

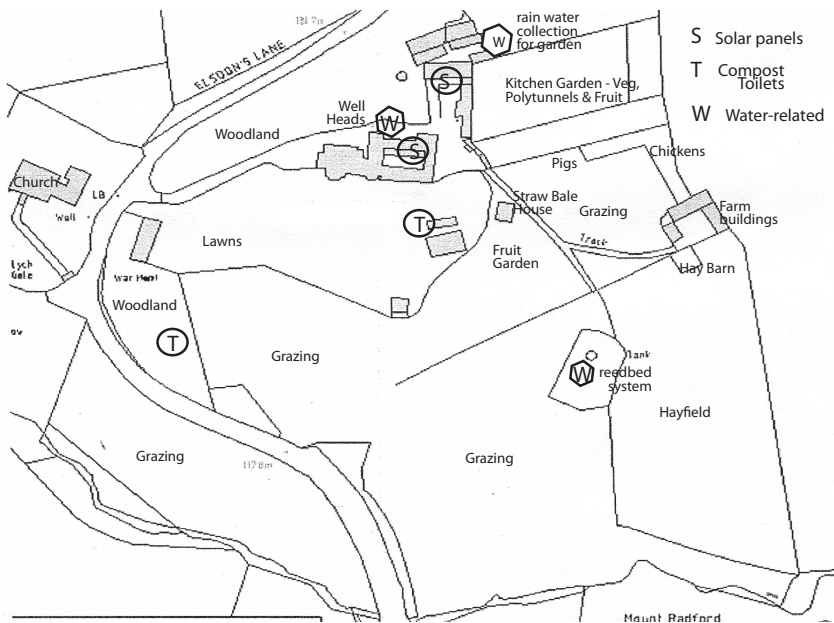


**SUSTAINABILITY
AT
MONKTON WYLD
COURT**



OUR HISTORY, OUR FUTURE

Here at Monkton Wyld Court we are facing the challenge of creating a sustainable community in an unsustainable Victorian building, built by a very rich woman; she would not have cared that the house is expensive to repair and extravagant to heat, is sited in a steep valley some distance from any town or settlement, and hasn't got enough land to sustain the number of people needed to occupy and maintain it. We are bound by what went before us, so our ecological footprint is not as low as if we were living here in more modest structures, or starting from scratch to our own designs. This booklet explains how we are shrinking the footprint we have inherited to one that will safely carry us into a future less damaged by careless living.



Map showing Monkton Wyld Court's grounds, with some of the features referred to in these pages. Why not walk around and see the real things?

COMMUNITY LIVING

As a community we share resources as much as possible - car use, living room heating, cooking fuel, washing machine, tools, equipment, and skills. Our overall ethos is to avoid products and practices that damage the environment.

HEATING

The structure of the building makes it impossible to insulate to modern standards, and some chimneys are unsuitable for woodburners without costly re-building. So far, we have wood stoves in the office, dining rooms, the Piano Room, both Libraries and the Pine Hall; and most residents' living spaces are heated by stoves. A new wood-fired boiler now provides most of the hot water and some central heating, including five bedrooms and an airing-cupboard. We want to replace all fossil fuels with local firewood, but worry about how much we already burn, most of which comes from "ghost acres" of woodland elsewhere. The most sustainable option would be to close the house in winter, except to guests prepared to wrap up in warm clothes, keep active, and tolerate Victorian levels of comfort, as we do.

WATER

We have two wells, supplying about 2000 litres a day for the house, outbuildings and farm. The water passes through ultraviolet and dolomite filters; no chemicals involved. The 12,000 litre capacity rainwater harvesting system uses the run off from 177 sqm of modified roof area on the old pottery and the Pine Hall to supply five 200 litre plunge tanks in the garden. Rainwater is also used for flushing toilets.

HOT WATER

Monkton also has solar thermal tubes fitted to the roof of the laundry/dairy building to generate hot water. These pre-heat the water for the main house. The hot water tank has a switching system so that hot water can be gathered from the solar tubes on sunny days, with the wood and LPG boilers linked to a thermostat as a back-up. In the summer we can generate all of our hot water from the thermal tubes, in the winter they typically heat the water to 20-25°C. Beech Bottom (volunteer accomodation) has a similar system, with an electric water heater as back up.

