

REIMAGINING PANDON DENE



DRAWING THE PAST

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INTRODUCTION

Dwellbeing Shieldfield has been working with artist Sara Cooper since 2018, initially working with local school children. Most recently, Sara has been undertaking an art commission with us. She has worked closely with our Shieling Working Group and has researched the history and plant life of the area, particularly around Napier Street. Working with a local botanist we identified over 50 types of plants, including a rare Hawkweed species. She thought about how the area might have been laid out in the past with its dene, woodland, river and pasture and, later on, as a place famous for its gardens and orchards. Sara undertook many types of drawing activity with residents young and old. This booklet shows a selection of these drawings by residents and the Shieling Working Group.

This commission has led to the planting of a wildflower meadow on Napier Street. The meadow is planted in the outline of one of Shieldfield's historic water mills which was once on the banks of the Pandon Burn - a river which now lies underneath the Central Motorway. This is a living artwork which will flower year after year.

It has been a pleasure to work with Sara in this work and to explore the creative potentials of plants and our own histories through Dwellbeing's first art commission.

REIMAGINING PANDON DENE

by Sara Cooper

Dene: From the Old English *denu* “valley” (den); a place of retreat” (late 13c.).¹

In the English counties of Durham and Northumberland a dene is a steep-sided wooded valley through which a burn runs.²

Shadow has its origins in Old English *sceadwe*, “shadow” from *sceadu*, “shade.” The verb shadow is interesting: it comes from Old English *sceadwian* “to protect with covering wings”.³

As part of the commission, I researched the area previously known as Pandon Dene, which defined the edges of modern-day Shieldfield. I tried to visualise how this landscape might have looked in the past.

I made shadow drawings using plant pigments as a way to think about the area’s natural history. The drawings allude to the passage of time and perhaps capture a vestige of the Dene.

Members of the Shieling Working Group created these drawings during the summer months, using black drawing ink to imaginatively record wild plants along Napier Street. We talked about Shieldfield's history, the group's growing activities and plans for rejuvenating their communal spaces through planting.

Making the drawings allowed us to closely observe and learn about Shieldfield, about plants and communities. The images are a resource, which prompt us to think about what this place might be in the future – a place of retreat, perhaps?

Sara Cooper is a North East based artist whose practice encompasses drawings, print, film and objects; often developed collaboratively in response to natural heritage and related social histories. Recent works include 'NZ4920 (code 142)' a 25m site-specific installation for the Tunnel Gallery beneath Middlesbrough railway station.

Her work has been represented in group shows including: Architectures of Displacement, Tate Exchange, Liverpool (2017); #Untitled10, Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle (2019) and Fragile Earth: weeds, seeds & plastic crust, mima, Middlesbrough (2019).

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PANDON DENE

“A very romantick place,
full of hills and vales”

Newcastle is built on glacial deposits which are over 100ft deep. As these flowed down to the Tyne gorge, deep valleys were cut into the surface. The Pandon Dene was 140 yards wide. In 1827 Eneas Mackenzie, a local topographer and historian described the Dene:

“The walk up the dene is extremely pleasant and romantic: the banks on each side, above the water corn-mill, are covered with little gardens, which are mostly kept in excellent order, and have pretty convenient summer-houses. Here many industrious tradesmen find pleasure and recreation, while they contribute to increase the beauties of this delightful vale.”⁴

