

Bring Power to the Garden

A three-part installation that invites you to step into history, walk through innovation, and imagine our shared sustainable future.

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Introduction

Welcome to *Bring Power to the Garden* – a three-part installation that invites you to step into history, walk through innovation, and imagine our shared sustainable future. This project brings together storytelling, exploration, and hands-on discovery to highlight how energy, community, and the natural world are deeply connected.

In **Part One**, you'll enter an immersive experience and meet Mildred Cookson, a miller for 30 years of expertise at Mapledurham. Through her words, you'll uncover the human story behind the craft,

and why her work matters not just to heritage, but to our lives today.

In **Part Two**, we invite you outdoors for a guided trail around our award-winning campus. Here, you'll see sustainability in action – from green technologies to ecological design – and learn how our university community is working together to create positive change.

In **Part Three**, we gather at the Harris Garden, where you can explore the mechanics of an old windmill and the sleek power of a modern turbine. This side-by-side encounter reveals how the past and present speak to each other, and how traditional knowledge can inform the future of renewable energy.

By combining three very different experiences – storytelling, exploration, and direct observation – *Bring Power to the Garden* shows that sustainability is not just a technical challenge, but a shared journey. It is a celebration of community, a call to stewardship, and a reminder that innovation thrives when we connect the wisdom of the past with the needs of the present.

The project is a collaboration between the [University of Reading](#) and the [Mills Archive Trust](#), generously funded by [the University's Centenary Fund](#) and the Environmental Humanities Group.

Mills of Memory

What is “Mills of Memory”?

“Mills of Memory: the Story of Mildred Cookson” is an immersive, reflective experience that brings to life the extraordinary journey of a dedicated miller and heritage-preserved. Through a series of video essays, the installation uses Mildred’s own voice – drawn from her diaries, interviews, and personal reflections – to guide you through her life’s work and passion for mills. Rather than simply recounting historical facts, the experience invites you to step into Mildred’s world: to listen as she recalls the daily rhythms of milling, the challenges of maintaining ancient watermills, and the deep personal connection she formed with the craft and its heritage.

As you move through the installation, the combination of archival images, personal writings and spoken testimony creates an

intimate portrait – not only of a woman, but of a vanishing tradition: one where wind, water and muscle power shaped landscapes, communities, and everyday life. The experience resonates especially with the themes of “power” and “heritage” invoked by Bring Power to the Garden. Mildred’s story reminds us that before industrialization and fossil fuels, people harnessed natural power – wind and water – directly, shaping both environment and social life.

Why this matters – for heritage, power and continuity

Mildred Cookson is much more than a subject: she exemplifies a living link between past and present. As one of the few full-time female watermillers in the country, she managed Mapledurham Watermill on the River Thames for nearly three decades. Her work was not just about producing flour – it was a hands-on dedication to preserving the physical machinery, the skills and the stories of centuries-old milling traditions. By sharing her diaries and memories, she raises awareness of how traditional mills once

played a vital role in food production, energy, and community life.

Through “Mills of Memory,” visitors are invited to reflect on the roots of energy and labour, the disappearing crafts of previous generations, and the value in preserving such knowledge – especially now, as we face environmental and sustainability challenges.

A short biography of Mildred Cookson

Mildred Cookson was born in 1944 in Blackpool. Her fascination with mills began as a personal interest, which over time grew into a lifelong vocation. In the late 1960s she joined Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), contributing to mill restoration and conservation work, including the rescue of a post-mill at Lacey Green Smock Windmill.

From 1983 she served as the miller at Mapledurham Watermill – a

working, historic watermill on the Thames – where she managed every aspect of milling: from grain preparation to maintenance of the mill machinery, adapting to changes over decades, and maintaining operations through challenges such as flooding and mechanical wear.

Beyond milling, she played a foundational role in establishing The Mills Archive Trust, serving as one of its founding members and trustees. Through her personal collection of drawings, diaries, photographs and research – some gathered from traditional windmills, watermills, and mills overseas – Mildred has helped create one of the most important national collections of mill-related documents in private hands.

