Social and Material World-Making in a Scottish Community Garden

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Introduction:

The Goals of a Community Garden

This dissertation is an ethnography of a space and organisation I call the Bricht-Bay Community Garden (BCG), situated in 'Sea-town' in south-east Scotland.[1] The BCG is 2.5 acres of garden, previously 'dog-walking scrubland', now developed into individual plots, raised beds, and communal areas.[2] It is in a hospital's grounds, under tenure from the regional NHS board.[3] It is also an organisation, whose members are voluntary; though distinguish themselves between 'volunteers' and those with organisational responsibilities, 'steering-group members'. My 'fieldwork' mostly concerned the twelve to fifteen volunteers who regularly attend 'Saturday sessions' to maintain communal areas; each session including a few of the eight 'steering-group members'. The organisation has much wider reach: at least forty volunteers attend regularly to maintain individual plots; and over six hundred local residents are members of the BCG Facebook page.

During my 'fieldwork', Harriet, a steering-group member, remarked in reference to the garden while raking seaweed, 'Something that looks so simple actually has a lot going on.'[4] My broad goal is to give an account of what does 'go on' at the BCG; and I conclude by suggesting why to Harriet it seems 'so simple'.

I inductively draw on eighteen months of 'fieldwork' and the BCG's charter to propose what 'goes on' in the BCG is the cultivation of a 'good life' (Fischer, 2014).[5] This contributes to the ongoing anthropological discussion of how people negotiate between ideals and practical action: which for the volunteers is not without ambiguity, conflict, and frustration.[6] Despite this, volunteers' cultivation of the 'good life' can itself be experienced as 'good': Fischer suggests people's capacity to strive for the 'good life' is conducive to their 'wellbeing' regardless of outcome (2014).

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[1] All interlocutors' and place names have been anonymised, in part because the identity of the place may be established with Google searching. The choosing of pseudonyms was an interesting and fun activity because it was a task in which I tried to express something of a person's character or positioning by the implications a pseudonym held for me – an entirely subjective activity. This caused some interest among interlocutors. When I told 'Kevin' his pseudonym, he was greatly amused. Other names I had to change - when I met a new volunteer with the same name as another's pseudonym.

[2] A quotation from Kate, a previous steering-group member, on a webpage on the website 'Data Thistle' which I shall not reference here to maintain anonymity.

[3] This hospital was built as an infectious diseases facility in 1903-1904, and has been part of the NHS since 1948. It now mostly provides long-term care to the elderly. Its future is uncertain, with Ward 2 closed in January 2018 and subject to increasing cuts to community hospitals. (Information from its Wikipedia page, which I have not included to maintain anonymity).

[4] Harvested from the nearby beach, volunteers use seaweed to provide nutrients to plants.

[5] My 'fieldwork' was quite literally in a field: before 2012, the BCG land had fallen into neglect. Gardeners did not know much about the history of the land, but Harriet and Francis told me it had at some point been a field: the furrows from ploughing still shape the land, and gardeners try to fill these in to even out the land and stop 'my ankles breaking', as Harry remarked.

[6] For example see Heintz (2009) proposing an anthropology of morality or Robbins and Sommerschuh (2016) reviewing an anthropology of value(s).

Under what conditions can volunteers cultivate the 'good life'?

What is intended to 'go on' is made explicit in the BCG charter:

> '[BCG] is a Sustaining [Sea-town] project to transform an area of land adjacent to [Bricht-Bay] Hospital, [Sea-town], into gardens where local residents, community groups, staff and patients can grow together. It has been running since 2012 when we first secured an agreement with [the regional NHS board]. Under this agreement, Sustaining [Sea-town] volunteers have been working to transform the grounds of [Bricht-Bay] Hospital into:

- A Therapeutic Space–for peace and relaxation, for staff, patients, visitors and local people….
- A Growing Space–for herbs, flowers, fruit and vegetables, for anyone who wants to come together with others in a supportive, sharing environment….
- A Learning Space–for sharing practical food growing and regenerative land-care skills, for all ages and abilities….
- A Biodiverse Space -for developing the range and variety of habitats so as to enhance the number and variety of species in the garden and its soil…."'[7]

Volunteers can work towards their 'good life', and thus potentially experience 'wellbeing' (Fischer, 2014), because the NHS, (landholders), and the BCG, (tenants), mutually acknowledge that gardens are health-inducing.[8] The tenure, and thus the BCG, however, has uncertain future.

[7] Accessed 7.4.22 from the BCG's webpage, under the website of its mother organisation Sustaining Sea-town.
[8] This is conducive for the NHS 'Greenspace' policy to cultivate gardens in hospitals. For example see NHS Greenspace | NatureScot .

What is the ‘good life’ to volunteers?

According to the charter, the ‘good life’ is a health-inducing state of ‘growing together’, not only ‘for’ volunteers but also other humans – ‘staff, patients, visitors, local people…’ and non-humans– ‘herbs, flowers, fruit and vegetables’, ‘species in the garden and its soil’. The charter suggests ‘growing together’ is synonymous with spatial qualities of the garden: ‘therapeutic’, ‘growing’, ‘learning’, and ‘biodiverse’. It also suggests volunteers’ gardening is both a means to the BCG acquiring these qualities, and an end through which people can experience them.

I suggest volunteers’ understanding and experience of the ‘good life’ as ‘growing together’ can be further specified and differentiated as ‘community’, ‘therapy’, ‘biodiversity’. I inductively explored what these values mean to volunteers. My broad interpretation, to be further specified, is that these three values are statements of is needed to ‘grow’ together. ‘Community’: to ‘grow’, humans need good relations with other humans. ‘Therapy’: to ‘grow’, humans need good relations with ‘nature’ and themselves. ‘Biodiversity’: to ‘grow’, both humans and ‘nature’ need good relations within a diversity of difference.[9] These values are understood by volunteers as both particular to their ‘good life’, and as universal ‘needs’.

I suggest that, to volunteers, the ‘good life’ is not just defined by the outcome of their gardening, but by their experience of it. The charter suggests the ‘good life’ to volunteers is working toward, experiencing, and giving others access to, ‘growing together’. Although the charter attributes ‘growing together’ to be mediated by spatial qualities, I argue it is more appropriate to consider these qualities to be created in the context of deliberate work through relations with a variety of presences, in space. Volunteers consider these qualities to be both outcomes of and experienced through relations with others – ‘human’ and ‘non-human’. I suggest volunteers’ relational ‘making’ and experiencing of the qualities of ‘growing together’ encourage similar re-thinking to human relations to space and objects as Navaro’s *The Make Believe Space*. Instead of attributing causation to either human interpretation or spatial qualities, Navaro suggests analysing the relation between humans and their surroundings (2012:18).[10]

Later I further explore what the qualities of the ‘good life’, or ‘growing together’, mean to volunteers. My interpretation of volunteers’ experience and the charter suggest ‘therapy’ and ‘biodiversity’ correlate with the visions of ‘therapeutic’ and ‘biodiverse’ space; while ‘community’ is not explicitly in the spatial visions, but instead incorporated into the gardens’ title. As such, for future research could explore whether volunteers’ understanding of the ‘good life’ correlate with, or diverge from, the charter. For my discussion, volunteers’ understanding and experience of the ‘good life’ and the charter are both resources with which to ‘purify’ my interpretation of what the ‘good life’ is to volunteers (Latour, 1993). ‘Community’, ‘therapy’, ‘biodiversity’, three aspects of ‘growing together’, are each a step

[9] I use ‘nature’ warily, acknowledging the rich anthropological critique of *a priori* assumptions of a nature/culture binary: instead using this as an ethnographic concept to explain volunteers’ understanding of their status as volunteers being in relation to the status of the garden’s non-human components, which they cultivate.
[10] I quote, ‘…in this book I take a ‘‘both–and’’ approach, arguing that the human centered perspective must be not eradicated but complemented with an object-centered one. The argument is that the environment exerts a force on human beings in its own right, or that there is something in space, in material objects, or in the environment that exceeds, or goes further and beyond the human imagination, but that produces an affect that may be experienced by human beings, all the same.’

upon which the other can be realised. These qualities both facilitate and indicate a harmonious state between actors, the means and ends of a communal state of 'growing' in the garden: each involves the volunteers' relationships between themselves and others – 'human' and 'non-human'.

Why is the BCG's 'good life' desirable to volunteers?

I explore how volunteers' ideals of the 'good life' - 'community', 'therapy', 'biodiversity' - are in critical opposition to conditions in wider society: including individualism, isolation, and ecological degradation. To volunteers, wider society relates to 'nature' problematically, which causes 'human' and 'non-human' needs to be unmet. Their cultivation in the BCG corrects that disordered relation to 'nature', and relations to self and others. Volunteers desire to participate in the BCG because they consider its 'good life' necessary, and thus more 'natural' than wider society.

The BCG is a garden volunteers consider conducive to the 'good life': a 'Community Garden'. To volunteers, this means the BCG is a communally used space, maintained by a collective, who seek to share the garden with others locally. Ian, a steering-group member, explained the BCG's allocation of both communally and individually maintained plots distinguishes it from allotments. To volunteers, a 'Community Garden' can provide something neither allotments, nor private gardens can.[11] The BCG is specific to 'Bricht-Bay', and as 'one of the first community gardens of its type [in the area]'.[12] Yet, volunteers consider it unexceptional: part of a contemporary global 'revival' of community gardens.[13]

Community gardens are defined variously and loosely in academic and popular literature but I consider as gardens cultivated by a non-familial collective, and which are in response to local needs (Webb, 2020:12). Community garden resurgence began in the UK and US in the 1960s and continues today. This resurgence is distinct from prior historical revivals for its longevity, and for being enacted by non-hegemonic interests, and not being a project of nationalism, or limited to the duration of war or depression (Perez, 2021:31-32). Community gardens are mostly located in inner cities, a phenomenon of urban industrial societies (Pogue Harrison, 2008:44). For Nettle, the ambiguity of some community garden definitions causes the term to no longer be useful (2014 cited in Webb 2020:12); meanwhile for Pudup (2008 cited in Webb 2020:12) the same ambiguity can beneficially evade evaluation of success or failure such as for funding outcomes. Alongside what community gardens *are*, literature makes wide claims of what they *do.*[14] This includes 'making community', 'urban activism', reclaiming lost skills, and counter-normative food systems (Webb 2020: 47-66). As Nettle suggests (2014), much of this literature can be critiqued for an uncritical discursive reproduction of community gardening's benefits, with an inadequate analysis of community gardening as social action. Not only does the literature recognise community gardening's

[11] Many interlocutors have their own gardens, and some have had experience of allotment gardening.
[12] Again, a quote from a former steering-group member, from the website Data Thistle, which I have again not referenced to maintain anonymity.
[13] This became apparent through conversations with gardeners. For example, some volunteers are involved in more than one community garden – such as Kevin and Arnold. Some volunteers are professionally or critically aware of the BCG's positioning in relation to other community gardens, such as Francis' or Harriet's tendency to draw inspiration for the BCG from other groups. It was with Francis that the 'revival' was named.
[14] This pairing - what something does as distinct from what it is – has been a helpful heuristic throughout my undergraduate studies and has come to help me understand anthropology itself. (Cameron, 2021).

social or political functions, but also its therapeutic benefits (eg ten Brink et al, 2016). Whatever the claims made of them, community gardens are a distinct contemporary phenomenon for their counter-normative politics. I suggest ethnography can contribute to the study of community gardens by inductively exploring people's experiences, rather than deductively assuming benefits.

Yet discourses of community gardening's benefits inform the volunteers' involvement. This is why they have formed and maintained the BCG: volunteers understand the project, and the place, to be beneficial. Kevin, a volunteer, expressed this sentiment at the beginning of my formal 'fieldwork'.[15] One Saturday, Kevin enthusiastically said I should begin asking him questions for my 'thingy'.[16] When I said I didn't know what to ask, he exclaimed, 'Ask me why I come here!' When I did, he replied, 'It's for the benefits and that, isn't it? It's peaceful here.' Asking what was peaceful, he answered – the space, the people, and the work.

How do volunteers work toward the 'good life'?

How volunteers work towards the 'good life' is also how they experience it: through their gardening. If the 'good life' is 'growing together', it is an experience of ongoing growth, rather than a process of production defined by an endpoint. How volunteers work towards and experience 'growing together' echoes Ingold's challenge (2020): how can analysis of 'making' and 'growing' avoid assuming differences between artefacts made and not made by humans? In other words, if the 'good life' is 'growing together', is this within volunteers' control, or is it only possible to experience?

My proposed framework to answer this question is to term volunteers' work upon the 'good life' as 'cultivation', defined as the action of tending to something, encouraging but not compelling its growth. Although the anthropology of ethical self-cultivation mostly implies work upon an individual self, I use 'cultivation' to express how volunteers' striving for, and experience of, the 'good life' is mediated through gardening. As volunteers encourage the growth of plants, they also encourage the growth of relations with the land, themselves, and others - considered alternate from those in wider society. I also use 'cultivation' to express how volunteers' striving for and experience of the 'good life' is analogous to plant growth. Volunteers can encourage the garden to be conducive to the 'good life'; yet they cannot control the outcome, and rely on factors beyond their control.

