

>Squib

>Art & Ideas >Rachael Adams

>The Spinney >Landscapes of the Edgeland

The Scrutineer



>Colophon

A Scrutineer Squib
First published 2017

>Scrutineer's: 11 Abinger Road, Brighton, BN2 6LF
07812 822725
scrutineer.org
rachael@scrutineer.co.uk

>Designer:

The Scrutineer, Rachael Adams
Fonts: Baskerville, Bree serif
Printed and bound by Blurb
Printed on 89gsm gloss paper with 96gsm matte cover

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without permission of the copyright holder

Copyright © Rachael Adams 2017
The moral rights of the contributors have been asserted

>Dedication

Dr Chris Mullen

>Preface

Published to coincide with the Research & Development of The Spinney, an Arts Council supported project.

The following text is from a transcript of the presentation Rachael Adams made at the *Sussex Modernists and Transformations in the Twentieth-Century Landscape* conference, which was held on 7th June 2017, at the University of Sussex.



I've spent much of my fine-art practice traversing landscape.

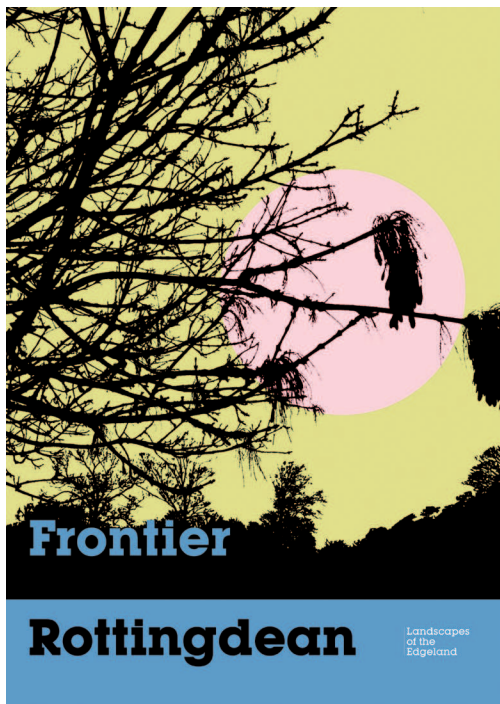
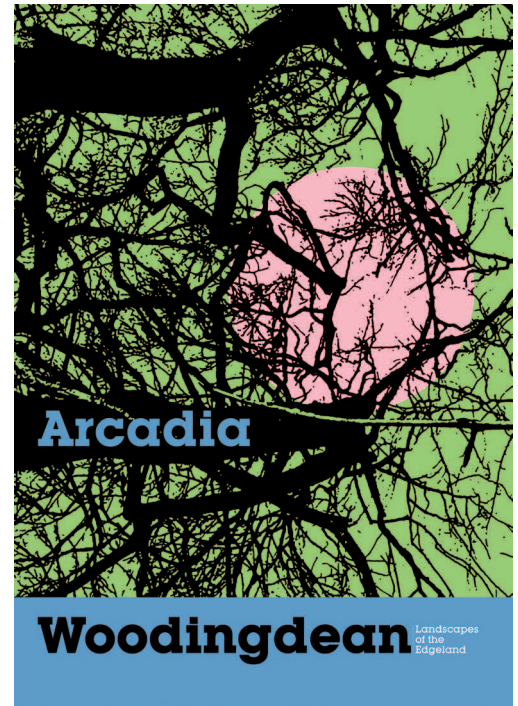
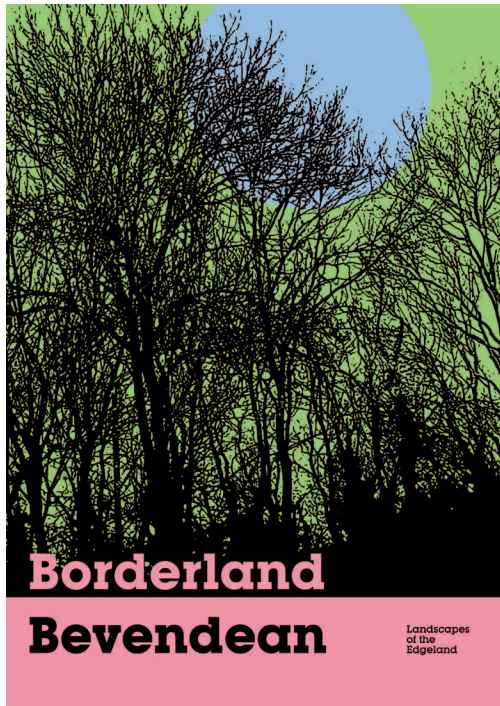
Not dramatic, mountainous, romantic landscape, but *edgy* landscapes. Landscapes of small-holdings, (like the one I grew up on). Landscapes that gardens back onto. Landscapes you see from the backs of the garages: the fringe landscapes. The landscapes of the Edgeland.

