

# The Introvert

Diversity Inclusion Representation In the Outdoor & Life

The Campaign is slowly  
kicking off!

New Book by Iris Retzlaff is  
out soon!

Shipshape Smithy Flash  
Reviews



Issue No.11

[www.deecrute.com](http://www.deecrute.com)

# Table of Contents

05

## Bamboozled by Puffins

Skomer Island revamps the idea of a perfect wildlife experience!

By Dee Crute

12

## Indie Business of the Month: Iris Retzlaff

Author

14

## How to help indie authors

By iris Retzlaff

16

## The Wheel of the Year: Samhain

By Jennie Smith

19

## Nature Kaleidoscope:

October

20

## October Foraging Basket

22

## Shipshape Smithy's Flash Reviews!

The Lost Alchemist by Samantha Vitale REVIEW

# Table of Contents

23

Discovering the Lost Houses of the  
Clyde Valley

By Christine Wallace

## From the Editor

**October Foraging Basket - page 20** - is shifting from what's above and at our eye level to what is on the ground! But don't lose sight of the branches! It is bird migration time and the best season to see Winter Trushes! Learn more with **Fall Nature Kaleidoscope on page 19.**

Autumn perfectly lends itself to nostalgia and exploring history - Discover the Lost Houses of the Clyde Valley with **Christine Wallace on page 23.**

With Halloween around the corner, we are closing on another turn of **The Wheel of the Year!** Learn more about **Samhain** from **Jennie Smith on page 16.**

In the meantime, enjoy the new **Flash Book Review** by **Shipshame Smithy on page 22** and a flash Natural History of Skomer Island and Puffins in **Bamboozled by Puffins** by me on **page 5.**

Lastly, this month's **Independent Craftsmen** section welcomes **Iris Retzlaff** and her new book on **page 12.** **Iris** writes exclusively for the Introvert on **page 14** on How to help Indie Authors.

As always! I would love to hear from you!

**Send letters to the editor to [dee@deecrute.com](mailto:dee@deecrute.com)!**



Dee Crute

Editor-in-Chief

# The Introvert



Agryll & Bute, Scotland, September 2024, ©Dee Crute

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# Bamboozled by Puffins

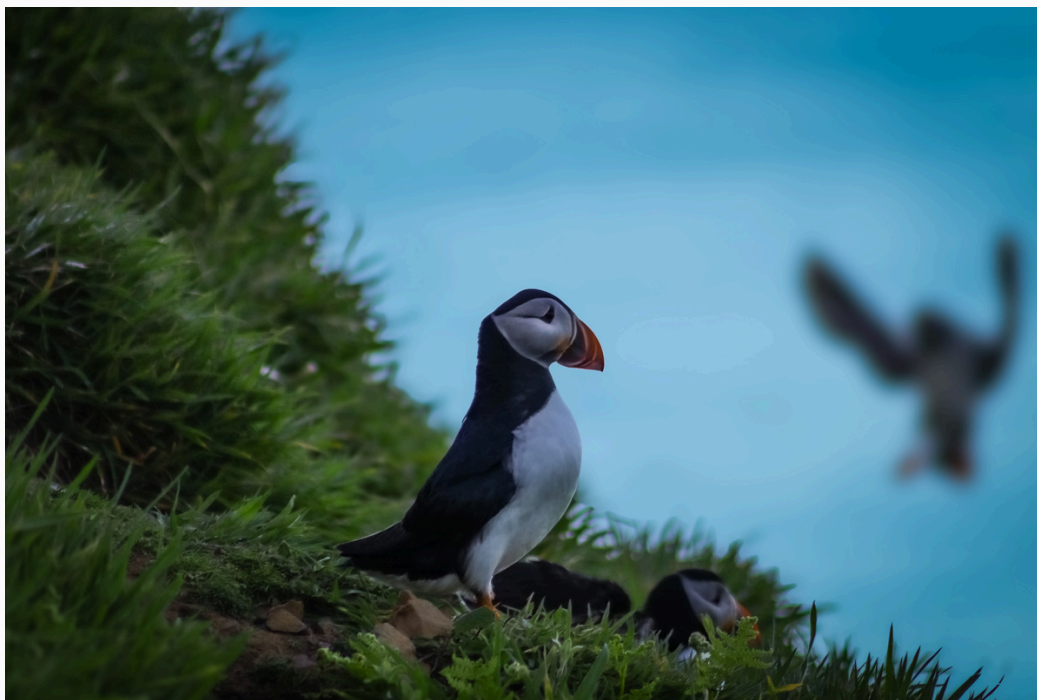
*Skomer Island revamps the idea of a perfect wildlife experience!*

