

# The *N*eedlesmith

*Journal of a creative*

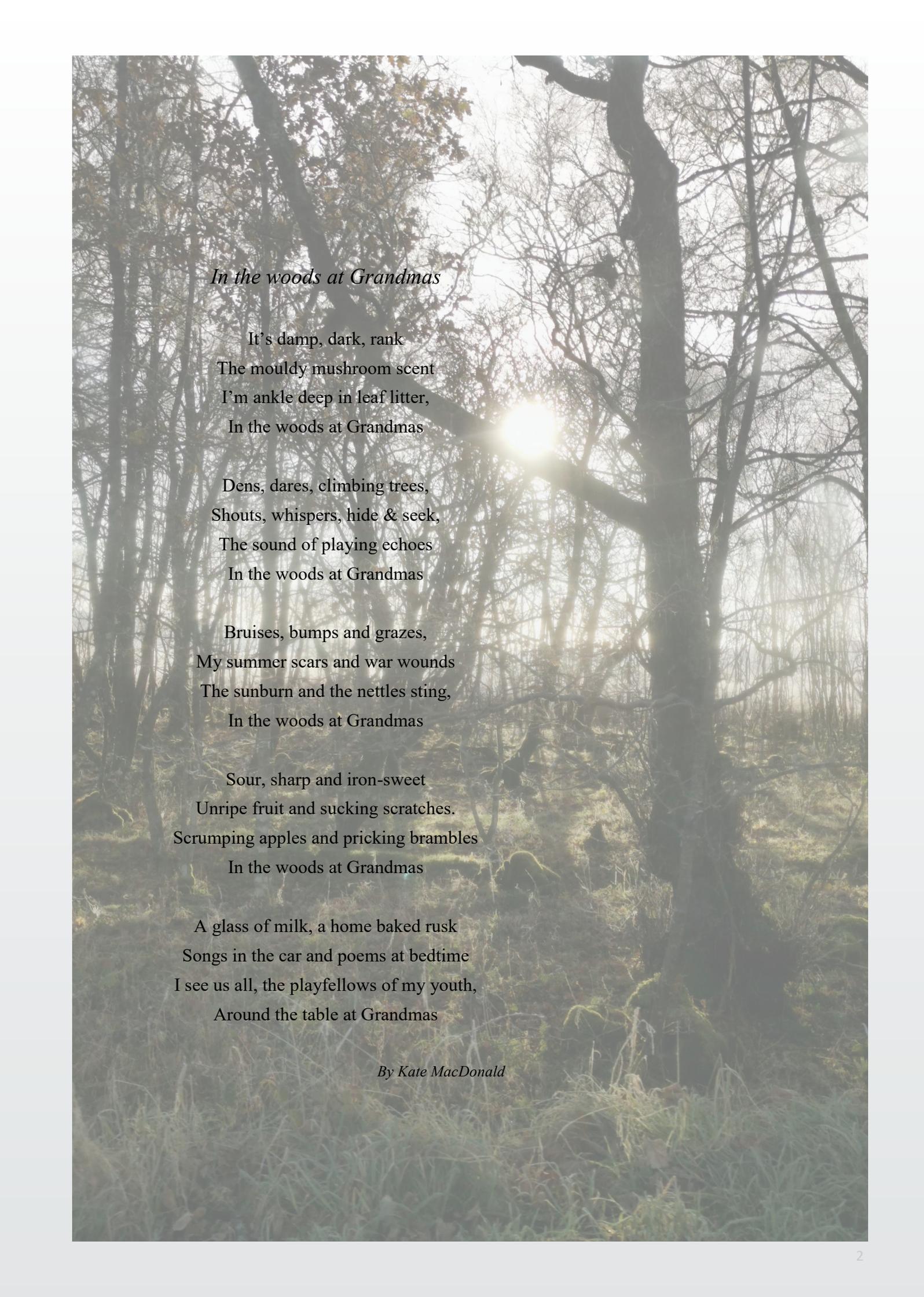


No: 4  
December 2019—February 2020  
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Coffee with a Creative  
Lucy Walsh, Jeweller

Managing the Overwhelm  
.... Or not

An interview with  
Snapdragon Life



*In the woods at Grandmas*

It's damp, dark, rank  
The mouldy mushroom scent  
I'm ankle deep in leaf litter,  
In the woods at Grandmas

Dens, dares, climbing trees,  
Shouts, whispers, hide & seek,  
The sound of playing echoes  
In the woods at Grandmas

Bruises, bumps and grazes,  
My summer scars and war wounds  
The sunburn and the nettles sting,  
In the woods at Grandmas

Sour, sharp and iron-sweet  
Unripe fruit and sucking scratches.  
Scrumping apples and pricking brambles  
In the woods at Grandmas

A glass of milk, a home baked rusk  
Songs in the car and poems at bedtime  
I see us all, the playfellows of my youth,  
Around the table at Grandmas

*By Kate MacDonald*

## A note from a Needlesmith

As I started to write this, I was tucked in a wee retreat away from the distractions of home, where I knew I needed to tidy up, sort washing, & put things away. I can't write in my cabin studio at the moment as it is a fabric heaped disaster zone. Although I have taken time off from organising and attending seasonal events this winter, it hasn't quite had the organising effect I had hoped for, as other responsibilities have slotted into their place. However, I have a new little workshop elf who is quite terrifyingly organising things for me after school. I'm having to defend items I want to keep but couldn't come up with a reason for the large quantity of empty plastic cotton reels we found, those had to go (to a local afterschool club). Sometimes I put my foot firmly down, at others she gets her way and things go out for recycling or to the charity shop. It's very good for me. One room down and another two to go. She's also great at putting the cards together and sorting receipts. I'm just no longer sure who's the boss though...

Wreaths are adorning doors, lights are twinkling from windows and although today is grey and damp we have had several cold, hard frosty days recently which have been quite beautiful. Dog walks have been brisk and cheek rosy-ing but coming back in to warm up with some spiced hot chocolate (see pg 19) makes it all worthwhile. I love seeing the trees silhouettes against the skyline, the branches, bare of leaves, are witchily spiky, but softened by garlands of old man's beard and other lichens. (see pg 7).

Winter is a time for getting cosy (see books pg10), resting up, almost hibernating if possible. There is a lot of 'cosy' in one form or another in these pages but please spare a thought and some pennies for those who aren't able to do that and donate to Homeless charities and Foodbanks to help those who are much less fortunate and for whom this time of year is just about hardship.

Magazines featuring Christmas have been on the shelves since at least October, and now the January editions are arriving in the post and on newsstands. I never read those until the new year as it seems to wish this anticipatory time of year away. However, I'm not feeling terribly 'Christmassy' yet. Maybe it's because I haven't done the mammoth Christmas product making sessions I usually do or organised my usual seasonal events. I have attended some of the local fairs as a visitor but not as a

participant. So, this edition of the Journal isn't particularly about Christmas but more simply Wintertime.

I'm looking forward to getting my new planner out, working alongside the wall calendar and the '12 week action plan' chart from [Josephine Brookes](#), planning and plotting. Trying hard not to do it just now as I have things to do first, however I've added some dates for classes and workshops (see pg 9). Do come along and create something and make those dark winter days a little lighter.

Until next time, a new year and a new decade. I wish you all a joyful Christmas, a peaceful & cosy wintertime and a very happy New Year.

With Love  
Kate x



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# Notes on Nature



## The Holly & the Ivy ...

### Holly

The holly is an evergreen tree and is dioecious, which means that there are separate male and female plants. Only the female hollies bear berries. The leaves are dark green, tough and shiny with sharp spikes a very good deterrent to browsing animals. But look high up in a holly tree canopy and you might notice the leaves are less spiky as there is less chance that they will be eaten.

Holly wood is the whitest of all woods, is heavy, hard and fine-grained. It can be stained and polished and used to make furniture or used in engraving work. Holly wood also makes good firewood and burns with a strong heat.

In the past the tree was seen as a fertility symbol, and a charm against witches, goblins and the devil.

In pagan times, Holly was thought to be a male plant and Ivy a female plant.

An old tradition from the Midlands of England (which is where I was born so I should take heed or perhaps Mr B should...) says, that whichever one was brought into the house first during winter, tells you whether the man or woman of the house would rule that year! It was also considered unlucky to bring either into the house before Christmas Eve. (I brought lots of ivy and no holly into the house on Christmas eve ...)

### Ivy

Ivy is often thought to be a parasitic plant but in fact has its own root system, and uses trees and walls for support, allowing it to reach upwards towards the sunlight. The nectar, pollen and berries, which have a high fat content, are an essential food source for insects and birds during autumn and winter when little else is available. Its flat leaves and tangled stems can provide shelter for birds, bats, small

mammals and hibernating insects.

The Roman god Bacchus, the god of intoxication, is often depicted wearing a wreath of ivy and grapevines and it was said that the wearing a wreath of ivy leaves around your head would prevent you from getting drunk. Ivy was also a symbol of intellectual achievement in ancient Rome and wreaths were used to crown winners of poetry contests.

Ivy was a symbol of fidelity, so priests would present a wreath of ivy to newly married couples. There is still a custom today for bridal bouquets to contain a sprig of ivy. Whilst I didn't know this at the time, I had a lot of ivy in my wedding bouquet, because I like how it trails.

It occurs to me that I have liked the way ivy trails and

twines around things for a long time. The edges of my school notebooks were doodled with ivy. I painted my first car, a Talbot Sunbeam, (called Casey, for Kates Car) matt black and then 'grew' trails of stems and leaves over it in shiny black paint. I even grew ivy up our wedding cake, it looked more like a mausoleum than a wedding cake by the time I had finished.

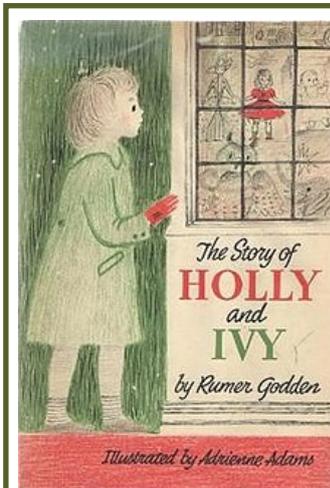


### Meanings

Holly, Ivy and other greenery such as Mistletoe were originally used in pre-Christian times to help celebrate the Winter Solstice Festival and ward off evil spirits and to celebrate new growth.

When Christianity came into Western Europe, some people wanted to keep the greenery, to give it Christian meanings but also to ban the use of it to decorate homes. The UK and Germany were the main countries to keep the use of the greenery as decorations.

*Continued on page 6*



### The Story of Holly & Ivy by Rumer Godden

It is the day before Christmas and the toys in Mr Blossom's shop know it is their last chance to be sold. Holly, a little doll dressed especially for Christmas, wishes hard for her own special child to come and buy her. But the day ends and Holly is left in the window.

Early on Christmas morning, a little lost girl finds herself outside the toyshop. Ivy has never had a doll to love. Or a family to love her. When she sees Holly, she knows that this doll is meant for her. And Holly knows that this girl is the one that she was wishing for. But Ivy has no money, and the shop is closed. There will be no Christmas Day for Holly and Ivy - or will there?

This was an Absolute favourite of mine as a child

## Holly & Ivy - Christian meanings:

### Holly

The prickly leaves represent the crown of thorns that Jesus wore when he was crucified. The berries are the drops of blood that were shed by Jesus because of the thorns.

In Scandinavia it is known as the Christ Thorn.

### Ivy

Ivy has to cling to something to support itself as it grows. This reminds us that we need to cling to God for support in our lives.

In Germany, it is traditional that Ivy is only used outside and a piece tied to the outside of a Church was supposed to protect it from lightning!

*from whychristmas.com*

### Green Groweth the Holly

*By Henry VIII King of England*

*Green groweth the holly,  
So doth the ivy.  
Though winter blasts blow never  
so high,  
Green groweth the holly.*

*As the holly groweth green  
And never changeth hue,  
So I am, ever hath been,  
Unto my lady true.*

*As the holly groweth green  
With ivy all alone  
When flowers cannot be seen  
And greenwood leaves be gone,*

*Now unto my lady  
Promise to her I make,  
From all other only  
To her I me betake.*

*Adieu, mine own lady,  
Adieu, my special  
Who hath my heart truly  
Be sure, and ever shall.*

*from poetryfoundation.org*

'Green Groweth the Holly' left was written in 1522 by Henry VIII, King of England, as a Christmas carol.

It celebrates the ability of the holly & ivy to resist the winter blasts which he likens to his unwavering love for his lady Catherine of Aragon.

### Did you know ...

...Holly bushes control how and when its berries are eaten ...

The bright scarlet berries attract many birds, especially thrushes including blackbirds, fieldfares, redwings and mistle- and song-thrushes. In autumn and early winter the berries are very hard and bitter due to mildly toxic compounds including saponins, flavonoids and cyanogenic glycosides. As winter continues, hard

frosts break down these chemicals eventually making the berries palatable in late winter and early spring, when hedgerows are otherwise largely bare. But even now the berries retain some toxicity, so birds eat just a few on each visit. Frequent visits are therefore needed and this aids dispersal of seeds, with a few seeds deposited in droppings in lots of different places over a long period of time.