Landscapes that locally, I call DeanLand.



Broadly, Dean means a narrow wooded valley.

These posters were designed to identify the places that fringe Brighton. There are more: Coldean, Westdean, Roedean... But it's Woodingdean that attracts me, and it's Woodingdean that has a particular Spinney that I've spent a year or so studying.

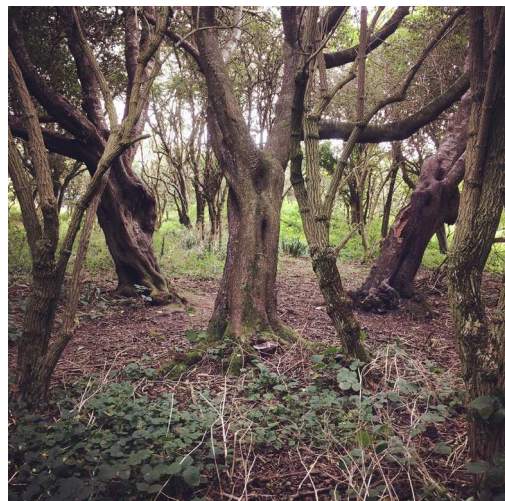
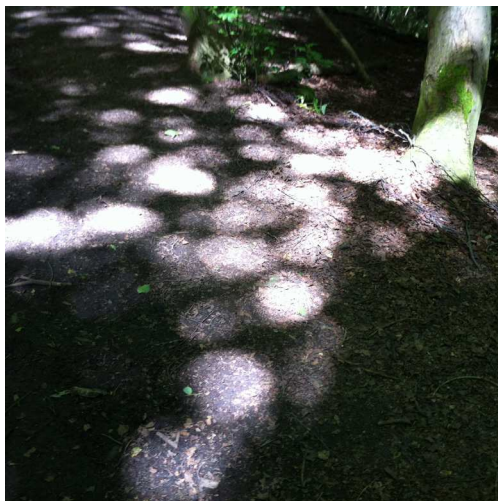
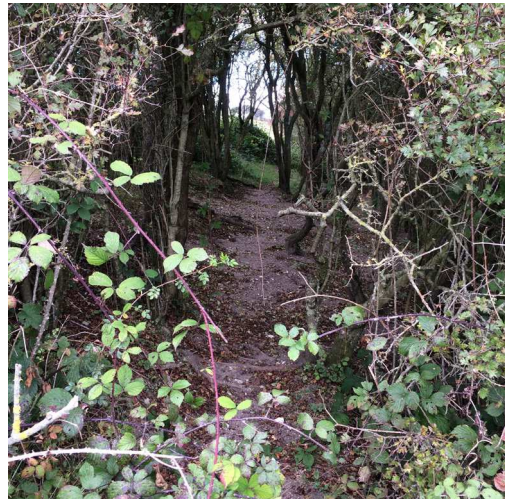
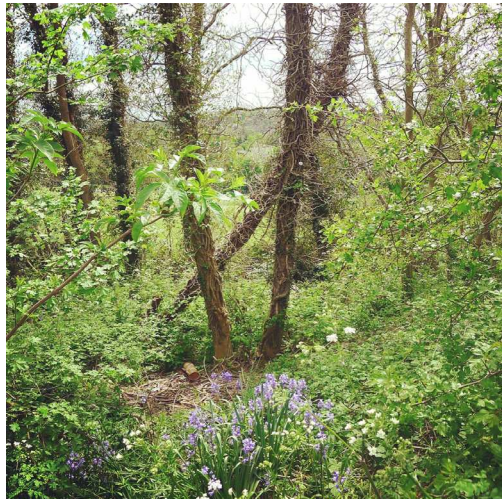


This spinney – a raggle-taggle copse that hides in clear view.