Volunteers' cultivation has parallels with both Pandian's and Lazar's analysis of cultivation. For both BCG volunteers and Pandian's Piramalai Kallar caste interlocutors, the 'good life' involves cultivation of virtues, interiority, and relations, through the transformation of natural landscape (2009: 3).[17] For both BCG volunteers and Lazar's (2017) Argentinian trade union

[15] I say 'formal 'fieldwork' because I had been involved, though much less regularly, with the BCG for some years prior to my anthropological 'fieldwork', which started in Spring 2020. I was able to conduct eighteen months of 'fieldwork' due to the unforeseen circumstance of living at home for this time, not in Cambridge.
[16] Meaning my dissertation.
[17] I quote, 'This book confronts a simple yet enduring question: how do people come to live as they ought to live? I suggest that we may seek an answer to this question not in the denial of natural life—in the domination of what is given, in the world and in the character of those who inhabit it—but rather in its cultivation. By cultivation I mean several things at once: the developmental horizons that lend individual lives a moral impetus and direction; the practical techniques through which people may engage their own desires, deeds, and habits in the pursuit of a moral life; and the material labor that may transform a world of embodied experience into an environment for both moral and natural growth.'

interlocutors, the ‘good life’ involves cultivation of not only individual selves but also kin-like collective selves. Volunteers cultivate not only the land, but in so doing cultivate virtues, relations, and a collective self.[18]

How volunteers cultivate the ‘good life’ can be understood in reference to the rich history of gardening being considered analogous to, or productive of, social order. I propose a partial simplified narrative (Euro-American): space constraints preclude justice being done to the rich literature. A ‘garden’ is a bounded socially-produced order: its etymology defines it as a space of human cultivation within boundaries, distinct from the wild beyond (Uglow, 2017: 3).[19]: gardening cultivates order firstly to ‘nature’, by distinguishing ‘nature’ from ‘culture’ (Pogue Harrison, 2008: 43), bringing order to ‘nature’ within the garden boundaries. Secondly, gardening cultivates order of self, or human ‘nature’: philosophers, spiritual leaders, and educators have promoted land cultivation as a way to understand or cultivate virtues of the self (Pandian, 2009: 19-21). Lastly, gardening cultivates or expresses collective social order: good rule (Perez, 2021), totalitarian dystopian rule (Bauman, 1989: 91-2), or virtuous community membership (Burton et al, 2021). According to this narrative, it seems how volunteers cultivate the ‘good life’ is a contemporary reiteration of humans cultivating order to ‘nature’, self, and others.[20]

Yet, anthropological critique and the ‘multi-species turn’ reveals imagining cultivation to bring order to ‘nature’ is both contextually specific and analytically problematic (Schroer, 2021): a ‘Euro-American’ and ‘industrial’ conception (Pogue Harrison, 2008). If I consider ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ not as *a priori* categories, and instead as a dialogical, or dialectical, relation, produced through practice, how volunteers cultivate the ‘good life’ emerges as a cultivation of *relations*.[21] This is significantly different to cultivating *order* to ‘nature’, self, and others; and is more consistent with how volunteers understand what ‘goes on’ at the BCG. How volunteers cultivate the ‘good life’ is through deliberate work upon inter-species relations: perhaps because how they relate to each other, and other species, is within volunteers’ control.

> As we conducted our orchard ‘ward-round’, I asked Harriet about her thoughts on the relevance or otherwise for the BCG of the categories ‘humans’ and ‘non-humans’.[22] She mused:
>
> ‘It’s all interlinked, and comes back to, that we all need nature. I think there is a lot of existential angst now, not only with climate change, but also the pandemic. In these

[18] I term these factors both ‘virtues’ and ‘values’. ‘Virtues’ implies my discussion’s situation amongst anthropology of ethical cultivation, and following Pandian (2009). I follow Laidlaw’s (2017) suggestion, however, that ‘values’ are also an emerging relevant concept for anthropology of ethical cultivation. Fischer (2014) also refers to ‘values’ in his discussion of the ‘good life’.

[19] ‘Garden’: from ‘ghordos’, the ancient Indo-European for ‘enclosure’ which also is the root in ‘yard’ and ‘orchard’. The Persian word for ‘enclosure’, ‘pairidaeza’, became the root for ‘paradise’ in the Old Testament (Uglow, 2017: 3).

[20] These thoughts have partly emerged in conversation with Tim Poehlmann, for which I am grateful.

[21] I use ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ warily in acknowledgement of anthropological critique and contestation. I use them as relational concepts, to account the cultivation of relations and distinctions between people, plants, and place, which occur through gardening.

[22] Harriet and I called the task of tending to the orchard trees a ‘ward-round’. This satirically drew parallels between the pruning and attention paid to the trees, and the care provided by a doctor to their patients. Harriet wielding a pruning saw and my impatient cutting reminds me perhaps more of historic barber-surgeons than a contemporary medic.

> big crises, people want to learn the fundamental and essential things about life, like how to grow seed, produce food, work the land, be together. It all comes back to that we all need nature – though we have long considered it a domain to be controlled.'

As Harriet cultivates the trees, she also cultivates a conceptual order of 'nature'. My prompt about the categories, 'human' and 'non-human', at first confused Harriet.[23] Not concerned with abstract distinctions, she expresses practical concern for how 'we', the gardeners, should relate to 'nature'. To Harriet, a wider 'collective' (Descola, 2006) has less than ideal relations to 'nature', treating it as a 'domain to be controlled'. Harriet suggests two evidential factors for why relating to 'nature' as such is problematic. Firstly, the contemporary crises, climate change and COVID-19: for which human degradation of ecosystems is an acknowledged causative factor. Secondly, a consequential distressed self, 'existential angst'. To Harriet, what 'goes on' at the BCG is volunteers' cultivation of better relations to 'nature': by recognising 'we all need nature'. Better relations are cultivated by 'learn[ing] fundamental and essential things about life'. This 'life' is not specific to either 'nature' or volunteers, but rather unites them, and is the essence of cultivation. Harriet suggests volunteers' cultivation of the land restores beneficial order to human relations to 'nature', to themselves, and to others; they cultivate relations to the concept 'nature', rather than to an innate state of 'nature' (Pogue Harrison, 2008: 48): they cultivate what 'nature' and 'culture' are in the BCG. In doing so, they rely on 'life', the essence of cultivation, which is beyond their control.

How volunteers work towards the 'good life' is also how they cultivate their own identity. As Harriet cultivates the trees, and an ontological order of 'nature' from 'culture', she cultivates her own relation to 'nature'. As anthropology of 'British Natures' has shown (eg Strathern, 1992), expressing a distinction between 'nature' and 'culture' simultaneously cultivates identity: for Harriet, being part of a 'collective' actively concerned with both social and ecological wellbeing. Further, Harriet considers the benefits of this relational identity as primordial, or innate: and thus 'natural'. To Harriet, BCG volunteers experience an aspect of wellbeing which others have forgotten, innate to human life: to relate in positive ways to the 'natural world', by gardening. 'Growing together' entails volunteers encouraging the growth of not only plants, but also particular interspecies relations, thus bringing mutual 'wellbeing'.

<u>What is the BCG?</u>

My discussion suggests the BCG is a both garden and project, in which volunteers cultivate, and then harvest for themselves and others, the 'good life': thus, as Harriet says, rediscover 'fundamental and essential things about life'. This is desirable for volunteers because it is alternative to problematic conditions they associate with wider society. How volunteers experience the BCG 'good life' is an order of interspecies relations: 'We're all needed, or it would all fall apart', as Kevin told me. [24]

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[23] This also confused other volunteers. Harry, for example, on my questioning about humans and non-humans and 'multi-species community', was confused. 'What, like baboons?' he exclaimed. Now I was confused – and he explained, 'Like there are invisible baboons in the garden which garden too.' To Harry, it seemed, 'community' is something specifically human. The categories human and non-human are not significant. Perhaps baboons were the closest animal in his imagining to humans – and thus the next step of considering what a 'multi-species community' would involve.

[24] This was during a conflict, later discussed, in which a fellow volunteer proposed withdrawing from the BCG.

I suggest the BCG is a prefigurative project. As a counter-normative project, problematising aspects of wider society, seeking to cultivate solutions, and in which the means to the 'good life' is also an end of experiencing it, the BCG is comparable to Maeckelbergh's prefigurative politics (2020: 324):

> 'The term prefiguration refers to a political practice in which social movements attempt to bring about a desired goal or vision for society by enacting and embodying that vision themselves in their own daily organizing. The principles and values of the desired future society are what guide the movement's own organisational logic.'

I will explore how volunteers translate their ideals of the 'good life' into practice through different levels of relations: and the ways in which this translation is, and is not, possible.

1: How do volunteers cultivate the 'good life' through inter-species relations?

I suggest, despite frustrations of translating their ideals into inter-species relations, volunteers prefigure a solution to their conception of wider society's separation from or devaluation of 'nature' – by intentionally interacting with other species.

Every Saturday, barring exceptional circumstances, BCG volunteers gather for a communal gardening session, where 'everyone, including families, are welcome to join in'.[25] The session is publicised on the BCG Facebook group: who will 'lead', and what the activity will be.[26]

> One Saturday, Harriet led a 'gentle' session to prune plum trees.[27] We agree it seems 'brutal' to strip the trees of new life; but also 'necessary', giving more sunlight and nutrients for the remaining plums. Slightly bored, some of us ebb to the raspberry patch, where Susan is spontaneously leading weeding, explaining, 'We want to have easier access to the raspberries for harvest.' Kevin, Susan, Polly, Theresa, Theresa's daughter, and I, tug and dig out nettles, thistles, brambles… and we uncover ripe raspberries dripping off the plants. Susan expresses surprise – the raspberries are ripe before expected; gladness – without our weeding, we would not have discovered this; and frustration - the raspberries are too ripe to distribute.

This Saturday's cultivation suggests 'growing together' is an exclusive order of inter-species relations. Volunteers destroy some plants, to prioritise others' growth. Volunteers call this selective destruction either 'weeding', removing other species from a bounded area; or 'pruning', removing excess fruit or branches of the same species. Volunteers cultivate these relations by physically arduous labour, or 'gentle' patience. Steering-group members guide other volunteers' technique of selective destruction to prioritise the growth of plums and raspberries, which are 'produce' for harvest. Mostly, although not exclusively, fruit and vegetables, 'produce' cultivation has been a significant intention of 'growing together' since the BCG's inception.[28] Volunteers legitimate their selective destruction by deeming it necessary for 'produce' cultivation: revealing the BCG's parallels to the rich inter-disciplinary documentation of destruction being common if not vital in agriculture and

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[25] From the BCG webpage under its mother organisation, Sustaining 'Sea-town'. I have not included the URL to maintain anonymity.

Occasions when this was prevented include during the most intense periods of COVID-19 national lockdowns, especially poor weather, or on national holidays such as Christmas.

[26] 'Lead' was the word most often used by steering-group members to describe their facilitation of the Saturday sessions. It involves describing the activity, providing instruction and demonstration of technique, and providing answers and instruction where necessary.

[27] As I explained in the introduction: although volunteers also attend the BCG at other times during the week, most of my discussion will concern communal gardening sessions. Similarly, although the BCG also has individual plots, most of my discussion will concern communal gardening areas: mostly, although not exclusively, volunteers cultivate communal areas during Saturday sessions, and their own plots during the week.

[28] Other 'produce' includes wheat, and a more recent addition – flowers, which are sold to a local florist. Francis told me: "Prior to establishing BCG we had carried out an extensive community mapping and engagement exercise which showed a strong local desire for more and easier access to locally produced food and to land for people to grow more of their own food. The food vision in our Local Resilience Action Plan (first published in 2011) was for a much more localised food economy based on mixed, regenerative farming and local processing. Early on we helped to get the private allotments at (local brewery) set up and then we jumped at the chance of establishing a community garden in the grounds of (Bricht-Bay) Hospital when that opportunity presented itself."

gardening. Pruning, in particular, has a rich religious analogy to ethical self-cultivation and spiritual growth, thus essential for some plants' cultivation.[29]

Volunteers' relations to plants express not only a hierarchy of 'produce' over non-'produce', but of volunteers over plants; yet plants resist this order by their capacity for growth and decay. Harriet and Susan led 'pruning' and 'weeding' believing that intervention in plants' growth is necessary to optimise 'produce' cultivation. Yet, Susan's response this Saturday suggests volunteers can overlook plants' capacity to resist this order. Susan, and other volunteers, expect 'weeds' and define them by their undesirable growth. It was not the 'weeds' alone which frustrated Susan, but a combination of factors beyond her control. The 'weeds' had hitherto obscured her vision of the raspberries' ripening. Whilst weeding she could see their premature ripeness. Just when harvest was possible, rain made the raspberries soggy. These circumstances prevented distribution of the 'produce' beyond the volunteers present. Susan's expectation for the 'natural' world to cooperate with her cultivation is not exceptional. Anthropologists of community gardens, and some interlocutors, often share this assumption, relating to plants as a passive resource through which human intentions are mediated (Webb, 2020). The events of this Saturday and Webb's analysis suggest relating to plants as such is unrealistic in expectations. Although volunteers try to control plant-growth, they can only encourage it. The results can be surprising: for example, in 2020 one of the trees produced only a single plum, despite pruning. [30]

> Harriet, steering-group member responsible for the orchard, and I are conducting our 'ward-round' on a quiet midweek morning. We prune the saplings slowly, giving each its time. I ask what variety this is, or whether this branch or strap should go. Harriet answers carefully, considering the trees' form, weight, health. She diverts my gaze down, pointing out small pink wildflowers beneath the trees. She explains during lockdown, the Community Payback Offenders had to stop their regular mowing. The result is wildflower growth around the orchard. Harriet explains there is contention amongst the steering-group whether to restart mowing after lockdown.