If you would like to read more about Mildred’s full biography and interview, you can visit her profile on the Mills Archive website: [Mildred Cookson: A Biography and Interview – The Mills Archive](#)

Sustainability Trail



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Whiteknights Sustainability, Art & Culture Walking Trail


Welcome to the Whiteknights Sustainability, Art & Culture Walking Trail—a journey through the University of Reading’s vibrant campus that celebrates creativity, environmental stewardship, and community heritage. As you explore, you’ll encounter inspiring artworks, innovative sustainability initiatives, and pockets of natural beauty that showcase the campus’ commitment to a greener, more culturally rich future.

Just as the *Mills of Memory* installation reflects on the lives and labour that once shaped this landscape—through the story of Mildred and the historic milling industry—the trail invites you to consider how past and present are connected through our relationship with land, resources, and community. Mildred’s story reminds us that sustainability is not only about the future; it is also

about remembering the people, skills, and local histories that shaped the places we inhabit today.

Along the way, the trail is enriched by culture as well as nature. Artworks, music, and poetry respond to the campus landscape and its stories, offering moments to pause, reflect, and experience Whiteknights through creative expression. Together, these cultural pieces highlight how art and sustainability can work side by side—encouraging us to imagine more thoughtful, connected ways of living with our environment.

Take your time, look closely, and enjoy discovering the stories woven into every corner of Whiteknights.

