



The Evesham Collection

A Basket of Stories and Dreams

The wonderful thing about the Vale of Evesham is that memories tend to linger, whether they spring from the almost cloying, perfumed sweetness of ripe plums, rows upon rows of colourful gillies (wallflowers), asparagus, spring onions or the soft rustle of a breeze through a plum orchard scattering in its path, petals of white blossom like snowflakes in springtime. Bounded to the east by the Cotswold Hills and to the west by the Malvern Hills, the Vale of Evesham, in all its beauty, is said by many to be the gentle, beating heart of England, a place to fall in love with the moment you arrive. At its centre stands Bredon Hill and, at just over 1000 feet high, it is technically a mountain shaped like a loaf of bread with a flat top and the stone built Parsons Folly stuck curiously at one end. It was in the Vale of Evesham that the couple who are today credited with saving Moorcroft from oblivion back in the mid-1980s, spent their childhood. With just four years separating them, it was between their studies at the same school, that the two learned of life in the Vale. They picked plums and apples to earn pocket money, supplemented their meagre income harvesting strawberries and blackcurrants and usually alone, they walked the hedgerows and fields gathering mushrooms for breakfast and picking blackberries for jam to be made at home mixed with Codlin apples. There were few luxuries for either of them, but one very real luxury was the weekly coach from their school to nearby Stratford-upon-Avon to watch one or other of Shakespeare's plays.

In recognition of their 30-year contribution to Moorcroft (a second career for both of them), Maureen and Hugh Edwards were given unrestricted access to the Moorcroft Design Studio to whose members they divulged a whole basketful of stories and dreams about the Vale of Evesham. These are now embodied in a unique collection of Moorcroft, each piece individually designed and crafted at what today is said to be the finest art pottery in the world. It is a collection born of love for two people who abandoned successful careers to ensure that Moorcroft survived. Those baskets of fruit, flowers, mushrooms and berries they once picked have been transformed from dreams of the past into the gentle, yet colourful, reality of today. It is a collection to be enjoyed because captured within every piece is a story waiting to be told to those fortunate enough to take it home.

Because of the intensely personal nature of the pieces comprised in the *Evesham Collection*, Moorcroft invited Hugh to write the story giving rise to the designer's inspiration for each piece. To the pleasure of all concerned, he agreed.

It was perhaps inevitable that an *Evesham Collection* would revisit Bowleys meadow, if only as an acknowledgement that Shakespeare, as a child, would have wandered through similar meadows nearby in his beloved Stratford-upon-Avon, and when you read Shakespeare's plays, wild flowers often have a hidden meaning. Moorcroft designer, Kerry Goodwin, first reread *Loves Labours Lost* to enable her to make her own contribution to the *Evesham Collection*.

"when daisies pied, and violets blue,
And lady-smocks all silver-white,
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue,
Do paint the meadows with delight"

At school, these lines were drummed into us, but the reward was the possibility of that weekly bus trip to the theatre. Over time, I began to understand how the sweet-perfumed violet became one of Shakespeare's favourite flowers, often used by the playwright to express extreme sorrow. Poor Ophelia said in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:-

"I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my
father died"

In her moving design, *Shakespeare's Flowers*, Kerry placed her violets on or near the base of the vase, symbolic, perhaps of extreme sorrow – a time when human feelings are at their lowest ebb. In contrast, Shakespeare saw cowslips as joyful flowers, full of nectar, early morning dewdrops and consequential happiness. Again in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, he tells us:-

"I must go seek some dewdrops here,
And hang a pearl in every cowslips ear"

As children, we would gather cowslips which grew in profusion in Bowleys meadow. Stalks and flowers would be bunched together and bound tightly to hang upside down in our homes as a colourful homage to spring. Those same flowers were also a source of sweet nectar which we, as children would suck from the base of each bloom whilst parents would go one step further and make cowslip wine. Kerry's love of the flower and the happiness it represented, caused her cowslips to be placed near the top of her *Shakespeare's Flowers* design, but curiously, it was the ever-present daisy tucked away between scattered wild grasses in Shakespeare's meadows to which the designer draws our attention. Many of us, as children, will remember making daisy chains, but for the Bard himself, daisies had a resonance all of their own. When he uses the words "When daisies pied in *Loves Labours Lost*, Shakespeare is also identifying daisies with the arrival of Spring just as he does with *Lady's Smock*, a flower of early Spring and also known as "cuckoo-flower". Although light pink or lavender in colour, *Lady's Smock* can appear as a silver white carpet spread over a wild flower meadow the memory of which can linger for a lifetime.