Text and Photography by Dee Crute

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**Like many birdwatchers, I wanted to see a Puffin.**

**You may spot them along Pembrokeshire's coast in Wales or Yorkshire's Flamborough Cliffs. But if you are desperate—as I was—and don't want to take your chances, there is only one way to grant you this unparalleled experience.**



**Puffins of Skomer ©Dee Crute**

**“Yet, that day, the weather and my health conditions allowed me to experience the most magnificent wildlife encounters...”**

Pack your bags, book the boat and sail to one of the most off-grid islands: Handa, off the west coast of Scotland, or Skomer and Skokholm in Wales!

But hold your horses, adventurer! Upon embarking on Skomer shores, you are a guest of the National Nature Reserve, critical for Puffin and Manx Shearwater breeding. To protect the island's natural integrity, only 250 visitors are allowed daily, and overnight stays in the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales's Hostel are limited. So plan ahead and plan well! And remember, we all have a responsibility to preserve this unique habitat.

## Rocks, auks and the perilous approach to Skomer Island

Aren't we used to constant access and availability? But if you want to explore Skomer—forget about that. Once you descend into Martin's Haven, your embarkation point nestled in the North Bay of Marloes Peninsula in Pembrokeshire, you enter the zone where nature is in control, and we are at the elements' mercy. Weather permitting, the boat operates twice a day to and from the North Haven Steps, jutting from the precipitous cliff of Skomer. However, with ceaseless, strong north-westerly winds, you may be stranded on the Island for days, as I was—albeit to my delight!

There is another thing to consider—accessibility—something I did not care to check.

Due to my disabilities, I found it challenging to access the Island via its 87 steep steps, and the narrow paths meandering around Puffin burrows make it impossible to use a wheelchair.

I was utterly oblivious to what was happening beyond the boat, feeding a Herring Gull—a stowaway perched next to me—on some mealworms that had somehow found their way into my pocket, when the commotion broke out... Shriill "kittiwaaaaakes" and raucous "arrrrrs" drew my attention to the cliffs of the Neck—Skomer's section separated from the main island by a constantly eroding isthmus—its ledges bustling with nesting populations of **auks!**



### The Flight of Auks ©Dee Crute

There are five species of those deep-diving seabirds in the UK, with three right in front of me! **Guillemots** with chocolate coats and thin, pointed bills; jet black, white-bellied **Razorbills** with striking yellow mouths; and, of course... **Puffins!** Thousands of them!

Soon, we were also accompanied by Fulmars, Gannets, and various Gulls. And once we passed Rye Rocks welcoming us to North Haven, I saw hauled-out Grey Seals! I was ecstatic!

## Plains of Skomer

Visitors must be briefed on safety before exploring the island. Skomer is honeycombed with shallow bird burrows, which can easily collapse under a foot, crushing a nesting bird.

With Puffins out at sea during the day, it was the perfect opportunity to explore the Island while saving the famous auks for the evening.

I did not walk far before logging my first sighting onto the Birda app: a Sedge Warbler followed by a Grasshopper Warbler—my two new "lifers!" Skomer Island is a twitcher's paradise: Wheatears, Rock and Meadow Pipits, Skylarks, Linnets, Swallows, Pied Wagtails, and Choughs - all recorded on Birda!

The island trail is 4 miles long, so it goes without saying that I needed to recover before dusk...

## Bamboozled by Puffins

Auks spend most of their time in the open waters, diving and bobbing on the waves. But it is at eventide that they are most active, sashaying around their burrows and interacting with each other—and Puffins are the most social and inquisitive of them!

While walking to the visitors' landing, I heard a swoosh over my head: hundreds of Puffins returning from the sea! Their burrows were everywhere! One Puffin peeked out of its nest, tilting its head adorably, but I reminded myself that they were not pets. I was in their territory, and I felt intruding.



Jazzy Jesters ©Dee Crute

**“After beak rubbing, one Puffin tossed its head back, a sign of bonding and affection”.**



The next day, Wildlife Trust staff advised me that Puffins aren't bothered by us and recommended I visit the Wick that evening to see them at close quarters. But I never got there!