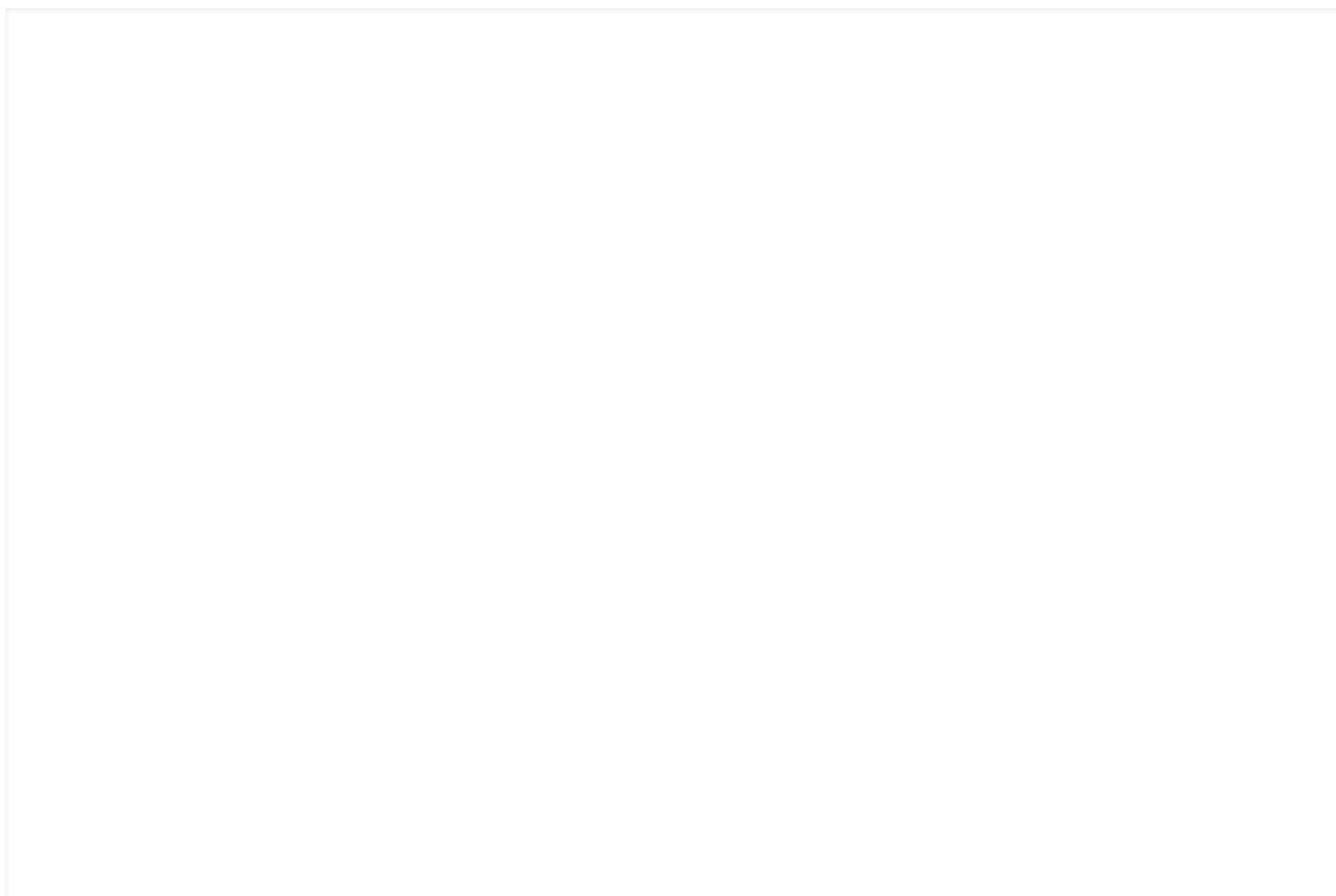


Whiteknights has a long and varied history that stretches back to the Norman Conquest, when it was known as the Manor of Earley. In 1798 the estate was purchased by the Marquess of Blandford,

who transformed the landscape through extensive garden design and the creation of a notable library. By 1817, however, the Marquess—by then the fifth Duke of Marlborough—had fallen into debt. The estate was broken up in 1819, and the original house was demolished in 1840.

In 1867 Whiteknights was divided into six leaseholds, each with a smaller house built on the land. The University of Reading acquired Whiteknights Park in 1947. Since then, the University has carefully managed the campus, preserving the lake, trees and open spaces that define the distinctive character of Whiteknights today.

Thomas Hofland, *A View of Whiteknights from the Park with a Lady Sketching*, oil on canvas, UAC/10236.



01_Ancient Trees on the Quad – “Timekeepers of the

Earth"

Our trail begins at the Ancient Trees on the Quad. If you attended the immersive experience in the Minghella Building, you can walk directly from Minghella to the trees (Stop 1 on the map). These mature trees—some centuries old—are vital to campus biodiversity. They store carbon, support insects and birds, reduce urban heat, and reveal how landscapes have changed over time. They demonstrate the importance of protecting long-lived natural systems.

You can find out more about the rich variety of trees across Whiteknights campus by taking part in the Whiteknights Tree Walk. This self-guided route highlights many notable and unusual species, with information that brings the landscape to life. It's a relaxing way to explore the campus while learning more about its natural heritage [Tree Walk](#).

As you stand among these ancient trees, take a moment to read:

"The Peace of Wild Things" by Wendell Berry

Berry's poetry reflects deep ecological awareness and encourages readers to reconnect with nature.

*When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

02_Whiteknights Lake – “Water, Life & Balance”

Whiteknights Lake, created in the mid-17th century by damming local springs and later enhanced by the Marquis of Blandford, now spans approximately 5.85 hectares and separates the north and south of the campus grounds. Centrally located and eutrophic, the lake is a key landscape and wildlife feature, with its once dense tree and scrub edges gradually giving way to diverse marginal plants like Yellow Flag Iris and Common Reed following selective clearance. Since 2020, a minimal-intervention approach has promoted natural “wilding” while addressing safety. Four pedestrian crossings connect a perimeter footpath network to the campus. The lake attracts a variety of overwintering birds, including Shovelers, Tufted Ducks, Pochards, Black-headed and Common Gulls, and increasingly Little Egrets, with occasional sightings of Grey Wagtails near the dam.

As you walk around the lake, listen to:

“Clair de Lune” by Claude Debussy

This piece is often associated with moonlit water and reflections— an invitation to appreciate natural tranquillity and reflect on the fragility of water ecosystems.

03_Wildflower & Pollination Meadow – “A Living Canvas”

Whiteknights hosts semi-natural grassland, a habitat that is increasingly rare in Berkshire and across the UK. The grasslands to the east of Whiteknights Lake are generally drier, while those on the western side of the lake are lower-lying and correspondingly damper, supporting notable ancient grassland indicator species such as Pepper Saxifrage (*Silaum silaus*) and Adder’s Tongue Fern (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*).

In addition, there are several recently established wildflower meadows, including one near Car Park 3 and another within the Harris Gardens. All of these areas are managed with a single hay cut each year, typically in August, while some patches are cut later to provide shelter for late-summer invertebrates, including crickets and grasshoppers.