The Spinney

Landscapes
of the
Edgeland



It sits at the bottom of a place called Happy Valley. And it appears to me like an ever-changing, enchanted plot of overgrown wasteland.

Resting between the houses and the fields. A thin-air space between what's seen and what's hidden. An arena for rites of passage.



**Where people like me can muck about, where I can test ideas or sit and think.
My use of it no more harmful than using the space to dump garden waste.**

Where privacy is almost assured. Where freedom can be experienced.

Spinneys quietly crop up rather often in my paintings. Here, as a magical cluster of trees in the centre of the horizon. A clump that draws my eye.

This painting came about as an exploration of Quest: the dog as a sort of Dick Whittington, putting into action the childhood desire to seek adventure 'over the hills, and faraway'.



And these 'tree-clusters' begin to get more abstract... they seem to take on a certain drama. Almost like supporting characters in the narratives that arise.

Here, in this painting, the real draw is of that deep, yolky-yellow light fixed between the trunks of those trees.

The spinney calls. The gap between the trunks cups the light, creating a tension that pulls me forward.



To be pulled inside the copse, by a sort-of nature's umbilical-chord, is to be drawn into a liminal space. Ground that connects me to my remembered child self. The self that anticipated adventure, a child also, desperate to escape.

It's neither forest nor garden, reality or dream. It is an in-between space where we are hidden from view but still within sight. Where we can hear yet not be heard.



If I can draw your attention to 'the yellow Gap' – the space between the trees, that cup-shape – I call it a 'cup of possibility', a handy visual code that describes, for me, that formation where the visible and the anticipated collide.





But back to Woodingdean, to the side of Mount Pleasant –

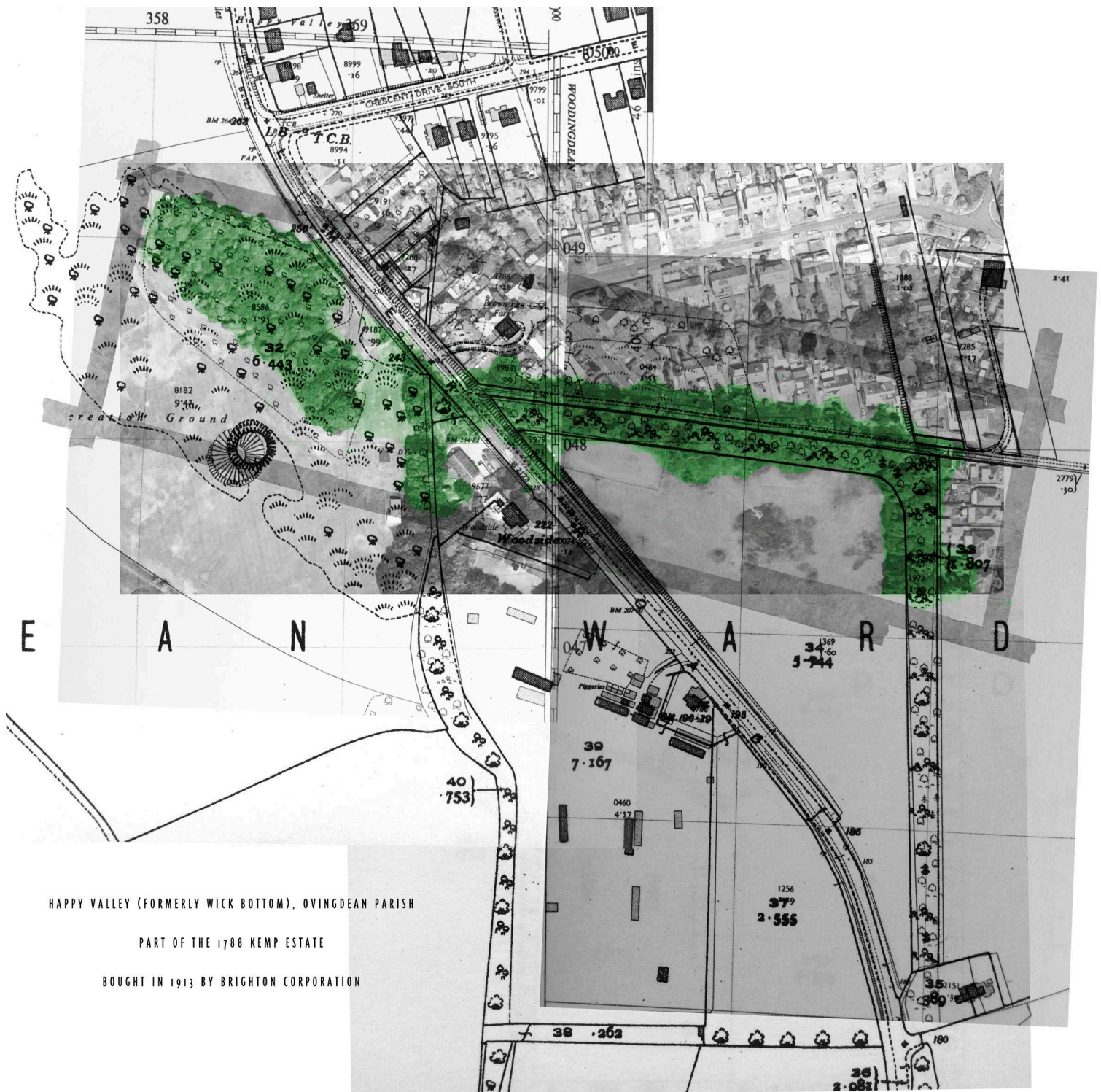
The spinney sits just above the kink in that road...