As I hoofed it to the Wick, the sound of a muted chainsaw startled me... With fewer than a dozen people on the Island after 5 p.m., it felt ominous!

But I had been bamboozled! The sounds were made by Puffins! As I descended onto the Welsh Way by the High Cliff, they appeared out of nowhere, bustling on both sides of the track and along the path ahead and behind me.

I lay on my front, watching them as they studied me.

They were surprisingly small at just over 7 inches tall. Though they appear chubby, their strong muscles make them excellent underwater fishers. Their set-back legs make other auks clumsy on land, but Puffins' relatively long legs allow for, very amusing, walking and running.

Always elegantly dressed in tuxedos—black tops with white underneath—they look so dapper that the contrasting colours of their eyes, beaks and legs make them look like slapstick characters! Upon closer inspection, the blacks and whites reveal a spectrum of hues, as if shaded by an artist.



**Pierrot Eyes ©Dee Crute**

Their eyes captivated me the most! It seems their irises are red—but they bamboozled us again! Their eyes are bluish grey with just about visible whites—an uncommon feature for animals.

Surrounded by red eye rings and black triangular ornaments, they earn the nickname "Clowns of the Sea." However, I see them more as Pierrots with their sad faces and bashful demeanour.

Only a couple of feet from me, two Puffins shook their heads from side to side and then rattled beaks together.

During the breeding season, the dark grey inner beak extends to the iconic grooved outer beak, vibrant in oranges and reds. The yellow mouth corners, known as "gape rosettes", are fleshy fish-holding adaptations.

After beak rubbing, one Puffin tossed its head back, a sign of bonding and affection. They mate for life but only cohabit during the breeding season, returning to the same colony each year like a large family.

During my stay, Puffins were still arriving on the Island, but by now, all the best burrows had already been taken by the firstcomers. The most desirable nests had the easiest take-off, and latecomers must excavate their own burrows.



**Grass Offering @Dee Crute**

Moments later, after the fascinating display of affection, a Puffin dove into a shallow hole just next to me, sending mud flying at nearby birds and occasionally kicking back his foot, which made me chuckle.

Soon after, I saw another amour—a Puffin strutted to his beau carrying an offering of grass and twigs in his beak. Infatuated with these wee avians, I returned to the hostel for the night, awaiting new adventures to come...

# Reflection

It was the most intimate wildlife experience and one I will never forget. Skomer Island is the ultimate destination for truly connecting with nature. I just wish it was more accessible for disabled folk without endangering the underground nesting.



**Night with Puffins ©Dee Crute**

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*Dee Crute is a disabled adventuress, photographer, naturalist, journalist & campaigner specialising in Women's Rights, Disability, and Inclusion.*

# Indie Craftmen of the Month

*Here in the Introvert, we believe in independent small businesses and craftsmen that promote the values of old: honesty, quality, and sustainability, creating community by supporting real connections between human beans.*

## Iris Retzlaff Author

Iris Retzlaff is a Master Procrastinator with special training in escapism and a head full of imaginary people and their stories.

She/they can also usually be found on Instagram, screaming about books with like-minded book dragons @[fendassor](https://www.instagram.com/fendassor)







## Iris Retzlaff's books

### Happily Maybe After trilogy:

*As long as Bran could remember, he had had but one dream: to be a hero. The stories made it sound pretty forward: you save a princess, you become a hero. Unfortunately, every princess has already been saved, and every evil been defeated. When Bran, against all odds, finds himself a princess to save at last, nothing is quite as it was in the stories.*

The complete novella trilogy is available as an ebook and in paperback on [Amazon](#) and at the [Dreamer's Bookshop](#).

### And the very new release!!!

Moon's Lament is a tale about love, found family, betrayal, loss, revenge, and the masks we wear.

Available via all major retailers in ebook, hardcover, and paperback November 13th!!!

Check on [GoodReads!](#)



Follow Iris's work on social media, and GoodReads!

Amazon: Author Iris Retzlaff  
Instagram: @fendassor

GoodReads: Iris Retzlaff  
Website: [linktr.ee/fendassor](http://linktr.ee/fendassor)

# How to help indie authors

By Iris Retzlaff

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**Writing and publishing a book can be scary for multiple reasons, but it most often means frustration, self-doubt, tears, and lots of hard work—unpaid work.**



For an indie author, it also means filling every position needed to publish a book: editor, proofreader, copy editor, PR, etc.