Harriet's celebration of the unexpected wildflowers suggests 'growing together' is also an inclusive order: their serendipitous growth is desirable because it indicates 'biodiversity'. I consider 'biodiversity' as volunteers do: healthy species diversity. To Harriet, no-mow was 'better for them' (the trees) and 'good for the bees'.[31] Harriet did not expect to encounter 'biodiversity' because she intends the orchard for 'produce' cultivation. Yet, volunteers also intentionally cultivate biodiversity: using organic methods; and allocating 'rewilding' areas, such as the wildflower meadow and dead-hedge.[32] Volunteers' celebration and cultivation of

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[29] For example see John 15:2 ; Benveniste in Life and the art of pruning | Wall Street International Magazine (wsimag.com) ; Clément, 2015

[30] This single plum, was, in fact, delicious. Harriet and I split it.

[31] Harriet is involved with regional rewilding initiatives as well as her involvement in the BCG. During my 'fieldwork', I also attended tree-planting sessions with Harriet.

[32] I use this term as my interlocutors do, to refer to the decision to leave a space to be pollinated by bees and the wind. This does require the intervention of gardeners: to decide to allocate the space, as well as sometimes to plant wildflower seeds, and to scythe the grasses to stimulate new growth. Francis, for instance, has lead a steering-group decision to dedicate a piece of land past the plots as a wildflower meadow. This meadow has been initiated by a decision; planted by the gardeners; and is cut with a scythe regularly to stimulate new growth.
For the volunteers, 'organic' means to not use pesticides or herbicides. The term's recent history is explored in Uglow (2017: 282) – as having originally referred to the living matter in humus.

'biodiversity' is evocative of Clément's 'Garden in Movement': both recognise an agency of gardens' non-human elements, and considers gardening to best work with, not against, plants' and pollinators' movement (Clément, 2015).[33] Yet, the steering-group's contention suggest volunteers vary in celebrating plants' agency, and do so only within certain areas. Over some months, Harriet noticed the wildflowers were restricting the saplings' growth. She came to support the steering-group's decision to restart mowing.[34] To cultivate 'growing together', volunteers negotiate between exclusion and inclusion of plants: whether to celebrate or control their growth, whether to prioritise 'produce' or 'biodiversity'.

Volunteers recognise a potential in their inter-species relations not only for 'produce', and 'biodiversity', but also a health-inducing state which both volunteers and the NHS charter term 'therapy'. A former steering-group member, Kate, explained,

> 'The NHS pays for some plants and materials and sits on the working group, but otherwise the garden's members have free rein. This is approached very sensitively: the first area to be completed was a sensory garden for hospital patients and staff, and the whole garden is designed for wheelchair accessibility.'

Kate suggests volunteers' relation with the NHS does not coerce, but encourages, their cultivation of accessible 'therapy' for hospital patients and staff. This includes allocation of the Sensory Garden to provide sensory therapy. [35] One Saturday in December, Francis guides volunteers to remove a collapsed rose-arch, cut fresh willow to weave a new archway, and train the rose over. Harriet described this as 'remedial' repair, which implicitly acknowledges the arch's contribution to the provision of sensory therapy.[36] Volunteers' 'remedial' repair cultivates a 'remedial' space for others.

Volunteers' cultivation is not only for others' 'therapy': it can be experienced as 'therapeutic' in itself.

> After the rose-arch is reinstated, Darryl, David, and I take the bag of cuttings to the dead-hedge. The sun sinks over the garden, bathing it in an orangey glow. I ask them why they garden here. Darryl replies, 'It's just so lovely. I mean – look at this space. It's so open to the sun. We have a small vegetable plot at home but it's great to grow more here. Alice lived next door to us so that's how we first got involved. Oh - look at that cat on the wall!' David interjects, 'And I really like growing things from seed.'

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[33] The intentional expression of some form of equality between humans and non-humans can be likened to attributions of agency to plants. I turn to Gilles Clément's concept of 'The Garden in Movement' (Clément, 2015). This phrase reflects a principle to respect uninfluenced movement of plants across a space; the gardener is encouraged to have less control over the plants, and to 'preserve the transition' (the movement of the plants), rather than 'preserve the flowers' (or the gardeners' aesthetic preferences). This recognises an agency for plants: of movement. It also positions the role of gardener as a collaboration with the plants.

[34] Others were against the wildflowers because 'biodiversity' should be kept to the specific 'rewilding' areas. Ian, for example, self-caricatures as a perpetual weeder, 'It's a wasted journey round the paths without a hoe to get out the weeds.'

[35] The Sensory Garden is the area of the BCG closest to the community hospital. Not only BCG gardeners recognise sensory gardens as a way to provide holistic health benefits, but also mainstream UK healthcare and NGOs. For an example see here .

[36] In December, Harriet posts: 'We have a rose archway collapse in the sensory garden. As a break from Christmas preparations, if you can spare an hour on Saturday (2pm) to help assess and carry out remedial structural repair, it would be most appreciated and rewarded with a minced pie. Thank you!'

> Looking to the horizon, over the railway line, Darryl sighs, 'That field will all be houses soon.'
>
> As we walk back to the rose-arch, Darryl draws our attention to a neglected boot, on a bench. 'Whose shoe is that anyway? It would make a great home for Mr Robin,' she says, and asks Harriet and Francis' permission. She starts to place it in the twisted willow in the Sensory Garden and fills it with straw. Harriet joins her to look at it. They decide to place it higher up in the tree to be inaccessible to cats. I climb up to attach it. 'What a good idea,' remark Harriet and David.

While Darryl and David cultivate inter-species relations, they experience what I consider 'therapy' – a health-inducing affective and sensory experience. I suggest their cultivation is 'therapeutic' because they appreciate both what they can and cannot control. Darryl and David contribute to the BCG: cultivating 'produce' in the larger 'space'; and 'biodiversity' by developing the dead-hedge and a robin 'home', both of which reuse waste as habitat.[37] Their contribution is motivated by concern for interspecies wellbeing. They express not only their own interests, 'I like growing things from seed', but also those of other species: Darryl's anthropomorphism of 'Mr Robin' and of his 'home' extends the respect of human relations to a bird. Darryl and David also appreciate elements beyond their contribution: the sensory pleasure and encounter with the forces of growth and the passage of the sun. I suggest Darryl and David's 'therapeutic' experience of cultivation involves a cultivation of their own affect. They 'learn to be affected by difference' (Latour, 2004: 209, 213, 226): appreciating what they can and cannot control and ordering that which they can. Darryl's lament of the upcoming housing implies their capacity to contribute to the BCG is experienced as particularly 'therapeutic' in contradistinction to wider social worlds beyond their control.[38] Although Darryl and David do not describe these effects as 'therapeutic', others use this word to describe similar positive affects upon their wellbeing, even while seeking other species' wellbeing.

I have discussed how volunteers attempt to cultivate relations with other species in the garden which are conducive to the 'good life', and how they must negotiate between their priorities, and with plants' capacity for growth and movement. I have mostly discussed volunteers' relations to plants, because they are the most significant inter-species relation in volunteers' cultivation of the 'good life'.[39] My discussion suggests an anthropology of ethical cultivation must not overlook the significance of non-human contributions, even when not explicitly recognised by interlocutors. The 'multi-species' turn problematises the passivity commonly attributed to non-humans in analysis (Ingold in Schroer, 2021). Yet, I suggest the passivity or agency attributed by volunteers to non-humans is a discursive component of volunteers' cultivation, and thus of ethnographic interest.

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[37] The dead-hedge is a windbreak gradually made by volunteers mounding organic matter, unsuitable for the compost. Although it is called a 'dead-hedge', the decomposing plants actually enable a fertile habitat for other species including insects and fungi.

[38] They can contribute to other species' habitats in the BCG but not the housing out-with it.

[39] Some examples of volunteers cultivating the 'good life' in relation to animal and insect species are Francis' and Alice's 'natural beekeeping', welcoming neighbourhood cats, and Harriet observing signs of a hedgehog.

2: How do volunteers cultivate 'the good life' in relation to other volunteers?

I suggest, despite tensions, volunteers' translation of ideals into relations with each other prefigures a solution to their conception of wider societal isolation – by together being 'community'.

Volunteers cultivate 'growing together' not only by encouraging plant-growth, but also the growth of a collective self. Volunteers call these inter-human relations 'community' and consider them to define the BCG as a 'community garden'. Volunteers struggle, however, to define 'community'. For Francis, it is ambiguous because 'the term gets bandied about far too much.' [40] For Harriet, 'It's hard to say what community is, but easier to say what it isn't – a solo project.' Roger agreed that 'community' is opposed to individual control, and is what should 'run' the BCG, 'Some will value community more than others and that depends on the amount of control they want to have in the garden. To me, a community garden is a joint enterprise… a communal venture… it is run by the community.' Harry contrasted the BCG 'community' to the 'gated communities' he knew in Florida. Despite this ambiguity, 'community' is a virtue which pervades not only the BCG's name, but also volunteers' motivations and experiences.

> One hot Saturday in July, I arrive at the BCG to find a boy, of eleven or twelve, watering with the hose, with much enthusiasm or unsettled energy.[41] Susan quietly explains that, earlier in the week, Francis discovered this boy and his friends 'messing about in the orchard': pulling unripe apples off the trees. Francis's reaction was to invite the boys to Saturday's session, though only one attended. [42]
>
> Soon, the boy grew restless even with the hose on full power and everything around him drenched. Consequently, each volunteer leads him in their tasks. The boy is still dissatisfied: he wants to use the electric strimmer. I hesitate, looking to Susan, who replies, 'Of course you can try strimming. But we need Ian for that – he's in charge of the strimmer. Ian will be here next Saturday, so why don't you come back then to try?'

Francis' invitation to the boys reveals 'community' to involve inclusion in an experience of togetherness. The BCG is a location and means for volunteers to experience 'community' by gardening together. This 'community' is self-selecting: hypothetically, anyone could volunteer.[43] Francis' invitation, however, reveals a concern to share an experience of 'community' beyond the volunteers: the boys' presence in the garden is an opportunity to include them in 'community'. This echoes other steering-group members' concern to cultivate diversity amongst volunteers. The BCG 'community' has reasonable socio-economic diversity: various occupations, retirees, unemployed, and students; gender ratio; diverse health conditions (including at least one unable to walk); age-range; and

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[40] Some volunteers – Francis and George in particular - even had experience of professional analysis of 'community'. Consequently, they were critically aware of the term's ambiguity, because they had seen 'community' operating as a powerfully discursive term by actors for their own benefit.

[41] This must have been his age, as in sporadic conversation with him I learned he was to start the local secondary school after the summer holidays – the Scottish state school system's ages are different to the English.

[42] I do not give the boy a pseudonym as I was not told the boy's name, either in my conversations with him or with Susan. I thought it appropriate, then, to not name him with a pseudonym. To my mind, the name only of 'the boy' implies his fleeting involvement in the BCG.

[43] All, however, must complete mandatory forms if they intend to regularly volunteer.

although Sea-town is predominantly white Scottish, BCG volunteers have diverse nationalities.[44] Volunteers cultivate 'biodiversity' not only in relation to other species, but also humans.

Francis' reaction to the boys reveals 'community' to involve ordered relations to plants. Although Francis' exact consideration of the boys' behaviour is unclear, Susan's impression was of destructive misbehaviour – which she called 'messing about'. This caused Francis not to react as he does for other visitors – a greeting or conversation – but instead to directly invite them to the Saturday session. This suggests the boys' behaviour challenged Francis' expectation of visitors – he did not consider it as constructive of 'growing together'. The boys' destruction of trees is not exceptional: volunteers themselves destroy some plants to prioritise others, including pruning trees. The difference, to Susan and it seems to Francis, was the boys' destruction was illegitimate in 'growing together': it interfered in 'produce' cultivation and was inconducive to other goals. Francis' inclusion of the boys attempts to re-order the BCG toward productive relations between humans and plants.

This vignette reveals 'community' to involve ordered relations to other volunteers. It seems, to Francis and Susan, the boys' destruction could be remedied by teaching them more harmonious relations to plants. Education in the BCG operates through hierarchies. When the boy is a member of the locality but not the BCG, Francis does not discipline him to protect the orchard. This may be partly due to ambiguity of the vandalism's legal domain.[45] When the boy becomes a temporary BCG 'community' member, he becomes part of legitimated hierarchies. In Francis' absence, Susan makes decisions concerning the boy's activities. The boy is led by her organisation, and by others present. Susan's deference to Ian's authority for the electric strimmer suggests she considers the boy wielding a strimmer as a potential hazard, and although she leads this Saturday, recognises other steering-group members' responsibilities.[46] Intentionally or not, the consequence was to defuse the situation: she avoided upsetting the boy by saying 'no'. The boy, as any volunteer, however, had no obligations to remain.[47] He did not return, and thus his inclusion in 'community' and its hierarchies was temporary.

