

Evergreen Yews and Eternity

Journey of a piece

1 February 2009

E eternal, eternity, evergreen, everlasting
V verity, veritas, vivid, vast
E each moment, everything, everyone
R resting, remaining, releasing, reliving
G graceful, generous, green, green, green
R rooted, revelatory, reaping
E energy
E euphoria
N nothing, yet evergreen

Please add any words to the acrostic that have have to do with today (very cold, very hungry!)

I would appreciate any writing, drawing, thoughts, about this event, they will all go into its further creation.



December 28 2007

Walked to the barn, to the fireplace for Coal, and found a lump covered in mud, like a seed – I wanted to bury it so I put it in the roots of the lightning tree ruin, as I buried it I found one piece of evergreen, mixed with leaves and grass. I stood up, I felt a pain in my left ankle, and removed a thorn – eternity and pain – the piece began

My first meeting was with Philip Carr-Gomm, Chief Druid of Sussex (and father of my student Sophia) who shared tales, books, and told me to visit Kingly Vale, a grove of yews north of Chichester.

I first visited with writer Jane Buckler in July, her time is very precious but we wandered in the yews then lay quietly for time immemorial under one. She then took my notebook and wrote and shut it quickly –

*evergreen, evergreen
never a sound
I lay my heart under the ground
not dead but asleep
I will love in this deep
deep in the wood
where no-one sees
deep in the green forever
under the yew trees.*

In the summer I met poet John Agard in passing, he asked what I was working on and I said yews, and did he think he might write something. John had picked up the beautiful yew book in the past, thinking there might be something there. I came back from a month away to John excitedly saying he had something to show me. It was a full oratorio! I think both of us were surprised.

Sculptor Wycliffe Stutchbury, who works with wood, was in my mind, amazingly he had a yew

tree. I had no idea what he would make as he went through ideas of how the yew wood could symbolise eternity – such a never-ending subject

I had picked up a round metal ring on the footpath into the yews so when writer Alan Judd, at a meal, began reciting '*I saw eternity the other night, Like a great ring of pure and endless light*' an old poem that always makes eternity alive for me, we met and talked about yews and time and he chose poet Edward Thomas as someone who wrote well about both yews and time, so some are included, though many more mention yews.

Then I took artist Kate Adams, part of all the gift series, to Kingly Vale. We wandered alone, no one else was there and Kate filmed. Sometimes the trees need more than one visit, and Kate returned.

The same with photographer Richard Davies, I had not seen him for seven years but late in December we met at the wood. After my first visit to the yews I knew I wanted to have photographs/images for this piece. Going there is a gift in itself but I never thought of situating the piece there...

In fact it had made me look at my roots! Family that goes way back in Battle. Finding Lucy's gallery was the catalyst – as this piece includes so many offerings the space was ideal, a quick walk to the churchyard – always good for a yew or two, site of my christening, my parents wedding and much family, then a walk deep into the valley, steep up to my father's field, full of footpaths, that he has been turning into a park of trees, what better place to plant a yew tree... And then tea at the Dodo House – fun if you have never been there!



My huge thanks to all the gift givers and to all the gift receivers for coming.

Kate Adams, John Agard, Richard Davies, Wycliffe Stutchbury, Jane Buckler, Alan Judd, Philip Carr-Gomm

Raphael Whittle, Rebecca Marshall, Ralfe Whistler, Lucy Bell

Clare Whistler, February 2009