Can't you just pay someone to do that for you, you ask?

Yes, you could, but how many Indie Authors can afford it? Every Euro, Pound, or Dollar you have to pay for cover art, merchandise, and anything else is an investment that doesn't guarantee a return.



You may wonder why anyone would still want to be an author.

The answer is simple:

**We are storytellers, and stories need to be shared so they can live.**

All the hard work, the pulled-out hair, and the sleepless nights are worth it for that magical moment when you hold your book in your own hands for the first time or when a reader tells you how much they loved your book, your characters, and the world you've created.

Indie literature is a treasure trove of originality, creativity, and diversity. Still, existing in the shadow of traditionally published literature is quite a challenge, especially since we are completely on our own for the most part.

**But we don't have to be. In fact, you, the reader, the bookdragon\* - eagerly adding to their hoard - can help us.**

I promise it's easy and won't cost you anything:

- **Read the book** – The first and most crucial step, and yes, all right, that does cost you some money, but if you are venturing onto a book hunt, why not pick up a book by an indie author? Give it a chance; you might be pleasantly surprised!



- **Pre-order books, even without a pre-order incentive** - Pre-orders, like reviews, help promote the book. For instance, pre-orders on Amazon help with book visibility and, therefore, attract more potential readers.
- **Follow the author on social media and engage with them** - This way you help with the fickle "socials" algorithm and stay in the know with new or continuing projects, giveaways or even access to ARCs\*\*.

**Give it a try, and most importantly, give indie authors a chance. You have no idea what incredible hidden gems you may find.**



\*A book dragon is a person who collects books in the same way a dragon hoards gold and jewels.

- **Leave a review** – Indie authors, even more than traditionally published authors, live by word of mouth, and reviews are among the most effective promotion tools.
- **Talk about the book** - Share it wide: post and make reels about it, or create mood board; whatever you want.
- Check whether the indie author also has a **website** where you can **buy their books directly from them.**

\*\*ARC - Advance Reader Copy, is a free, unpublished version of a book that a publisher sends to a select group of readers before the book's official release



The Wheel of the Year has  
turned again...

# Samhain



Text and Photography by  
Jennie Smith

**The days are getting cooler, and the nights longer. The leaves on the trees are falling, covering the ground in beautiful hues of reds, oranges, yellows, and browns. Pumpkins and jack-o-lanterns are on front porches and lining walkways. It's the Season of the Witch, and Samhain is upon us.**

Samhain, the third and last harvest festival on the Wheel of the Year, is on October 31st.

It is the halfway point between the Autumn Equinox and the Winter Solstice.

Samhain is a magical sabbat when the veil between the physical realm and the spirit realm thins, making it easier for spirits to pass through and join us. It is a time to focus on the dark gods and goddesses, practice divination, and honour our ancestors.

Samhain is also considered the witch's new year. It marks the end of the seasonal cycle on the

Wheel of the Year and the death of the sun as we approach the darkest days of the year.





Many Samhain and Halloween traditions overlap, such as carving pumpkins, dressing up in costumes, and trick-or-treating.

In addition to these fun activities, other ways to celebrate Samhain include honouring the dead. We can do this by hosting a special meal known as a dumb supper, where everyone eats in silence or speaks quietly, and a place is set for those who have passed. We can also open a window or door and leave a cake or food offering out for the dead that visit, attend a cemetery and clean gravestones or leave flowers, and add pictures of relatives who have passed on your altar.

## Samhain Correspondence

**Colours:** *Orange, purple, black, white, gold*

**Animals:** *Bats, spiders, crows, owls, ravens, snakes, black cats*

**Crystals:** *Bloodstone, onyx, peridot, quartz, black tourmaline, hematite, malachite, obsidian, ruby, amethyst*

**Herbs:** *Mugwort, cinnamon, yarrow, clove, sage, nutmeg, rosemary*

**Flowers:** *Chrysanthemum, marigold, belladonna, rose*

**Altar decorations:** *Acorns, pumpkins, gourds, skulls, candles, cauldron, besom, crystals, offerings, pictures of ancestors, items of ancestors, crows/ravens, black lace*

**Themes:** *Death, passage, remembrance, transformation, wisdom*



**Ways to celebrate Samhain:**

- Decorate your home and altar,
- Carve pumpkins,
- Bake with pumpkins,
- Set up an ancestor altar,
- Host a dumb supper,
- Have a bonfire,
- Watch Halloween movies,
- Practice divination,
- Leave an offering,
- Make an incense blend,
- Make herbal tea (you can also practice tasseography or tea leaf reading),
- Honour or learn about the dark gods and goddesses (such as Hekate, Persephone, Hades, and Hel) and what they have to teach.