*from plantlife.org.uk*

### The Holly and the Ivy

The holly and the ivy,  
When they are both full grown,  
Of all trees that are in the wood,  
The holly bears the crown:  
*O, the rising of the sun,  
And the running of the deer  
The playing of the merry organ,  
Sweet singing in the choir.*

The holly bears a blossom,  
As white as lily flow'r,  
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ,  
To be our dear Saviour:  
*O, the rising of the sun ...*

The holly bears a berry,  
As red as any blood,  
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ,  
To do poor sinners good:  
*O, the rising of the sun ...*

The holly bears a prickle,  
As sharp as any thorn,  
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ,  
On Christmas Day in the morn.  
*O, the rising of the sun ...*

The holly bears a bark  
As bitter as any gall;  
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ  
For to redeem us all.  
*O the rising of the sun...  
And the running of the deer  
The playing of the merry organ  
Sweet singing of the choir*

*Traditional British carol*

# Lichen' it, a lot.

Scotland is home to an enormous variety of lichens, mosses, liverworts, fungi and ferns, some of which are important on a global scale. Lichens are a unique organism, they are a symbiotic relationship between two organisms — fungus & algae. The fungus grows on the tree and can collect moisture, which the algae needs. They evolved millions of years ago and are sensitive indicators of air pollution — many will only grow in clean air and Argyll has very clean air.



*Old Mans Beard*



*Slender Mousetail moss & Tree Lungwort*

It's at this time of year when the leaves have fallen, and you can see the bones of the tree, that the growth that mostly goes on unseen, reveals itself. The skeletal fingers of twigs against grey skies can look quite threatening but cast your eyes down to the bigger branches and trunks of the trees and you'll find them covered in deep green velvet moss, pale ropes of 'Old Mans Beard', trunks are covered in slender 'Mousetail moss', and large leafy 'tree lungwort', rare in many parts of the UK it grows abundantly here due to the lack of pollution.



*Lichens & moss including hooded tube lichen and Candelariella reflexa*



*Lichens & mosses covering tree trunk of a silver birch*

Although we often groan about how much rain there is, it is the unique combination of high rainfall and a stable mild temperature along with the clean air quality which creates this rare rainforest habitat. Argyll rainforests are rarer even than tropical rainforests.

Lichens & mosses growing on a tree are completely harmless to the tree itself as they are not parasitic. However, very heavy lichen growth can smother a tree to death. They provide homes to insects and nesting material for birds, even dyes for colouring wool. Harris Tweed's characteristic orange colour was traditionally produced using a dye extracted from rock-dwelling lichens.



Next time you're in the woods in what might seem to be the dead season, have a closer look, there is still a lot of green and life. It is also the time for finding the monsters.

Brought up on tales of Boggles in the woods, especially in Scottish pine forests, where the hollow silence caused by the litter of needles on the ground deadens footsteps, just right for Daddies to go Boo at their little girls from behind the trees! Utterly terrifying. I still see the shapes of woodland creatures and lurking monsters. This handsome fellow on the left, forever about to cross our path, lives near the ruined township of Kilmory Oib.



*Tree Lungwort - Lobaria pulmonaria*

## Sew, what to do you want to sew?

For the first time I ran four weeks of classes where I hadn't write the course, I didn't choose a pattern, and boy did it keep me on my toes! There was a variety of skill levels from very beginner to experienced, on the 'Sew What You Want To' classes, and a wide variety of projects. A cosy gilet Christmas present using some beautiful tweed *below middle*. Upcycling, making a dress into a top and some zipped bags *top right*. Two new summer dresses *below right* and alterations and project finishing *below left*.

It was hugely enjoyable and sociable as well as productive. So by popular request I'm running more of these sessions during January & February.

All levels and projects welcome.



*"I have learnt so much from attending Needlesmiths courses. Thank you.*

CG



## Silverclay play

One of the last workshops I ran this year was a Beginners Silverclay Pendant making. This is always a popular workshop so I'll be running more next year. 3 hours of creating, making, & chatting then you get to take home something a little bit shiny and special.

*"I just want to say thank you so much for such a fantastic evening. I absolutely loved it, and great to meet so many like minded people and taste your delicious mince pies."* BH

## Junior Needles

Just a couple of photographs of the end of term projects this year. They made table top Christmas trees, tree topping singing angels, gingerbread people garlands and advent calendar bunting and a couple of stockings. A luxurious red & blue velvet one to replace the one that had been mauled by a cat and a green and tan corduroy one for the dog specifically for her Christmas bone so she won't feel left out.





## DECEMBER

- 4th Beginners Play with Silverclay**  
6-9pm MS Centre Lochgilphead
- 8th World Candle Lighting day
- 10th Human Rights day
- 15th International Tea day
- 21st Winter Solstice - Shortest Day
- 24th Christmas Eve
- 25th Christmas Day - I wish you much love & happiness
- 27th National Fruitcake day

## JANUARY

- Wednesdays 8th, 15th, 22nd, & 29th**  
**Sew what you want to**  
Evenings 6-9pm MS Centre Lochgilphead

- 1st Polar Bear Swim day (outdoor swim, usually in the sea brrrrr!)
- 3rd Festival of sleep day
- 5th 12th Night (time for the decorations to come down)
- 23rd Chinese New Year
- 25th Burns Night
- 28 - 29th RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch Weekend

January has a lot of themes:  
(some of these are American but are worth adopting)

*Get a balanced life month, Commitment month, Soup month, Hobby month, Creativity month, Celebration of Life month, Get Organised month, Oatmeal (porridge) month, Clean up your computer month, Downs Syndrome Awareness month, Christmas card recycling (at WHSmith & Tesco's) month (or cut up and use for collage/children's afterschool clubs, next years gift tags).*

With reference to getting a 'Balanced Life', or a new Hobby and getting Creative ... come along to my Sew What You Want To workshops, beginners, and experienced alike, everyone is welcome to come along to these sociable sewing classes. Look out for some tester/taster Saturdays coming soon too.

## Interesting Fact.....

*In the 1930s, the Addis Brush Company introduced the first artificial brush Christmas tree. It was produced using the same machinery that was originally designed to produce toilet brushes...*

## FEBRUARY

- Wednesdays 5th, 12th, 19th, 26th**  
**Sew what you want to**  
Evenings 6-9pm MS Centre Lochgilphead
  - 28 January - 4 February - National Storytelling Week
  - 1<sup>st</sup> World Read Aloud Day & Take your child to the library day
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Candlemas (Christian)
  - 14<sup>th</sup> Feb St Valentines day (see page xxx for a love poem)
  - 17<sup>th</sup> Random Acts of Kindness day
  - 21<sup>st</sup> Shrove Tuesday aka Pancake day
- February's themes include:  
Library Lovers month, Bake for family fun month, Bird feeding month, Hot Breakfast month

## MARCH

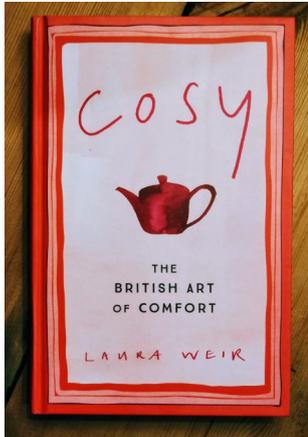
- 4th & 11th Paint and stitch a lampshade**  
over two evenings 6-9pm MS Centre Lochgilphead
  - 18th & 25th Silverclay Pendant/Brooch Making**  
6-9pm MS Centre Lochgilphead
  - 5th World Book Day
  - 8th International Women's Day
  - 17th St Patricks Day
  - 18th Mothering Sunday
  - 21st World Poetry Day
  - 25th British Summertime - clocks go forward an hour.
- The themes for March: Women's History month, Craft month, MS month, International Ideas month, Small Press month, Veggie month, the Great Daffodil appeal - for Marie Curie Cancer Care



# OFF THE BOOKSHELF

It's a bumper pile off the bookshelf. I read novels all of the time, paper books, e-books and audio books. I always have a couple of books on the go at any one time, by the bed, in the loo, beside the sofa, on my kindle (although I prefer paper books to electronic, I admit it can be useful, especially when hospital visiting or appointment waiting) & via BorrowBox, an audio book or two. I also love

non-fiction books to flick through. Books with house style to lust for, recipes to drool over, or crafts to try. Here are a few I've enjoyed recently, so settle in and get Cosy, Coorie in, and light the candles for the Hygge effect. However you do it, in what ever language you do it in, I hope you enjoy a bit of comfortable reading time this winter.



'Cosy' this is a real hug of a book. Not very long, easily readable in one sitting, preferably in front of the fire with a teapot and plate of crumpets at your elbow. If you're not in that position by the time you've finished the book, you will feel as though you have been.

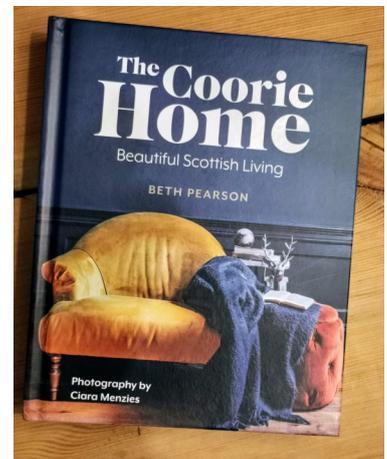
Quirkily illustrated, it is full of observations that, until you read them, you hadn't put words to ... for example ...

"Tea isn't frisky or fun, it's a tender, bosomy wet snog. You don't take someone upstairs for tea—it's not saucy like coffee."

*Cosy: The British Art of Comfort*  
 Laura Weir  
 Published by Yellow Kite £14.99

This beautifully photographed book isn't just about Homes it's about what goes into a Scottish home, the outside and the inside, the living, the wearing, the phrases, the growing, the making, even the eating, though I'm not entirely sure I'll be trying Carrot Porridge anytime soon, but the recipe is there should you wish to try it.

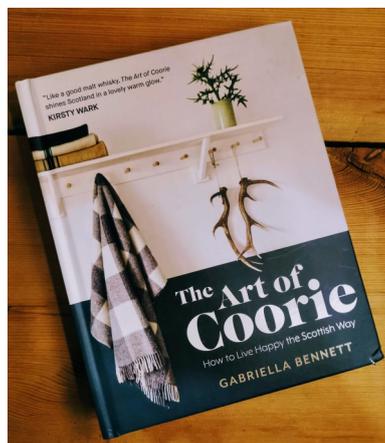
*The Coorie Home - Beautiful Scottish Living*  
 Beth Pearson  
 Black & White Publishing £14.99



A great book to dip in an out of and learn something new. A light hearted tour around the country for all things 'Coorie', less about the home and more about the living. Includes gems like this traditional Miner Lullaby:

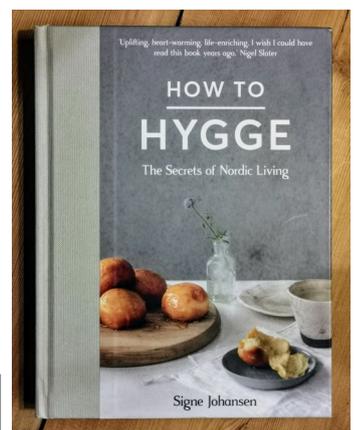
Your daddy coories doon, my darling,  
 Doon in a three foot seam,  
 So you can coorie doon my darling,  
 Coorie doon and dream.

*The Art of Coorie - How to Live Happy the Scottish Way*  
 Gabriella Bennett  
 Black & White Publishing 14.99



'Hygge' (pronounced *hoo-ga*) seems more elegant than 'Coorie'. It's cooler and perhaps more refined in a slightly aloof and unattainable way. However should you wish to attain it then this book will definitely help. A personal story with reference to the authors family as well as her land There is a mouth watering recipe section which has me itching to wield a wooden spoon to whip up assorted 'Fika'.

*How to Hygge - The Secrets of Nordic Living*  
 Signe Johansen  
 Bluebird Books for Life £14.99



All of these books have been printed on uncoated paper which gives a matt soft and strokeable quality to them. It's not just the contents, the words, the recipes and the photographs that are warm and inviting, the pages between the covers are too.



Christiane Bellstedt Myers is the friend of a friend of mine and I had heard about her long before I ‘met’ her on social media. Tales of her ‘Cozy Club’, and Christmas Fairs, descriptions of the beautifully seasonally decorated veranda of her house, which has featured on the front of at least one Country Living Magazine.

I have her first book ‘A Scandi Christmas’ which centres on Christmassy projects, cards, decorations, baking, you name it. Her second book ‘Seasonal Scandi Crafts’ follows the years seasons and includes projects for springtime and easter, lovely sewing ideas for summertime before swinging into autumnal crafts and then into Christmas delights.

It is a book in which at any time of the year and you find yourself in need of a project you will find one. The projects are as simple or as complicated as you’d like to make them. Much is made of using little scraps and leftovers from other creativities or from the garden, or a quick forage.

There’s no rushing out to buy brand new, expensive or complicated pieces of equipment. It has been skilfully and beautifully photographed to provide guidance and inspiration.