> Although Ian did not teach the boy how to strim, he often teaches volunteers techniques. One Saturday, Harriet asks me to 'weed' a neglected plot belonging to Iris, a volunteer undergoing family difficulties.[48] The work feels unending. Ian approaches and asks what I am doing. I explain. 'Why don't you try the chickens?' he asks. I am clueless. He suggests we bring 'community chickens', housed at the school, to peck the 'weeds'. The prospect of delaying the task's finish, or of my toil being pointless, drain me and I almost cry; then, grimace. I have forgotten my gloves, and my fingernail has bent back with soil under it. Not noticing my pain, Ian nevertheless proposes an alternative solution: he demonstrates how to loosen the

[44] Including Russian, Polish, German, American, English.
[45] The BCG has tenure for the land, not ownership, and Scotland has the right to roam.
[46] The BCG steering-group has no formal leader, but each garden area has a responsible steering-group member and some members have other roles such as maintaining the website or emails.
[47] Other beneficiaries of the garden, such as school children and the Community Payback Offenders, however, do have an obligation to participate. This tension between voluntary and obligatory participation is explored by Webb (2020) in her ethnography of New Zealand community gardens.
[48] Including couch grass, a plant most volunteers considered as a 'weed' and a particularly dominant one at that.

> ‘weeds’ with a hose. This technique allows the frustrating and painful beginnings to become a satisfying solution.[49] Some weeks later, the plot is ready for planting.[50]

Hierarchical relations can make cultivation more effective. My submission to Ian readies Iris’ plot for planting ‘produce’, teaches me a technique, and provides me with ‘therapy’.[51] By helping me cultivate the land, Ian helps cultivate my technical capacity as a gardener. We form a knowledge hierarchy: by following his advice, I legitimate his technique as superior. This legitimated hierarchy results in a peaceful relation between Ian, Iris, and myself.[52] This is a typical example of the BCG’s knowledge hierarchies, which are continually made: through experimentation and collaboration, volunteers’ techniques and preferred solutions evolve.[53] But some volunteers, including and especially Ian, tend to engender subordination by others in matters of technique.[54] Education dissipates the knowledge which forms the hierarchies: thus broadens equality of knowledge, through a hierarchy. Hierarchy and equality are, contrary to prior anthropological analytic tendency, co-implicated (Buitron and Steinmüller, 2020): ‘growing together’ through hierarchical relations of ‘community’ enables the growth of volunteers’ technical capacity.

Volunteers can attempt to hide the hierarchies of ‘community’. This is an accounted phenomenon in community garden literature which has been claimed as a means by which ‘social conformity and homogeneity’ are maintained (Pudup in Nettle, 2014: 115).[55]

> The same Saturday, Susan invites Kevin and me to the online platform she is developing, and an upcoming celebration.[56] As Kevin puts the date onto his phone, he says, ‘Susan BBQ 3pm’. Susan rapidly returns, ‘Put BCG BBQ, not Susan.’

Susan tries to cultivate and celebrate ‘community’ by organising an online platform and a gathering. Her invitation expresses equality of inclusion, or access. This reciprocates or recognises Kevin’s and my volunteering. This inclusion is read by Kevin as her leadership, which he expresses by naming the gathering after her. This likely reflects the significance of mentor-mentee relations for Kevin’s gardening, which he considers beneficial. Susan resists any implication of authority by renaming renames the event.[57] She is not interested in making explicit her organisational authority, but instead ‘community’. After observing this, I noticed other steering-group members negotiating away from explicit hierarchies toward

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[49] A fun – and extremely muddy – solution!
[50] Harriet donated the seedlings from her home garden.
[51] Other techniques taught me were the opposite - contributing to ‘biodiversity’ more than ‘produce’ cultivation - such as Francis teaching me to scythe the wildflower patch to stimulate growth.
[52] Although it results in a peaceful inter-volunteer relation, it also results in a destruction relation to the ‘weeds’.
[53] For example, when Ian told me to take the top off the hose as this works better, Jane whispered to me that she thinks it works just as well with the top on, but she nevertheless helped me remove the top.
[54] At first, I interpreted interactions such as this with Ian as reciprocal exchange. However, I realised that this wrongly assumed reciprocation is necessary for relations to endure. I thank Poehlmann, conversations with whom inspired my thinking on reciprocation not being necessary for enduring relations.
[55] ‘Despite this, many scholars are dismissive of the concept of community, finding it at best hackneyed and imprecise, at worst a means to disguise a reassertion of values and relationships that emphasise social conformity and homogeneity. On these grounds, Pudup (2008) advocates jettisoning the term ‘community’ from analysis of collective gardening projects.’
[56] This is a different platform to their Facebook group. Susan started using this to communicate tasks – which she hoped could prevent occassions like the raspberries spoiling before harvest.
[57] I do not mean to imply this process was consciously mediated by the two, but it happened so quickly, as part of ongoing chatter, that I suggest it to be more of a reflexive exchange.

'community' ownership of plots, projects, and events.[58] Steering-group members seem concerned to resist association with the 'authoritarian and coercive aspect' of utopia, by selective naming of their attempts to cultivate a better order (Moos and Brownstein in Schiffer, 2018: 75).[59]

Throughout my 'fieldwork', there were some organisational and personality conflicts between volunteers, mostly between steering-group members. This suggests 'community' is not unproblematic to cultivate. Occasionally, the conflicts were resolved through withdrawal from the BCG.[60] One conflict particularly distressed Kevin due to his mentor-mentee relation with Alice. Alice had quarrelled with another volunteer, whom Kevin began to call 'mein Führer'.[61] For some months, Kevin's distress led him to categorise volunteers between the 'good team' and the 'bad team', which was almost exclusively 'mein Führer'. However, some months later, I observed amiability between Kevin and 'mein Führer'. He told me he was more peaceful: Alice now avoided conflict by attending the BCG on Sunday, when it was 'quieter', and Kevin joined her and continued his attendance on Saturdays and Wednesdays.[62] Kevin's trust in 'mein Führer' was lost during and after the conflict, because of his loyalty to Alice. Gradually, his trust was restored – his name for the volunteer remained, but it changed from a satire of their authoritarian manner, to an absurd yet affectionate nickname.[63] Inclusion in the togetherness and hierarchies of 'community' can be distressing, for volunteers both directly and indirectly involved in conflict.

Volunteers' relations with each other are not only the means to cultivate other virtues, but also a virtue in itself: 'community'. This defines the BCG as a 'Community Garden' for volunteers, yet can cause conflict and even prevent volunteers' continued involvement. If the 'good life' is 'growing together', 'community' is the growth of a collective self, and subsequently of individuals within the collective. Just as for plant-growth, however, 'community' cannot be controlled. The potential for members' relations with each other to both enable and prevent realisation of ideals is an issue widely noted in the anthropology of contemporary social movements, such as Lagier (2020) on the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement.

[58] For example, while we dug over the wheat-trial plot, Kevin referred to the plot as belonging to 'Francis'. Francis quickly and emphatically corrected Kevin, 'It's not my trial, it's the community's'.
[59] This somewhat mirrors some of Schiffer's interlocutors' emphasis of 'cohousing' over 'eco-village', to bring less antagonistic implications.
[60] 'Roberta' had recently left the BCG as I started 'fieldwork'. I asked her if she would be interested still in being involved in my research, but she declined – 'I would rather leave that behind me.' She explained there had been a clash between herself and another volunteer, who 'means well but doesn't know what she is doing.'
[61] I do not include a pseudonym of 'mein Führer' both to follow Kevin's naming, and to further protect their anonymity.
[62] Although at the end of my 'fieldwork', Kevin told me Alice had stopped coming.
[63] I am quite sure, however, that Kevin never called the volunteer this name to their face!

3: How do volunteers mediate their social relations through the garden?

I suggest the non-human components of the garden are good to 'think with' and to 'act with' upon the values of the 'good life'; 'with' recognising the incapacity of volunteers to control the non-human garden components.[64] Not only is gardening a means of cultivating the 'good life', but also a means of communicating and deliberating upon it.

> The Saturday in which we weed raspberries and prune plums, we have our first formalised 'cake-break'.[65] Harriet had said this would be at 3.30pm. Around 3pm, the rain begins, drawing us under the trees. Susan and Harriet have both brought home-made cake, using last year's frozen 'produce': gooseberries and apples respectively. Harriet pours warming tea, made with garden mint. Theresa and Polly excuse themselves by home responsibilities.

Harriet and Susan's cultivation of 'community' is mediated through analogy with land cultivation. Not only do volunteers consider 'community' and plant cultivation as synchronic, but also as similar in essence. Steering-group members consider themselves responsible for cultivating 'community'. Harriet and Susan emphasise this cultivation as not due to their own capacity, but as working with a pre-existing potential or essence. For Susan, 'community is not created, it is grown'; or as Harriet described, 'strengthening or building resilience in the community'. Therefore I consider 'community' to be cultivated: Susan and Harriet's facilitation of gardening and 'cake-break' are attempts to encourage relations of 'community'. However, they cannot control either plant or social life: both volunteers and non-humans can resist being ordered into 'community'. Theresa and Polly exercised their freedom to not participate in 'cake-break', which the rain made earlier-than-planned. Just as land cultivation, volunteers cultivate 'community' by working with pre-existing 'life', the consequences of which cannot be controlled. Others drew parallels between 'community' and organic life: such as for Livia, for whom 'community' has health and spirit, and is energised when people exchange locally:

> Buying local and trading with neighbours puts energy and life into community... Being part of a community, part of tribes, is essential to human life, through history. But the community will die back if people don't put themselves into it, and then individuals suffer. In healthy communities, individuals flourish. People put in community spirit, give life to the community – like by looking out for people on their own and including them.

Others, such as Kevin and Polly, did not use explicitly organic language to describe 'community', but instead attributed it with a life-essence which led them to discover it. Drawing comparisons with 'nature', then, is a popular method amongst volunteers to think and act upon relations with one another. This suggests the ongoing anthropological discussion of humans' analogies between themselves and 'nature', is relevant for contemporary community gardens. Degnen's study of British gardeners (2009) argues analysing these parallels as 'just metaphor' not only hinders analysis but also has a biased dualist dichotomy of 'society' from 'nature'. She suggests her interlocutors' analogies 'exceed metaphor', as

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[64] I intentionally invoke an anthropological adage, first written by Claude Lévi-Strauss in Totemism (1962) which was later translated into English.

[65] Prior to this, there were occasions when volunteers brought cake to share, but time was not explicitly allocated by the facilitating steering-group members for 'cake-break', nor did they explicitly mark the end of the task time and beginning of 'cake-break'.

they express similarities not only between plants' and humans' physicality, but also intention, personality, and politics (2009: 164). Whether or not I call volunteers' analogies 'metaphor' is not a belittlement or otherwise. Instead, if 'nature' and 'culture' are relational constructions, it is of ethnographic interest how volunteers normatively evaluate analogies to 'nature', not 'just' metaphor.

> During 'cake-break', Susan asks after Arnold – whom she knew Kevin might have seen at another local project. She expresses to me the 'difficulties of trying to build community' – 'I want to know how Arnold is doing, not because I mind that his plot is overgrown, but because that shows he hasn't been able to come in a while.'

Susan's enquiry after Arnold reveals 'community' cultivation is mediated by specific parallels between volunteers and their plots. She is prompted by the overgrown state of Arnold's plot. As Susan tries to vocalize, concern for his plot does not negate 'real' concern for Arnold: they are one and the same. His plot's condition indicates his own wellbeing to Susan; that he hasn't tended it may mean he has more serious issues. However, Susan's description of this as a 'difficulty' of building community and her restatement of her intentions suggest she works within a 'naturalist' framework in which comparing Arnold and his plot risks offence.[66] [67]

Harriet and Susan's cultivation of 'community' is also mediated through interactions with plants and produce. In cultivating 'community' and the land, gardeners give labour which is reciprocated from the land by 'produce': including social relations, vegetables, fruit, 'therapy'. As Harriet and Susan demonstrate by leading and providing for 'cake-break', 'community' is cultivated not only through reciprocal relation with the land, but also with other volunteers. In fact, a clear-cut division between the 'natural' and 'social' elements may be misleading in that the refreshment we enjoyed, garden 'produce', was both reciprocation or payment for our work from steering-group leaders, and from the land.

Volunteers recognise a potential for gardening to also cultivate 'community' with the locality. As we pruned plums, Harriet remarked she would leave some trees to prune with the Rural Skills Group. This local initiative provides practical education to vulnerable high school students. Harriet recognised potential for pruning to not only nurture the trees, but also the students. Many other local initiatives gather at the BCG, such as natural remedy workshops, school cookouts, and Dementia Friendly.[68] Volunteers also recognise a value for completed tasks to mediate the cultivation of 'community' by using the BCG Facebook page to share photos and videos.

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[66] I refer to Descola's iteration of 'naturalism' (2006, 2016).

[67] Where 'nature' is compared to 'culture', volunteers seem to consider no risk of offence. When I asked Darryl to draw a free-hand map of the BCG, she drew a diagram of only the Sensory Garden, reflecting her role as steering-group member responsible. Darryl explained she drew not only the plants she 'liked', but also those she 'didn't like', which she called 'weeds'. These 'weeds' were 'dominant', 'over-bearing', or 'over- powered' the other plants. Beyond classifying 'weeds', volunteers frequently evaluate plants, weather, and the land with positive or negative social characteristics.

[68] As I have already said, the potential resource for non-gardeners to become involved in the BCG is so valued by steering-group members, and the mother organisation 'Sustaining-Sea-town', that the only paid worker for the BCG has an outreach role: partly working with the primary school and nursery in their gardens, partly leading 'community outreach sessions' at the BCG, and partly restoring the garden of a local brewery.

