change your perspective. Not only is Arthur's Field somewhere I don't visit very often (not having any need to camp), it's also very new to me to be living in a caravan. It's so quiet and peaceful here, it's giving me a chance to appreciate what we have in the village.'

Caravanserai has included events in the village too, like the 'Open Day' held at Gerran's Memorial Hall, which included a drop sewing session where you could recycle your own clothes, spinning and knitting circles, demonstrations of traditional skills such as Peg Loom weaving with raw fleece, a Fair Trade stall and information displays about the future of local landscapes from Professor K. Brace and the University of Exeter. All funds raised went to local charities, like the Jolity Farm Animal Sanctuary in Gerrans.

Cornwall based poets such as Penelope Shuttle and Caroline Carver, have come along to recite their work, while the comic dramatist Dominic Power and composer Chris Gray of Falmouth's Troubadour Studios have performed as well. Fireside audiences have found out more about local history too, from Chris Pollard (author of 'The Book of Gerrans and Portscatho: From Churchtown to Luggers End', published by Halsgrove).

There's been Sea Shanty performances by the local Shout 'Du Hag Owr' (whose name means 'Black and Gold') along with wonderful music, poetry and storytelling from both local residents and visitors to the campsite. All sorts of people have contributed in the creative activities at Treloan (formerly known as 'Arthur's Field'). Some have admitted to never writing poetry before, let alone reading it aloud in front of an audience.



Alyson Hallett - whose poetry has featured in previous issues of Cornish World - has left a legacy of her Caravanserai Writer's Residency in the landscape of Treloan itself, Alyson's carved slate stone sits permanently in the entrance garden. A simple quote from a poem by Keats, 'tread softly because you tread on my dreams', gives visitors a pause for reflection as they come to wash their dishes or clean the fish they've caught for dinner. Simple words that echo the inspiration of being in a beautiful place, which are accompanied by other poetry sculptures in the landscape by Annie, Mac, Cat, and the fire sculptor Hannah Cox.

Ghost Ship

There's a ghost ship in the bay
cargo of souls, skeleton crew
blue fading to mist-drizzle grey.

Cargo of souls, skeleton crew
the steel giant turns with the tide
old horizons slowly renewed.

The steel giant turns with the tide
like a clock, like a compass
marooned at sea, no place to hide.

Like a clock, like a compass
anchored in endless circles
things come, things go, but rarely pass

away. Anchored in endless circles
star of night, blaze of day
dusky seas all shades of purple.

Star of night, blaze of day
haunting seals and haunting waves -
there's a ghost ship in the bay.

by Alyson Hallett

It's not only the established writers who have left their mark - one family anonymously adorned the fireside with painted text on stones - phrases such as "soliloquy on serpentine", "syllables on slate", "grammar on granite". Poetry has gone out into the local community too, Alyson and Mac read poems to the residents of Eschol House nursing home. While poetry became the centre point of the New Gallery window display in Portscatho as part of an installation by local artist Chris Insoll, and the Harbour Gallery farther down generously exhibited a poetic piece by Alyson.

But Caravanserai hasn't just been about poetry and art, the project has included Scientists like Dr. Harriet Hawkins a geographer, based at the University of Exeter;

'Annie's and Mac's residencies, along with those of the other resident writers and artists weave the local community into larger networks. Drawing attention to what is on the doorstep, they enmesh local anecdotes and histories, revive dying craft techniques and instigate environmental practices and discourses in an organic interlacing of politics, history and poetics.'

There's been a lot of work being undertaken by Visual Artists too, such as sculptor and skills historian Greg Humphries. Greg's enthusiasm is in researching and re-introducing the traditional knowledge and skills that communities can sometimes lose;

'As I was clearing hemlock on the first day I met Allan. Allan is a carpenter who was working on the barns adjacent to the coppice. He told me the coppice was planted by a man called Morley in order to make crab-pots. When I asked if the skill of willow crab-pot making was alive in the area, Allan replied with a familiar story. He was shown how to do it as a child, but nobody of his generation were making crab-pots today. The skill was dying out, but Allan resolved to find someone in the village who knew how, and see if they would be willing to teach us.'

For Portscatho's RNLI Station Officer Allan Collins, the Caravanserai project is just a beginning;

'While working locally I met Greg and Annie. Thanks to them I have now made plans to go on a number of courses, one of these being willow crab pot making - an art sadly lost in the village. I will then teach and pass on these lost skills - and the gap will hopefully be bridged.'

Greg also made a 'Peg' loom from this willow which was well used during an Open Day event at Gerran's Memorial Hall. On the day various people contributed to his installation artwork titled 'Patience and Perseverance' through spinning and weaving with raw fleece on the peg Loom for a future art exhibition. Meanwhile there was an Open Caravan day, where local celebrity Robert Gray (actor, and avid collector whose TV appearances include Channel Five's 'Hotel Inspector' and BBC's 'Cash in the Attic'), welcomed visitors to his 1926 Eccles caravan 'Tehidy' sited at Treloan. Tehidy has appeared in many classic caravan shows and been showcased in plenty of glossy magazines. Besides which all caravan owners at Treloan on that day were invited to open up their own in return for a look into each others Caravan 'world'. These including the ones in which the Caravanserai Project operates, two custom built examples of crafted coachbuilt design sourced from Martin Scarrett, a local collector and restorer.

As Annie Lovejoy, the project organiser says, 'Caravanserai is still underway and the stories continue. They will be carried afar by locals & visitors through memories and shared experiences. It's been amazing to see how the invited writers and artists have responded to this unique place - and in turn how locals and visitors have become involved. This project has shown me the importance of 'being' in a place and just 'doing', getting on with what we all do best.'

It's been a revelation to see poetry written fresh, talked about, recited, and off the page - in sculptures, in concrete, hung on the walls and windows, fire sculptures, sound sculptures - a poetry that is literally written on the landscape. The Walker family at Treloan have created a cosy, friendly atmosphere, and been enthusiastic about the creative side of inviting poets and writers.

It's often the simplest things that leave a lasting impact, and apart from the beauty of the Roseland coast, it's been sharing a fire and food with strangers and friends, listening to music, storytelling, and poetry - both old and new - as the days work is done, and night draws in. There is something timeless in that, something that echoes back through our shared histories, cultures and languages. An experience we share with our ancestors, wherever we're from, something people have shared together long before words were ever written down to describe it. *m.d.*



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