*Seasonal Scandi Crafts*

*Christiane Bellstedt Myers*

*Published by CICOBooks £12.99*

For tales of Thomasina the cat, and what the kitchen mice get up to when no one is looking follow Chris on Instagram [@theCozyClubx](https://www.instagram.com/theCozyClubx)

Facebook [@thecozyclub](https://www.facebook.com/thecozyclub)

[www.thecozyclub.co.uk](http://www.thecozyclub.co.uk)



I recommended The Wild Remedy by Emma Mitchell in the first edition of the Journal but will do so again, especially for those who find the start of the year very difficult. Cold, grey, often wet days, low light levels, and with the bright and sparkly time behind us it can feel as though there isn’t much to look forward to. However, spring is on the way and Emma’s book, beautifully illustrated with her own photographs, paintings and illustrations

will guide you through what to look out for. It is a candid diary style book detailing Emma’s life in walks, looking at the little things, as well as descriptions of her findings and sightings it includes accounts of her thoughts and feelings. It is written with wry humour, honesty, and beautifully.

You can find Emma on

Twitter [@Silverpebble](https://twitter.com/Silverpebble)

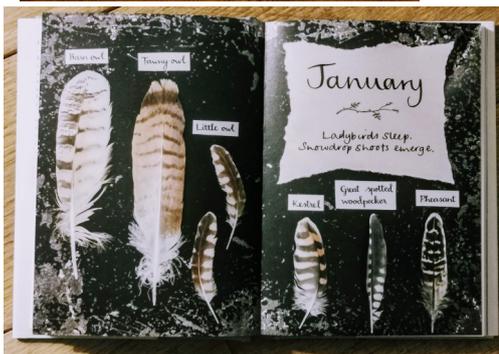
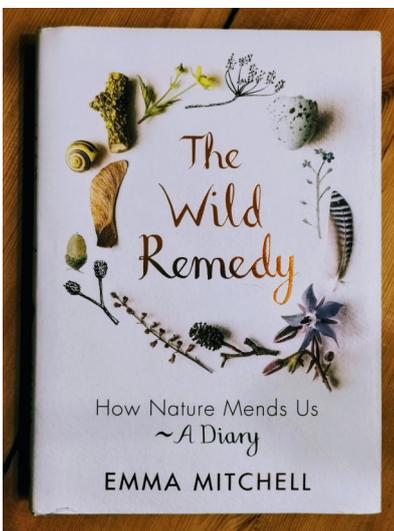
Instagram [@Silverpebble2](https://www.instagram.com/Silverpebble2)

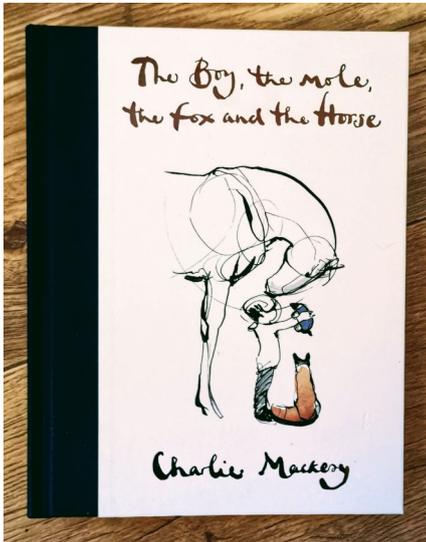
[www.silverpebble.net](http://www.silverpebble.net)

*The Wild Remedy - How Nature Mends Us ~ a Diary.*

*Emma Mitchell*

*Michael Omara Books £14.99*





## The Boy, the mole, the fox and the horse

Charlie Macksey

Waterstones Book of the Year 2019, and listed on both The Sunday Times Bestseller and New York Times Bestseller lists.

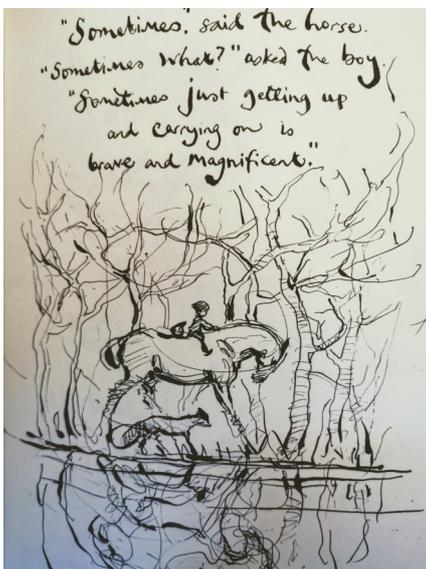
Charlie Macksey artist & cartoonist has worked for The Spectator and as a book illustrator for Oxford University Press. This, his first, book is filled with deceptively simple pen & ink illustrations, and humble, meaningful sentences which strike a chord with many, reading through some of the comments below the photographs on his Instagram account is plain to see. One person wrote that the “Drawings are visual haikus from the heart”. A beautiful description.

If you haven't come across the phenomenon that is this book you need to go out and buy it now. Whilst nothing like Winnie the Pooh & Christopher Robin and friends at all, it is just like Winnie the Pooh et al. I think it is something to do with having a naive charm, an innocence, however it is also deep, meaningful and profound.

Having borrowed dad's copy to read, I was delighted to have been given a copy as an early Christmas present.

At a time when all around us there is war and destruction, rudeness and meanness this book is balm to the soul and simply makes you believe that humans can be kind. And in the words of the mole “If at first you don't succeed, there is always cake”. How wise.

Instagram [@charliemacksey](https://www.instagram.com/charliemacksey)  
[www.charliemacksey.com](http://www.charliemacksey.com)



## Wrapping up Reading for Children

One of my favourite seasonal 'chores' is to choose and wrap up 25 parcels each for two small (but getting bigger fast) boys, the sons of two of my very good friends. I've been doing it for about 8 or 9 years now and it's been a lovely way to revisit my own childhood reading list. Some new, some second-hand. Mostly books - fiction & non-fiction, and I add a few small games, toys, a chocolate bar and so on. This year I wrapped them all up in blank newsprint paper that I had stamped with suitably festive designs.

I get the most delightful 'thank you' letters from them both in the New Year. It is such a pleasure to do.

I have already heard that a poem a day book and an encyclopaedia have been this year's star books!





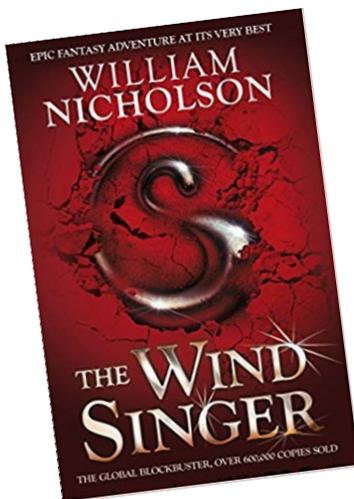
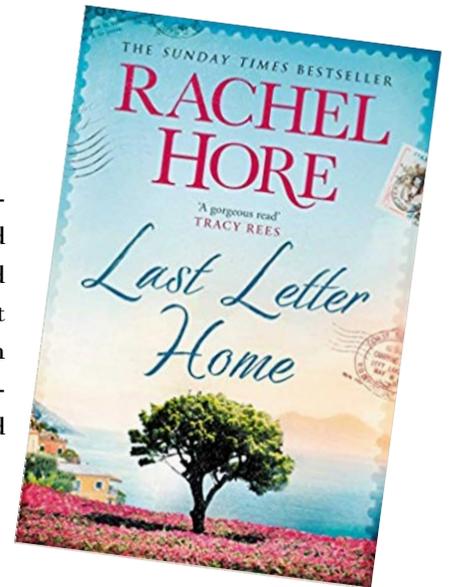
Everyone should have a Mattie in their life. Slightly eccentric, intelligent, inspiring, knows her own mind and doesn't suffer fools. A militant Suffragette in her youth she is now in middle age and nothing quite has the excitement of the past. Deciding that their Maid is intelligent but uneducated and in need of direction she is inspired to start a club on Hampstead Heath just for young ladies, of all classes, which they name the Amazons. This book was one of BBC Radio 4's Good Reads and they all enjoyed it too.

We meet Mattie again, now at the end of her life, in 'Crooked Heart' which is also an excellent read. Author Lissa Evans is novelist who writes for both children and adults equally brilliantly. She wrote 'Their Finest Hour and a Half' which became the lovely, if very sad, film "Their Finest".

*Old Baggage*  
Lissa Evans  
Published by Black Swan £8.99

I have enjoyed enormously all novels by Rachel Hore. Some I have reread several times. Would that I was able to write like her. This one was a Richard and Judy Book Club book in 2018. All of her books are incredibly well researched and this is no exception, period details abound. She specialises in novels that cross time zones and back again. And they also often feature big old houses, in Last Letter Home the house is in Italy discovered whilst on holiday and unexpectedly having a link to her own family through soldiers that were stationed there during the war.

*The Last Letter Home*  
Rachel Hore  
Published by Simon & Shuster UK £7.99

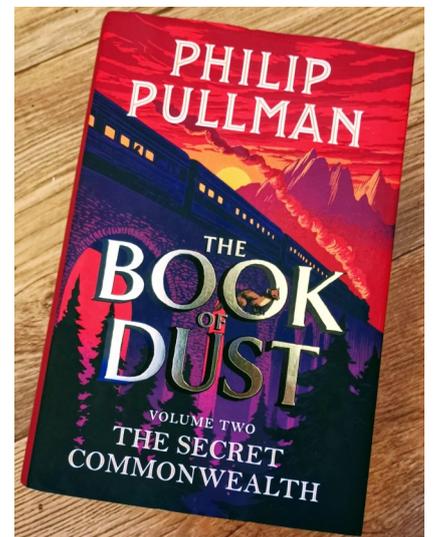


I came across the 'Wind on Fire' trilogy when we were on holiday this year, read them back to back and was left completely bereft when I had finished them. Friends, lives, countries lost forever with the closing of the last book. This series has won prizes including the Blue Peter Book Award and Smarties Prize Gold Award. William Nicholson not only writes children's/YA books and novels for adults he also writes screen, radio and stage plays, & films including Gladiator and Shadowlands. He has a descriptive way of writing that takes you out of your time and place and wholeheartedly dumps you in another that, whilst the covers are open, are as real as your everyday.

*Wind on Fire trilogy : The Wind Singer, Firesong & Slaves of the Mastery*  
William Nicholson  
Published by Egmont £6.99each

I'm really looking forward to reading the second 'Book of Dust—The Secret Commonwealth' by Phillip Pullman, once Mr B has finished reading it. \*Taps fingers impatiently... Well, it was his birthday present so I suppose he had to read it first. So now I'm planning to read it between Christmas & New Year, during that strange quiet time that seems to be neither one thing or another. Following on from 'La Beau Savage' it is the second of the trilogy prequel to 'His Dark Materials'.

*The Book of Dust Vol 2 The Secret Commonwealth*  
Phillip Pullman  
Published by David Fickling Books in association with Penguin £20.00





## Coorie

A Scots word meaning "to crouch for protection eg. against a rock out of the wind, and, to snuggle and get cosy."

A seasonal word



## Pareidolia

The word for when you see the face in the rock, a dragon in the clouds or monsters in the trees.

# Victoria & Albert in Dundee A review



The weekend I went on the Patchwood Sampler course Mr B & I stayed with family near Perth, and, being half way across the country, we decided to keep going and visit the V&A in Dundee. Something I had wanted to do for a while. I was a student at the Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, Dundee University in the late 80's/early 90's and 30 years later the town is unrecognisable. In particular the riverside developments. Gone is the seedy casino and grubby train station



with its insignificant entrance, replaced by the V&A and the station is housed in a huge curved building with a hotel situated above the station.

The Dundee V&A is the first V&A museum outside London and was designed by a Japanese architect, Kengo Kuma as part of the £1 billion regeneration of Dundee's water-

front. The museum has been built out over the River Tay, with a "prow" jutting across the water like a boat, referencing the shipbuilding heritage of the city and the cladding was inspired by the cliffs on Scotland's north-eastern coastline. The museum build cost a staggering £80.11m, this didn't come from the V&A which is run by a board of trustees and funded by the UK government. The finance came from various sources: the Scottish government paid for largest part of the construction - putting in an initial £25m and then a further £12.61m as part of a Growth Accelerator Fund; The Heritage Lottery Fund £12.5m; Creative Scotland £4.5m; the Dundee Waterfront Project £4m; Dundee City Council £6.5m and the UK government £5m; with

£15m from private fundraising.