At the peak of summer, the meadows are teeming with plant and insect life. Butterfly species commonly observed include Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Marbled White, Ringlet, Common Blue, and Brown Argus. Of particular conservation interest is the ground beetle *Carabus monilis*, a priority species under the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act.

Beyond the Meadow stands the Department of Meteorology and its observatory, a hub for world-leading research into Earth's atmosphere and environmental systems. At the University of Reading, scientists are advancing understanding of some of the planet's most pressing environmental challenges.

Research from the department helps governments, organisations, industries and communities respond to complex global issues, including climate change, ozone depletion, atmospheric pollution and space weather.

As you pause at the meadow, surrounded by wild grasses, insects, and birdsong, you might feel inspired to read [Silent Spring](#) by Rachel Carson. The meadow reflects the delicate balance of nature that Carson wrote about in her book, where she warned that the widespread use of pesticides could silence the sounds of birds and insects that make places like this vibrant and alive. Standing in the meadow you can see the importance of protecting such ecosystems: the buzzing pollinators, the plants they depend on, and the birds that feed among them. The connection to *Silent Spring* lies in this living example of biodiversity, reminding us that without careful stewardship, the natural harmony of landscapes like

the meadow could be lost.



04_Agriculture Building – “Feeding the World Sustainably”

The School of Agriculture, Policy and Development possesses expertise across agriculture, animal science, international development, environmental management, food marketing, and consumer behavior.

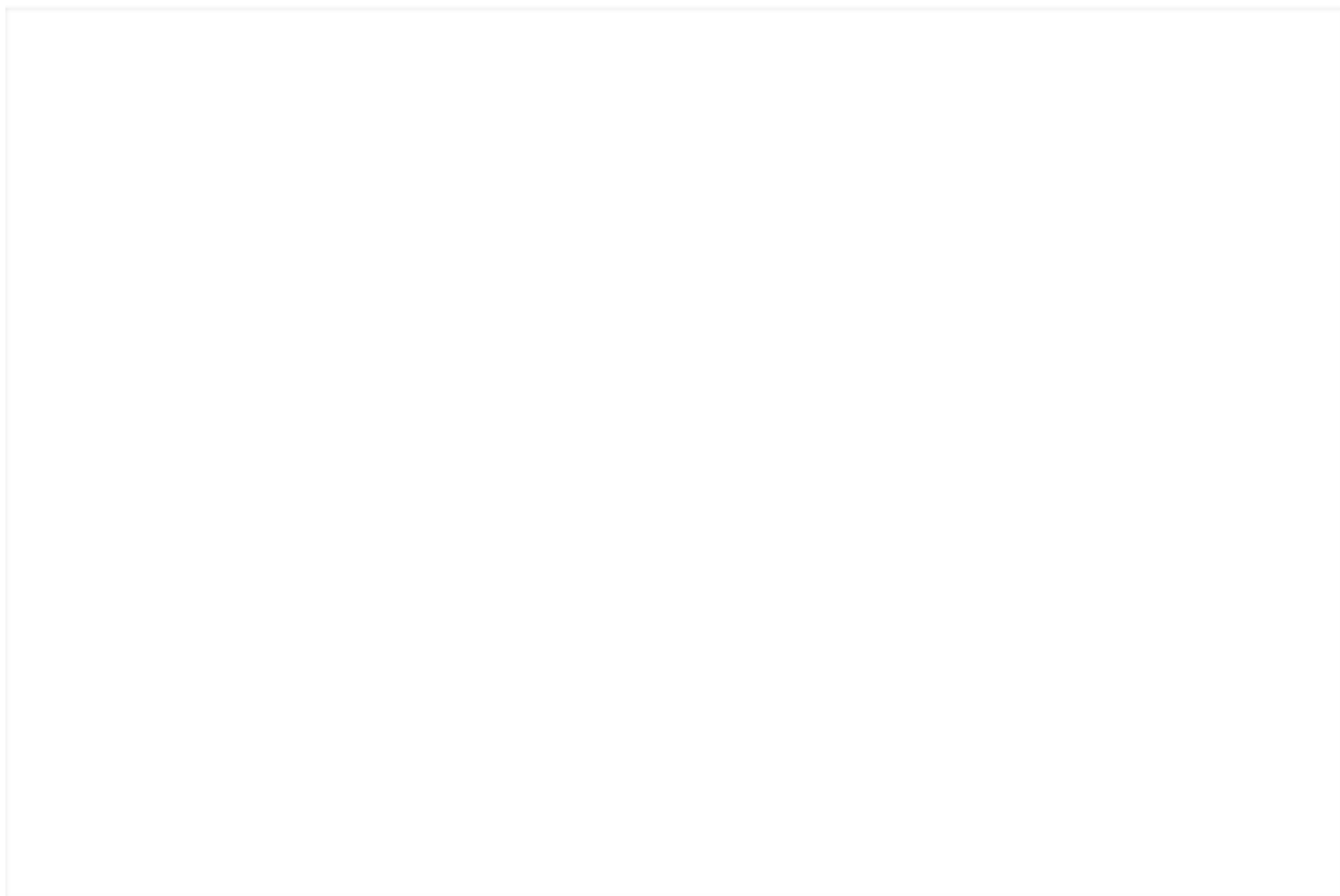
Founded in 1892, the school has contributed to teaching and research in agriculture and related fields for more than a century. Its research expertise is integrated into the curriculum, providing students with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in their careers or pursue further study.