*I wish you all the magic of this beautiful season.*

*Mabon Blessings, witchy friends*

*Jennie Smith @nature\_seasons\_magic*



## About Jennie

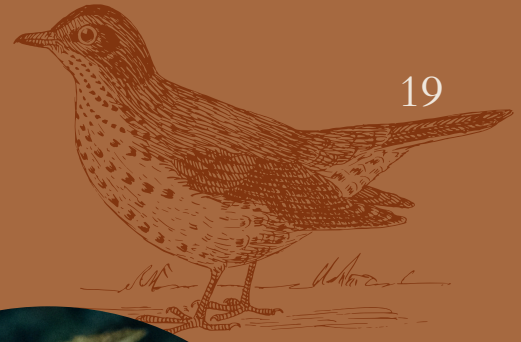
I'm Jennie. I live in Ohio with my husband and our three kids, ages 19-22. I am a special education teacher of high school students with multiple disabilities. I am also currently working on my master's degree. I am a pagan and green witch. I have been practising green witchcraft for many years and studying herbalism for over 20 years.

My hobbies include gardening, herbalism, reading, and outdoor activities like hiking and kayaking. As a green witch, I work with nature and the earth's energies. I love working in my garden, working with different plants, flowers, and herbs, and making teas, tinctures, lotions, and salves with them.

For me, to be a green witch means living seasonally, finding magic in the mundane and recognizing the sacred in everyday life (working in my garden, talking to my houseplants while watering them, mindfully sipping my tea, etc), and living in harmony with nature.



# Nature Kaleidoscope: October



October brings us the most fascinating events! Stags are strutting their stuff, vying for the attention of a prospective mate and trying to daunt their rivals. Their bellowing and clashing antlers can be a phenomenal experience - just as a dangerous one. It's important to give Red Deer space and observe from a safe distance using binoculars.



Look up! And look around you! Autumn sees bird migration in full swing: there are departures and exciting arrivals!



Birds like Yellow wagtails and Sand Martins are leaving our shores for the Sahel, south of the Sahara in Africa. But don't worry! There is plenty to see! Geese and ducks visit us from Russia, Iceland, Scandinavia and Northern Europe.

Whenever you see trees and hedges adorned with ripe berries, keep your eyes peeled for "Winter Trushes" - Redwings and Fieldfares! They always stick together, so if you spot one, prepare your binos or camera for more!





# October Foraging Basket

By Dee Crute

**October is predominantly the time for fungi!**

## Disclaimer

The Editorial team assumes no responsibility for the readers' actions. **DO NOT EAT, LICK, OR PICK UP** anything that might be poisonous. When you forage, make sure you are confident in your identification.

Better still, turn the foraging session into a Fungi Hunt, looking for and observing details: patterns, shapes, and colours! Maybe take a notebook or drawing pad with you, or take a photo to paint what you found at home.

Movement and being outdoors are necessary for our wellbeing, but healing and recharging "power" or efficacy depend on how present you are. If you connect with your surroundings mindfully, you will see enormous benefits!





# Fantastic Fungi & more!



## Penny Bun



### *Boletus edulis*

Look for in oak and beech woods. They are delicious and appear in groups! Rejoice! You may know them from your supermarket as porcini - their Italian name. The name stems from its maturing cap that looks like a crusty brown roll.

## Chanterelle



### *Cantharellus cibarius*

To find them, think the Big Five: Beech, Oak, Birch, Pine, and Spruce woodland. Then, rummage in moss and leaf litter, and voila! Be careful with online photography to identify this mushroom: overedited photos can look closer to the False Chanterelle (*Hygrophoropsis aurantiaca*), which is more orange-yellow and poisonous. The "real" Chanterelle has white flesh, so cut it in half if you are not sure!