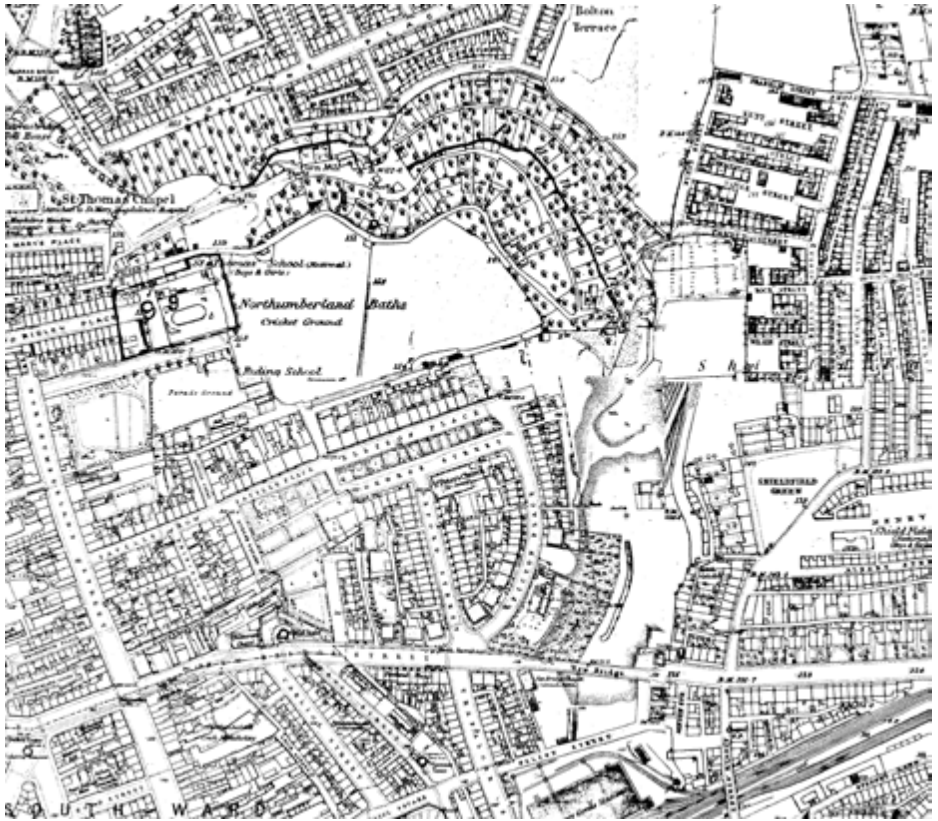
The lower section of Pandon Dene up to Pandon Gate was culverted after 1649. From around 1840 the culverts (manmade underground structures that divert water) were used for sewage disposal. Pandon Dene beyond the town walls was the last major section of the valley to be filled. Waste material from the Victoria

Tunnel was dumped in the Dene in 1842, then material from the construction of Manors Station was added and then in 1881 material from St. Michael's Mount. By 1886 Pandon Dene was almost all infilled. In 1977 during President Carter's visit to Newcastle, part of the infill of Pandon Dene south of the Civic Centre, subsided under the weight of the crowd.⁵