SHAKESPEARE'S FLOWERS

Designer: Kerry Goodwin

Numbered Edition Shape: 99/8 Height: 8" / 20cm



I remember with clarity an incredible ridge and furrow field near Evesham called Bowleys Meadow. Not more than a hundred metres away was my childhood home, a small, red-brick cottage tucked against another field carrying the ancient name of Black Ryden. To reach Bowleys Meadow was a one-minute walk down a mud track known as Ryden Lane, past Bill Fowler's apple orchard and through a five-bar gate. Bowleys, as it was known locally, was actually a series of three small fields, which had been used as pasture through two world wars without pesticides or weed killers. As a result, the medieval ridge and furrow which covered its surface ran down from Ryden Lane at the top end to the Merry Brook at the bottom end. Almost by accident, Bowleys, remained wild, grazed only by the occasional cow or a pair of cart horses, and as a result, colourful flowers and wild orchids carpeted its surface and attracted brilliantly-coloured butterflies to feed on nectar every summer. In simple terms, Bowleys had evolved into a haven for wildlife and home to millions of honey bees and insects of every size and shape. There were daddy long legs for small boys to catch and grass snakes to chase. On one occasion in the late 1940s, I can still remember running recklessly down Bowleys' ridges as fast as my legs could carry me, and before my pounding feet, cloud upon cloud of blue, orange and white butterflies would rise like rainbow clouds into the air and scatter away in the wind towards the plum orchards beyond.

Decades later, when I told this story to my children, they would look at me as if saying silently 'clouds of butterflies. You're lying, Dad'. Nowadays, to my relief they accept that I was telling the truth as did Emma Bossons at that almost surreal Design Studio meeting last year when Evesham was first discussed. The outcome for Moorcroft is *Butterfly Cloud*, designed by Emma on the gracious 104/9 shape. When the final trial emerged warm from the kiln, it almost reduced me to tears. Before my eyes were Orange Tips and Common Blues fluttering joyfully across the surface of the vase. Emma had drawn both species so as to include, to my wife's delight, males and females. Artistically, this actually creates an illusion that more than two species had been included. A perfectionist through and through, neither had Emma forgotten the rich pink and purple wild orchids from my original story about Bowleys – but then Moorcroft is an art pottery and that is precisely what the world would expect of a designer of Emma's calibre.

BUTTERFLY CLOUD

Designer: Emma Bossons FRSA

Limited Edition: 50 Shape: 100/9 Height: 9" / 22.5cm



A resident of England since the Norman invasion, this ancient flower varies in colour from blood red to a subtle, shaded orange. In the days before perfume, deodorants and air fresheners, wallflowers, or gillies as they are often called, filled a much-needed void in the fight against smells. The word 'gilly' is a derivation of the French word 'girofle' meaning clove, and from the time of their arrival, gillies have been used both as fashionable air fresheners and colourful flower displays at one and the same time. During World War II, gillies received an unexpected boost in popularity when perfume became scarce and old hygiene problems surfaced once more. As a result, Evesham market gardeners always had a patch of gillies somewhere on their land and even as late as the 1950s, market gardeners continued to refer to their perfumed flowers as 'gillies'.

Just outside my home village of Charlton and only a few hundred yards up Ryden Lane, a wonderful market gardener called Fred Habbits always had a brightly-coloured patch of reddish-brown wallflowers. Fred always called them 'gillies' and from the moment our friendship began, so did I. One of my spare-time jobs was to help Fred pick his beloved gillies in the late afternoon to ensure that they arrived at Pershore market the next day totally fresh with their clove-scented perfume undiminished. It was actually hard, back-breaking work and to do it properly, we used a razor sharp, hooked knife. It was the same knife that Fred used to take cuttings from which he would propagate his next year's crop. My pay for the work was five bunches of Fred's best asparagus 'when the time came' – a fine rate of pay in those days and one which provided our family with a seasonal luxury we otherwise could not afford.