ELECTRICITY

Monkton has 32 solar panels fitted on the roof of the Pine Hall which feed into the general electricity supply system, and more on the courtyard roof. Some residents also have small solar panels and wind turbines to generate power for their personal living spaces.

CLEANING

We mostly use harmless traditional cleaning agents such as bicarb, vinegar, and newspaper, plus some environmentally friendly cleaning products which are bought in bulk and put into smaller re-usable containers, to avoid plastic packaging. All grey water passes through the reed-bed which would be damaged by harsh chemicals, an extra reason for not using them. Floors are mostly polished wood which can be swept with a broom instead of hoovering.

LAUNDRY

Bedding for B&B guests is professionally laundered; however hostellers provide their own bedding, greatly reducing the need for this energy-intensive service. For the community, not having to “dress up” for work saves on personal laundry, and washing clothes by hand is encouraged. Drying is either on outdoor lines (solar) or racks above the woodstove in the common room (passive heating). For agricultural-grade laundry we use the local laundrette, helping to sustain a facility shared in common with the whole area.

COOKING

The old oil-guzzling Aga has been replaced with a wood-fuelled kitchen range. The dairy uses about 60kg bottled gas a year to pasteurise milk for guests and for making cheese.

FOOD

We share a communal vegetarian meal twice a day. This saves on fuel, and enables bulk-buying from ethical suppliers, which also saves money and food miles. We grow some of our own fruit, vegetables and salads and make jam, preserves and juices from any surplus. Our farm provides the community with milk, yoghurt, cream, occasional butter and ice-cream, and a variety of cheeses - ample protein and fat - all derived from our own grassland, where free-range chickens also roam. We try to source foods we cannot produce ourselves as locally as possible. Waste food is fed to the pigs and hens, producing eggs and occasional low-impact, high-welfare meat for those who choose to eat it.

LAND MANAGEMENT

Monkton Wyld School (1940-1982) included a smallholding, comprising a vegetable garden, pigs, and six dairy cows, all expertly managed by locals Derek and Dennis. After 1982 the quality of land management began to slip, ten acres of good quality land were sold off, and by 2008 both garden and farm were uncared for. Now we are working hard to bring back the land to its former productivity, and the community to a higher degree of self-sufficiency.

The Walled Garden and Fruit Garden:

Monkton's gardens produce a wide variety of vegetables, fruit, salads and herbs. We grow on organic principles as far as possible. Manure for food crops comes from the farmyard and the fruit trees are mulched with the well-rotted end-product of the compost toilets. The "potato patch" is the fertile result of cultivation by pig-power.

The Farmyard and Grassland:

Monkton currently owns about five acres of sloping grassland and we rent a further three acres. This land is managed organically, though it is not certified, and supports three dairy cows (Jerseys). About a quarter of it has been resown to improved grass varieties, while the rest has been left unimproved to maintain biodiversity. Nearly all the work, including milking and haymaking, is carried out without fossil fuels. The grassland provides manure for the garden, and we grow small amounts of grain - wheat and naked oats, for animal feed and porridge.

Woodland and Amenity Land:

There are about 1.5 acres of woodland and hedgerow, managed to maintain biodiversity. The lawns are mown by hand with scythes.

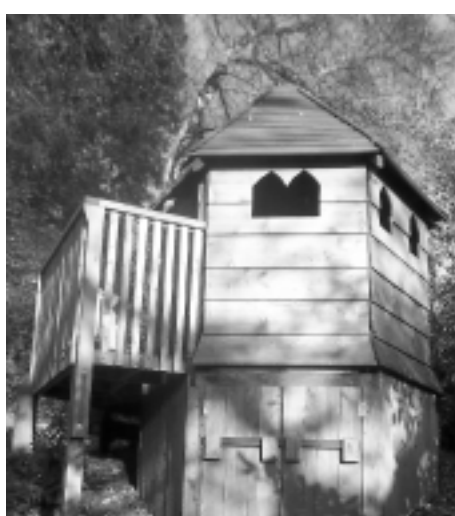


Cows and pigs together happily polishing off crop residues on a patch of land that was until recently abandoned to docks, thistles and rubble.