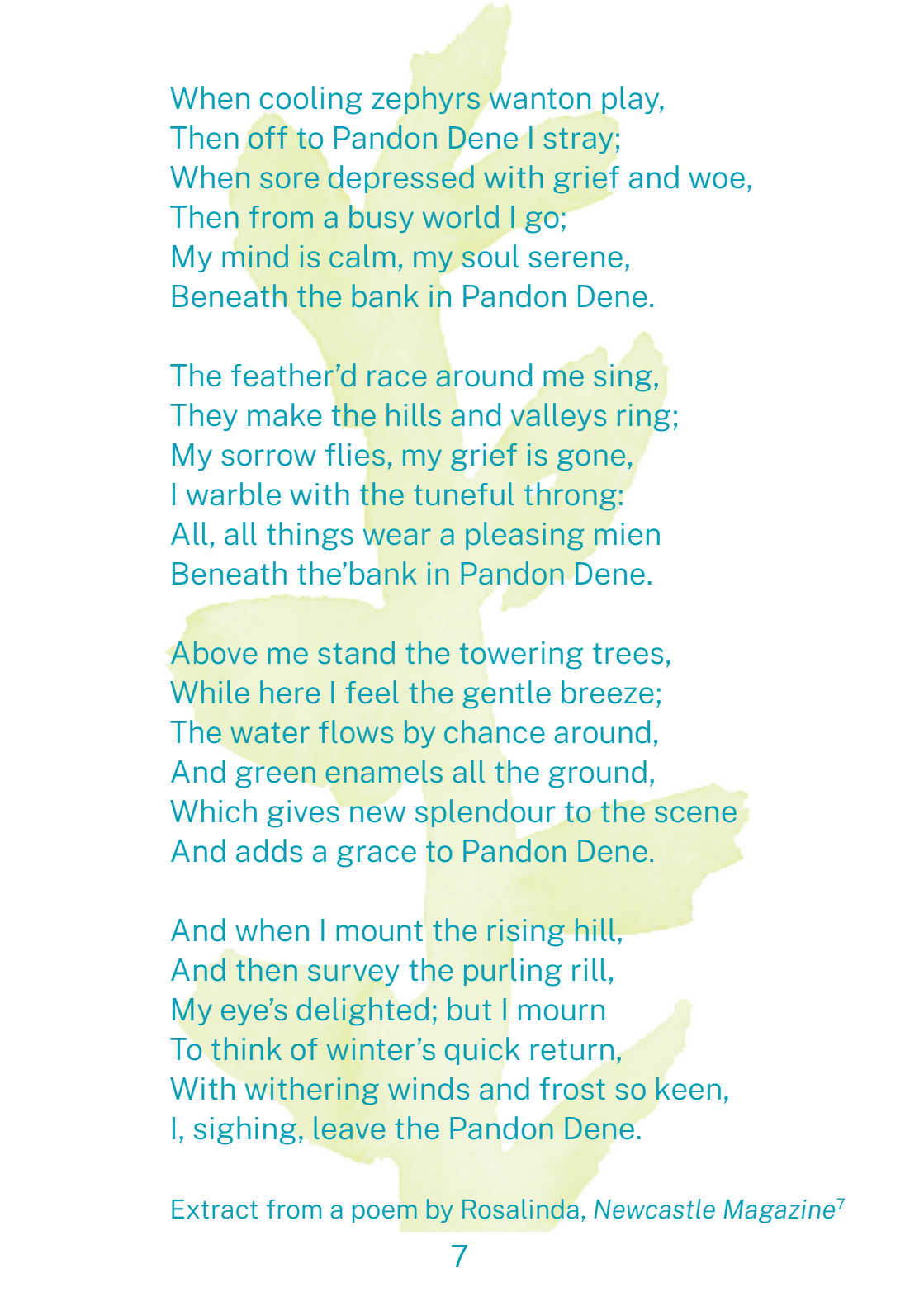
The railway was built on reclaimed land following the line of the former Dene. The route of the central motorway now follows this, once again splitting the city in two. Little evidence of the Dene remains, lost amongst rubbish, railway tracks and now roads. However, street names, like Pandon Bank, near the Quayside remind us of the watercourse that runs beneath our feet.

John Morton from the *North East Lore* website mourns the loss of Pandon Dene:

*"To write of Pandon Dene is like writing of some departed friend. There is a tender melancholy associated with the place like that associated with the memory of the dead. And when we think of it as it once was gay with foliage and blossom and look upon its condition of today, buried far beneath a mass of ever accumulating rubbish, our melancholy is not unmingled with regret that so splendid a site for a public park should have been lost the city."*⁶



1860 Ordnance Survey map showing Pandon Dene snaking through the city, separating the city centre from Shieldfield.



When cooling zephyrs wanton play,
Then off to Pandon Dene I stray;
When sore depressed with grief and woe,
Then from a busy world I go;
My mind is calm, my soul serene,
Beneath the bank in Pandon Dene.

The feather'd race around me sing,
They make the hills and valleys ring;
My sorrow flies, my grief is gone,
I warble with the tuneful throng:
All, all things wear a pleasing mien
Beneath the'bank in Pandon Dene.