As I cut the flowers, I noticed those familiar dark purple buds and the fine veins on each petal, all of which added an unexpected dimension of colour to every bunch of gilly flowers. Over a cup of tea in the Moorcroft canteen, I found myself talking to Paul Hilditch about the Evesham gillies, and as is so often the case, I had no idea whether the designer had taken my comments on board, or not. As things turned out, I need not have worried. Paul remembered the gillies complete with the soft, purple buds, orange/red petals and fine veins of colour. The first trial already had me thinking of a *Gillies* vase which I could put on display as a memory of past times and in a form which would never wither and die. Memories are precious and one of the joys of having Moorcroft in your home ensures that those memories never fade, even though the flowers that gave rise to the designer's inspiration, have long since come and gone.

GILLIES

Designer: Paul Hilditch

Limited Edition: 60 Shape: 370/6 Height: 6"/15cm



One of my favourite walks as a small boy, took me past an old sprout dump (a great source of wild mushrooms which grew in profusion and on to a row of ancient elm trees. Above the elms, two black carrion crows were swooping and soaring in a positively cacophonous series of anxious caws. A baby chick had fallen out of its nest, yet despite its long fall, this ugly, featherless creature was unharmed, its yellow beak already open revealing a cavernous red mouth demanding food in the noisiest possible way. Left on its own, the chick would have died, so I carried it home. Mother was horrified and banned the bird from the house whilst Dad had some sympathy and offered his garden shed as a temporary refuge. Our family's new carrion crow loved big fat worms but hated fish: scraps of family food were all fine except for cabbage and sprouts which both received a firm beak down. After many weeks, Carey grew sleek, shiny black feathers, exchanged his yellow beak for a black one and developed an unbelievably sharp pair of equally black claws.

My new friend was never caged and lived 24/7 outside. He tried unsuccessfully to catch swallows and sparrows but soon realised that a freshly-dug garden was a rich source of food. Occasionally, our resident pig was obliged to share its meals with a powerful black beak and sharp claws. Indeed, during the winter months, Carey would roost on the beam in the pigsty thereby achieving warmth, shelter and safety at one and the same time.

Sadly, I have to report that Carey evolved into something his parents from the giant elm tree would not have understood. From being a carrion crow, their son became a vegetarian, with a particular taste for ripe plums and strawberries, and it was the strawberries which became the cause of the problem. My Dad would forgive the crow for swooping down on his bald head whenever he saw an opportunity. Indeed, he forgave Carey for teaching him how a crow flies when the bird was unceremoniously dumped in a Cotswold wood for stealing strawberries, yet still managed to fly back to our home before father himself returned. Father's strawberries were his pride and joy: something eaten at a special family meal with fresh cream and bread and butter. I can still remember his howls of rage whenever he caught Carey hiding quietly away under a large strawberry plant eating the forbidden fruit to his hearts content. William Morris would have recognised a strawberry thief whenever he saw one, but Carey became our very own strawberry thief. That is how designer, Nicola Slaney, saw it too. *Carey the Crow* has been immortalised on a 769/6 ginger jar, complete with ripe strawberries and snowflake-textured white blossom. Using a designer's licence, Nicola actually created two crows for her presentation. At the shallow end of interpretation, it was because her design suited two birds, but there was another, more curious reason. My veterinary daughter, Kardy, once rescued a crow herself. The bird had been hit by a car, but she nursed it back to health in her own home. Surprisingly, Kardy's crow also loved fruit!

CAREY THE CROW

Designer: Nicola Slaney

Limited Edition: 60 Shape: 769/6 Height: 6"/15cm



I had often talked with Design Studio colleagues about plums. To the best of my knowledge, William Moorcroft only delivered a single plum design in a working lifetime of well over 40 years. Today, times are changing. Senior Designer, Rachel Bishop, picked up the threads of remarks I had made about the Vale of Evesham and its plums, and *Kirke's Blue* was the outcome. Believe it or not, the story of Kirke's Blue is interesting.