## Wood Blewit



### *Lepistula nuda*

The young cap is lilac-blue and turns brown with age. Gills can be purple or lilac and get paler when matured. The stem is stout, fibrous, and also blue-purple. It is a common mushroom found on leaf litter in woodland, grassland, hedgerows, and even gardens.

## Curry Milkcap



### *Russula camphoratus*

Look for a dark red-brown cap sitting on the brittle stem. If your mushroom gills produce clear milk with cloudy bits and a distinctive smell of curry, you've got your dinner!

## Sweet Chestnut



### *Castanea sativa*

These roasted Christmas treats are only available in October, so you better hurry! Look for prickly clustered husks and brown nuts! Bring gardening gloves, as their spikes are vicious!

## The Introvert



# Shipshape Smithy's Flash Reviews!



## The Lost Alchemist by Samantha Vitale REVIEW

### Do I recommend this book?

Yes, a 1000 times yes!

*I have spent the last four days being sad that the book it is over. Here are the reasons why I loved it. The plot twists that had me stopping several times and making this face 😞. The way the different fairytale stories have been woven in. Some I didn't notice and then was like duuhhh! The new romance that was introduced, which might be one of my favourites ever – gives me a sharp-edged female and a soft male, and I am all in. And the new point of view that we didn't know we needed but must be protected at all costs! The world building or should I say worlds. I could go on.*



*This series is one of my favourites and one that I will always recommend. It's a coming-of-age, action-packed, steampunk fantasy series that you should all read!*

### Did I enjoy it?

*I loved it!*

### Any criticisms?

*Nope.*

### Will I read the sequel?

*I cannot wait!*

Read more Flash Reviews on the  
Introvert Bookstagram web page!

Follow Shipshape Smithy on  
Instagram @shipshapesmithy



# Discovering the Lost Houses of the Clyde Valley

Text and Photography by  
Christine Wallace

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Have you ever passed an imposing gateway at the side of the road, at the entrance to a winding lane that disappears out of sight? Or discovered an old stone wall that seems to go on for ever and wondered who built it and why? Or admired an ornamental cottage, perhaps in the middle of nowhere or surrounded by a modern housing estate and pondered over its history? These clues, along with snippets of old stories told by my elderly relatives and the sweeping views across the great river to stone pinnacles glittering in the sunlight, are what led me to discover the Lost Houses of the Clyde Valley.



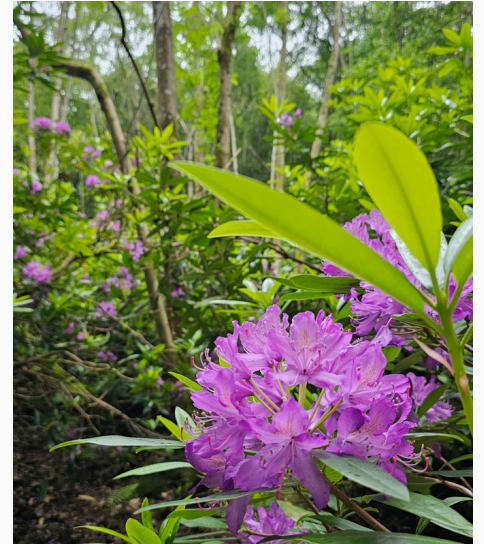
Cambusnethan Priory, the fairytale castle of my childhood – then and now



“This summer, I returned to the Clyde Valley once again to look for traces of the past. My quest took me to old estates, along tree-lined avenues, down deep glens and across rushing streams.”

I grew up in an isolated house down an old farm road on the cusp of the valley and, as an only child after my brother passed away, I was the very definition of an introvert. I made up stories for myself and explored the countryside, dreaming about the nearby fairytale castle where I imagined a princess was imprisoned and I would have to rescue her. Later, my father took me on long drives along the winding Clyde Valley Road at night and we would explore together,

finding the ruins of Cragneithan Castle and the great tower house of Hallbar, as well as countless lodges and gatehouses, in most cases guarding roads that led to nowhere. I remember craning my neck, trying to catch a glimpse from the car of the ghostly castle which lay beyond, only to find out it was long gone. I realised there was a forgotten historic wonderland all around us that we never learnt about in school.



Traces of past: gate posts, walled gardens... and rhododendrons!