Step inside to look at The Four Seasons by artist Elizabeth A Talbot.

Elizabeth Talbot was an undergraduate student in the University's Fine Art Department when she was commissioned to create artworks for the new School of Agriculture building. Talbot drew inspiration from the farm in Oxfordshire where she spent her childhood, as well as the south coast of Cornwall, where she went to school.

In these paintings, Talbot mixed gloss paints with natural pigments to create four bright and bold interpretations of the seasons.

Elizabeth A Talbot, *The Four Seasons*, 2001, high-density gloss paint on canvas. UAC/10345. © the artist.



05_ The Wilderness – “The Return of the Natural World”

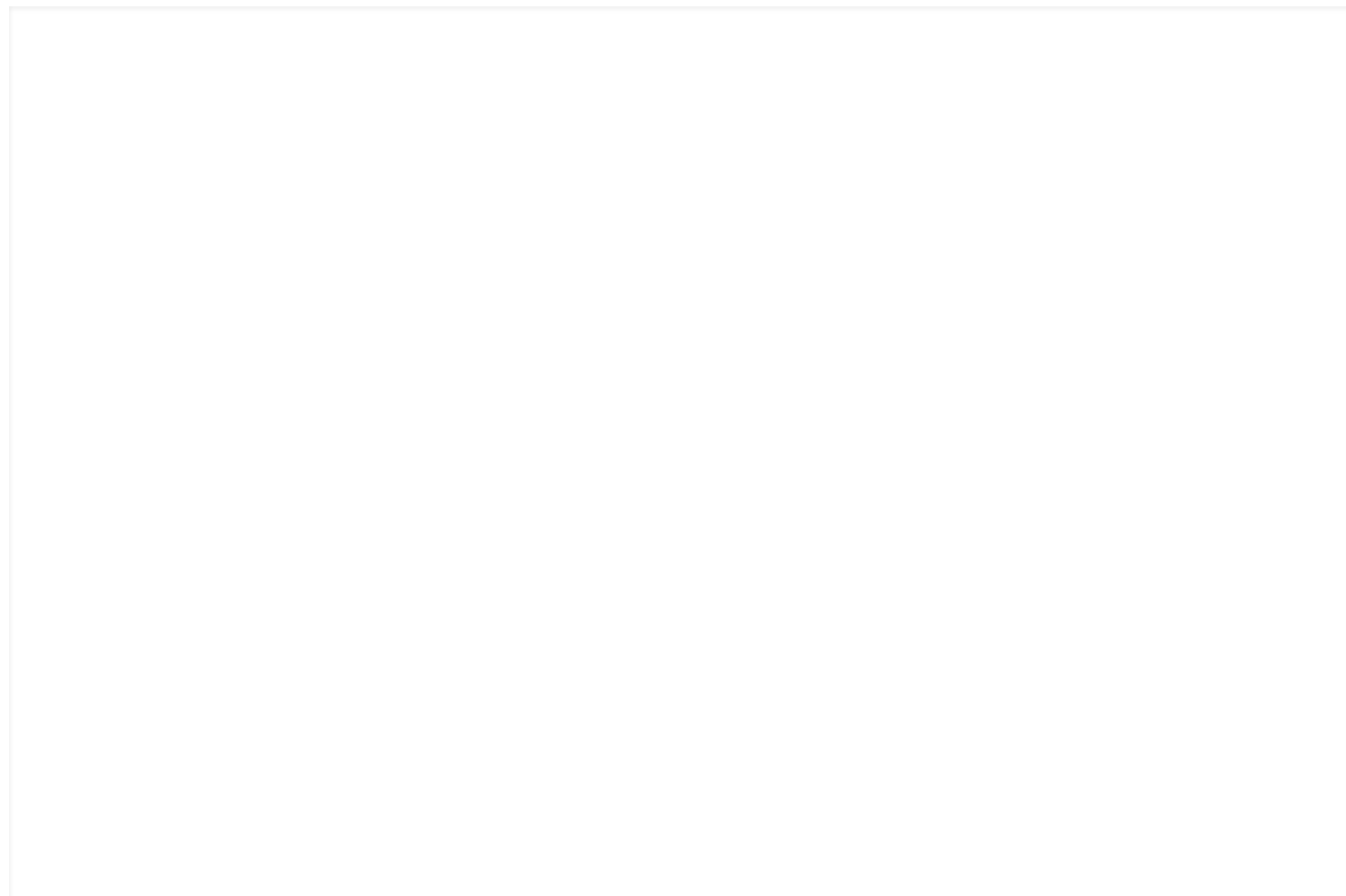
The surprisingly extensive woodland along the eastern edge of the