During the 1820s and 1830s, fine plums on the high table of the great and the good became all the rage. Around that time, one Joseph Kirke stumbled across an incredibly blue plum in a London market, tracked down its origin and propagated the plum that we now know as Kirke's Blue. Despite its huge early promise, Kirke's Blue failed to live up to expectations. It was a lazy plum tree, prone to disease and which only produced fruit when it felt like it. Unreliable croppers were not attractive to Victorian fruit growers and merchants. Worse still, although every plum, when it finally turned blue, was good in appearance and taste, the moment it finally ripened, it fell off its tree and sadly, damaged plums lying on the ground were equally unattractive to those same hard-nosed fruit growers and merchants.

The Victorian era literally burst upon the world of plums, bringing with it the famous Victoria plum, coloured like a peach, large and juicy and a reliable heavy, cropper. Before long, Kirke's Blue ceased to be all the rage and its life worsened when, early in the 1890s, another blue/purple plum entered the lives of the late Victorians. It was called the Pershore Purple, cropped heavily and reliably, was free of disease and tasted like heaven itself. For poor Kirke's Blue, it was the final straw. Trees were torn down and orchards ripped up and replanted with the upstart Pershore Purples. Gradually but inevitably, Kirke's Blue slipped into oblivion. Nobody wanted it anymore, so much so that it has now entered the 'at risk' species of plum trees and is only available from specialist plum nurseries including Walcott Organic Nursery at Drakes Broughton, ironically near Pershore where the Pershore Purple is now one of the most famous of all local plums.

Rachel Bishop's *Kirke's Blue* comes dressed with currants, another soft fruit from the Vale of Evesham. The combination is a mix of nostalgia and happiness – the latter deriving its strength from the humble currant which, to this day, is still the basic ingredient of a well-known soft drink with a reddish purple colour!

KIRKE'S BLUE

Senior Designer: Rachel Bishop

Limited Edition: 75 Shape: 372/11 Height: 11"/27cm



In post-war England, it was in summertime that the Vale of Evesham changed from a quiet haven of silent fruit orchards and tidy market gardens, in to one of the bustling, cosmopolitan centres of England's fruit and vegetable industry. The canning and jam factories opened for the season and local 'pickers' drawn from the surrounding villages were recruited by the growers to harvest their fruit crops. These pickers made a small army, strengthened by an influx of travellers and Romany gypsies. The Romany's were fastidious fruit pickers whilst the travellers and young people like myself would work so fast that sometimes our baskets would fill up with twigs and leaves as well as fruit. "You've got next year's crop in them leaves and twigs, my lad!" was once an angry snap from the orchard foreman. It was to my everlasting shame, that such a comment had been directed at me. I stood among the leaves and twigs carpeting the foot of my tree, flushed bright red with embarrassment. At that precise moment, I vowed to follow the Romany style.

Over the years, as I earned my much-needed pocket money, I acquired several Romany friends, but I always had to remember that my friends were actually earning their livelihood and not pocket money. Year on year, we would share a strange, sweet, grey-coloured tea together – tea poured from a fine, bone-china teapot into fine bone-china cups and saucers. Head of the local family was Ma, and it was she who organised the men and told them where to go picking and what to do. The women came and went like ghostly spirits, never saying much and always obedient. Ma had no need to tell them what to do. It was simply done, and that was that.

Ma's caravan was covered with images of flowers, colourful toadstools, leaping fish and elegant trees, but immediately next to it was a new caravan, shaped in the same style, but which was pure white. This was Queenie's van, the home of a young, olive-skinned girl with long black hair. She would have been about twelve or so years of age, but Queenie never picked plums, strawberries or blackcurrants like the other men, women and children. She was an avid reader but physical work was not on her agenda although several times I came across her picking wild blackberries for jam and on one occasion, I even found her crouching at the edge of Shakespeare's Avon trapping slippery eels with large hessian sacks. My curiosity would never be satisfied, largely because Ma would not tolerate me speaking to Queenie, and as a result, the Romany girl remained a mystery to the end.

