



Clare Shaw

Carbon Landscape Poems

In summer 2021, poet Clare Shaw was appointed Carbon Landscape Poet in Residence by Manchester Literature Festival and Lancashire Wildlife Trust. She was commissioned to write a sequence of poems responding to her interaction with the landscape and local people. As part of her residency, Clare ran creative writing workshops for local writing/community groups including the Paperback Writers and Art Tea Group in Leigh. A film of Clare performing some of her poems in Little Woolden Moss and discussing her residency with poet Helen Mort is available to view on the MLF [Vimeo channel](#).

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The Story of the Carbon Landscape

Chat Moss SJ713963

This story was written by peat cutters
and farmers. It was dreamt of by glaciers
and carved out by rivers.

It doesn't think too highly of itself –
it isn't complicated.

It was told, very softly, by orchids and mosses,
by firelight in terraces.

It was shouted by crowds on Peter's Fields.

There are Romans lost in this story,
a Viking horde

because this is a story of war,
of fire in the sky at night, of survival.

It is spoken in many tongues –
in fox scream and traffic, bad weather and linnet.
It doesn't mind if you fidget

or are distracted – it wants you
to stare to stare at the moon,
to be held, to have a good time
with your friends. Sometimes, it rhymes
so you'll sing it, so you'll remember it

all of your life. Because this is a story
and you are in it.

Perhaps you're a wall, stone-
silent, perhaps you're a ranger.
You might suddenly appear

as a hare. Your part might be small
but it could be pivotal.

Maybe you are a rare insect,
a bird. Maybe someone will save you,
perhaps you are treasure, or spider –

perhaps you are peat.

Maybe you have been exploited.

Perhaps you will be restored.

The Healing of Little Woolden Moss

Little Woolden Moss SJ68869546

There's beauty in what is repaired,
in old wrongs softened
in moss, and all of its colours.

Though not everything can be restored
here there are dragonflies
and their wings are bright windows –

they lift you.
Here, healing is still in progress
and it sounds like summer.

It is skylark and curlew, buzzard –
the wide sky
where all things are possible,

and the earth
which holds its stories within it
and tells them through curve and ditch

because this a place of purpose
where hard work unmakes mistakes
and though the ground is unstable,

it is soft,
and a man will stand here for hours
to name the birds

and where once there were wounds,
there are scars
and they shimmer

and in summer
the swifts and the swallows return.

Brown Hare

Amberswood SD 6065003727

All hail the hare, the strength of her stillness –
the muscle and fire in the length of her haunches –
a flare from the long grass – all power, all ear –
racing and boxing, half-mad with desire!

Let's hear it for hare – outgunning the car,
outrunning the farmer, rapid as river,
swifter than motorway, bumper-to-bumper –
quicker than progress and fleeter than fear –

flushed out and hunted by poacher and hunger,
the bullet and buzzard, the lurcher and lamper –
the truth of the hare, here in muscle and amber –
in the flame of her eye – still burning, still running

back to old Lancashire, back to the grasses –
a million or more running faster than foxes
back over centuries, back to the mosses –
dear quarry rewriting her story - all glory!

What We Have Repaired

Paperback Writers, Leigh

My kitchen tap. A relationship.
The clasp on a necklace. My mind.
A bicycle wheel, buckled with time.

An ornamental mushroom,
The button on the bass player's jeans.
Little Woolden Moss, my finances,

my kitchen, my car, my face,
my favourite bra.
My house, the garden shed,

the roof, a Hoover. My sanity.
So many things –
a friendship, hedges and fences –

a marriage. A hole in the garden fence.
A room in need of decoration.
A lawn.

How to Open a Door to a Secret World

Bickershaw Country Park SD 6230 0203

Maybe you've seen it every day –
or never noticed it.

It might look like a gap in a hedge,

a dirt track. It might be a path
in a patch of brambles
you've always ignored before.

Perhaps it's behind the shops
or in your memory –
you don't need a key or a code.

There isn't a guard.
Step in.
The air is different here,

the birdsong is louder.
The years don't matter at all –
you can forget yourself,

you can remember
how once you were a creature
in a book.

You are magic.
Trees tell you all of their secrets.
Dragonflies swoop

around and inside you.
There are dark miles beneath you
a vast space above you.

The river within you runs calm.
Now when you go home
take this with you.

Let the seeds in your chest
burst into flower.
Let the sky inside your head be very blue.

How to Save the World

Paperback Writers, Leigh

1. Plant wildflowers.
2. Spread the word about hedgehogs.
3. Spend an extra half hour in bed,
4. take a Covid test.
5. Have a good chat with your neighbours.
6. Buy peat free compost.
7. Visit Windy Bank Woods in the evening when the trees feel like friends.
8. Repair the kitchen tap, your trousers,
9. repair yourself.
10. Restore the wetlands,
11. rake the leaves out of the pond so the frogs can swim.
12. Stand in your own back garden, barefoot in the rain.
13. Rescue a snail.
14. Pick up your friends when they fall.