Over the years, I found out that the valley had once been lined with castles, mansions and palaces, some with an original 15th-century tower house at their heart. In the early years of the 20th century, many had been demolished while others fell prey to decay and vandalism, sometimes even fire and, in a few cases, under-mining... literally! It was a way of life that came to an end due to many factors – the Great War, the rise of industry, the Great Depression – and yet every lost estate had its own particular story. The list of names of the Lost Houses is fascinating in itself: Mauldslie, Milton Lockhart, Stonebyres, Carfin, Auchtyfardle, Dalsarf, Auchlochan, Jerviston... but the Clyde Valley is not alone in this respect – the loss of the great houses occurred all across the United Kingdom and beyond.

This summer, I returned to the Clyde Valley once again to look for traces of the past. My quest took me to old estates, along tree-lined avenues, down deep glens and across rushing streams. Some substantial ruins still remain, such as Eastend House and Carmichael House, which stand in the great shadow of Tinto Hill. Other estates have been turned into country parks, such as Chatelherault and Carfin. I wandered the old lanes, admiring the ancient rows of trees and coming across fallen stone gateways that had once stood proudly.



**Discovering Carmichael House and Eastend House in the summer of 2024**

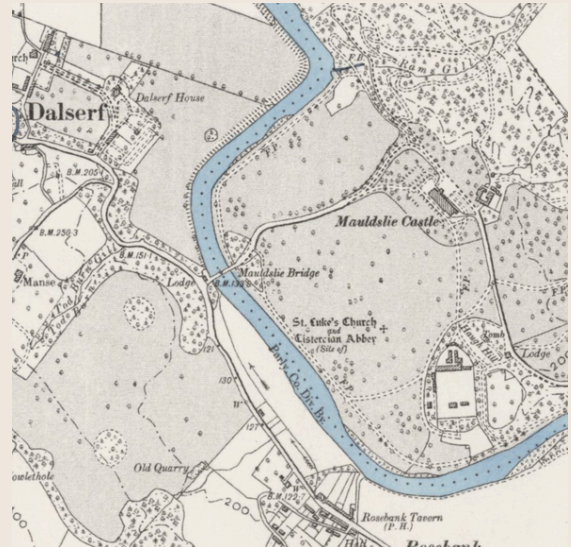


***So why is this history important, and how can we harness it for the benefit of everyone in the local community?***

In fact, many of the green spaces we love today, such as our public parks, were once country estates. In many cases, they provide a safe place - a refuge - where one can walk for miles in relative peace and quiet, away from busy roads. The Clyde Walkway is a wonderful long-distance walking path that follows the river and allows one to get close to both nature and the history of the area. My dream would be to make this landscape even more accessible by restoring one of the ruined houses as a multi-purpose visitor centre for the local community.

In post-industrial areas, access to green space for all is increasingly important, and understanding the historic landscape fosters community spirit. I have witnessed this through my earlier work running the campaign to restore Cambusnethan Priory and attending the Community Heritage Conference, as well as through our local history group page. Other great local community projects include the restoration of Carluke High Mill to provide education facilities, exhibition space and cottage gardening facilities, still a very important part of the Clyde Valley heritage - the area was once known as the Orchard Country.

And finally, perhaps most important of all, these landscapes tell a story. In many cases the history is not written down but passed on through the generations of people who had ancestors living on or near these estates. Not all stories are nice and, of course, there was a huge gulf between those who owned the houses and the people working in the neighbouring mines who provided much of the wealth. But today through this shared history I believe we can all stake a claim to these places and see them for what they are now - quite simply beautiful, lush green landscapes for all... and a place for adventure!



**Maudslie Castle and the historic estate map from NLS Maps: <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/side-by-side/>**

To end this article, I would like to share with you an amazing resource which has been invaluable in my studies of the designed landscapes of the past – the side-by-side map view from the National Library of Scotland.

This allows one to see the designed landscape of the past beside the aerial view of today. I have discovered many lost houses and lost estates using this tool, which covers the whole of Great Britain and, for the budding archaeologist, also LIDAR, which illuminates hidden details of the historic landscape.

So, next time you go for a walk in a local park or along a tree-lined avenue in the countryside, have a look at the old map. You might just find that you are walking along the hidden drive to a lost house...

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**For stories from the countryside, gardens, history and architecture, follow Christine - a Scottish physicist in a German farmhouse - on Instagram [@RedSequoiaDawn](https://www.instagram.com/RedSequoiaDawn).**



# The Introvert



Loch Long, Argyll & Bute, Scotland, September 2024, ©Dee Crute