After telling my tale to Emma, *Queenie's Van*, on a fine hexagonal plate was the result. Ma's colourful van takes centre stage and Queenie's white van stands next to it. To this day, the mystery remains. One summer, neither Ma nor Queenie returned for the summer fruit picking and neither were ever seen again.

QUEENIE'S VAN

Designer: Emma Bossons FRSA

Numbered Edition Shape: 51/10 Diameter: 10" / 25cm



All I knew with any certainty was that there exists a variety of apple called a Codlin which had its origins centuries ago in the warmer climates of central Asia. In England, we had the Carlisle Codlin and the Keswick Codlin to name but two, but the Vale of Evesham was famed for its plums and less so for its apples, although the perky red Worcester Pearmain is an undoubted exception. There was nothing particularly unusual about codlin apples. They were mostly green with a quaint conical shape preceded, admittedly, with a pure white, slightly flared blossom. To be honest, codlins faded from my interest spectrum until one dramatic afternoon in early autumn, I was returning in the local school bus from an incredible performance of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night at nearby Stratford Theatre. With Malvolio's words "*Not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy, as a squash is before 'tis a peascod, or a codling when 'tis almost an apple...*" still ringing in my ears, I realised that at sixteen years of age, I was a codling. It was not an auspicious moment by any definition, but an attractive and highly intelligent class mate called Sheila asked me to sit next to her on the way home. In those days, the journey to and from Stratford-upon-Avon took more than half an hour, and not the ten minutes or so that it takes in a car today. With little grace, I agreed, but then I was a codling and Sheila was being kind and a little feminine as well. I could tolerate her snuggling up as a friendly gesture, but the request for a kiss took things too far. Even so, I obliged and found the experience not altogether unpleasant.

Further reading into the words and techniques of the immortal Bard taught me that Shakespeare was ambivalent in his use of fruit and used it to introduce hidden meanings more often than not. This knowledge evolved into a profound understanding of the fruits of A Midsummer Night's Dream which ultimately became one of the great Moorcroft designs of all time. I am, of course, referring to *Queens Choice*. Just as she had done with *Queens Choice*, Emma guided *The Codling* down a similar path, her green, conical apples representing the adolescent years of youth.

From the beginning, Moorcroft has used both fruit and flowers to create ceramic art, all of which has been designed to stand the test of time. For this reason alone, it is perhaps not altogether surprising to find that William Shakespeare eases his way effortlessly into Moorcroft. The profound love I have for Shakespeare's work and my respect for this colossus of the literary world join together in *The Codling* designed by Emma Bossons FRSA on a shape derived from a cracked clay vase found in the Atlas Mountains in Morocco. Design is all about joining knowledge of one kind with another. With *The Codling*, Moorcroft is not really talking about apples at all (the 'g' on the end came courtesy of Shakespeare), but about youth, symbolised by a green apple, making that difficult journey from childhood to adulthood.

THE CODLING

Designer: Emma Bossons FRSA

Limited Edition: 50 Shape: 576/9 Height: 9" / 22.5cm



Like myself, the poet and classical scholar, A.E. Housman, spent his childhood years in Worcestershire, and perhaps not surprisingly, I grew up with the words of Housman's poetry ringing in my ears:-

In summertime on Bredon,
The bells they sound so clear
Here of a Sunday morning
[I would] see the coloured counties
And hear the larks so high
About us in the sky

The ringing of those village church bells and the almost musical sound of Housman's words, still resonate around the Vale of Evesham and Bredon Hill to this day.

The starting point of my many, many walks around the fields, orchards and hedgerows near my home at Ryden Cottage, was a five-bar gate just past Bill Fowler's orchard at the top of Bowleys meadow. In the distance, lay Bredon Hill, a long, flat hill, (technically a mountain at just over 1000 feet high) marking the southern boundary of the Vale of Evesham. At one end, you can see the stark outline of Parsons Folly perched on the summit. It always reminded me of a watch tower on a submarine, but when the clouds descended, both the summit and the folly would disappear.