Above me stand the towering trees,
While here I feel the gentle breeze;
The water flows by chance around,
And green enamels all the ground,
Which gives new splendour to the scene
And adds a grace to Pandon Dene.

And when I mount the rising hill,
And then survey the purling rill,
My eye's delighted; but I mourn
To think of winter's quick return,
With withering winds and frost so keen,
I, sighing, leave the Pandon Dene.

Extract from a poem by Rosalinda, *Newcastle Magazine*⁷



A view of The New Bridge, Pandon Dene 1821, engraved by John Knox from a painting by John Lumsden. The scene was:

“taken from near the foot of the steps which used to lead down from Shieldfield at the end of the lane called “the Garden Tops.” It... shows the old water corn mill, afterwards the Pear Tree Inn.”⁸

FROM COMMISSION TO COMPLETION

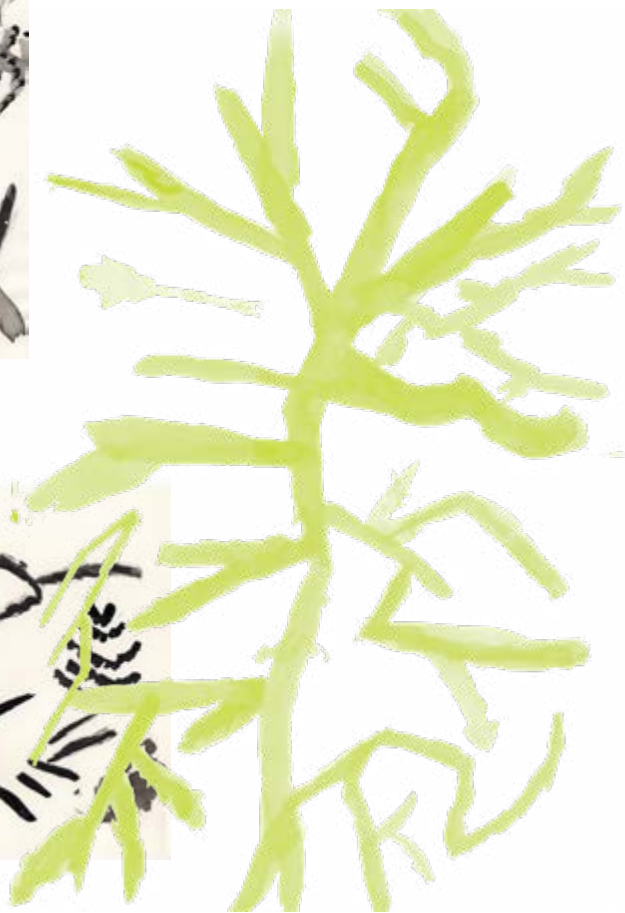
by Helen Lunn

How does an art commission happen? This is a new world to me, and an interesting one. What has been learnt that can be shared and used again?

- I think qualities needed are patience, flexibility and perseverance. Come with an open mind, explore the area, both the geography and the history. Talk to the people who live in the area now. Experiment and adapt, and encourage people to be involved and take risks. Think big but focus on a smaller area.
- Planning is important, but be prepared to change if need be. Draw on as many contacts as possible to share skills and resources and make links.
- Find out who you need to talk to to enable the commission to proceed, and don't give up.
- Be realistic financially. Be open and accountable.
- Communicate widely and involve the community.
- Recognise that this is the start of a process. It is about sowing seeds (literally in this case).
- Look ahead and consider where this can lead.
- Be excited. Growing through art can enrich people and places and bring joy.