Sadly, I was incredibly underwhelmed by everything about the V&A, except for the robot that 'blew' bubbles. I had such high expectations and had wanted to love it. Instead I found it dark and gloomy inside, with tiny window openings to the river. A shiny black, fossil studded marble tiled flooring runs throughout the ground floor. Oddly it makes the place look untidy, as though lots of bits of white paper have been dropped. I mentioned it to the cleaner in the loos and she said it drove them mad! The walls are clad in wood panels that are set at odd angles, I desperately wanted to be able to straighten them up. I had thought that one section would convert into arena style seating, but no it was just an oddly angled wall.



ued on Pg 31

Contin-



# Did you see?

## His Dark Materials



Based on the trilogy of books by the same name by Philip Pullman this BBC dramatization has received some mixed reviews. It is an epic piece of Sunday night television drama and the cast list is excellent. But somehow it's missing something and I'm not quite sure what. Maybe I know the story too well and the television version doesn't quite look like my imagined version. However, it is still very watchable, so long as I pretend it isn't the story I know. The daemon - the soul part of each human in the alternative reality part of the novel - on screen are produced using puppets and artist driven CGI, they are fascinating to watch. [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000b1v2](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000b1v2)

## Kirstie's Handmade Christmas

Love her or loathe her (I love her) you have to give Kirstie Allsopp credit for helping to raise the profile of crafts and encouraging everyone to have ago. "Think of creative time as therapeutic time, and never underestimate the positive effect crafts can have on your mental health". This year's series was just as full of different crafts, hints, tips & inspiration.



[www.channel4.com/programmes/kirsties-handmade-christmas](http://www.channel4.com/programmes/kirsties-handmade-christmas)

## The Repair Shop

Now on it's 5th series I have only recently come across it. Described as the 'antidote to the throwaway culture', this show highlights the skills of the traditional makers and shows how there is a role for these skills still today. Detailed repairs and restorations are carried out for the general public who bring in well loved but broken items for repair. [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b081581p](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b081581p)



# Have you heard?

## L I S T E N T O P O D C A S T

These two BBC Radio4 dramatisations are really worth seeking out. 'The Box of Delights' by John Masefield, and 'His Dark Materials' by Phillip Pullman. I have the first on cassette and the second on CD and I have to listen to both of them at the time of year. The Box of Delights is charming, I do need to make sure that Rosie is out of the room as she barks at the Wolves, protective sausage that she is. You can also find both read aloud by various actors, however the plays are brilliant. Ask at your local library or your search engine to find copies.

If you can't find the audio versions then read the books. Wonderful stories both. If you look at YouTube then you'll find a rather delightful and very dated 1984 televised version of The Box of Delights, but the audio version is better.

Both are available to buy on Amazon here: [Box of Delights](#) & [His Dark Materials](#)



On the podcast front I've been enjoying, have been inspired by, and recommending to friends, the series "Letters from a hopeful Creative" with Jen Carrington and Sarah Tasker.

A bi-weekly podcast where Jen & Sarah discuss a letter or subject matter that someone has written in about. Sometimes there is a 'quick fire questions' episode where lots of things are discussed, others answer a single subject in depth.

<https://www.lettersfromahopefulcreative.com/>



## THE SLOW LIVING GUIDE

Not the first place you'd think of to look for me, however I'm delighted to say that you can [find me here](#) on this very lovely website. Marjolijn, describes herself as a '45 year old freelance copywriter and designer, wife and mother of two teens, tea drinker, choir singer, mountain and forest girl.' After 20yrs in corporate roles Marjolijn took a sabbatical. During this time she found herself longing for a slower, simpler lifestyle and discovered that there were many more people like her. A self-confessed organiser Marjolijn has set out to gather the makers, the places, the events and the activities in one place – The Slow Living Guide – a space for inspiration and aspiration, to make contacts, to learn how to slow down, if only sometimes. This is the place to find how, why, when & where to do & buy it.

Marjolijn says that the idea is for TSLG 'to become a hub



for the slow living community; a meeting place for those seeking and those offering inspiration. A place where you know you'll find like-minded people and where you can leisurely browse around while having a cuppa.' Sounds like a fabulous space to me

You can find TSLG [www.theslowlivingguide.co.uk](http://www.theslowlivingguide.co.uk)

Instagram [@TheSlowLivingGuide](https://www.instagram.com/TheSlowLivingGuide)

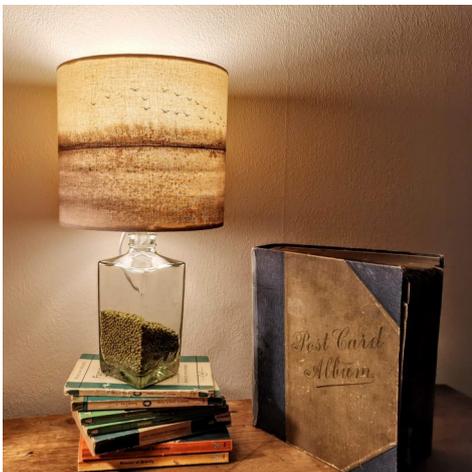


## My New On-line Shop ... via Facebook

I have been thinking, planning, trying to get an on-line shop system that I was happy with. That was simple to use for my customers and, importantly, didn't take for-abso-bloomin-lutely-ever to list my products. Each of my lamps, lampshades, clocks, cards and pictures are originals, one offs. There might be one or two that are similar but no two are exactly alike. That's part of the joy of buying handmade, and also of hand-making. However, it is extremely tedious if your website providers shop system is geared more for stock and several hundreds of the same thing. After a one-to-one session with Rene from the excellent [TuMinds Social Media Training](#) all my problems were solved. Well, the website shop one was anyway. We set up the Facebook shop and connected it to Paypal. An afternoon with the elf we photographed all the shades and lamps I had in stock and in no time at all I had products online.

You can also buy the printed copies of The Needlesmith there too.

[www.facebook.com/needlesmiths/shop](http://www.facebook.com/needlesmiths/shop)



## S u b s c r i p t i o n s   t o   t h e   p r i n t e d   J o u r n a l

The  
Needlesmith  
*Journal of a creative*

A free, quarterly, digital publication

I'm still working out how to set up a subscription for the printed copies, (I'm going to be working on a whole website overhaul shortly) for the moment you are able to buy them individually via the Facebook shop links above, they are also available from Love Dove Studio in Lochgilhead, and Coastal Design in Campbeltown for £3.50.

Digital copies are still available for free and will arrive via email quarterly, by signing up on the Needlesmiths Facebook page or on the contact page on the website. GDPR bit: all contact details are held securely by MailChimp and I will not share them, or sell them to anyone else, or bombard you with irrelevant sales emails, you can unsubscribe at any time by clicking the link at the bottom of each email. The Journal is now also available for free at [issu.com/needlesmiths](http://issu.com/needlesmiths). There you can read all the editions in a digital magazine format.

# Sanctuary

*A short story*

By Kate MacDonald

Isabella and I played at the sea's edge, the icy water making her shriek and giggle with delight as I dipped her toes in and out of foaming waves. We had walked to my favourite part of the beach where the sands narrow to a tiny strip and shells stack up, unceremoniously dumped by the tide against the rocks at the foot of the cliffs.

\*\*\*

The house is full of shore treasure collected by visitors. Every room has bowls overflowing with rounded pebbles, sea-smoothed glass in myriad colours, tiny yellow orange shells, grey winkles and denim blue mussels. Outside, in amongst the weed-strewn gravel of the garden paths lie yet more shells, the bone white of broken edges pale against the stones.

Inside, dust motes dance in a shaft of sunlight filtering through dusty windowpanes. A chipped blue and white enamel jug sits in the centre of the table, flowers dried, their colours faded, one by one petals fall silently onto the damask cloth.

High above the sea the sound of a child's joyful shrieks can be heard. In the garden, a snail makes its slow silent way across a sign lying buried in the overgrown border. The gate bangs squeakily, gently in the sea's breeze. The house seems to be waiting, looking out to sea, over the cliffs, down to the shore.

\*\*\*

Carrying Isabella, I run to catch David and the boys making their way up the chalky cliff path. It is the last day of the holidays and soon we must head back, pack up the car and leave.

I worry about David. He is unhappy; the inner-city school depresses him. The constant battles with the school board, paperwork, truancy, indifferent parents are not why he became a teacher. I saw him reading the local paper; there is a position in a school nearby.

We talked last night after the children had gone to sleep, worn out by their exertions, wind-reddened cheeks and salt-stiffened hair, they lay abandoned in a heap, like a pile of puppies, in the middle of our bed. David, turning his wine glass so that the colour glowed ruby in the lamp light, said that he was looking for something else. I paused, mid sip from my own glass, its contents liquid gold, pale against his ruby strength, unsure of what he was saying. Sensing my disquiet, he looked up and reached for my hand, tugged me slightly to sit closer to him. He said he wants more for us. He wants the children to play on the beach every day. He wants me to be happy, content, and knows that in the city I am on edge and cannot relax. He has watched the colour bloom in my face and sees the contentment I feel here.

The wind picked up gently buffeting the caravan, but I feel safe with my husband and brood of children. I have created a cosy nest in this small space. Piles of cushions and blankets help to pad the uncomfortable bench seats. The curtains are checked in blue, trimmed with red; a spotty oil cloth covering the Formica-topped table. The floor is gritty underfoot from the sand traipsed in by each of us. My children are growing; we won't be able to come away in our little home on wheels much longer. Next time the boys will be too big to sleep head to toe and Isabella will be too big to sleep in the old carrycot.

David was silent for a long time. The traces of grey at his temples are becoming more noticeable. The creases that used to be laughter lines have worry lines added to them. He leant over to pick up a piece of paper. It was about a house. A stone house, standing on its own, surrounded by a garden, at the top of the cliff. I read the small note at the bottom of the page, a date and time. Tomorrow, at 10.

I lay awake listening to the wind outside, thinking about a house, a life, a view. I picked up a pebble from the bedside cabinet, smoothing it between my fingers, and slept.

\*\*\*

Seagulls call overhead, the wind whips around a corner rattling dried Honesty. Magpies have nested in the chimney, twigs and feathers litter the cold fireplace. The house doesn't seem to mind these indignities. Standing solidly four square, it seems to know its time is coming. It waits. Its windows, like eyes tucked under the brows of the roof, seem to search the beach then watch the family climbing the cliff path towards the gate. Squeakily it swings open on rusting hinges as though in welcome.

\*\*\*

# A quick make

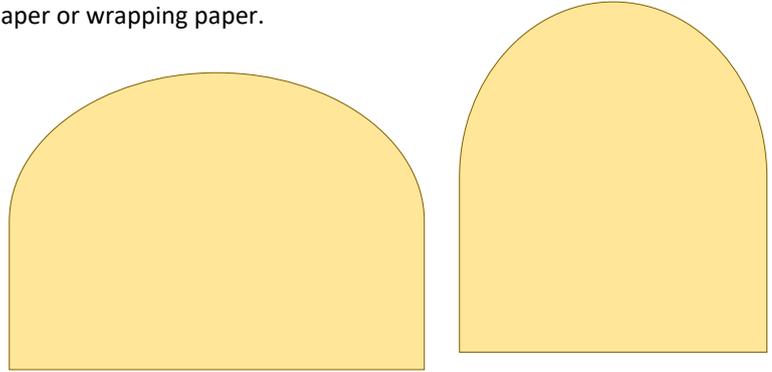
## Tea cosy, Coffee pot cosy and Mug wrap from a Jumper

You will need a woollen jumper, preferably felted through washing, or put it through a hot wash before starting this project

Lining —mattress covers are great as they have a quilted cotton finish on one side. Another piece of jumper/old blanket unworn fleece jacket or any other fabric that is thick and will keep the teapot warm.

Cut a paper template out of brown paper—or wall paper or wrapping paper.

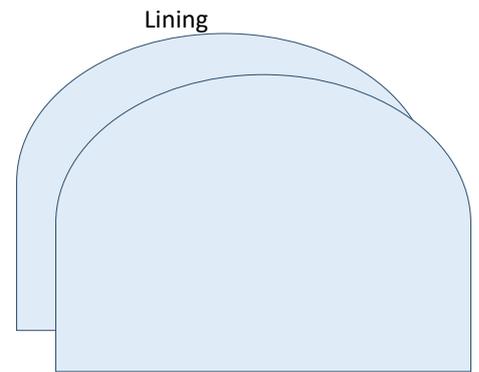
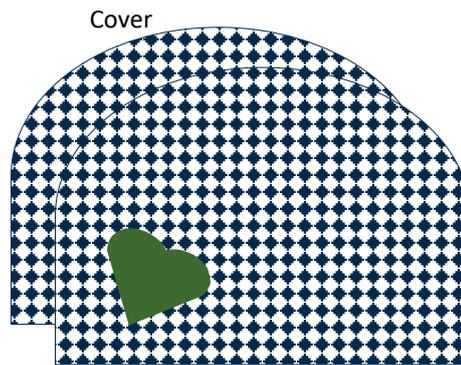
Measure your tea/coffee pot around the widest point, including the spout and handle. Measure the height of your tea/coffee pot, all the way around, top to bottom, including the lid handle. For each measurement divide by 2 and add 3.5cm.