Lockdown in Wigan and Leigh

When the traffic stopped, birds started.
There were owls in the darkness.
Birds woke us early with the sun
they told us we were not alone.
The sky was bigger than we'd remembered
and very blue.

Then the parks became meadows,
there were flowers.
The gulls sang a memory of ocean.
and the magpie shouted *stay home*
There was suddenly so much thyme.
In the night, we heard foxes scream.

When the hospitals filled with our sick
we looked to trees. Oak breathed for us
and the chiff chaff insisted *stay safe*.
Then we sang from our lonely rooms
like the birds
and we felt our hearts break and ease

and the robin was river
and though it was the end of the world,
a snail climbed up our window –
we watched it.
There were seeds on the ledge –
we saw them grow.

We grew used to being afraid.
The grass in the cobbles was untroubled
and the wren poured its comfort on the air.
There were deer
and the breeze through the door was a memory
of wide fields rippling like sea.

Doves consoled us. Poppies shone for our fallen.
The pavement was home to clover,
buttercups grew in the cracks. Months passed.
Self-heal grew tall on the verges
and though the news was a dream
we could not wake from

there was pollen, there was nectar,
there was bee.

Lullaby of Astley Green

sung to an original composition by Corrie Shelley
Astley Green Colliery Museum SJ70509996

I've tunnelled through dark miles to reach you,
I've travelled through underground lands
and I've blasted through hard rock to hold you
tiny and safe in my hands.

Son, I'll dig you a ton of the best coal,
and it burns with a flame clear and bright.
Some things are meant to stay underground
and others are made for the light

so we'll walk through the warm fields together,
and we'll swim where the river runs clean
where lapwings fly high in the wide open sky
over Bickershaw, Ince, Astley Green.

and tomorrow it's back to the coal face
where five good men laboured and died
and their ghosts will keep watch in the shadows
and my friends will work hard by my side.

No pony was born to work underground
and no bird should live in a cage
and they buried those men where they perished –
oh, the miner works hard for his wage.

So I'll tell you a secret for keeping –
Hindley Green, Chanters and Nook –
and I'll sing you this song till you're sleeping –
Gibfield and Springs, Ellenbrook

*Atherton, Ince Hall, Pretoria,
Great Boys and Bedford and Fan
May Pole and Bryn Hall and Shakerley,
Yew Tree and Park, Lovers Lane.*

*Michael, James, William and Robert,
Edward and Eli and Tom
Matthew and Scotty, Peter and Frank
Ernest and Abel and John.*

The moon's riding high and the owl's in the sky
and I'll stay by your side through the night.
There's some things are meant for the darkness
and others are meant for the light – sleep tight –
my son, you are meant for the light.

What We Have Repaired

by the Art Tea Group, Leigh Turnpike

Books. A garden. A window.
My self. A handle on a cup,
my thoughts, my mum's glasses.
A printer, my son's health,
a necklace with a cross on it.
A patch on my jeans, my relationship
with my brother. A freezer door.
My life back on track. A page of colour.

My emotions, my dog's bed,
my granddaughter's toy. My mind.
A zip on a jacket, a TV remote,
an audiobook. My sense of self,
my friendships, a teddy's arm.
A keyring. My confidence.
The barrier between art and kids,
a pair of glasses. My sanity.

Love Song of Astley Moss

Sung to an original composition by Olivia Doherty
Astley Moss SJ713963

The swallows are leaving, the last weeks of summer –
the sky like a bruise and the light growing thinner.
The silence of moss and the stillness of water,
sing me a song I can always remember.

Sing me a girl, say, a peat cutter's daughter –
a boy from the town – let's call him a miner.
Sing me the story that brings them together
in the blaze of the gorse and the blush of the heather.

Now sing them apart in the blustering winter,
the sweep of the snow and miles without shelter,
the suck of the mud and the treacherous water.
Sing them a path, bring them back to each other.

It's the close of the day and the motorway's busy.
The shops are all full and the shelves are half-empty
and the marshes are drained and the mines are a memory
and I'm hundreds of miles from your arms.

So sing me the cottongrass, sing me the plover.
Sing me back Astley Moss, sing me the warbler,
the darkness of peat and the light on the water.
Sing me a path that will carry me over.

Sing me the sundew, sing back the summer –
the warmth of your skin and your voice like a river –
sing me the crowberry, sing me the heather.
Sing me the story that brings us together.

What Cadishead Taught Me About Love

Cadishead SJ711924

that some people don't know it is there,
though it's on their doorsteps.
That it can be tricky to find

but the paths are well marked –
you should keep to them.
That there is mystery there

and the water is dark but rich,
the flowers are bright –
orchids and fox gloves, red campion.

Sometimes, all you can hear is a bird
or a road in the distance.
That it can keep its secrets for years

and give them up suddenly.
That there are ghosts.
That people are lost there,

and found.
It can knock you breathless.
That it has been utterly drained

but it can be mended.
What looks like desolation
is repair.

That the cottongrass has returned,
that it can save us.
That it's closer than you think,

that it can grow.