

Common Ground

www.England-in-particular.info

Common Ground¹ is pleased to announce:

1. A new website: www.England-in-particular.info²

initially its task is to excite people as locals or visitors with ways of getting under the surface of places, offering a way of looking and an evolving celebration of the local and the particular.

2. A new venture: for the next few years Common Ground will be working intensively towards a big book³ – a kind of encyclopaedia of LOCAL DISTINCTIVENESS⁴ – and extensively championing the importance of variegation across England. We would like to hear from people about their local stories, details, examples, observations about the particularity of everyday places.



On May Day Common Ground launches its new website:
www.England-in-particular.info

The site will keep changing and evolving, but to begin with you can try four journeys – through a Calendar of Customs, Parish Maps, Orchards and their produce or with the Green Man and take another view through a county gazetteer.

Sue Clifford, director, says "Spring is the moment for renewal - don't miss it – the countryside in particular is burgeoning with new life: blossom, birds, bluebells. Everything announced by the cuckoo is true, England is worth exploring, singing about and caring for.

And we all have much to do, much more than the good people of Dorset who, in order to capture the spring, made cuckoo pounds, rings of trees to capture the bird, and the men of Marsden in Yorkshire, who built a circular wall for the same purpose⁵. The bird, of course, flew up and though the stories remain below, the memory is not enough. >

The local is where we work, live and play, yet ordinary lives, everyday nature, commonplace histories are often taken for granted. Common Ground has championed involvement and celebration as one starting point for local action and pioneered the idea of Local Distinctiveness – the particular weave of places with ordinary culture, everyday nature, commonplace buildings and landscapes.

With the support of the Countryside Agency⁶ we have just created the new website through which we hope to trigger and gather details, stories and examples of Local Distinctiveness to help communities share their local knowledge.

With the help of a new DEFRA Environmental Action Fund⁷ grant we shall develop this, seeking everyone's help towards a major book - a kind of encyclopaedia of the local – to be published by Hodder & Stoughton.

The aspiration is to elevate the small things which make a place important to people, encouraging them to become involved in making their surroundings better for nature as well as daily life. We welcome the help of people in city and country, not only so that we can document some of the things which differentiate England, but because we are intent on exciting people to take more care of our everyday places."

Clare Stevens, project officer at the Countryside Agency said, " By encouraging local communities to get together and record their stories through this website, we hope tourists will be inspired to visit them."

Example⁸: many of our fruit varieties hail from named places (Norfolk Biffin, Keswick Codlin, Pershore Yellow Egg, Aylesbury Prune). Pride in this and the knowledge accumulated over generations, layered with recipes, cider and songs, wassailing and planting patterns which vary from place to place, excites peoples' willingness to create new orchards and conserve old ones. Tall tree orchards prompt passions, colour the landscape, harbour wild life, sequester carbon..... and give wonderful example to how we can live well with nature.

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NOTES

1. Common Ground plays a unique role in linking nature and culture, working to inspire, inform and involve people in learning about, enjoying and taking more responsibility for their own locality. As an ideas organisation we work hard to cross boundaries from an imperative in environmental practice, and often within the arts. We champion popular involvement and inspire celebration as one starting point for local action to improve the quality of ordinary places and everyday lives. See base website : www.commonground.org.uk

2. www.England-in-particular.info

Why England in particular? The rich range of peoples and places in England is more than enough to start with... we hope to see the world in this grain of sand.

We are intending to search out all kinds of examples of the way we and nature have selected and built, sifted and sorted to make places rich with local variety: from houses and woods to food and legends, dialect words and endemic wild life to vernacular greetings and breeds of sheep,

As a start we offer a series of pathways which may lure you into going the long way round. These are just a few ways of navigating the great common wealth of nature, landscapes, settlements, buildings, histories, myths and stories, always on the move, which in their interweaving give us the rich and variegated particularity of our surroundings.

Why - Calendar Customs? They show both persistent and vibrant new ways of socially celebrating the seasonal, the particular and sometimes the peculiar.

Why - The Green Man? Like local distinctiveness he is elusive, but we know him when we see him. His moment is the spring and we think of him as a symbol of regeneration, of new life – a positive force.

Why – Orchards? Traditional tall-tree orchards vary greatly and subtly from place to place, they offer a great example of how well we and nature can work together. And as ordered woods, they enliven the landscape with blossom and fruit, they link birds, bees and butterflies with songs and wassailing, food, drink and much local knowledge about growing, grafting and pruning.

Why - Parish Maps? What do you value in your place? Many people have come together to chart the things which are important to them, a Parish Map can lead you to the heart of a place.

We need to confront the paradox of LOCAL DISTINCTIVENESS. Our surroundings are dynamic: questing nature, new people and ideas, cultural shifts, climatic change, new technologies and economic imperatives. Some of these enrich, some homogenise and deplete. We can all grumble, but we are looking for the positive, and for good examples of change – THE BEST OF THE NEW.

3. Common Ground will be working with Hodder & Stoughton to produce a big illustrated book.

4. Local Distinctiveness is a term coined by Common Ground in its first book *Holding Your Ground* (Temple Smith 1985; Wildwood House 1987). Common Ground has pioneered the idea of Local Distinctiveness which is now used in design, planning, tourism, heritage and natural environment fields and by people based in arts and community action.

5. See [England-in-particular](http://www.England-in-particular.info) Calendar of Customs - May and Marsden Cuckoo Fair 27 April.

6. The Countryside Agency have been working to encourage people back to the countryside: see countryside.gov.uk



7. DEFRA give grants for Biodiversity and Education projects under the Environmental Action Fund. See www.DEFRA.gov.uk

8. See [England-in-particular](http://www.England-in-particular.info) Orchard pathway