

3.1 Introduction

The landscapes of the Forest of Dean have inspired many authors, poets, artists and musicians. Many are well known and of national or international importance. Others are less well known outside the district and have their work displayed and published locally. In recent times the district's landscapes have provided a forum to develop local cultural initiatives. A number of these are also introduced in this section.

3.2 Writers and Poets

For hundreds of years writers and poets have visited and settled in the district and have been inspired by the landscape, its traditions and people. Others have been raised in the district and have returned to the landscape for inspiration time and again.

Wordsworth and Gilpin

The first poets known to have brought the district to the attention of the wider literary world were William Gilpin and William Wordsworth. During the 18th century the Wye Valley became famous for its natural beauty, and landmarks such as Symond's Yat were well known in artistic circles. The valley's rugged and inspiring landscape was initially promoted by William Gilpin in 1782 in his book '*Observations on the River Wye and Several Points in South Wales*'. Later the landscape was adopted by Wordsworth and other Romantic poets. The Wye and the surrounding landscape were seen as providing examples of the correct balance of feature, form, proportion, foreground, background and colour and as such, conformed with Gilpin's complex rules for his theories of the 'picturesque'. As the search for the picturesque became fashionable, a tour of the Wye became an integral part of the development of a person of taste. The extract presented below from a poem of 1798 by Wordsworth illustrates the Romantic way the landscape was viewed at this time;

"Once Again

Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs

That on a wild secluded scene impress

Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and

Connect

The landscape with the quiet of the sky".

(From 'Lines composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey'.)

William Wordsworth is identified as having a close relationship with the River Wye. His dual attitude to nature is seen as representing the loss of his parents at an early age, with the grand dark landscapes of his poetry associated with the admonishing father, and the homely images of the Wye Valley linked to his mother and sister. Indeed Wordsworth is noted as being more influenced by nature and landscapes of the Wye rather than the religious association of the ruins when visiting Tintern Abbey .

Catherine Drew

Catherine Drew, a contemporary of Wordsworth was born in 1794 in Cinderford and during her life she wrote many poems about the Forest Dean, a number of which were published in a limited edition book in 1841: '*A Collection of Poems on the Forest of Dean and its Neighbourhood*'. Unfortunately it is believed that only 100 of these books were printed.

The Dymock Poets

Perhaps the most celebrated group of writers to have been inspired by the district's landscapes are known as the Dymock Poets. In the years leading up to the First World War, the six Dymock poets (Lascelles Abercrombie, Wilfred Gibson, Rupert Brooke, John Drinkwater, Robert Frost and Edward Thomas) made their base at Dymock from where the group explored the countryside between May Hill and the Malverns and indulged their love of nature and the countryside. A number of walks have been established which allow visitors the opportunity to access some of the landscapes that the Dymock poets found to be inspirational.

Abercrombie, Gibson and Drinkwater published a quarterly magazine in 1914; however, only four issues were published. The First World War, and significantly the death of Rupert Brook, brought an end to this venture. However, their significance in the development of modern poetry is now recognised, and their time at Dymock seen as a golden idyll;

*"..... I had a song, too, on my road,
But mine was in my eyes;
For Malvern Hills were with me all the way,*

*Singing loveliest visible melodies
Blue as a south-sea bay;
And ruddy as wine of France
Breadths of new-turn'd ploughland under them glowed.
'Twas my heart then must dance
To dwell in my delight;
No need to sing when all in song my sight
Moved over hills so musically made
And with such colour played. --
And only yesterday it was I saw
Veil'd in streamers of grey wavering smoke
My shapely Malvern Hills"*

(Excerpt from the poem 'Ryton Firs' by Lascelles Abercrombie).

Frederick William Harvey

Frederick William Harvey was born in Hartbury in 1888, the son of a successful horse breeder. Like the Dymock Poets Harvey was inspired by the local countryside. This is clearly expressed in his poem, 'My Village'.

*'...I love the tangled orchards blowing so bright
With clouds of apple blossom, and the red
Ripe fruit that hangs a-shining in the blue air
Like rubies hanging in the orchard's hair'.*

After surviving the Somme offensive, Harvey was held in German Prisoner of War for two years. During this time memories of the landscapes of his homeland helped him endure his ordeal.

Leonard Clarke

Leonard Clarke, best known as a poet and broadcaster was raised in the Forest of Dean. His books, 'Green Wood', 'A Fool in the Forest' and 'Grateful Caliban' give an autobiographical account of his life in the Forest. In particular Clarke writes with warmth about the people and places of the Forest, giving a clear insight into the social history of the Forest of Dean. Clarke reminisces about his favourite wood, Abbot's Wood, south of Cinderford in 'Green Wood';

'In spring, the glades around me were purple with bluebell light. The foxgloves followed, the tall soldiers of the forest, solitary bees buzzing in and out of their silky sheaths, with other tiny insect noises chiming unendingly around me'.