Further, 'produce', reciprocated by the land for volunteers' cultivation, is recognised by volunteers to embody the value of 'community'. There is a body of anthropology exploring the processes by which value is added to produce, including that of 'locality' (e.g. Weiss, 2016). Volunteers consider 'community' is not only shared by their co-cultivation and commensality of the 'produce', but also potential to share with non-volunteers: some 'produce' is sold at a nearby community-owned greengrocer, labelled with the added-value terms 'local', 'community', 'organic'. These labels make explicit the value volunteers recognise in their produce, which they cultivate in interaction with the land. Susan was frustrated that the raspberries were too ripe, and thereafter too wet, to distribute beyond volunteers present. This frustration is not about missed monetary profit for the BCG, but rather of missed potential to share 'community'. [69]

Lastly, the cultivation of 'community' is mediated through volunteers' care for others' plots and communal areas.

> One hot Saturday in the height of summer, when I arrive Kevin is already at the garden. He is walking back and forth from a water-butt to other volunteers' plots. 'I'm just watering them,' he explains, 'The plots were very dry.' It transpires he arrived an hour ago and he has also filled up the communal water-butts all around the garden.[70]

It is not only steering-group members who try to order social relations as 'community', though not all would explicitly label their actions thus. To Kevin, 'community is being there for each other.' He 'is there' for others by various actions of care, including helping to cultivate others' plots. As such, his voluntary upkeep of others' plots is 'just watering.' This is what Kevin understands being part of a 'community' to involve – others' 'very dry' plots, and empty water-butts, are his concern, too, and problems he can alleviate. Kevin's watering suggests the 'good life' cultivated through the BCG blurs the boundaries between programmatic and everyday utopias (Schiffer, 2018). Volunteers cultivate virtues from a learnt prescribed order – such as the charter, incorporated in volunteer forms – and spontaneously.

This act of communal concern is not exceptional: either for Kevin, or other volunteers. Nevertheless, Kevin's care is particularly significant, because of his dependence on others' care. He is long-term unemployed because of chronic health conditions including learning difficulties, dyspraxia and anxiety. He has long endured limited NHS support and indeed relocated from England to Scotland seeking better NHS care. During COVID-19, his care was limited to a monthly GP call. Besides his mother and pets, Kevin's care provision comes from his volunteering: three times weekly at the BCG, twice weekly at an employability project, and once weekly with countryside rangers: all providing informal mentor-mentee relations.

I have explored how cultivation of 'community', the 'good life' of social relations, is mediated through the land and other species. 'Community' is not the only aspect of the 'good life' to be mediated thus: but is a particularly pertinent example of how BCG's social

[69] The income generated by produce sold at the local greengrocer's is very small in comparison to both the total amount of produce, and to the funding relied upon to sustain the BCG.
[70] Kevin's dog, Pip, also joined him in these tasks.

relations are cultivated through, thought about, and aspired towards, mediation by the material. [71] I have tried to write both about and with volunteers' analogies to 'nature'.[72]

[71] Examples of organisms compared to sociality include asking of cobnut trees 'have we loved them enough?', describing plants or the soil as 'happy' or 'healthy' or 'well fed'.
[72] My limited understanding of Strathern's analytical style suggests this can be a helpful mode (eg 1992).

4: How do volunteers cultivate the 'good life' in relation to wider social worlds?

I suggest volunteers' cultivation of the 'good life' is opposed, sustained, frustrated, and contributes to wider social worlds. I suggest regardless of outcome, volunteers challenge individualism, fragmentation, and purely monetary exchange - by explicitly recognising, and working through, relations of interdependence with the locality.

> The Thursday immediately after Christmas, Ian leads volunteers to 'shift' a seaweed delivery from the back-gate to the orchard. Roger and I arrive together, and he clambers over the back-gate. 'Careful!' exclaims Susan. 'Don't worry, I'm quite agile,' replies Roger. 'I didn't mean you,' she replies, 'I meant the gate. Those school kids cut across here on their way home, which is battering the gate.'

This Thursday's session suggests 'growing together' involves intentional cultivation of relations with the locality, to bring mutual benefit. The seaweed volunteers 'shift' was harvested from Bricht-Bay beach and delivered by the local council; to 'give nutrients' to the soil, Roger explained. This nourishes the orchard, from which volunteers will harvest 'produce', and distribute to each other and local greengrocers. This is an example of volunteers cultivating a localised 'circular economy', as Harriet explained to me while we raked seaweed under the trees,

> 'We now have a critical mass of produce – too much for us to deal with. The trees get bigger every year, so we get more and more harvest. I'm working on a plan for a circular economy: how best to generate income for the garden with the produce, moving beyond selling it at the [greengrocers] and giving to volunteers. How can we add value to the produce, to use local initiatives and equipment, and strengthen the local economy?'

Earlier in my 'fieldwork', Susan expressed frustration at the BCG's 'system' to harvest and distribute 'produce'. Harriet suggests a solution: to better plan 'produce' distribution and waste reincorporation – a 'circular economy'. To Harriet, this would benefit the BCG – use what is 'too much for us to deal with' to 'generate income'; and the locality - 'strengthen[ing]' its economy. This mutual benefit is cultivated by recognising a value in waste, including, as our seaweed 'shifting' indicates, from beyond the garden's spatial boundaries.[73]

As something cultivated, volunteers can encourage but not control relations to the locality. The back-gate is an attempt by volunteers to cultivate a spatial boundary. Yet, schoolchildren not only cross but also degrade it: they cultivate a relation with the BCG which is beyond volunteers' control. Susan's concern for the back-gate echoes other volunteers', to whom high-school pupils' relations to the BCG can be undesirable: smoking in the polytunnel and littering in the orchard. Similarly, volunteers cannot control each other's methods of cultivating relations to the locality; which can cause frustration. To 'shift seaweed', Ian used an electric wheelbarrow and Roger a manual handcart. For Ian, the electric wheelbarrow was

[73] Other examples of the 'circular economy' include: volunteers collect Christmas trees from local residents in January for woodchip; use turf from digging to even up furrows in the land; prepare soil for planting with cardboard from shops; nourish the compost with pigeon droppings gathered in the locality.

more ‘efficient’, but for Roger, it was ‘too noisy and just unnecessary.’[74] Roger, bothered about Ian’s wheelbarrow, continued in his method despite Ian’s interest in ‘efficiency’. Volunteers cannot wholly control their affective involvement in cultivating these relations. After a communal willow-trimming session, Ian was distressed to see the wood discarded and not trimmed. He immediately began preparing it for future use, frustrated his intervention was necessary to prevent waste. Ian’s frustration distressed Kevin, who wanted to know who to blame. Ian and Kevin’s reactions, just as Susan’s earlier in ‘fieldwork’, suggesting an obligation to cultivate the ‘circular economy’, causing distress when others do not cooperate.

> Putting away tools after reinstating the Sensory Garden’s rose-arch, Harriet says, ‘This is one reason I love the BCG. I put up on Facebook asking for people to help solve a problem – and people come, even those who hardly come along. Together we can solve a problem which is impossible on your own.’
>
> I suggest this is like community. Harriet agrees, ‘Yes – it is impossible to do community on your own!’ We start walking home. ‘It’s what we forget with western individualism,’ says Harriet, then exclaims, ‘Oh! I meant to collect some leeks.’

Volunteers do not only cultivate relations to the locality, but also wider social worlds. They problematise aspects of wider society and prefigure solutions within the boundaries of the BCG. To Harriet, volunteers’ attendance shows their willingness to ‘help solve a problem’ which is ‘impossible to do on your own’. This ‘problem’ is firstly the rose-arch collapse, and secondly the need for ‘community’. Both are consequential within and out-with the BCG’s boundaries. The rose-arch collapse was caused by Storm Arwen, which caused damage throughout the country.[75] Once reinstated, the rose-arch contributes to patients’ experience of sensory therapy.[76] The second ‘problem’ is a lack of ‘community’. Harriet suggests this is relevant for all implicated in ‘western individualism’: a ‘we’ including her. She expanded this theory another day whilst weeding in the polytunnel,

> ‘We all need community because we are social creatures… Recently the west has had too much emphasis on the individual and the nuclear family. This lockdown shows the strain on individuals from restricted community – household and workplace bubbles cannot support us enough.’

Both these Saturdays occurred between COVID-19 lockdowns, meaning volunteers’ participation in ‘community’ was a particular ‘relief’ and helped three new arrivals in the locality meet others.[77] To Harriet, both the ‘problem’ and solution of ‘community’ are expressed during the session. She suggests the participation of those who ‘hardly come to the garden’ both indicates their need for, and cultivates an experience of, ‘community’. Thus, volunteers’ prefigurative problem-solving has significance beyond the boundaries of the garden: just as Mahmud suggests for Italian Freemasons’ cultivation of the ‘good life’, ‘The goal… is to better society by bettering individuals’ (2014: 7). Although Harriet’s concern for

[74] Roger, as a keen triathlete, seemed also to enjoy the exercise of running up and down the garden with the handcart. Ian, meanwhile, seemed to enjoy teaching others how to use the electric wheelbarrow, including myself.

[75] For example, about half of a forest on the outskirts of Sea-town was uprooted by the storm.

[76] The Sensory Garden’s rose-arch is also the BCG’s principal entrance from the side of the hospital.

[77] Jane, one of these interlocutors, said it had been particularly difficult to move to a new town during lockdown because the normal opportunities to meet others were restricted. She was invited to the BCG by a neighbour – Harriet – and has since become a regular volunteer at Saturday sessions as well as maintaining her own plot.

'community' is specific to humans, at other points Harriet emphasised the 'problems' and solutions in the BCG are an interspecies entanglement,

> 'While there are all the positive effects on people, I think of the gardening element as central. Planting, biodiversity, soil health and crops all add up to healthy ecosystems that are essential for wellbeing. And while I like the social side and while the community building is crucial, my main motivation is to restoring and nurturing this corner of land.'

Not only do the BCG's relations to wider sociality define its prefigurative problem-solving vision, but also enable volunteers to cultivate that vision.

> While we scythe the wildflower meadow, I ask Francis how the BCG began. He replies, 'We [Sustaining Sea-town] were looking for space for local residents to grow their own food, so applied for tenure of this land. The head of [the regional NHS board] at the time was sympathetic – their 'Greenspace' policy was encouraging other hospitals in the area to start gardens.[78] I think it helped that we applied as Sustaining Sea-town – an organisation he knew. It definitely helped get us off the ground with initial funding. We followed the models used by the other hospital gardens – for food production and therapeutic benefits.'

Francis's long involvement informs him that the BCG has always relied on relations to wider sociality. The BCG's application was accepted, and it got 'off the ground', because of conducive external conditions: NHS 'Greenspace' policy, Sustaining Sea-town's renown, and pre-existing 'models'. Francis' narrative implies the BCG is enabled by a conducive current of wider society. Their reliance on external capacity is indicated also by Francis' scything. Despite volunteers' emphasis that the wildflower meadow is 'rewilded' through the movement of plants and pollinators, it is also cultivated through the actions of volunteers. Volunteers draw inspiration from bodies of knowledge.[79] Volunteers' cultivation of 'rewilded' areas, though not exclusively, draws inspiration from historical techniques to address climate change: such as Francis' Alpine scything, the wheat-trial, and Francis' and Alices' 'natural beekeeping'.[80] To Francis, finding historical solutions to contemporary problems is an act of 'defiance',

> '… some of us were also inspired by the 17th century Diggers - the idea of planting an orchard that would take 20 years to reach maturity, even though we had no long-term security over the land, felt like an important act of defiance.'

As Webb (2020) demonstrates, 'relearning' historical techniques is common in contemporary community gardens. I suggest BCG volunteers' cultivation of relations with both contemporary and historical wider sociality defines the BCG not only as a prefigurative project but also *re*-figurative. Volunteers cultivate solutions for contemporary problems by drawing inspiration from history. This is comparable to Rethmann's analysis of proactive nostalgia among 'die Linke' in Germany, a contemporary political party (in Angé and

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[78] A policy to cultivate gardens in hospitals. For example see here NHS Greenspace | NatureScot

[79] Such as the Royal Horticultural Society, or the 'Farmerama' podcast. See here RHS - Inspiring everyone to grow / RHS Gardening and here Farmerama Radio – The voices of regenerative farming .