Cut two top covers—for the tea cosy from the body of the jumper and the cafetiere from the sleeves. (this way you have a matching set)

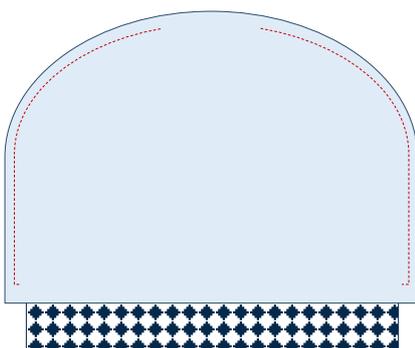
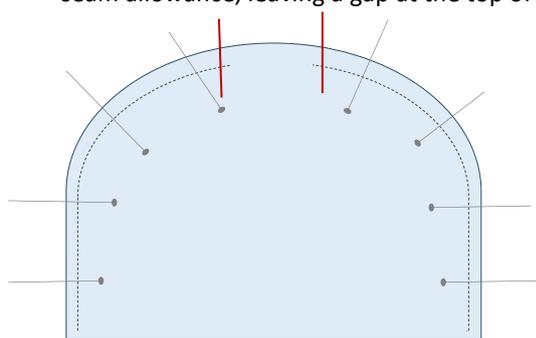
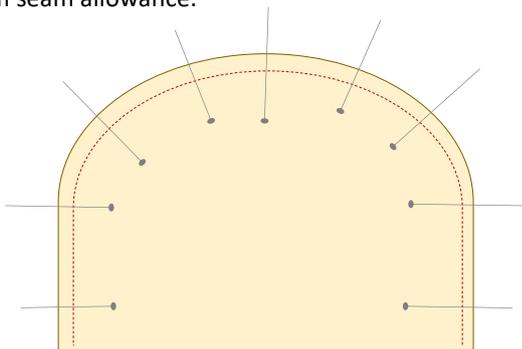
Cut two lining/wadding layers

Applique a motif, letter/word on to the outer cover before you begin. Remember to leave at least 6cm from each edge.



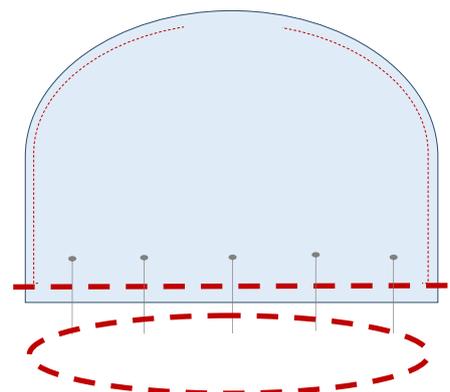
Cover— right sides together pin and sew with a 1.5cm seam allowance.

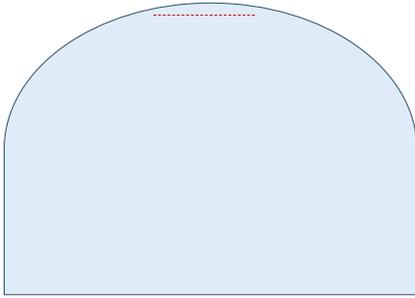
Lining— right sides together pin and sew with a 1.5cm seam allowance, leaving a gap at the top of apx 5 cm.



Turn the cover the right way round. Place the lining over the top of the cover (all will become clear shortly!)

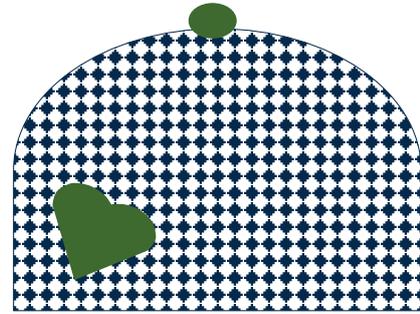
Pin then stitch the two together around the bottom.





Pull the outer layer through the hole. Sew up the hole in the lining and push it up & into the cover and settle into place.

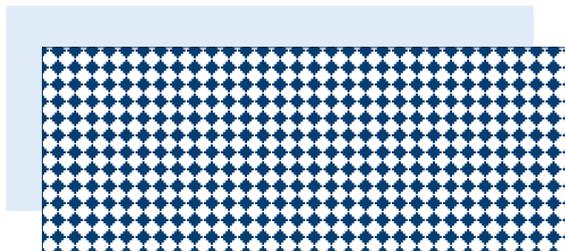
Stitch a button or loop to the top to finish



### To make the mug wrap.

Measure around your mug, excluding the handle, add 1.5cm.

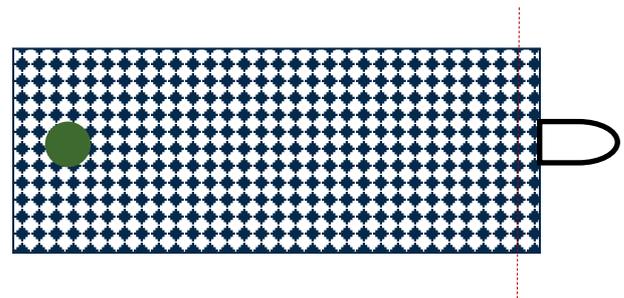
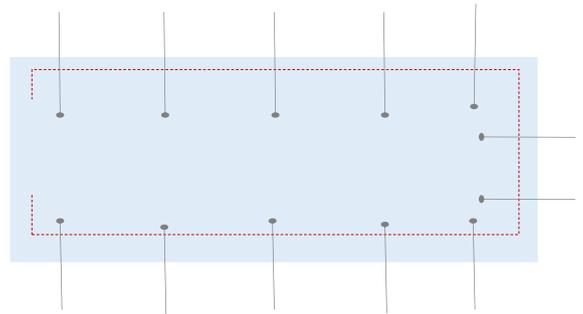
Cut a template, draw around on your fabrics (a great way to use up left over scraps from other projects)  
One piece of top fabric and one piece of lining fabric.



Cut the corners off within the seam allowance then turn the right way round, off and poking out the corners & Press.

Top stitch the end closed including a loop of elastic.  
Attach a small button to the other end.

With the rights sides of the fabric facing each other, pin then stitch together leaving a gap at one end.



*Ideal for keeping spiced hot chocolate warm.*

**Spiced Hot Chocolate**... with cream on top, dusted with cocoa & nutmeg. Not for the feint hearted or the vegan or the dairy intolerant, or those on a diet, however it is very delicious, very decadent and is at the uber end of Extreme cosy.

- \* Instant hot chocolate powder—you need the added milk powder for extra creaminess.
- \* Sugar
- \* Mixed spice or cinnamon
- \* Whole nutmeg
- \* Milk
- \* Cocoa powder
- \* Can of squirty cream
- \* Mini marshmallows, a chocolate flake, shards of peppermint candy canes...

Spoon three heaped table spoons of the chocolate powder into a bowl. Add the mixed spice, apx two teaspoons. Add approximately one heaped dessert spoon of sugar. Stir gently to mix everything together.

Get your largest and most favourite mug. Add three heaped teaspoons of chocolate powder mix and pour on boiling water whisking as you pour.

Top with squirty cream.

Dust with cocoa powder and a fine grating of nutmeg and or add any other toppings of choice.

Serve with a teaspoon after a wintery walk and bright red cheeks.

Perfect for a winter picnic poured from a flask into tin mugs and served with fruit cake.

Another favourite twist to a hot chocolate is a shot of Baileys, or, as a friend of mine & I discovered when I didn't have any Baileys, a slug of Apple brandy soon brings a glow to ones face, and a chuckle or two will bubble up before the mug is drained.

## Coffee with another creative

*I was first introduced to Lucy by a mutual friend not long after she & her family had returned to Ardfern after a sojourn in Australia, eight or nine years ago. Then we kept meeting in interesting places and have become friends. When organising a Christmas House event in 2018 Lucy was one of the first makers I knew I had to contact to take part. I was delighted to commission a pair of cufflinks to go with a lapel pin that Mr B had indicated he would like, for his 60th birthday last year and I particularly covet one of Lucy's large pieces of silvery lichen or perhaps seaweed statement pendant pieces ... I have a 'big' birthday next year I may just start dropping some hints...*



*Where are we meeting & Why here?*

Out for a walk in the ancient woodland outside my studio. Wonderful to live where we do with inspiration all around. Every time of year is magic in this wood but Autumn into winter is especially gorgeous - the wonderful smell of the fallen leaves in the chilled air as well as all the gorgeous colours. I find all sorts of windfall lichen, leaves, flowers, seed heads, and so many textures to work with in this wood. As we walk further the view down Loch Beag appears which is always stunning. You can see Jura in the distance – she has some low cloud on her shoulders today.



*What will you have?*

Let's sit under the giant beech tree and share a flask of good, freshly ground, strong, hot coffee. And later – we'll swap the coffee for a flask of mulled wine.

*Tell us a little bit about your business, what you do & where you work*

I make jewellery using recycled fine silver. I have just started to introduce 24 karat gold – also a recycled product. Much of my work so far has been based around turning real things found in nature into pure silver- things like feathers, seeds, leaves and flowers, lichen and seaweed. I am now just developing a new range of my own created forms – still very much inspired by nature – but adding my own twist.

I work from my home studio at Craignish but recently also from a new space, in Craignish Village Hall, where my lovely friend and brilliant upholsterer, Jo Gregory, and I are working in a shared space becoming known as the 'Craignish Creative Hub'. It is wonderful working alongside another creative on so many levels. We have opened a space for anyone from the community to drop in and use. We feel there is a need for - but a lack of - studio space available locally and realise there is an issue around social isolation for many people who work alone. We would like to encourage anyone who wants to drop in to the Hub to discuss sharing this great creative space with us.

*Do you have a favourite tool or material?*

Apart from appreciating being able to use my own hands - I love my wire brushes and burnishing tools. It is incredibly satisfying to get a piece of work fresh out of the kiln and start to compress the surface of the silver or gold to bring out the shine.

We're coming in to winter now, what are you most looking forward to?

Clear starry night skies; moonlit bonfires with mulled wine; sculptural tree forms revealed as leaves fall; long shadows in the early evening; looking to the north in case the Aurora borealis shows itself; moon rises reflected in the sea; enjoying lots of creative time before



my gardening work and job on our plant nursery hots up again in Springtime; cosy evenings in front of the fire with my wonderful husband and daughter – with a glass of red of course!

What is inspiring you?

Everything – constantly!

We are so lucky to live where we do. I feel utterly grateful to not only be surrounded by beautiful and ever-changing nature – but also by wonderful people sharing their friendship, insights, skills and talents.



*Anything you'd like us to know? A guilty secret or special plans, announcement?*



I am really looking forward to developing the 'Craignish Creative Hub' project. We have quite a few exciting ideas up our sleeve ...

I am very excited and honoured to be working in collaboration with an all-round wonderful person and incredible local weaver, Zoe Ritchie. Zoe collects plants and makes beautiful dyes for the wool she uses in her hand-woven pieces. We have a lichen-inspired project on the go.

I am also working on my website and hope to open an online shop early next year – I'm very excited to take this next step in developing my business.

I would like to say a massive thank you to you, to you Kate, for all you do to support the creative community. I personally have been lucky enough to be on the receiving end of your generosity and I so appreciate it, so many thanks. *[I found it hard not to edit this out! – thank you Lucy for your kind words]*

Apart from all that I am always looking forward crossing paths with other creatives – you never know what exciting thing might happen next!



You can find Lucy and her beautiful jewellery on Instagram [@lucyjw77](https://www.instagram.com/lucyjw77)

Facebook [@LucyJaneWalsh](https://www.facebook.com/LucyJaneWalsh)

and her website [www.lucyjanevalsh.co.uk](http://www.lucyjanevalsh.co.uk)

# *Managing the overwhelm .... or not - a confession*

*... or at least a realisation that I can't always do it all, all of the time, although that doesn't mean I don't/won't try!*

One evening in November, for no apparent or specific reason, a panicky feeling, like a physical weight, started to crush my chest. My heart was racing and breathing felt difficult. I couldn't concentrate, couldn't settle, couldn't read, couldn't watch television, couldn't scroll through Instagram – usually a soothing occupation – I couldn't do any of the things I needed to do, I couldn't do any of the things I wanted to do. This exacerbated the panic. The pressure seemed enormous. I stood up, sat down, stood up again, walked round the sitting room (to the consternation of both Rosie & Mr B), sat down, stood up went to make a cup of tea came back and sat down having only managed to switch the kettle on. I fidgeted. I downloaded Tetris to my phone and got lost in slotting bricks into place, becoming obsessed with beating my last score. I played it for hours that evening. And for a couple of days after that, whenever I felt the waves of panic rise, it kept the tsunamis at bay. I have since deleted it realising that I could quite easily become addicted to playing it and it wasn't, in anyway, a very productive use of time. But it did what I needed it to do in the moment.

You may not know that I juggle running my business alongside Caring for three people with chronic and long-term health conditions. There are times when I feel stretched but I snap back to 'normal' after a short while. Recently, however, my elastic had felt flabby and overstretched and there had been no snap back.

Although I had decided during the summer that I wasn't going to organise the events I usually organise at Christmas & I also wasn't going to do special Christmassy products this year. I had hoped that this would mean that the exhausting feelings of spinning plates would lessen. That wasn't the case which I found quite bizarre.