between Falmer and Rottingdean.

It's a sort of hedge-spinney.

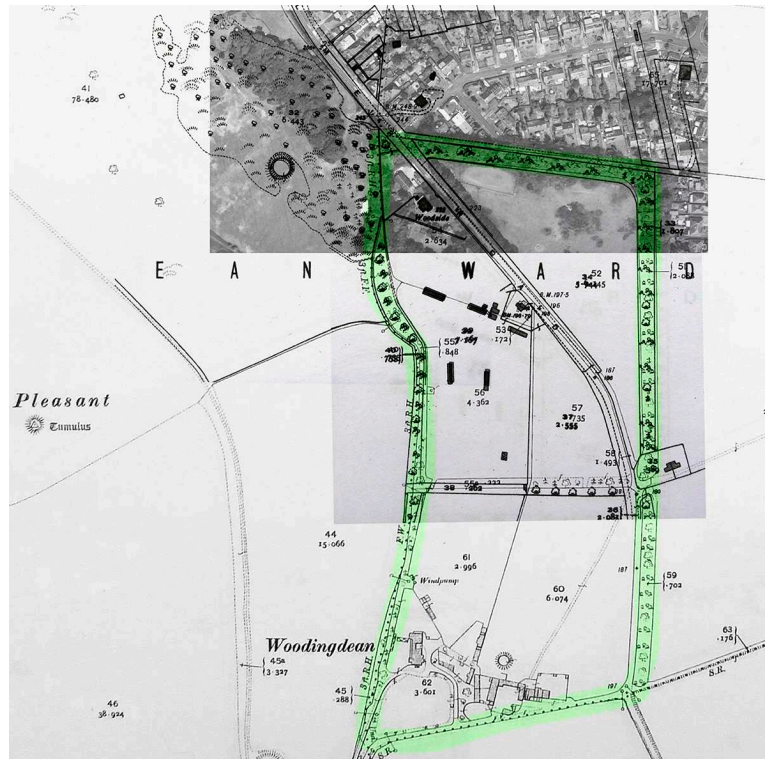
It sits along the top of that triangular field – or Three-corner Field – as it was once known, straddling the diagonal sweep of the road. I presumed it was just overgrowth. Leftover space at the edge of a 50's development.

Dozens of bungalows were built on old plot lands, which appeared shortly after the First World War for returning soldiers.



But actually, it was the upper boundary of a small estate built a hundred and fifty years before the bungalows...

Woodendean Hall.





THE SECRET PLAQUE
THE RED TREE
THE SLIPPERY SLOPE

HAPPY VALLEY
BLACK ASH EARTH

THE CHANGING ROOMS

THE BENCH
THE PLAYGROUND GRAVEYARD
THE TREES THAT COME ALIVE AT NIGHT
THE WOODEN BADGERS
THE BLAIR WITCH DEN
CALLUM'S CLIMBER

THE CUT CORNER

BROWN-EGG FARM

THE ALLEY

LYNN'S PADDOCK

THE BIG STASH

THE PRIVILEGED VIEW
THE TWO-FINGERED TREE
DEAD MAN'S TROUSERS

THE FOXES

THE WOODPECKER
THE BADGERS PARADE
THE FLINTY BONES

THE NETTLE INCIDENT

THE ABINGER ESTATE

I walk little Dick Whittington (who you saw in the first painting), through this spinney.