[80] As Francis and Alice explained to me, this involves keeping the bees not to harvest honey, but to support their pollination of the garden.
See here: Scotland The Bread - Scotland The Bread

Berliner, 2015). Although volunteers did not make this explicit, I suggest the BCG's *re*-figurative project to also involve their use of the BCG as common land. Enabled by tenure, this is evocative of common pastures before enclosures. Sea-town, as throughout Britain, formerly had land owned by the local aristocracy but used by locals for herds. Sea-town's 'inner' Common[81] was all but privatised by the mid-1800s (Pugh, 2003:228). As Ostrom has shown, restricted access commons can be an effective method for sustainable land management (Ostrom, 1990, 2010 in Wilson, 2016); thus volunteers address contemporary climate change through their historical technique of communal land-usage under tenure. [82]

> I ask Francis how he thinks what 'goes on' at the BCG continues, despite uncertain funding, tenure, and volunteers. He replies, 'It continues to succeed because it continues to meet a need.' He suggests this 'need' means different things to different volunteers: 'meeting folk', 'working the land', 'growing your own food', 'therapeutic benefits'…

Volunteers' relations with wider sociality legitimate their 'good life' as necessary and desirable. To Francis, the BCG may be dependent on wider sociality, but wider sociality is also dependent on the BCG: the BCG meets a 'need', provides something essential which wider sociality lacks. As Esteva et al (2013) suggest for the 'Basic Needs' discourse, 'need' is a claim of innateness, universality, or 'naturalness'. I suggest that Francis' 'need' discourse and origin narrative answers how the BCG continues despite vulnerability on two levels.[83] Firstly, the BCG has been enabled by conducive conditions and continues because volunteers recognise the BCG as necessary for their 'wellbeing'. Secondly, Francis and other volunteers have learnt a language to communicate the value they recognise in the BCG, perhaps conducive to tenure and funding applications: the naturalised legitimation implied by conducive wider currents and a 'needs' discourse. Perhaps Francis also implicitly critiques the conditions of the BCG's vulnerability: it is ironic that the BCG's future capacity, including to provide 'therapy', is undermined by factors including uncertain NHS tenure. When I asked volunteers how they became involved, a pattern emerged: usually through relationship with a steering-group member.[84] Social relationships, then, are a 'need' the BCG both meets and experiences: 'face-to-face' relationships have been significant in encouraging involvement and thus the BCG's continued success.[85]

Although volunteers understand their prefigurative 'good life' as opposed to wider social and ecological problems, their cultivation actually depends upon relations to wider social environments. Not only are these relations' outcomes beyond volunteers' control, but also their spatial and social boundaries, others' cultivation, and their own affective reactions. If the definition of a garden is bounded cultivation, I suggest ethnography's role can be to

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[81] 'Inner' common is opposed to an 'outer' Common with much less practical use and which was sold earlier.
[82] In her Nobel prize winning challenge to Hardin's Tragedy of the Commons, 'groups are capable of avoiding the tragedy of the commons without requiring top-down regulation, at least if certain conditions are met…" These conditions, from her study of Common-Pool Resource Groups, are summarized in eight "core design principles": "1) Clearly defined boundaries; 2) Proportional equivalence between benefits and costs; 3) Collective choice arrangements; 4) Monitoring; 5) Graduated sanctions; 6) Fast and fair conflict resolution; 7) Local autonomy; 8) Appropriate relations with other tiers of rule-making authority (polycentric governance)'.
[83] I consider Francis' narrative as comparable to a creation myth: which is not an evaluation of its factuality, but instead a recognition that what and how origins are remembered is informative of people's values.
[84] Kevin and Polly, however, both described themselves as 'discovering' the BCG spontaneously.
[85] Gardeners often used the phrase 'face-to-face' during the COVID-19 pandemic to describe knowing and meeting people in person as opposed to online.

denaturalise the boundaries and explore how they are made and experienced through discourse and practise. I suggest the boundaries of the BCG are porous, through which flora, fauna, volunteers and ideals of the ‘good life’ bidirectionally flow. This chapter has included discussion of relations within the garden, because volunteers embody both wider sociality and the BCG: any intra-garden relations inevitably also concern wider sociality.

Conclusion: cultivating 'nature'

I have explored the question inherent in Harriet's introductory comment: what 'goes on' at the BCG and why does it appear 'simple'? I suggest, what 'goes on' seems 'simple' to volunteers because they consider the BCG a 'natural' solution to 'cultural' problems; and they consider what is 'natural' as being 'simple' – as well as essential, fundamental, healthy, and desirable.[86] I use 'natural' and 'cultural' as ethnographic concepts: which evoke volunteers' understanding that the BCG problematises wider society's relations to 'nature' and seek to cultivate better. I consider the 'good life' volunteers cultivate as a 'natural' solution because both its means and ends have parallels with what volunteers consider to be 'nature'. Volunteers justify why their 'good life' is beneficial, how they cultivate, and what enables the BCG to continue, through analogy to organic growth and life. It is beneficial because of inter-species essential qualities or 'need'; it is pursued through gardening; and it can continue because of wider conducive circumstances. As such, they express the 'good life' to grow, just as plants grow: they can encourage it, yet rely on factors beyond their control. They express their 'good life' to be more analogous to 'nature' than wider society. Where volunteers associate wider society with individualism, volunteers consider their own 'needs' to be intertwined with other species and other volunteers. Where volunteers associate wider society with competition, they engage in relational hierarchies to exchange care and knowledge. Where volunteers associate wider society with ecological degradation, they consider gardening to restore health of people and other species alike. The consequence of a successful cultivation of the 'good life' is thus a restored 'natural' order: a *re*-figurement of how 'culture' and 'nature' should relate to each other. The BCG's order being 'natural' legitimates it as good, or proper, as well as explains how it continues to succeed; this is how relations should be, or would be if 'culture' didn't cause problems. BCG volunteers thus cultivate 'nature'. The BCG is organic in both senses of the word: volunteers do not use artificial fertiliser, pesticides, or chemicals in the garden; but also, the BCG is the living, organic, 'natural' consequence of gardeners' cultivation. Thus what volunteers do is cultivate: working with a pre-existing life, to encourage its growth. Whether this is the naturalisation of 'needs' met, or belittling their own intervention (Kevin's 'I'm just watering'), or describing the BCG in analogies to organic life ('community spirit'). Volunteers express the cultivation of the BCG as a 'natural' order: it meets their 'needs', is shaped and enabled by factors beyond themselves, and yet is beyond their control. In doing so, they communicate the BCG in a language which correlates with the BCG's vulnerability to external conditions: funding and tenure applications may be more successful if the BCG is communicated as necessary.

Volunteers' cultivation of the 'good life' is ongoing: as Ian said, 'A garden is never done.'

> I return to the BCG during my Easter holidays. For Harriet, 'It has all been a-go here.' The garden has changed: new members, log circle, and compost bays…[87] As has the

[86] I use the terms 'natural' and 'cultural' warily: acknowledging the 'post-plural' social constructionist critique that 'nature' is in fact whatever 'culture' makes it (Strathern, 1992), that 'the domain of the social and the biological are one and the same' (Ingold, 2013: 9 in Pitrou, 2015), and that thus anthropology seeks to explore what its discipline entails without this assumption - anthropology 'beyond nature and culture.' (Pitrou, 2015 on Ingold and Palsson, 2013).

[87] Our task was to ready the wheat-trial plot for planting. Each year, too, the wheat changes: not genetic modification, Francis emphasised, but instead gradually selecting diverse wheat species, best adjusted for the ecology. He hopes in some years to grow enough wheat to produce locally processed flour for the community bakery.

locality: more new houses, a famed samosa maker retired…[88] Francis concludes the ginger-cake-break by sharing: the NHS has given them two years' more tenure.[89] 'You should've told us at the beginning!' Harry exclaimed.[90]

[88] These were some of the changes the volunteers expressed, with sadness.
[89] Two years, he explained, was an improvement from previous one-year tenures which have proceeded the initial five years.
[90]Francis replied, 'Sorry, I forgot.' Perhaps Francis had forgotten because he had been too busy leading the session.

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Appendix:

All images are included with permission.

Figure 1: The polytunnel and raised beds, taken by Sustaining Seatown.

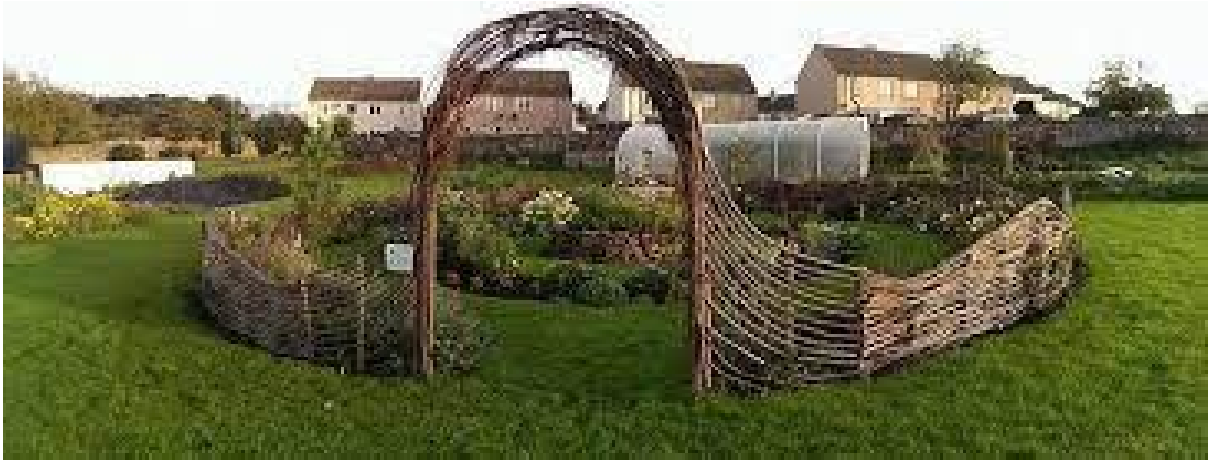
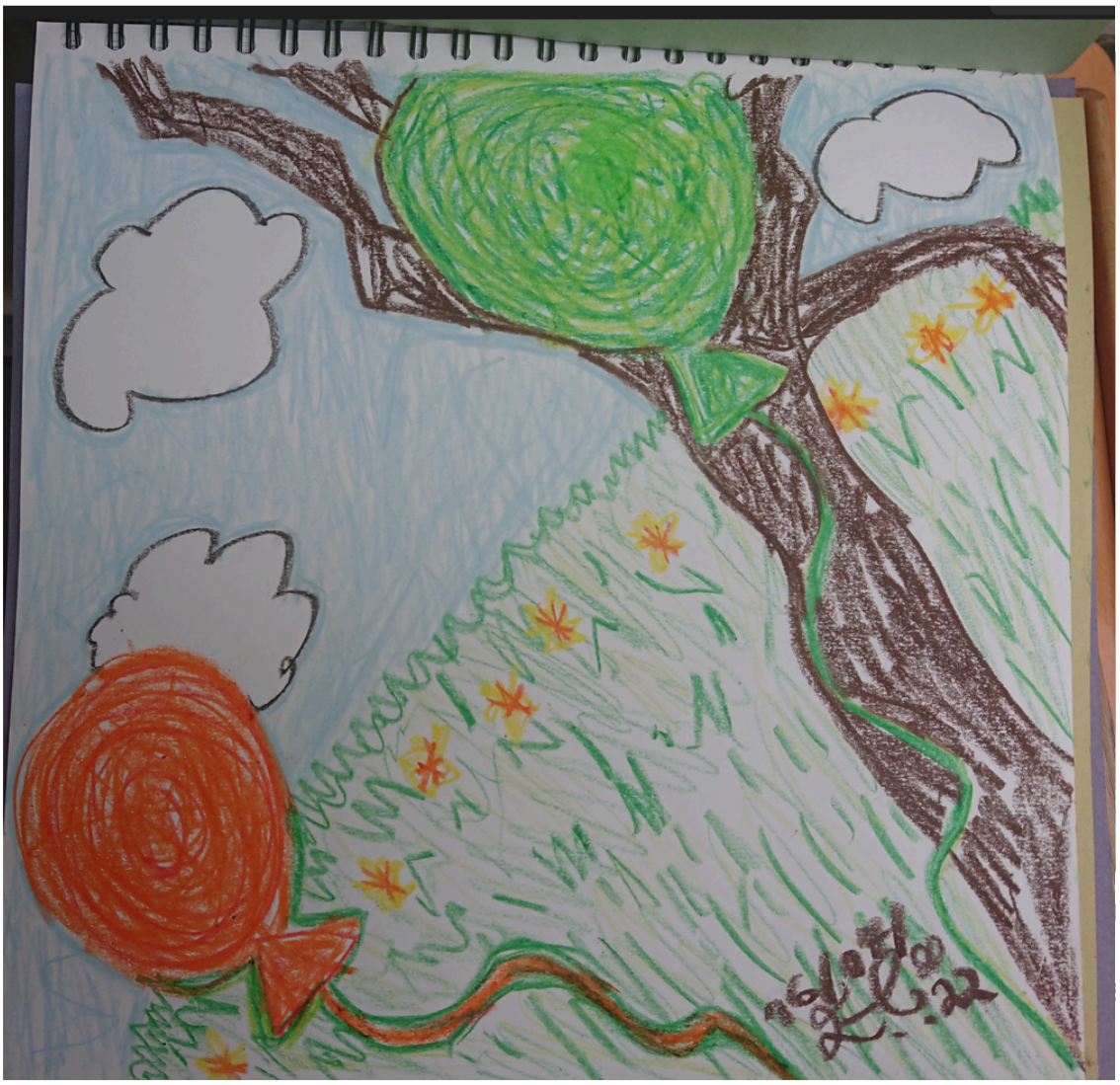
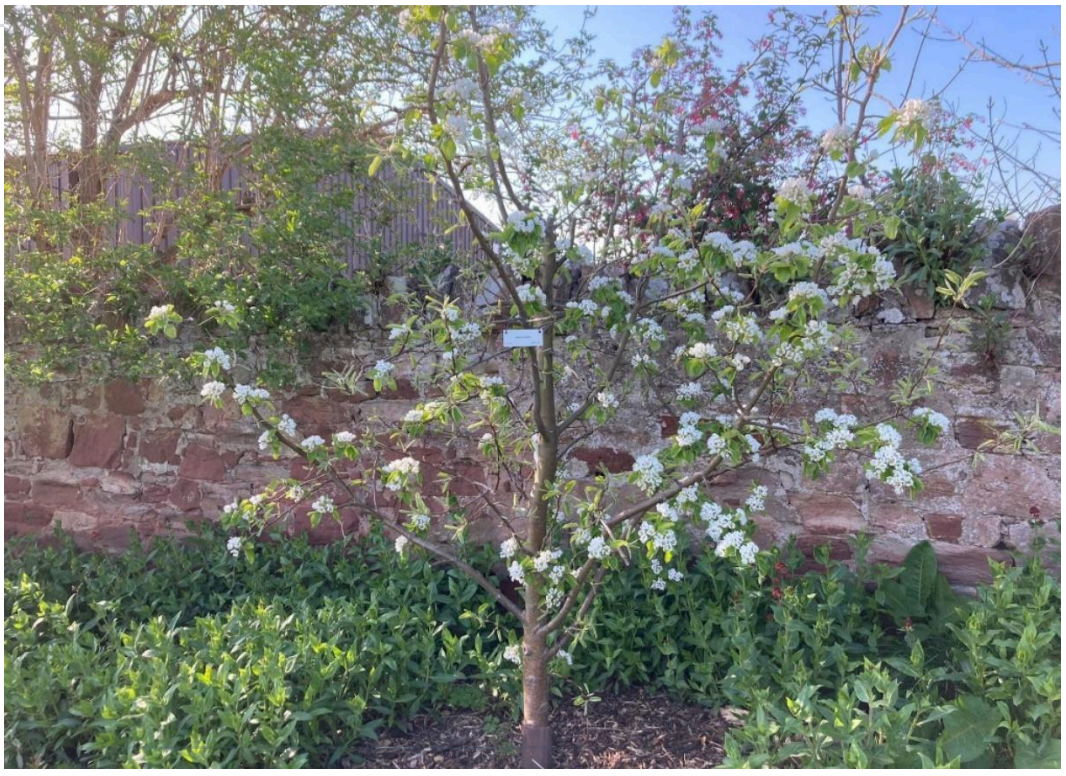