TOILETS

There are several compost toilets in the buildings and grounds, which conserve organic matter to increase soil fertility. They also reduce water use, and problems with antiquated plumbing and an inadequate 1980s reed-bed system. These prizewinning toilets work in different ways:

Beech Bottom toilet, and residents' personal toilets: liquid and solids are collected in a container which is emptied weekly and composted in bays in a fenced area behind the toilet. This *above ground, hot*



composting (aerobic) method creates food grade compost, used for fruit trees. The **Forest School** toilet has two pits dug into the ground underneath it to collect liquids and solids. These are used alternately, one being filled as the other rots down. This *below ground, cool composting (anaerobic) method* creates lower grade compost to be used on non-food-growing, ornamental areas of the grounds.



The urinal next to the Beech Bottom toilet is filled with charcoal fines, a long-lasting waste product, which filters the liquid, removes the smell and stores all the nutrients.



Award-winning composting toilets: above left, Beech Bottom. Above right, the Forest School toilet. Below: the composting bays and maintenance area.

BUILDINGS

As far as possible we use renewable and recycled materials and locally extracted stone and sand in our new-build and our repairs and keep the use of concrete and breeze blocks to a minimum. The new barn, compost toilets and summerhouse are all built from local timber. We try to use European birch-faced plywood rather than tropical plywood, although this is becoming difficult to source. Other low impact structures include a straw-bale cabin, a pair of yurts and an ancient caravan clad with local timber, all used as personal dwelling spaces all round the year.

RECYCLING

We avoid packaging - for instance, beer is bought collectively, in a returnable barrel - and we separate our rubbish for re-use or recycling, reducing landfill to a minimum. We buy recycled goods such as paper and second-hand clothes.

TRANSPORT

In the 19th century, when the house was built, all the stone and other building materials were brought in by horse, despite the steep hills. When it was a school, the pupils got out and about on bicycles. Nowadays, we seem to lack the time to transport everything by horse or bicycle over this difficult terrain, so we run a shared car for residents and long-term volunteers, plus several private vehicles which often lift-share. We encourage guests and volunteers to arrive by public transport if possible. Most long-distance journeys are by train via Axminster, three miles away. Sadly, the bus running along the A35 avoids Monkton Wyld as there is no village here for it to serve, but because of the community structure, and because we live where we work instead of commuting, the number of daily trips we take is much lower than average for people living in the country.

ENTERTAINMENT

We don't have television. Our pastimes are mostly non-electrical - reading, chatting, making or listening to music (often on a wind-up gramophone). Playing board games, dancing (Morris on Wednesdays), doing a jigsaw or enjoying a pint of ale in our garden-shed-sized pub are other pleasures enhanced by communal living. And why fly abroad for a holiday when we have such fine beaches and walks nearby?



PEOPLE POWER

Our most valuable resource, the one that makes everything else possible, is people. The community is reinforced by many much-appreciated volunteers, long and short term. Together we use our physical energy, our muscle power, to achieve great amounts of work that in the “normal” modern world is usually done with machines, using irreplaceable fossil fuels. For instance, our hay (many tons of it) is mown and turned by hand and brought uphill to the barn in bundles by teams of volunteer “sherpas”. It’s hard work, but also fun. There is always someone to be seen pushing a wheelbarrow, heaving a bucket, digging, chopping, or scrubbing. The cows are milked by hand, of course. Wherever practicable, we use hand-tools in preference to

electric or petrol-driven, and thus help to pass on and keep alive skills that may well be needed in an uncertain future. This willing and co-operative work ethic helps to keep us fit and cheerful; it seems the more (human) energy you use, the more you get. That old proverb, “Three people can do the work of two in half the time” turns out to be true. Fossil fuels? Let’s leave ‘em in the ground.

We hope this booklet has explained how we live, what we do and why we do it, and perhaps given you new ideas for making your own lifestyle more sustainable.

If you would like a copy to take home (£1) please ask in the office or shop.



Taking hay up to the barn in a sheet bundle, Summer 2013