Winifred Foley

Winifred Foley, born in 1914 in the small village of Brierley, near Cinderford, and the daughter of a Forest of Dean miner, is another life long resident of the Forest to write an autobiographical account of her life. Her celebrated '*Forest Trilogy*' tells the story of a period of great social and landscape change in the Forest. In the publication '*A Child in the Forest*' Foley describes the landscape as; *"Ten by twenty miles of secluded, hilly country; ancient woods of oak and fern; and among them small coal mines, small market towns, villages and farms. We are content to be a race apart, made up mostly of families who had lived in the Forest for generations"*.

Dennis Potter

The critically acclaimed playwright Dennis Potter was born in the Forest of Dean in Coleford, the eldest son of a Forest coal miner. The landscapes of the Forest of Dean inspired much of Potter's work and indeed he once referred to the Forest as "this heart shaped land". Two of his books, '*The Glittering Coffin*' and '*The Changing Forest: Life in the Forest of Dean Today*', provide a detailed account of Forest life, the unique Forest dialect and Forest traditions. In '*The Changing Forest*' Potter's deep appreciation is made clear; *"I know of few more fascinating areas, and, entering the Forest of Dean by whichever route you choose, you can soon sense that you are in a self absorbed community where the interrelation of landscape, work and the different generations demands more than the usual flickering attention"*.

3.3 Artists and Sculptors

Joseph Mallard William Turner

Given the nature of the dramatic and varied landscapes of the Forest of Dean it is of great surprise that there is no wealth of work, or artist of national importance that can be traced back to the district. As a Romantic artist, and contemporary of Wordsworth, Joseph Mallard William Turner is known to have painted and sketched extensively at Tintern Abbey. However, the dramatic landscape setting of the monument appears to have been secondary in importance to the abbey ruins. Only one finished watercolour (dating to c.1828 and titled Tintern Abbey, Monmouthshire) provides a view of the dramatic wooded gorge and the River Wye.

Ian Hamilton Finlay

In more recent times the contemporary artist Ian Hamilton Finlay produced a lithograph of the central forest entitled '*A Proposal for the Forest of Dean*' in 1988 in the '*Garden Proposals*'.

Lightshift

In recent years the district has seen artists and craftspeople grow in confidence and produce work of great merit. In 2001, for example, a collaboration of artists, foresters and students created a light based performance event in the Forest of Dean. 'Lightshift' incorporated installations of light, sound, projection and pyrotechnics into the Forest of Dean Sculpture Trail, which itself is an important forum for local artists.

3.4 Musicians

Herbert Howells

The eastern part of the district falls within the influence of the Three Choirs Festival which began in 1724. Indeed the Three Choirs Way, a long distance footpath which links the cities of Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester, incorporates a number of the district's varied landscapes. The most notable composers associated with the festival and the district are Herbert Howells of Lydney who was a friend of Vaughan Williams, and Edward Elgar who was born at Broadheath in Worcestershire, and whose mother was from the Forest of Dean.

Herbert Howells had a strong affection for his home county and amongst his most fluent works is the string quartet '*In Gloucestershire*', the first movement of which describes the River Severn and the fourth movement which is suggestive of the Welsh borders of Dean .

Edward Elgar

Edward Elgar, England's first major composer since Purcell, was also deeply inspired by the landscapes of neighbouring Worcestershire and it is not impossible that the landscapes of the Forest of Dean also inspired his music.

3.5 What Makes The Forest of Dean Special?

The By Definition team has collected the views of stakeholders and community groups across the Forest of Dean District in order to contribute to the 'Forest of Dean Landscape and Heritage Study'. One to one interviews were undertaken with 1256 individuals and the attendance of the By Definition team at over 50 gatherings across the district in order to answer the overall question, 'What Makes the Forest of Dean Special?'

In addition to questionnaires, the By Definition Project adopted a multi media approach to data collection in order to canvass a broad spectrum of views from those living and working within the district. This included a parish photography project (Forest 41) where local communities were asked to record aspects of Forest life or special features within it, and a video project aimed at young people. A number of photographs provided to the By Definition project have been included within this report.

Included below is a brief summary of the data collected as a part of the project. Further details are available from the By Definition team. Example responses are contained in Appendix 6.

'When you talk about the Forest of Dean, what do you mean?'

Less than a fifth of the people gave the district as their answer. There was a significant difference in the sense of belonging between residents in the North of the District and those who live in the centre or south.

'What's special about the Forest of Dean?'

Before asking this question, By Definition clarified that the term was being applied to the whole district and so wished respondents to include anything special within the District boundary. The results illustrate that those questioned regard strong sense of place and people as being special. 84% of those surveyed gave place (general, features, specific) or people as special. Only 10% said just 'place', 5% said just 'people'.

This shows that the answer to 'what's special about the Forest of Dean' is not a simple one, but a combination of ingredients. Sense of 'place' and 'people' were again mentioned a lot. However, 'past, heritage and rights'; 'presence' (e.g. peacefulness, tranquillity, safe); 'process' (e.g. walking, cycling, fishing); and 'access and freedom' were also highlighted.

A more specific question relating to particular places, events, ways of life and seasons was also asked. Of uppermost importance to those interviewed was again 'place' with 59% of people giving this as their reply. Events figured highly (51%) with the traditional Carnival and Fetes sharing support with more contemporary events such as festivals of music and transport and fayres. Sites and attractions, ways of life and the seasons were all also identified as important as things which make the Forest of Dean special.