campus grew on the site of the old Whiteknights Estate's 'Wilderness' garden, which originally featured a more formal design. Traces of the original garden remain visible—for instance, shortly after passing this sign, a row of mature Yew trees can be seen to the right. Woodland management includes the removal of low-value invasive shrubs such as Laurel and Rhododendron, which are replaced with newly planted native trees. Activities like coppicing are carried out to promote healthy ground flora. Dead wood is left either as standing trunks or in stacked piles, providing excellent habitats for invertebrates, including several notable beetle species.

As you walk through the wilderness, listen to:

“The Lark Ascending” by Ralph Vaughan Williams

Inspired by nature, this composition evokes open landscapes and the value of preserving wild spaces.



06_Harris Garden

The Harris Garden is a 12-acre botanical garden belonging to the University of Reading, located on the Whiteknights Park campus about 2 miles from Reading town centre. Established in 1972 and expanded to its current form in 1988, it is named after Professor Tom Harris, a noted palaeobotanist. Although situated within the university campus, the garden is separate from the main parkland and is accessed via the School of Biological Sciences. It is supported by the Friends of the Harris Garden organisation.

The garden features a wide range of landscapes including formal and walled gardens, ponds, woodland, wildflower meadows, and specialist plant collections, and is recognised as a hotspot for butterflies. Originally used primarily for teaching and research, it has since been developed as a public space focused on recreation and conservation, while still supporting academic activity. The Harris Garden also hosts open days and has inspired cultural projects, including exhibitions and publications based on artistic residencies.

As you explore the Harris Garden, take a moment to read **Mary Oliver's poem: The Gardens.**

*Moon rose
full and without
compromise through the good
garden of leaves,
here and there
stars rode in flickering
slicks of water
and for certain
the burly trees
hunched toward each other,
their dark mantles
like the fur of animals
touching. It was*

*summer on earth
so the prayer
I whispered was to no god
but another creature like me.*

Where are you?