I have started to work on managing those feelings. To practise breathing out for longer than I breathed in, as recommended by a friend. I walk more mindfully when out with the dogs, by appreciating my surroundings, looking at the views not at my feet, studying the trees and clouds, not just striding along listening to an audio book or podcast. I stare out to sea and listen to the waves in an attempt to empty my mind. Then, whilst planning out this edition of the journal I stated to write fast, in large looping words. So large that sometimes there were only three or four words to a line. I let my hand and mind do their own thing. I got lost in the in the movement and in the moment. The words ceased to make sense within the context of the article I was writing, and it didn't matter. It was incredibly relaxing and reminded me I should get back to writing Morning Pages. A mind freeing exercise from 'The Artists Way' by Julia Cameron.

Having decided that I would write about 'Managing the Overwhelm' in this Journal it promptly became a bit of a stumbling block, at a time when I wasn't able to manage it. Along with the exercises above I took some time to break down the HUGE list that filled my mind, into smaller more manageable pieces. Looking at my calendar and blocking

out times for certain activities helped me to see where I was in the week. Where and when I could, or couldn't, focus on various aspects of life or business.

I also planned to, and then did some, clearing out of 'stuff'. Which I will be continuing to do in the New Year. I found I felt I was able to take control of some area of my life. As I said at the front of the Journal, I have a new workshop elf and one of the things that became obvious very quickly was that she had to have somewhere to sit. So, we started by tidying and clearing my work desk and then set to with the rest of the cabin. Boxes of things have been taken to the Mary's Meals charity shop, not just for sale it turns out that they help to support three local after school clubs with crafting materials, so I found a home for my ~~hoarded~~ collection of empty cotton reels after all.

At home I started with my clothes, no-one but me to argue with over whether or not it had to be kept. If I don't like it, doesn't make me feel/look good it's gone. I didn't look in the bags that were stored in the attic. Realistically I wasn't going to get it listed on eBay. And as the bags had been in the attic for a year or two I obviously didn't miss the contents. So instead it all went to the charity shops. Three weights lifted in one go. Emptier drawers of things I don't wear, emptier attic, and no more feeling that there's another job I'm not getting to. It had felt so good just writing out the plan that I couldn't wait to get home to actually do it. I have seen/read some of the Marie Kondo 'Konmari' method of sorting things out and keeping only what 'sparks joy', and also Jessica Rose Williams' eBook on creating a capsule wardrobe. My method had nothing, consciously anyway, to do with either of them. It was to do with the Overwhelming feelings of everything being out of control and that here was *one* thing I could act on. I could get rid of the weight of these belongings even if I couldn't make someone better.

That was my practical action and immediate 'I can do this now' moment, reading several websites helped too.

The calming tones of Gabrielle Treanor in her "Pressing Pause" podcast (I recommended this in the first edition of the Journal) lead to an email conversation, followed by a wonderful phone call that reduced me to tears. She explained to me that the reason I was feeling so out of control especially just now when there was less to do than usual was that those very things that I organised, that I had control over were missing. Her wise and sympathetic words during that phone call helped me to decide to join her Calm Mind Club. The Calm Mind Club is an online community providing support and coping strategies for likeminded over thinkers. A chronic over thinker & doer herself, Gabrielle has first-hand experience and has spent a lot of time reading and researching solutions. She is a writer, teacher and overwhelm coach and with gentle, practical advice, and a lot of patience, Gabrielle helps to guide you through the panic. She has a free Mental Health First Aid Kit which includes affirmations, meditation's, gratitude practice worksheets and even playlists to help soothe frayed nerves. Joining the Calm Mind Club is the first really proactive self-care action I've made, and it feels good. [www.gabrielletreanor.com](http://www.gabrielletreanor.com)

*Continued on pg 28*

# The Green Pages

♪♪ "Have yourself a very merry-plastic-free Christmas.." ♪♪

Is it even possible?

I'm not sure that it is. Just as an example, you will see on the back pages, I make our Mincemeat and Christmas Cake.

The sultanas, raisins, currants, cranberries, cherries, nuts, brown sugar, marzipan all come in plastic in one form or another. The only reusable or recyclable one is the glace cherries tub, the rest is single use plastic bags. If I bought mincemeat it would come in a reusable/recyclable glass jar (and contain candid peel) and chances are that it will contain palm oil/fat. Ditto the cake. Most of the ingredients I buy in plastic packets, if I bought one it would contain things I don't want in it eg. peel, palm oil – and probably the cardboard box would have a plastic window in it but that is one piece of plastic compared to a minimum of 10 pieces. Never mind all the other bits and pieces we buy around Christmastime. It seems to be a constant 'You pays your money you takes your choice.' Trying to work out what is the best worst.

There has been a lot written in the media about wrapping paper and using alternatives as so often the plastic and metallic shine in wrapping paper means it cannot be recycled. So somehow, I found myself very surprised when I saw rolls of sparkly wrapping paper in WHSmith's in Oban. I think I'd thought that there wouldn't be any. Brown paper is often suggested as an alternative and indeed it was there in the same stand as the sparkly stuff with a 'use natural wrapping' notice, rolls of brown paper ... wrapped in plastic ... and the trims and ribbons all came in plastic boxes.

The Plastics Free website has a guide to a zero waste Christmas <https://www.plasticsfree.co.uk/zero-waste-christmas>

And Country Living magazine had an article listing 13 ways to have a more sustainable Christmas which includes getting a smart meter (I don't think they meant as a present) <https://www.countryliving.com/uk/homes-interiors/interiors/g25329535/eco-friendly-christmas-ideas-green-christmas/>

Whilst researching weblinks I came across a Country living magazine article <https://www.countryliving.com/uk/wildlife/countryside/a20713758/iceland-first-supermarket-use-plastic-free-trust-mark/> talking about the Plastic Free Mark. Which I hadn't heard of before. A Plastic Planet created the label to help educate shoppers as to which products contain plastic and which don't. Iceland is the first major retailer to pledge to remove all plastic from its own brand products and the first to carry use the Plastic Free Trust Mark. For more information look at [www.aplasticplanet.com](http://www.aplasticplanet.com)

The Marine Conservation Society have these tips for a plastic free Christmas <https://www.mcsuk.org/news/12-tips-plastic-free-christmas> and Zero waste Scotland have 10 tips <https://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/content/top-10-tips-waste-free-christmas>

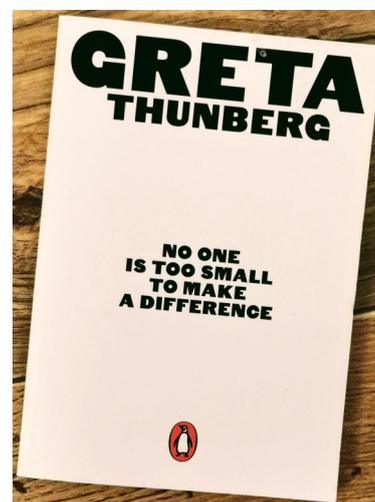
One year I used tea towels – from Ikea - & ribbon or twine to tie up my Christmas bundles – you couldn't really call them parcels. Useful, pretty, and not a piece of Sellotape in sight.

This is a very little book commenting a very big subject. Greta Thunberg the now 16yr old Climate Activist who has been all over the news, who has been all over the world and who has met a lot of very important people in governments all across the globe, is a force to be reckoned with. This small book is just some of the speeches that she has made. We've seen many of the highlights in the headlines on the news, but this book contains the whole speech given at various events and conferences, not just the sound bites. These are her own words. You can tell that English is not her first language but that the speeches were written in English. These aren't translated and so nothing is lost in the translation. It is a rallying cry. It is stirring stuff. And it is very readable. I defy you not to want to take action, to do something, any little thing after you've read this.

*No one is too small to make a difference*

*Greta Thunberg*

*Published by Penguin £2.99*



# Dryad Candleworks

'Dryad Candleworks' is a teeny tiny family business that is growing rapidly in a crowded market. With fragrances that are organic, essential oils and wildcrafted botanic essences, including infusions and artisan distilled oils from bark, needles and moss. Everything is made in Argyll, the candles are poured by hand in small batches, the incense is hand rolled.

The range of products which has expanded rapidly from candles to include incense and reed diffusers contain *no* petrochemicals, *no* herbicides, *no* palm wax, and *no* pesticides, John & Louise are making products which are as natural as possible, vegan and they use carefully sourced, non-GMO or forest destroying soya wax.

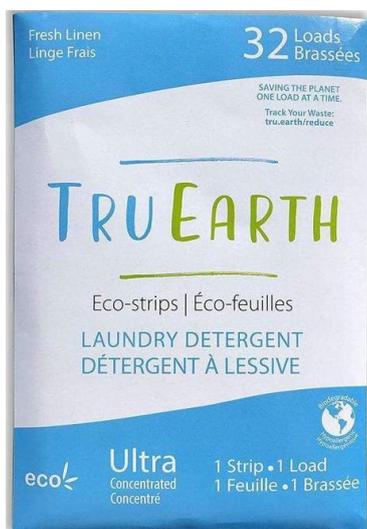
When you burn the candles, you are getting as close to a pure fragrance experience as they can create. Unlike a lot of commercial products, the fragrance loading sits at 11%, a lot higher than many producers. However, it is a subtle and delicious scent, and one that doesn't give me a headache. The incense has a natural woody aroma, not sweet & heady or typically incense-y, we are already on our third packet.

The packaging has been carefully considered too. Having not just chosen suppliers that use recycled materials, their own packaging is recyclable & reusable too. The attractive brown apothecary style jars have recycled aluminium lids,

the labels are made with recycled paper, reed diffuser bottles are presented in a simple brown recycled cardboard box.

The whole concept is extremely stylish and beautifully produced.

You can find them on Instagram @Dryad\_Candle and website [www.dryadcandle.com](http://www.dryadcandle.com)



## Laundry Strips

It would seem that I am obsessed with doing laundry as I've been trying out new laundry products in every edition. This time it's TruEarth dissolvable laundry strips.

They are easy to use, dissolve completely and smell nice. They come in a cardboard envelope, absolutely no plastic — great, so far so good. . But, and there are quite big buts, they are made in Canada; That's a lot of miles away, and also at

£12.99 for 32 loads, which makes it a little under 41p per load, they are also expensive. I'm still a fan of ['smol'](#), even though they arrive in plastic (which can be sent back for reuse/recycling) they are made in the UK, available by subscription so arrive in the post. At £3.85 for 24 capsules which means it costs 16p per load, I think I know which I will stick to using.

I bought the TruEarth Laundry strips from [Ecovibe.co.uk](http://Ecovibe.co.uk) and you can find out more about TruEarth at [www.tru.earth](http://www.tru.earth)

## Swap Sellotape for Washi Tape

Washi tape is usually made from natural fibres (like bamboo or hemp) and is a pretty, decorative paper masking tape. It's thin but durable, inexpensive, and comes in hundreds of colours and patterns. The tape is easy to stick on many surfaces — including wood, plastic, and metal, as well as paper. Washi Tape is an eco-friendly, reusable, biodegradable, tree-free alternative to traditional tape and adhesives.

[www.re-wrapped.co.uk](http://www.re-wrapped.co.uk) sell 100% recycled paper products, greetings cards, wrapping paper, and use vegetable inks which means that the paper can be recycled too.



# The Needlesmith

Journal of a creative

## Readers letters

Hello Kate,

I picked up issue 2 of your journal at the Design Exchange in the Buchanan Galleries yesterday - what a treat! It feels like it was written just for me, covering all my favourite things - textiles, environmental issues and of course shortbread biscuits!

Thanks in particular for the recommendation for the Ramblings radio show, I listened to a couple of episodes on the train yesterday and it's sure to become a new favourite.

I see that issue 3 is out now, and I was wondering how I can get my hands on a copy? If you could please let me know how much it would be for a copy and postage (within Scotland) and how to order, that would be great.

EG by email

Hi Kate

Thank you for the journal - I'm going to take it with me when I go away to Wester Ross for a wee break next week. Looking forward to settling down with a cuppa and reading it, perfect holiday reading!

LW by email

Thank you so much for sending the autumn edition of The Needlesmith. It arrived just in time to come away with me for a weekend of crafting in Cornwall on my own without the kids!

It's lovely to read something in hard copy and so inspiring to read about you doing it, being a creative. I'd move to your neck of the woods in a minute but my husband and kids are less convinced and like the warmth of Devon. So it's quite nurturing to have a connection to your part of the world in between summer holidays.

SB by email

## A POEM FOR FEBRUARY

### Love is ...

My Love is  
On a washing line  
Fluttering in the breeze

Your love is  
Dried on a radiator  
Hot, rumpled and untidy

Their love is  
From the tumble drier  
Easy care and crease free

Her love is  
On a whirly gig  
Spinning round dizzily

His love is  
Like a clothes horse  
Folded away stiffly

Our love  
Needs no washing  
Fresh as a daisy daily

By Kate MacDonald

## Disclaimer & Statement

For reasons of transparency I wanted to add a statement here ... to say that all the opinions in the Journal are my own!

The products I buy to try, books I read, podcasts I listen to etc & et al, are not 'gifted' to me, I am not sponsored or paid a fee by the companies concerned, they are just things I have found of interest and want to share. When the words aren't mine I credit the author and link to the source.