"Where Bredon Hill is wearing her hat, ye men of the Vale beware of that"

Ancient sayings such as this were all important before mankind developed the science of weather forecasts, and with plum picking in full swing, Bredon Hill with a hat was very bad news.

Vicky Lovatt's *Bredon Hill* is mesmerising. Designed on the timeless 147/5 lidded box, it uses the curves of the round box to suggest the curves of the Vale of Evesham itself but the design is conveniently divided into three separate landscapes. The first shows a valley complete with a wooden fence, trees and toadstools: the second is a mirror image whilst the third introduces us to a landscape with Bredon Hill in the distance. The geometric outline of Parson's Folly stands clearly visible at the western extremity. The designer's white, billowing clouds are scudding across the sky as if to seize an opportunity to settle on the hill's Iron Age ramparts before drowning the Vale in heavy rain. What particularly pleased me, was the designer's use of toadstools to tie much of her linework together – a real test for the unbelievably skilled tubeliners and painters at Moorcroft today. It is the toadstools in Moorcroft style which are particularly attractive and which cover the lid of the box. Between them, they enable Moorcroft to bring Bredon Hill to life for the very first time as a piece of Moorcroft art potter .

BREDON HILL

Designer: Vicky Lovatt

Limited Edition: 50 Shape: 147/5 Height: 5" / 12.5cm



In 1947, I was too young to realise just how lucky I was to still have a dad at all. Flight Lieutenant 'Ronnie' Edwards had joined the RAF at the outbreak of World War II and survived to the end. When he was demobbed, he arrived home a virtual stranger, complete with RAF greatcoat and officers cap. Both he and I had to forge a wholly new relationship – that of father and son, complicated admittedly, by the fact that I also had a younger brother, John. Our Dad made huge efforts to get to know us both and learn, literally, how to be a good father. One of the ways he set about doing this was to take his six and four year old boys on walks – something he loved to do whenever the opportunity arose. One winter's day, he told us all about Broadway Tower, the brainchild of landscape gardener, Capability Brown. Broadway Tower was initially designed by the renowned architect, James Wyatt, funded by the Earl of Coventry and completed in 1798.

It was a cold late winter's day when Dad decided to first take his two sons to Broadway Tower. Our walk started in Broadway itself and from there, we climbed Fish Hill before taking a long path still covered in snow, to Broadway Tower. My father was a natural storyteller, and on the way we were told all about the tower, its wartime custodians and roomfuls of what are now known as fox-red Labradors, although I have to say it never occurred to us to ask how he knew about the dogs. In the previous century, Broadway Tower had hosted members of the Arts and Crafts Movement who used it as a holiday retreat. Visitors included Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris himself. Indeed it was Morris who launched his campaign for the preservation of historic monuments from Broadway Tower. Perhaps not surprisingly, the tower now has on public display, examples of the work of William Morris which show the link between Broadway Tower and the Arts and Crafts Movement. My brother and I would listen in awe to our Dad and his stories, and when he told us about the Arts and Crafts Movement, little did I know that one day with my wife, Maureen, we would lead the company which still stands as the only original surviving member of the Movement itself. Life can be strange as it unravels its mysteries, but it can always transform them into stories.

It was a slow journey climbing up from Broadway, admittedly interrupted by a little snowballing on the way, but suddenly, there it was! Broadway Tower, complete with its turrets and battlements, gargoyles and balconies. The wartime custodian was still in residence, and the moment he saw us coming and opened the door, a lively, reddish brown labrador puppy galloped outside and lay down firmly at my feet. Father said nothing, but Broady as we called him, became our first family dog. These days, I still think of Broady and the twenty years and two days he gave to us all.

Designer, Nicola Slaney's *Broadway Tower* plaque, is set in a winter landscape and framed by classic Moorcroft trees. Two small boys are walking with their Dad along the path that leads to the tower itself and Broady is there too, still wagging his tail after racing out to greet the three of us. Nicky's *Broadway Tower* plaque measures 10"x20"/20cmx40cm, and with it, another chapter in my life is shown.

BROADWAY TOWER

Designer: Nicola Slaney

Limited Edition: 75 Shape: 6x14 Dimension: 8"x16" / 20cmx40cm incl. frame





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