Figure 2: The Sensory Garden after inception, towards the beginning of the BCG project. This is taken by Sustaining Seatown.





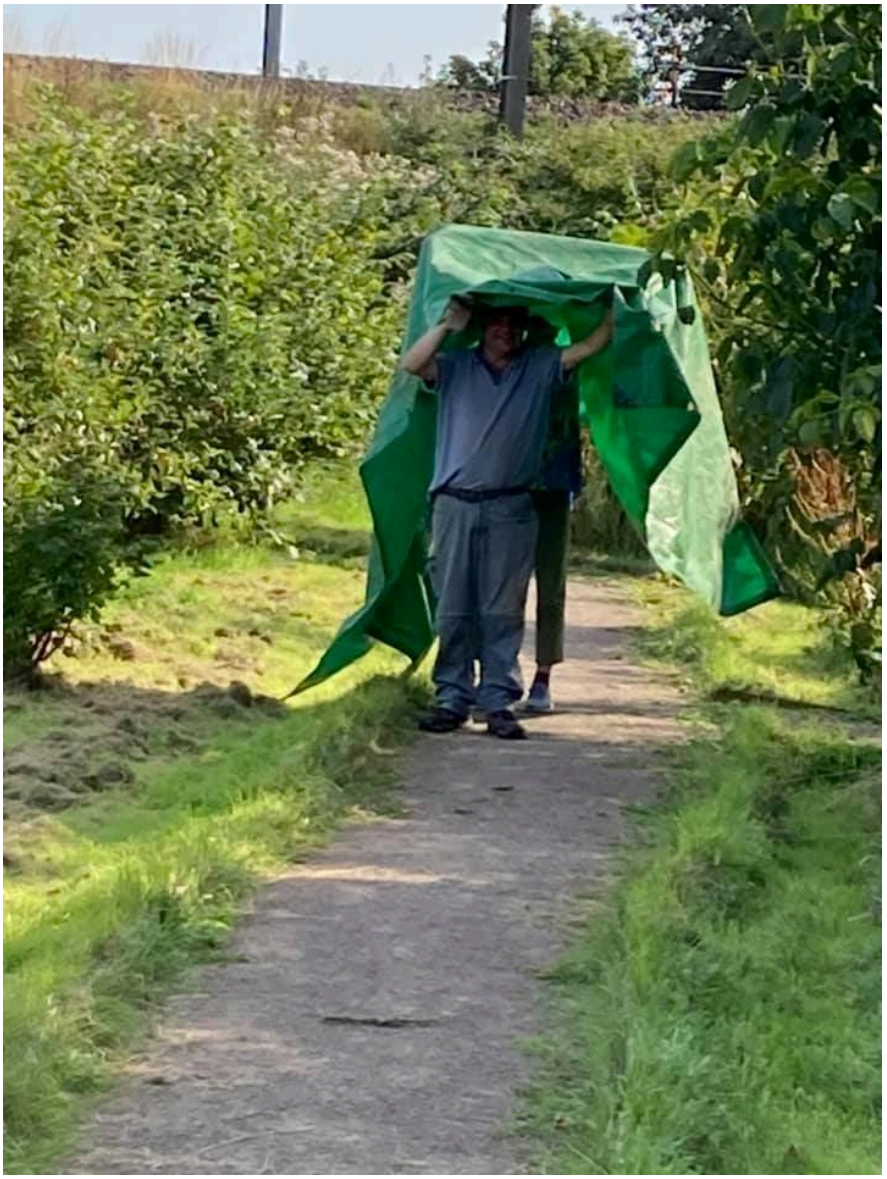


Figure 6: Kevin and the author making a tarpaulin conga!

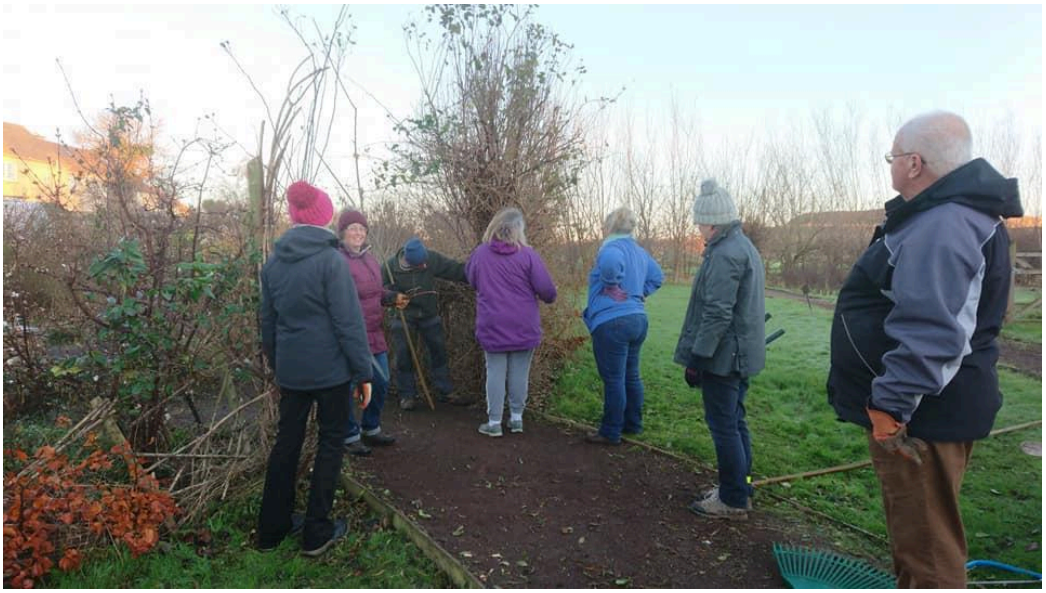


Figure 7: Some volunteers restoring the collapsed rose-arch in the Sensory Garden.

Figure 8: Susan improvising a game of throwing unripe plums into buckets.

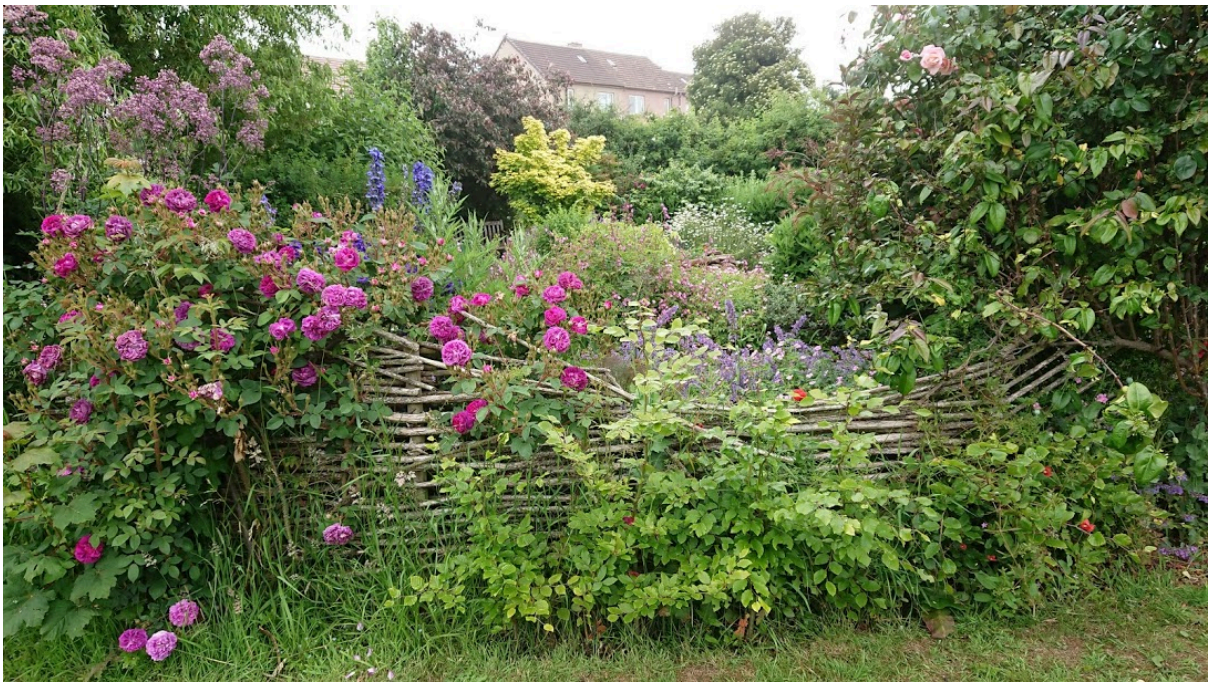


Figure 10: The Sensory Garden in summer 2021, including a rose and the willow fence.

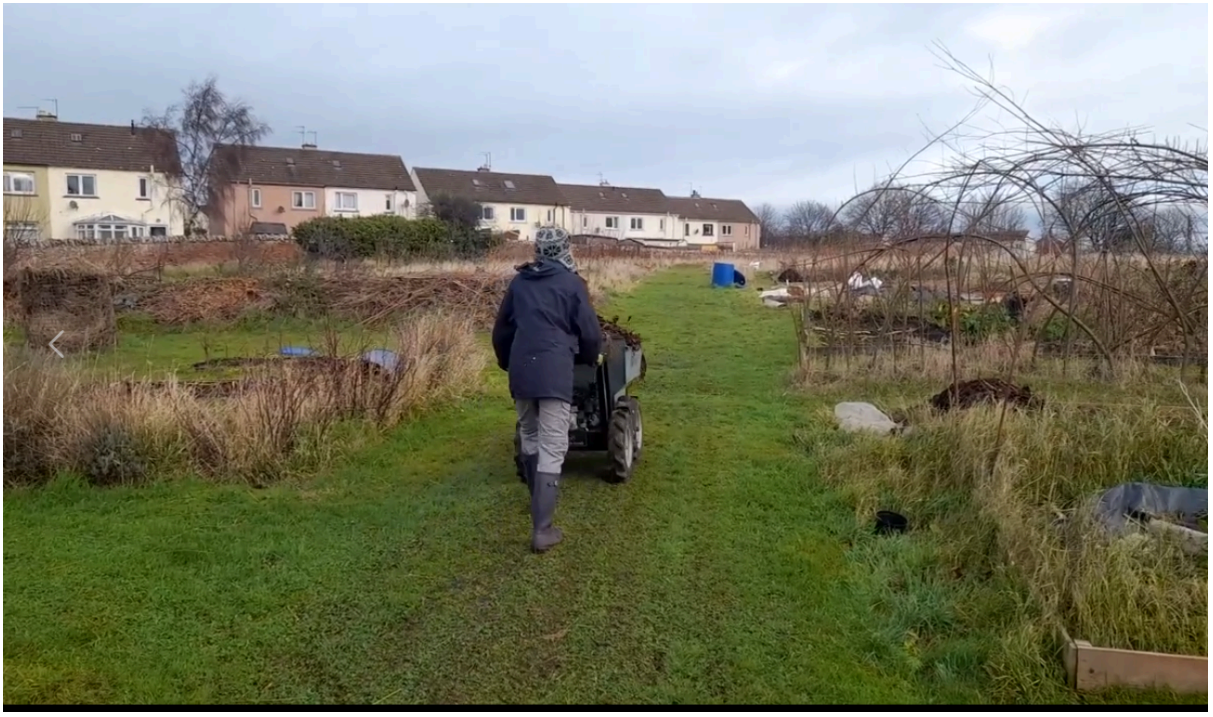


Figure 11: Taken by Ian, this is the author learning how to drive the electric wheelbarrow to 'shift' seaweed.