And I've absorbed stories from local residents and fellow dog-walkers, plotting them on this diagram.

And I've learnt that what I call '*my bit*', over on the right-hand side, is only used by others when I'm not there. Or rather, I've never met *anyone else* in there. I've always had it to myself.



This has enabled a confidence to use the space.

Here, in *'my bit'*, I encouraged the spoken-word poet, Jacq Aris, to perform a re-enactment of her childhood experience of playing in spinneys.

She remembered making dens, making mischief, fearing witches and the child-catcher one year, hoping for cigarettes and snogs the next.



And – in what were produced as large c-type photographs – she appears, in true folk-lore fashion, to be conjuring spirits...

But perhaps my most astonishing discovery...



Is that from the position marked by the arrow –

Having crossed the road, dropped down through the thicket, over the badger sets and through the trees – remaining almost entirely invisible – you face a long green, sloping valley –

With a view through the Downs, all the way to the sea.

And I'd noticed that the view was more a Prospect.

My Art School Art History lectures had taught me to recognise an Arcadian Landscape.



A Prospect of Arcadia.

There's the S-shaped disappearing road –

A distant view of the sea –

The view framed by *repoussoir*, the foreground branches that give such pictorial depth. There are elements of *staffage*: the livestock – not quite a red waistcoat wearing peasant on a donkey – but a forlorn horse, and the back of an old truck that doubles as a shed. It's an Edgeland Arcadia!



By creating this layered diorama, drawn with a fine-liner, I could consider my Arcadian Landscape as viewed from The Spinney, with an elevated, more 'Privileged View'.



Finally: I'd like to show you this painting.

It's 12 feet wide and five foot high. It's my Prospect of Arcadia, viewed from the edgelands of Woodingdean.

The clusters of spinney dot the edges –
The tracks and paths are traces of another time –
A landscape hovering somewhere between 'no longer' and 'not yet'.



This pamphlet is a record of the presentation Rachael Adams made at the Sussex Modernists and Transformations in the Twentieth-Century Landscape conference, which was held on June 7th 2017, at the University of Sussex.

Extract from the programme:

This presentation reveals the visual findings of a personal investigation into 'Landscapes of the Edgeland', specifically *spirit of place* of a spinney on the fringes of Woodingdean, Brighton. This small strip of land remains undeveloped, whilst the demographic of the area surrounding it has seen many changes.

I have pondered the experience of 'entering' the Spinney; of being 'within' and of the view beyond. In diagrams, paintings, sound-scape and photographs, I have traced ideas of a particularly 'Downland' liminal space: of thresholds, of anticipation, of 'the gap', and in doing so, discovered traces of The Prospect and The Privileged View in a contemporary interpretation of the Arcadian Landscape. I have identified a visual 'Cup of Possibility', describing that formation in the landscape where the visible and the anticipated overlap/collide/conflict: there's an S-shaped disappearing path, distant view of the sea, *repoussoir*, (the foreground framing which gives pictorial depth) and elements of *staffage* (the accessory items in a painting).

In researching heterotopia, and how liminal/fringe space is acknowledged & recorded, (with overlapping areas of folklore, memory & a quest for adventure), I have explored their significance in charging our emotions. I believe that time spent in these spaces is loaded with connection to the past & an anticipation of the future.

Rachael Adams has a BA in Fine Art at Brighton Polytechnic and an MA in Sequential Art at the University of Brighton. She is an artist, designer and publisher. She explores narrative in the liminal spaces of fringe landscapes and the development of an emblematic language expressive of contemporary semi-pastoral landscape. The Scrutineer is both publisher & identity: a combination of publication and alter ego, jostling ideas of announcement & reflection. She is an experienced art director, book designer, web developer and arts facilitator. Her work has been extensively exhibited.



The Spinney

Arcadia

Deanland

Landscapes
of the
Edgeland



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

>Rachael Adams
>The Scrutineer of Scrutineer's
A Fine Art (Painting) Graduate, Designer & Publisher