All the *Quick Make* patterns are my own designs, and I share them in good faith, ditto the recipes, I will credit the original source, when I can, but most will have been tweaked and amended/improved by me. (The original writer may not want to be associated with it any longer!)

Images are mostly my own, company product pictures, or I have been given permission to use them, very occasionally I might use photographs from a royalty free website following their guidelines.

# If you go down to the woods ...

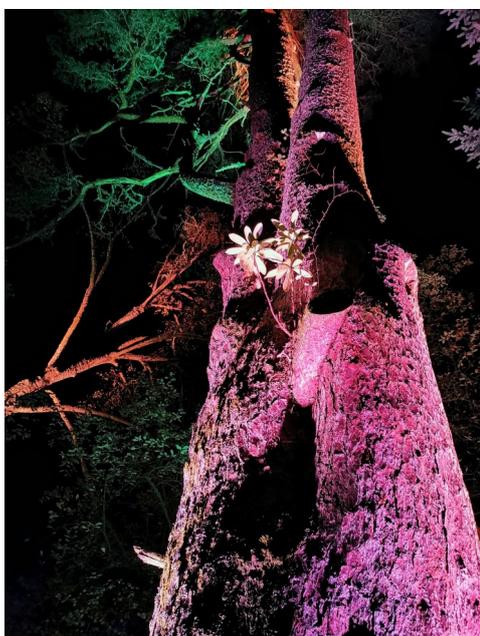
.... Make it next October in Pitlochry ... make it the Enchanted Forest

Last year Mr B was in hospital for his birthday so this year I thought that we would do something a little different.



Inspired by photographs of a friend's trip to the Enchanted Forest in Pitlochry I snapped up two of the last tickets available.

It was one of the most amazing evenings we have ever spent at an event. Superbly organised, although there was a little bit of waiting around but nothing to write home about. Everyone in the queues were happy and chatty (if also rather cold) and we enjoyed meet-

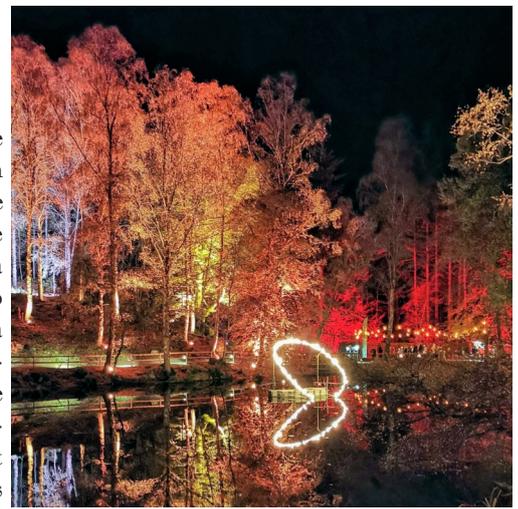


ing our neighbours. Then we were processed through the queues and on to the busses for the 6-minute drive to the venue. The moment we stepped off the bus we were in a woodland wonderland. First stop was a small igloo shaped tent for a

video about the cosmos – setting the theme for the evening. Then we spent the next two hours (& I could have stayed longer) oohing and aahing watching the colours change, the pictures screened on a spray of water, listening to noises from outer space through what I can only describe as tumble dryer tubes with funnels on the end. At each bend in the path there was a different view, a different spectacle, more lights, more colours,

different sounds and music. My favourite bit has to be the hanging moon and earth. Suspended over land and water it was simply breath-taking. It was a cold and frosty evening with not a breath of wind which must have been the best evening to visit. We paused for hot chocolates and to toast marshmallows at a fire pit to warm up a bit, and then continued wandering along, simply immersing ourselves in the light and sound spectacle.

Whilst looking up some details for writing this piece I discovered that The Enchanted Forest has been going for 18 years, The show is set in Faskally Wood which was created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by an Archibald Butter. It was then acquired by the Forestry Commission, now Forestry & Land Scotland and used as a training centre, initially for new Foresters who were trained to repair woodlands ravaged by felling for the war effort, and then until the 1960's for testing new ideas and planting mixes. Faskally Wood is part of the Tay Forest Park, and currently has 23 species of trees some of which are more than 200 years old. Within the woodland is the little loch that we walked around –



L o c h D u n m o r e . The Enchanted Forest event was started by Forestry & Land Scotland in 2002 to encourage more people to visit the woodlands. Then in 2010 the management passed to a community led organisation which now operates as The Enchanted Forest Community Trust.

The Enchanted Forest Community



Trust select three official charities that work to benefit the Highland Perthshire area. The event supports the charities through publicity – information available on the website etc. and they also receive a large donation from the proceeds of the show. The 2019 charities were the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Guide dogs Scotland, and Perth & Kinross Association of Voluntary Service.

I was pleased to read that in 2018 an independent Environmental Impact Study was carried out to measure the effect that the show might have on the

# Patchwood Samplers

In October for a birthday treat I went with a friend to the Dalkeith Restoration Yard. I had no idea what I was going to, picturing a reclamation yard type yard (I was very wrong), and I was also a bit worried about what I was going to do when I got there. Although sewing was on the menu it wouldn't be as I knew it, we would be stitching wood not fabric...



The Dalkeith Restoration Yard is a beautiful place. It's been in the Buccleuch family for over 300 years and the 1740's stable block by William Adam, which is now home to the Restoration Yard, was developed by Francis, the 2nd Duke of Buccleuch. This and the surrounding parkland are open to the public, but the Palace has been let to the University of Wisconsin for a study abroad programme since 1986 so you can only admire the building from the outside.

In one of the upstairs rooms, a long attic type space, beautifully light and airy with a wooden floor – they hold regular yoga classes there and it felt very calm and comfortable. Ali Ferguson of The Purple Thread Shed had set up the classroom for us. Long tables laid out with all we needed to create our wooden samplers, and further side tables full of the sort of ephemera I delight in, tins and boxes containing bits of 'stuff'. Dried plants and rusty nails, vintage papers & postcards, bits of clocks. Even surrounded by material I am familiar with am able to handle and nothing was incredibly

difficult, I will admit I found it very stressful, I felt rather out of my comfort zone. I was filled with anxiety and almost terror. Even if it was a bit uncomfortable at the time, I now have huge sympathy for those who come on my own workshops and who might feel worried about the task before them, so it was good for me to be the other side of the table.

It was a great venue, and a super workshop and I'm delighted with the piece I made, *below*.

You can find Ali: [www.aliferguson.co.uk](http://www.aliferguson.co.uk) on Facebook @ThePurpleThreadShed Instagram @ThePurpleThreadShed [www.dalkeithcountrypark.co.uk](http://www.dalkeithcountrypark.co.uk)



event. Mr B & I had wondered about the animals and birds and even though the show wasn't on all night, habitat's and sleep patterns would have been disturbed. The Study reported that all possible measures were taken to minimise any impact there might be on the forest and the wildlife, and that there were no signs that the wildlife was being adversely affected by the event and the numbers of visitors.

For far better photographs than I was able to take, and to see videos from the events from the last couple of years visit the website [www.enchantedforest.org.uk](http://www.enchantedforest.org.uk) Instagram @enchantforest and on Fa-

cebook @theenchantedforest We stayed very comfortably at the [McKay's Hotel](#) in Pitlochry and due to a mix up with dates we ended up in their self-catering cottage, a happy outcome, it worked well as we had Rosie with us.

We went out for dinner at [Caffe Scozia](#) just over the road from the hotel & our cottage. Full and bustling with Enchanted Forest visitors, the food arrived very quickly, and was delicious, served by cheerful waiting staff.

I'm already looking forward to going back in 2020.



## Managing the overwhelm ..... or not

Continued from page 22

Snapdragon Jane (see opposite) wrote this blog [www.snapdragonlife.com/news/blog/five-ways-to-step-back-from-overwhelm](http://www.snapdragonlife.com/news/blog/five-ways-to-step-back-from-overwhelm) about how she tackled the exhausting feelings she was experiencing.

This website has some very interesting comments and links [www.verywellmind.com/ways-to-calm-down-quickly-when-overwhelmed-3145197](http://www.verywellmind.com/ways-to-calm-down-quickly-when-overwhelmed-3145197) I've tried practising Progressive Muscle Relaxation, mentioned here, before going to sleep on nights when I can feel that the cogs are in overdrive and it can really help. Or having a shower before I go to bed. (Having a bath makes me too hot and can take too long as I always take a book with me.) However, I find meditation incredibly irritating and very stressful which does not make me feel relaxed. Each to their own.

Reading before sleeping helps me to relax and clear my mind, a real book though, not electronically, and so long as it isn't something I really have to concentrate on. Comfortable books by Katie Fford, Veronica Henry, Catherine Alliot, Rachel Hore, are some bedtime favourites, alongside Lee Child, David Baldacci, Felix/Dick Frances, James Patterson thrillers, to name a few (although sometimes it gets hard to put them down!). Young Adult books are good too, authors such as Rick Riordan, William Nicholson, Anthony Horowitz.

I have worked through that period of panic now and have come through it with several coping strategies. Deciding that even though the Journal would be *much* later than I had planned or wanted it to be, leaving it to one side for a short while would be OK. It was put on the 'important' to be done list but not the 'urgent-have-to-do-it-now-and-immediately' list. I do hope you understand.



Spending a Sunday afternoon baking Christmas cakes whilst singing & bopping along to vintage Christmas songs from the 30's, 40's, & 50's also helped. This is the one I made for my parents.

I know that the start of this next year is going to be difficult. But because I know this - there is a date marked on the calendar - I am trying hard to concentrate on the

positive aspects of this New Year too. I have some constructive and energising changes to put in place with regard to my business, some exciting plans to look forward to, as well as working with some new and inspiring people. I have a new Planner, a new wall calendar and a new diary. I am looking forward to taking control of things again.

And on bad days I repeat my mantra - "*This too will pass*".

## The Seamstress's Rosary

I heard the whispers fly  
out as the tape unfurls.  
I saw the dust of years spill  
out from within the curls.

Sighs of a seamstress,  
finger tips pricked by pins.  
Moans from a child, bored,  
twitching fingers, wanting to play.  
Tears of a matron bereft,  
mourning ribbons to trim her gown.  
Giggles from girls a-twirl  
preening, pretty in new frocks.

Fragments of silk  
headed for a dance.  
Crumbles of tweed  
woven in the hills.  
Clippings of wools  
for bright winter coats.  
Sparkles of tinsel  
that trimmed an angels wings.

I felt the memories flow  
out as the tape unrolled.  
I smelt the scent of use rise  
out from within the coils.

Recalling stories told,  
in tucks and pleats and hems.  
Revealing a life measured  
in inches and in yards,  
Numbers rubbed faint with use,  
the seamstress's rosary.

By Kate MacDonald

# Support an independent Business

In the last two of editions of the Needlesmith I have interviewed a couple of independent businesses so I've decided to make it a regular feature. Let me introduce you to Jane Lindsey, aka Snapdragon Jane, and her business Snapdragon Life. Jane is a designer & on-line shop owner, & has four part time employees. I've followed Jane for many years since she was featured in Country Living magazine's Small Business feature and then she won the Small Business of the Year Award, and I first met her at a Country Living Magazine Fair in Glasgow. I have watched in awe as the business as grown and changed over the years. Whilst at times of chaos in my life I have had to stop following through jealousy, as I unfavourably & soul destroyingly, compared my life & business to Jane's, I return to her as she is inspiring, generous, and genuinely kind & lovely.



*that I could make a go of that side of the business. I was also becoming more and more fatigued by what turned out to be a chronic health condition and the sewing was more doable than heavy gardening at that point..*

What has been your business highlight to date?

*When I changed the way I run my business - starting up a membership community - I didn't know whether it would work at all and it was a big gamble. At that point nobody was doing it so there wasn't a road map at all and it would be fair to say that there was a lot of scepticism amongst friends and family. When I sent out the sign up email I was amazed and delighted that people were really enthusiastic and prepared to trust me and that within a couple of days we had reached my year one target.*

I know you have remodelled your business recently, but what inspired you to set up Snapdragon initially?

*Right at the start Snapdragon was a business selling home grown cut flowers from the garden gate and at Farmers Markets. I had left my job as Curator of British art for Glasgow University's Hunterian Art Gallery desperate to work outside and had retrained in horticulture - growing flowers was something that nobody else was doing at the time (2002). It gradually became clear why - because I had 6 months of the year when I had no flowers, and that is when the crafting side of the business began.*

Why did you call it Snapdragon?

*My first flower 'field' was actually a 10 foot square patch in our family garden - it was plagued by slugs and one of the few plants they don't eat is the snapdragon. I had a pretty Snap-dragon heavy selection that year and the name stuck.*

How has Snapdragon evolved and what inspired this change?

*The crafting side of the business expanded a lot when I was asked to do a show stand for the Country Living Fair in Glasgow - their show garden had had to be cancelled with a few weeks to go and they asked me if I could put own a showy stand with our old Vintage H-van instead. I said yes and then realised that I had very few flowers - so instead I sewed pretty much around the clock to make enough stock for an abundant feel. We sold out and won best stand and it made me realise*

What are the highs and the lows of working as an independent retailer?