HELEN

Shadow Drawings





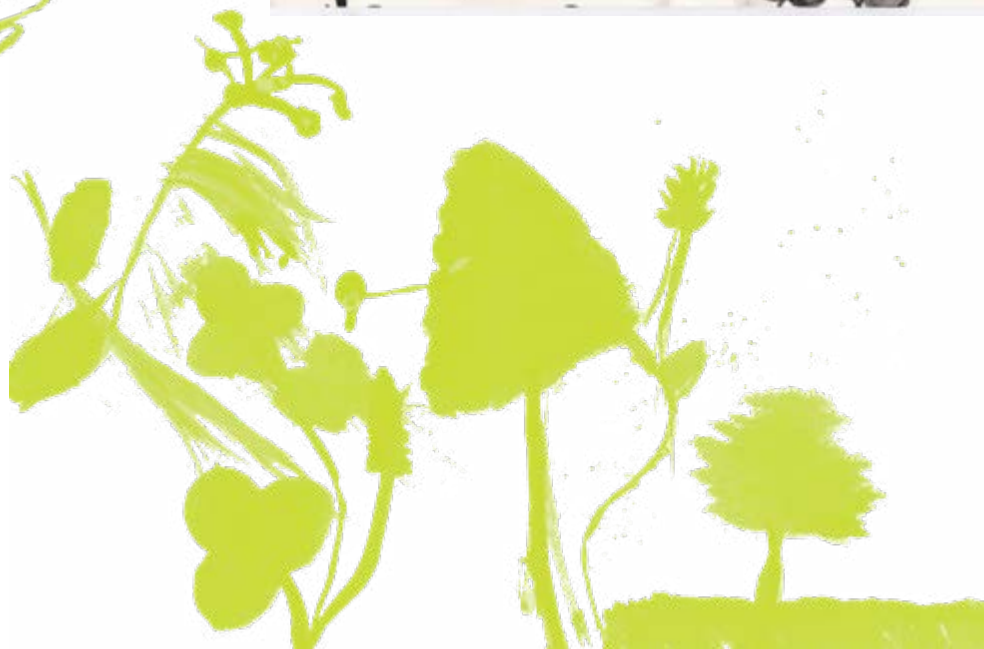




MARIA



LIANNA



KALTOUMA





LYDIA



JULIA



HELENA



HELEN

Drawing with plants



KALTOUMA

Drawing with grasses





Endnotes

¹ etymonline.com

² [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dene_\(valley\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dene_(valley))

³ etymonline.com

⁴ Mackenzie, E. (1827) *A Descriptive and historical account of the town and country of Newcastle-upon-Tyne: including the borough of Gateshead*. Mackenzie and Dent: Newcastle upon Tyne, p. 192

⁵ <https://blog.twmuseums.org.uk/the-real-barras-bridge-and-newcastles-beautiful-lost-dean/>

⁶ <https://northeastlore.com/2016/10/10/pandon-dene-newcastle/>

⁷ Rosalinda, *Newcastle Magazine*, 18th September 1776

⁸ *The Monthly Chronicle of North-Country Lore And Legend*, 1890

THANK YOU

From Sara Cooper

Thanks to the Dwellbeing Shieling Working Group for welcoming me to their neighbourhood, for their willing participation and lovely drawings by Kaltouma, Maria, Helen, Lianna, Helena, and Lydia. Thanks also to other local residents and children who participated in earlier drawing activities.

Thank you Hannah, Helen and Julia for continued support and collaboration.

And also to Ken, Mahamat, Ikbal, Clare, Edyta and HarperPerry Architects for input during the commission.

Dwellbeing Shieldfield is a welcoming community group and co-operative for people of all ages and backgrounds in Shieldfield, Newcastle. We share life together, support our neighbours and celebrate our community. We enjoy regular social events and educational activities such as group walks, coffee meet-ups, planting and growing food, youth activities, and making improvements to our neighbourhood. Our aim is for community members to play an active role in shaping life in Shieldfield.

The Shieling Programme is responsible for the public realm aspects of Dwellbeing's work. This includes food growing, creating and sustaining community spaces and public realm improvements, as well as building community knowledge and engagement around the issues of food security, sustainable and participatory forms of building, land, planning and urban development. It is run by a working group of residents alongside Shieldfield Art Works.

Get in touch to find out more and become a member:

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