

Growing projects and opportunities for *The Commons: Re-Enchanting the World* at The MERL, Museum of English Rural Life, Reading, 2020

I'm Amanda Couch and an artist working on a project around the idea of *The Commons: Re-Enchanting the World* that will take place at The MERL, Museum of English Rural Life in Reading this year. A number of artists will be responding to the context of the enclosure of the commons, and its impact on English rural history, with its social, colonial and ecological repercussions, through the collections of The MERL, intervening in the galleries, growing in the gardens, and curating a programme of activities and events, some of which are growing initiatives with interested participants and collaborators across Reading.

Amanda Couch: Becoming with Wheat (& Other More-Than-Human Others)



My contribution to The Commons project is called *Becoming with Wheat (and Other More-Than-Human Others)* around which I am creating a 'Becoming with Wheat' (BwW) community, where interested people from a variety of growing and allotment groups in Reading, students/staff in agro-environmental studies and plant sciences at the University and local young farmers, and networks from The Mills Archive, will work with, advise, care for and learn from each other and the wheat, growing in The MERL garden, which will be sown in especially crafted mobile raised beds. The project would begin in March when we would select and sow the seeds. The aim would be to meet monthly, guided by the needs and desires of the group to create a kind of commons to learn from, help cultivate, care for, observe, process and bake with the wheat, from sowing to ingestion. For more information and to express an interest in getting involved, please email me, Amanda Couch at amandajcouch@gmail.com

Grow Beer



We are also initiating a 'Grow Beer' in Reading. Grow Beer was started by Helen Steer and Ann Bodkin in Brixton, London, after a conversation over a pint of beer in October 2011, wanting to celebrate beer and growing stuff in a fun way. There are now over 22 groups across the UK who regularly grow beer utilising their Grow Beer kit that includes everything a group needs to grow, Youtube instruction videos, and advice and information packs. Reading's iteration which will be a community "patchwork farm" across the town with local people growing hops in their back gardens, on their patios and balconies, in allotments and community gardens, with the goal of growing, harvesting, and with the collaboration of a local brewery, making a green hop beer to enjoy communally.

The project will kick off with an information session at in February where Ann Bodkin, will introduce a 'find out more' for anyone interested in getting involved. For to express an interest in getting involved, for more information, and/or to offer to host this session, please email me, Amanda Couch at amandajcouch@gmail.com
<https://growbeer.city-farmers.co.uk/about/our-story/>
<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/sep/11/how-to-produce-your-own-community-beer>

Sigrid Holmwood: Woad Growing



Sigrid using woad to make Mayan blue in workshop performance

Also, another part of the project is with the artist Sigrid Holmwood, who will be exploring the idea of the commons through the history of dye plants - the knowledges and technologies surrounding them, and their global histories. She is looking for volunteers and collaborators to help grow woad (*Isatis tinctoria*), a plant native to Europe which contains indigo, and Chinese/Japanese Indigo (*Polygonum tinctoria*) in the gardens of The MERL. And Sigrid can also provide seed for people to grow tropical indigo native to the Indian subcontinent (*Indigofera tinctoria*) at home indoors. Seeds will be planted in March, and in the summer, the various indigo plants will be harvested and processed to discover how different cultures around the world have much in common when it comes to the ways of using indigo, as well as exploring unique inventions such as 'Mayan Blue.' What is produced will be presented in the exhibition launch in July.

If anyone is interested in this aspect of the project, please email sigrid_holmwood@hotmail.com.