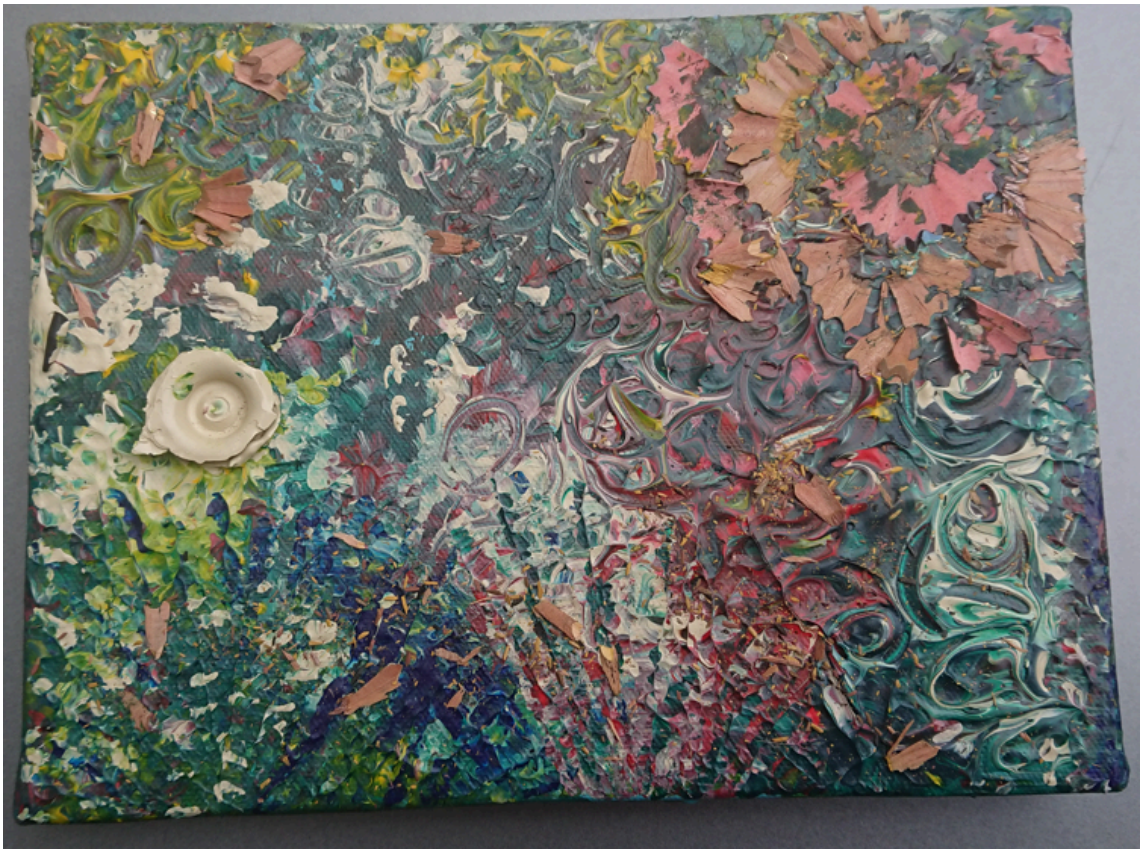
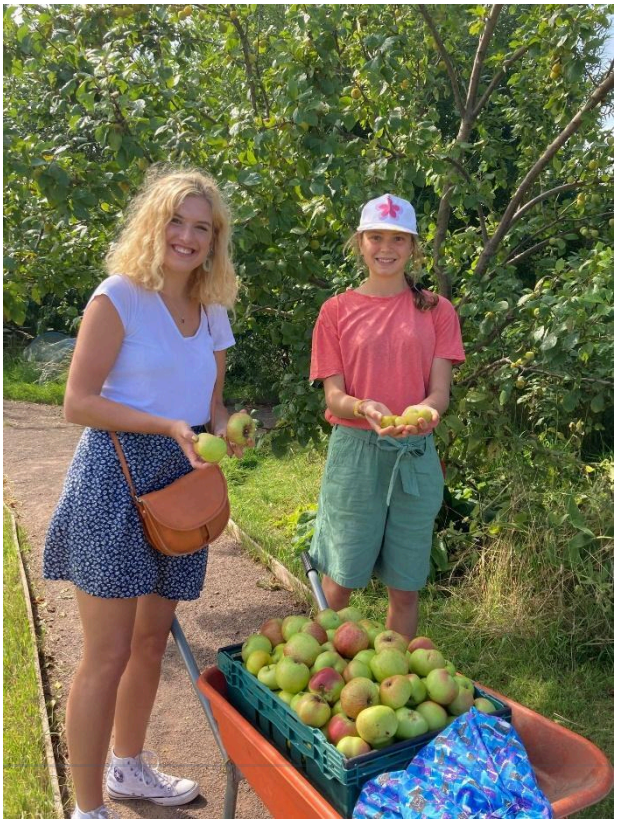
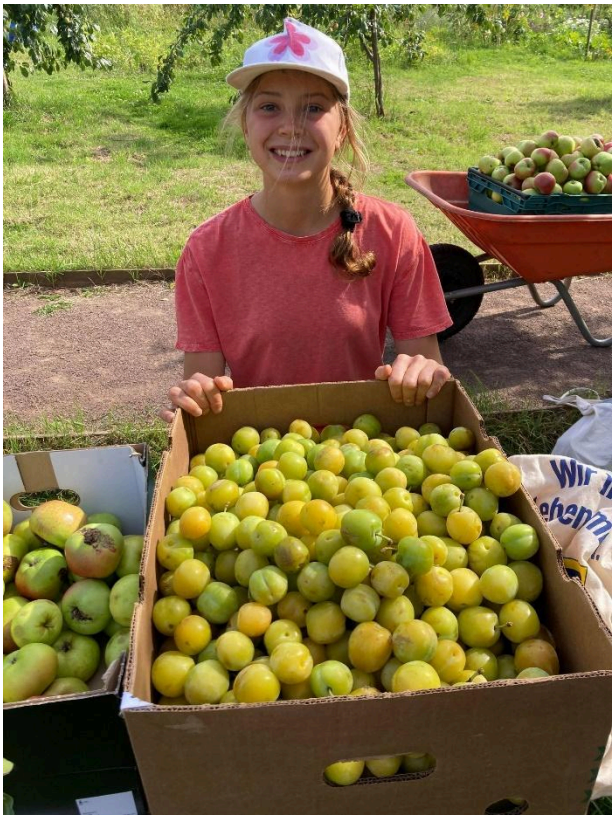


Figure 12: The author's expression of the BCG's circular economy: utilising the value in my own waste of pencil cuttings, dried paint, and cardboard!





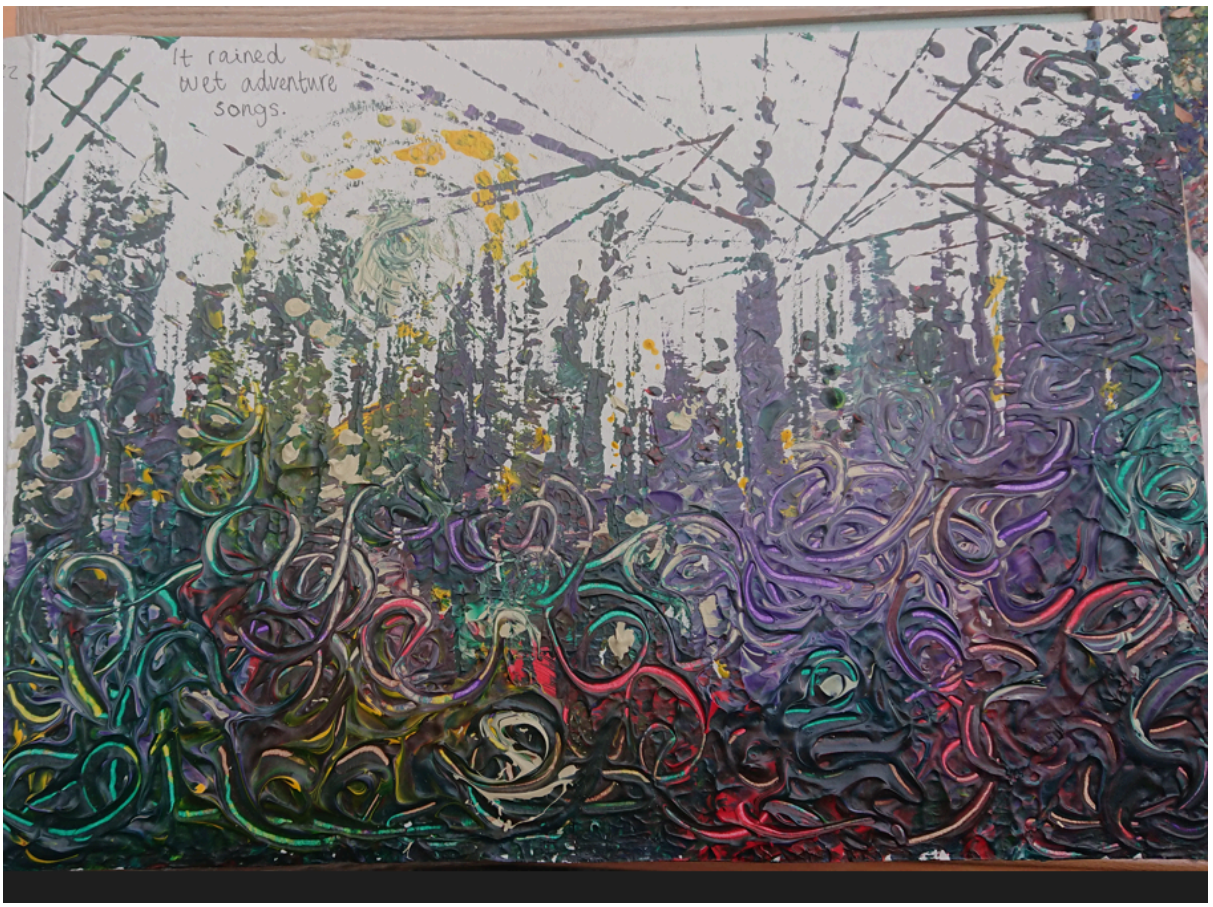


Figure 14: The author's expression of the garden's ongoing movement, growth, and adventure.

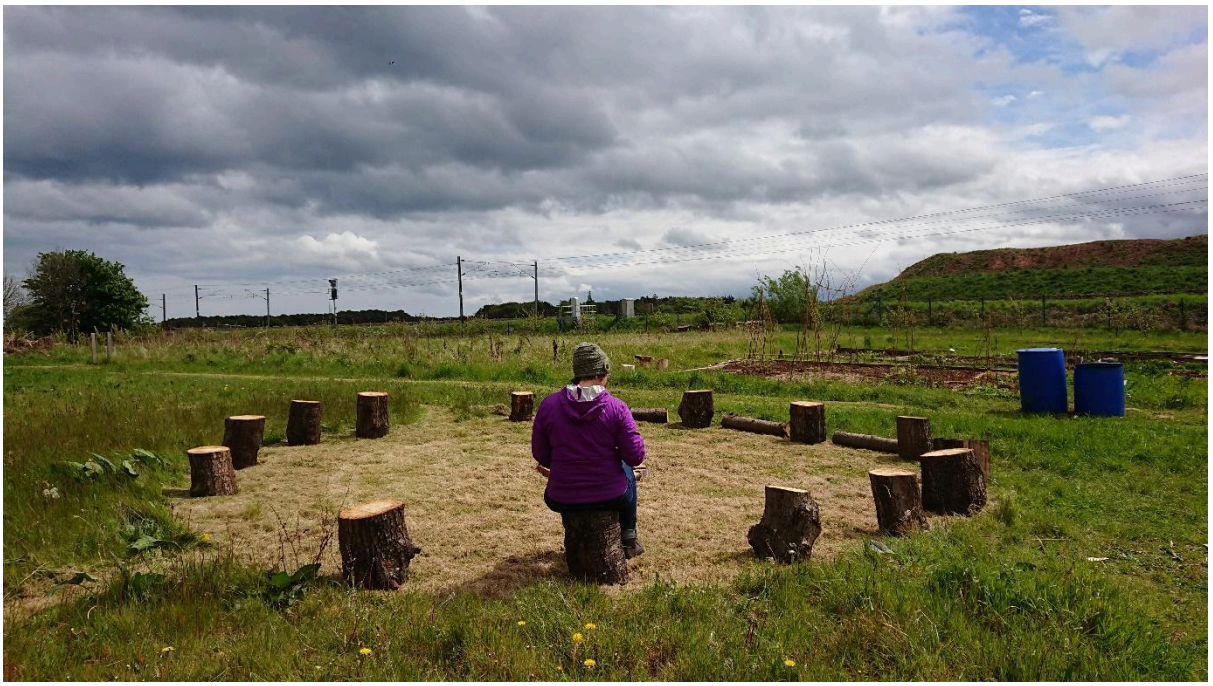


Figure 15: Harriet enjoying a moment's rest in the new log circle.