*The highs are the freedom to create - I don't have anyone telling me what to do and if something interests me then I can try it out. Also the connection and relationship that I have developed with so many members who began as customers and have become*



far more. The lows are always cash flow and exhaustion and the nasty email from someone whose parcel has got lost in the mail that always seems to arrive when you are exhausted and low on cash!

When did you discover the passion for what you do?

*I've always been a maker, a doer of things - I love using my hands and creating things out of nothing - so gardening, crafting, cooking, writing. I got this from my Mum and Grandmothers. I also love teaching - that was my favourite part of my University job and I continued teaching evening classes for several years. I'm lucky to have been able to create a job that combines these things.*

What's a typical working day in Snapdragon Life?

*It takes me ages to wake up properly in the mornings so I get brought a mug of coffee and my phone and I spend the next hour chatting on Facebook and Instagram. I then get up, sort priorities for the day. I try to batch things a little - so Mondays are writing days, Tuesdays embroidery days, Wednesdays often photography,*



*Thursdays product development/ listing and Fridays a freeform day where I sometimes meet friends, sometimes go to exhibitions, sometimes work on designs. I work until 3 or 4 and then walk my spaniel Dixie, make dinner etc. I often work a couple of evenings if I have a big project on - like the A*

*Seasonal Way magazine which needs good blocks of uninterrupted time.*

Do you have a favourite product?

*I love our craft subscription Studio Box best - every quarter I get to devise something entirely new, a new skill for people to learn and send them all the supplies and instructions to make a pro-*



*ject. As we only send out 150 of these I can include things that are a bit more unusual than if I needed to make thousands - so there have been hand drawings and vintage bits and pieces included. We included original Punch magazines in our notebook making box for example and that is such a fun thing to be able to do.*

Can you sum up the Snapdragon Life style in three words?

*Curious, Engaged, Generous*

For a daily dose of cats, plants, and inspiration, you can find Jane on Instagram [@snapdragon.life](https://www.instagram.com/snapdragon.life) on Facebook at [@SnapdragonJane](https://www.facebook.com/SnapdragonJane) and [www.snapdragonlife.com](http://www.snapdragonlife.com)



LOVE  
DOVE STUDIO

L O V E D O V E S T U D I O .

Is an independent art gallery & artists studio owned by George & Gill Stewart. It opened in December 2018, Colchester Square, in Lochgilphead. Originally inspired by the events that I organise as 'Homestyle Argyll' showcasing work by local artists & artisans. Gill has gone on to develop the floral side of the business and she & George both run workshops.

In the emporium that is Love Dove Studio, can be found work by a number of Argyll artists. Including Lucy Walsh Jewellery (see pgs 18 & 19) A Touch of Glass (featured in the first edition of the Journal), Katkin Knitting, Ugly Duckling Creations Woolley Bobbins felt pictures, my lampshades and paper copies of the Journal. There are soaps, candles, bags, purses and pottery, as well as their own work including George's watercolours & lots of Gills wreaths and floral arrangements. In a bit of a new adventure and part of a new direction, I'm going to be doing some work with Gill & George, babysitting the shop on a Tuesday and working on a new online shop & emailing list. Do pop in and say hello.



Follow them on Facebook [@LoveDoveStudio](https://www.facebook.com/LoveDoveStudio) & Instagram [@lovedovestudio](https://www.instagram.com/lovedovestudio)

## A speedy I'm-not-a-mince-pie Pie

*Do you have a gluten free or dairy-free visitor coming and don't know what to give them? Then this is the answer—just so long as they don't have a nut allergy!*

I had planned to make mince pies for one of my workshops then remembered that one student was gluten free. Briefly flummoxed I worked out that if I used an almond 'sponge' or frangipane, then I could make mince-pies that weren't actually mince-pies.

100g/4oz Butter/Hard Stork (dairy free)

100g/4oz Caster sugar

100g/6oz Ground almonds

2 egg

1/2 tsp Almond essence

Flaked almonds to scatter on top

Filling: eg. Mincemeat, Jam, Spiced stewed apple, Brambles...

Paper cake cases & 12 hole cake tin

- \* Preheat the oven to 190c/Gas 5
- \* Cream butter/Stork & sugar

- \* Add beaten egg and ground almonds and mix together
- \* Pop a paper case into each of the holes in the tin
- \* Add a small tsp. of the mixture to the bottom of each case and spread it out a little to cover the base
- \* Add a tsp. of your filling to the middle
- \* Add enough of the mixture to cover the filling
- \* Scatter a couple of flaked almonds over the top
- \* Bake for 10-15 minutes or until golden brown
- \* Lift out of the tin and leave to cool on a rack.
- \* Sadly this is important, no eating whilst still warm, as the pies don't come out of the cases neatly until they are cool.

*Warning:  
they are very moreish!*



*Continued from pg14* There is such a huge amount of wasted space. A vast atrium of hollow echoey noise, hard surfaces, scraping chairs and the constant sound of chattering visitors, contains a lift shaft & staircase leading up to the exhibition level. There was an odd display area with an exhibition of fashion design and loud music of the era playing. We stood and watched the robotic arm blow bubbles for quite some time. But there wasn't any information about it, who designed it, why it was there even. We found the door to the main exhibition space, although it wasn't immediately obvious that that was where we were supposed to be going. We entered into what felt like the backstage area of a theatre. Incredibly high ceilings, the walls, floor and ceilings were black with islands of lit display cases, tall exhibition cases dwarfed the visitors. It was totally incomprehensible, there didn't seem to be any rhyme or reason as to the collection layout. Information was thin on the ground. It all

seemed rather inconsistent and not terribly interesting or well thought through.

We visited the café before we left and had hard, stale, unpleasant tasting scones, and tea in disposable, although compostable, cups. There was a short video on a loop that showed an interview with the architect and his vision for the museum and also explanations for various

aspects of the building. Some areas reflect the Japanese way of doing things, the main entrance to the building for example is seemingly like the entrances to temples, the way the light & shadow was supposed to play through the wood interior mimicking the light through the cherry trees in Japan. Inside a building shaped to look boat like with crevices and ledges inspired by east coast Scottish cliffs... This building doesn't know what or where it is.

The shop contained unrelated toys, games, a lot of them Japanese, much of it plastic, very little to do with Dundee or Scotland. I really felt that the architect, designers and the commissioning board that organised the museum have completely missed a trick. Here was a real opportunity to showcase the best talent, designers, designs, materials, environmental engineering and technologies that Scotland has to offer and none of it was put to use. There is an art college & two universities. A School of Architecture in the Art College & an Interior & Environmental design department (the one I was in) as well as a Centre for Contemporary Arts within the town. The history and location of Dundee seems to have been mostly ignored and the building dwarfs the RRS Discovery ship in the dock next door (a far more interesting museum and visitor attraction). I am absolutely not against modern design, buildings and development, but this feel so inappropriate, incongruous and gratuitous, I won't rush back for another visit. It wasn't anywhere near as interesting as the little parochial 'Atholl Country Life Museum' in an old school that Mr B & I visited near Blair Atholl when we were in Pitlochry.

[www.vam.ac.uk/dundee](http://www.vam.ac.uk/dundee)

[Atholl Country Life Museum](#)



# Pages from my recipe files

## Last minute Christmas Cake

This recipe originally came from a Women & Home magazine recipe. As always, I've changed things a bit.

175g/6oz butter or margarine (I use Stork as Unilever use sustainably sourced Palm oil. If you use solid Stork block then it is vegan)  
 175g/6oz soft light brown sugar (or dark brown demerara for colour)  
 3 medium eggs - beaten (if making a vegan cake replace with 2tsp Baking powder)  
 1tsp almond extract  
 175g/6oz ground almonds  
 175g/6oz plain flour  
 1tsp baking powder  
 Heavy grating of nutmeg  
 1 - 2 tsp mixed spice  
 175g/6oz sultanas }  
 175g/6oz raisins } Or thereabouts!  
 175g/6oz currants } You could also swap/add chopped  
 175g/6oz dried cranberries } dried apricots, dates, flame raisins  
 175g/6oz glace cherries }  
 175g/6oz chopped roasted nuts  
 Large slug sherry/whisky/port  
 Juice of two clementines/ 1 orange

Heat the oven to 150°C 140°C fan,  
 Gas 2

Place a roasting tin of cold water at the bottom, this ensures that the cake is moist. Grease and line a 19cm/7" tin. Wrap the sides in a double layer of brown paper & cut a circle of brown paper to pop on the top to prevent burning.

Put all the dried fruit into a pan and pour on the fruit juice & alcohol. Heat gently to help the fruit plump up. Then put into a bowl to cool down.

In a large mixing bowl, cream the butter/margarine & sugar together. Gradually beat in the beaten eggs. (tip - if it looks like it's going to split add a tablespoon of flour with each egg.) Stir in the almond extract and ground almonds.

Sift the flour, baking soda, nutmeg & spice, and fold in.

Add the cooled fruit mixture.

Mix it all together thoroughly then spoon into the cake tin. Smooth the top and make a small hollow in the centre - this allows it to rise but keeps the cake top reasonably flat.

Bake for around 2-2 ½ hrs, check after 1 ½ hrs. If it is looking slightly browned on top but not in the middle, pop the brown paper circle over the top to stop the cake from over browning (burning!)

Leave to cool in the tin before turning out. If you have any 'holes' in the cake or a broken corner, fill in the gaps with marzipan. Sieve the apricot jam to remove lumps, paint your cake with the jam. Roll out the marzipan to cover the cake. If you are using ready to roll icing then paint the marzipan with vodka or gin, roll out the icing to size drape over the cake and smooth down. Decorate the top with silver balls or little cake topper figures and tie a wide piece of ribbon around the middle, (fix in place with a couple of clean pins).

Or you could top the cake with almonds like the traditional Dundee cake. Blanch the almonds to remove the brown skins and arrange in circles on the top of the cake before baking.

If icing  
 Royal icing/Ready to roll icing (not vegan)  
 Ready to roll natural colour marzipan  
 2tbl spn sieved apricot jam  
 2tbl spn vodka/gin

If not icing  
 Packet of almonds  
 Glace cherries  
 Sieved Apricot jam or fruit jelly to glaze



Above is the cake just before it went into the oven and below, after a couple of hours baking and glazed with some warmed apple jelly, and left in the tin to cool

Although this was much quicker to do than icing and decorating I have missed the marzipan.



# Homemade Mincemeat

Why would you make mincemeat? It readily comes in jars from all sorts of shops. Well, firstly, neither Mr B nor I like candied peel, and secondly I don't feel it's necessary to have suet in mincemeat, and thirdly... it makes lovely Christmas gifts! As there's no suet in this recipe it is fat free & vegan. My original recipe is one from the Queen of Lusciousness Nigella Lawson which I found the recipe in a Christmas edition of Good Housekeeping magazine, I think, many years ago, and involved boiled kumquats. It has evolved over time, and is very simple. Make it now for a rich, mature mincemeat next Christmas.



I like to measure everything out in to separate bowls first. It gives me a chance to use all my white pudding basins although it makes me feel a little like a TV chef, it looks pretty.

12oz grated or finely chopped cooking apple  
12oz Raisins  
12oz Sultanas  
12oz Currants  
12oz any other dried fruit you fancy or a mix eg. cranberries, chopped apricots, glace cherries, dates, figs, 'exotic' fruit like dried pineapple, mango or papaya would work too and you could use rum for a Caribbean flavoured mincemeat (candied peel if you like it!)  
6oz Light muscovado sugar  
6oz Dark muscovado/Demerara sugar  
1 tbl spn Mixed spice  
1 Tsp Ground nutmeg  
Grated zest and juice of 2 oranges  
½ pint, sherry/brandy/port/rum/whatever takes your fancy, or fruit juice

Add everything to a large saucepan and simmer until the sugar has dissolved and the fruit looks fat and glossy. If it looks like it might need a bit more liquid just add an extra glug!

Whilst the mincemeat is simmering switch on the oven and rinse your jam jars in hot water, place in the hot oven to dry.

When the sugar has dissolved bring out the jam jars and stand carefully on a baking tray.

using a wide necked funnel fill the jars to the top. Wipe off any drips, taking care as the jars and contents are hot.

Screw the lids on tightly. If you do this whilst the jars are still hot a seal will form, and you won't need to use wax discs or cellophane jam tops.

Don't forget to add a label. This is lovely to give as a gift, simply top with a pretty piece of fabric and tie with ribbon to hold it in place.



Add everything to a large pan, and pour over the alcohol or fruit juice— not forgetting the cooks perk



Not all my baking turns out well. This was a vegan Christmas cake I baked a couple of years ago. Last minute as always I needed to deliver it to my friend that afternoon. I was at a totally loss as to what to do. I didn't have enough ingredients, or the time, to make another one. I don't remember where the idea came from but I sent Mr B out to buy a tub of dairy free, vegan, Swedish Glace vanilla 'ice cream'. I let it defrost for a bit and then stirred the cake crumbs through the Glace. Lucy was given strict instructions that her 'cake' was to be put in the freezer immediately. I forgot to taste it before it went, I was in such a kerfuffle, but she kindly said it was absolutely delicious. Phew!



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