*The wind stood still.
Lightning flung
its intermittent flares;
in the orchard
something wandered
among the windfalls,
licking the skins,
nuzzling the tunnels,
the pockets of seeds.*

*Where are you? I called
and hurried out
over the silky sea
of the night, across
the good garden of branches,
leaves, water, down
into the garden
of fire.*

*This skin you wear so neatly,
in which you settle
so brightly on the summer grass, how
shall I know it?
You gleam as you lie back
breathing like something
taken from water,
a sea creature, except
for your two human legs
which tremble*

*and open
into the dark country
I keep dreaming of. How
shall I touch you
unless it is
everywhere?
I begin
here and there,
finding you,
the heart within you,
and the animal,
and the voice.
I ask
over and over
for your whereabouts,
trekking wherever you take me,
the boughs of your body
leading deeper into the trees,
over the white fields,
the rivers of bone,
the shouting,
the answering, the rousing
great run toward the interior,
the unseen, the unknowable
center.*

Harvesting Nature's Power

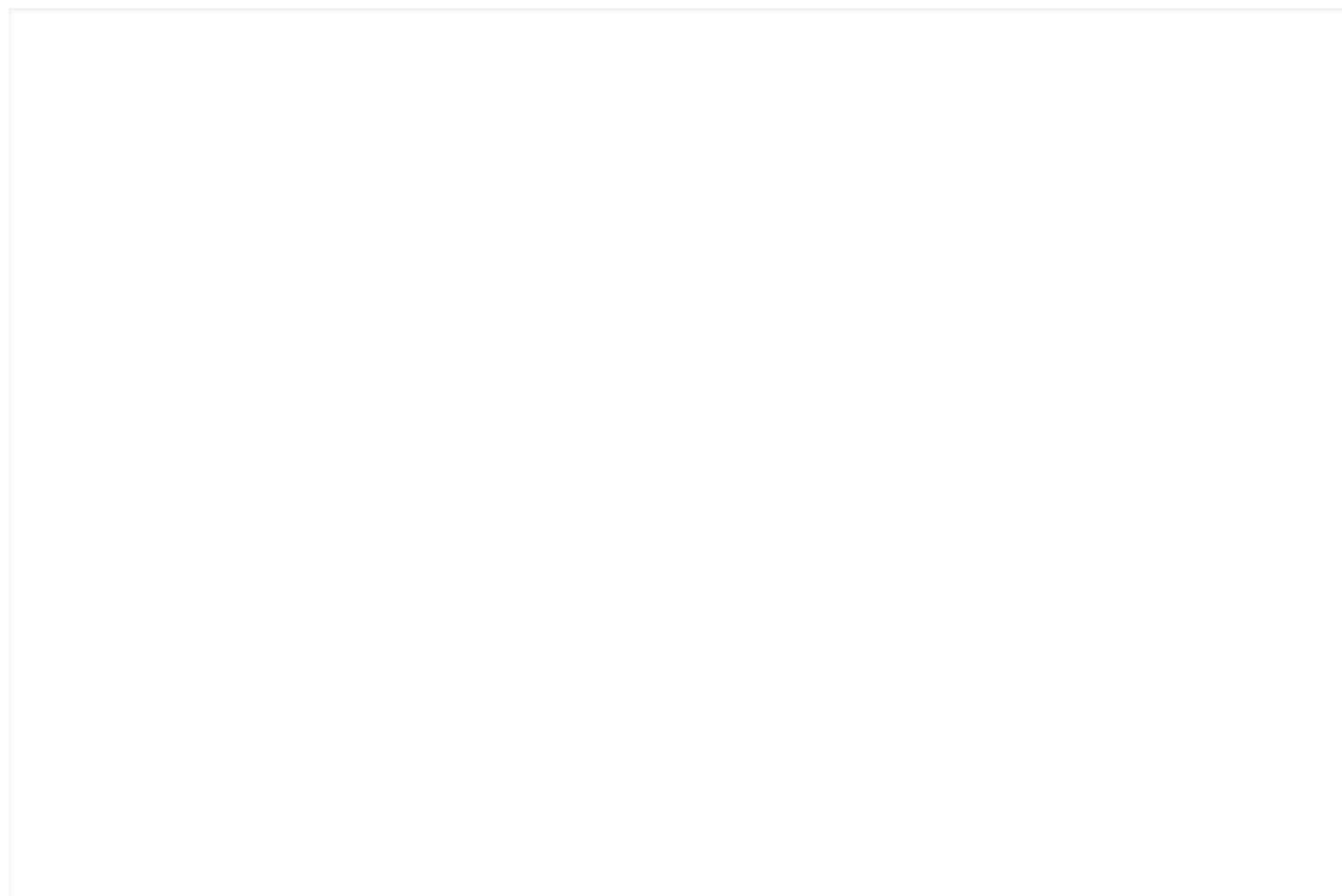


A model of a bamboo mill and a model of a wind turbine may seem very different, yet both illustrate how historical practices inform modern technology. Traditional mills harnessed natural forces—such as wind or water—to perform work efficiently. Modern wind turbines operate on the same basic principle, capturing kinetic energy from the wind to generate power, and in some ways even echo concepts found in traditional sails or blades. These models highlight how history, heritage, and craft can inform the development of renewable energy technology, showing that careful observation of past designs can inspire innovative solutions for today’s energy challenges.

The bamboo windmill was built by artist Anthony Green. Both the bamboo windmill and the wind turbine model are located within the newly restored walled garden, creating a setting where heritage, landscape, and sustainability come together. Placing the work in the garden allows visitors to experience the movement of wind and

the surrounding environment directly, reinforcing the idea that natural forces have long shaped human innovation.

This final part of the installation also connects directly to the wider *Mills of Memory* and Sustainability trail. Along the trail, visitors encounter stories and artworks that reflect on historical milling traditions and the ways communities once worked closely with natural energy sources. The bamboo windmill represents this historical knowledge and craft, while the wind turbine model points toward contemporary renewable energy technologies. Together, they form a bridge between past and present, demonstrating how traditional ingenuity continues to inform sustainable design today. By concluding the trail in the restored walled garden, the installation brings these themes together in a reflective space, encouraging visitors to consider how memory, landscape, and innovation can shape a more sustainable future.



To learn more about the history of renewable energy, take a look at Mills Archive's project: [Mills to Megawatts](#)

Team



Dr Mara Oliva

Mara Oliva is Associate Professor in Modern US History at the University of Reading and Director of the Interdisciplinary Research Centre in Digital Humanities. Her research sits at the intersection of environmental history and digital humanities, examining the environmental dimensions of modern political and diplomatic history and the role of climate politics in international relations. She applies computational and digital methods to the analysis of large historical corpora and public discourse, and incorporates scholarly video essays into her research practice, using audiovisual media as

a mode of historical argument and interpretation that brings together narrative, archival sources, and digital scholarship.

Dr Jacqui Turner

Jacqui Turner is a modern British historian with a focus on women and parliamentary politics between the wars. After several years working in heritage, she remains interested in archives, collections, and material culture. She is also interested in how we share important historical events from the archive with the public and how we engage schools through outreach activities. She is currently working in this capacity with the National Trust. She served as a senior partner on the Parliament Vote100 programme, marking the centenary of women's suffrage in 2018. In 2019 and 2020, She was the national curator for the Astor100 centenary programme, which celebrated women in politics and featured a

wide range of academic and public events. Her experience curating the Astor 100 programme has led her to write about the 'impact of impact,' especially the role of the 'expert voice' in the media and on social media.

Dr Rachel McCloy

Rachel McCloy is Associate Professor in Applied Behavioural Science at the University of Reading UK. An expert in high-level cognition, her research interests fall broadly within the fields of reasoning, judgment and decision-making, with particular areas of interest in counterfactual thinking about past events, improving the understanding of uncertainty and risk, understanding pro-environmental behaviours and food choice, and applying psychology to public policy issues.

Dr Eugene McSorley

Eugene McSorley is Associate Professor in Experimental Psychology and Co-Director of the Behavioural, Experimental and Social Sciences Lab. His research and outreach activities have made very influential contributions to the understanding of the bi-directional interplay between visual perception and eye-movements (Active Vision). This work has been extended to show the impact of threat and positive emotional visual cues on visual processing, attention and eye-movement control, mapping where people look, their use of visual cues to support healthy food choice and weather forecasting, and the role of action on aesthetic responses to the perception of art.



Elizabeth Bartram

Elizabeth Bartram is Director of The Mills Archive Trust in Reading, where she has worked for over a decade. She is passionate about advocating for the contemporary relevance of archives and history, and enjoys designing projects that engage wider audiences, particularly through co-creation. With a background in the charity sector, Elizabeth is currently enrolled on the Archives and Records Management MA at Aberystwyth University. She is also a Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Reading.



Anthony Greentree

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