

## **EPIC RIVER PROJECT - What is the Water Bench about?**



**WATER!** Sompting meant ‘marsh people’ in Old English, the next village is Broadwater and around the site is ‘flushed fenland’ which means that water is all around from the sky falling as rain and from the ground in springs and rising mist.

The shape of the back is a ripple pattern as you may see on the river, but also refers to the hills of the South Downs where the water comes down from.

When it rains the actual water will run round the raised seats and through the lower holes, marking its presence on the cement over time.

### ***above the seats there are:***



**VIEWING HOLES:** You can look through the holes and frame views of the Downs in the distance as well as reunite the village of Sompting with the church, bringing it back across from the A27

**CREATURES THAT FLY:** Kingfisher, bat, owl, dragonfly. All either have or will be seen here around the water

**BOG PLANTS:** horse tail, reed mace, reeds, grasses. I photographed horse tail at this site in 2017, reeds are abundant now, as are different types of grasses, reed mace has little problem finding its way to water

**CROPS:** Watercress, oats, wheat. The area was farmed in the past and will continue to be.

Watercress was grown commercially here in late Victorian times, oats and wheat are in records as having been grown here for centuries.

### ***on and round the seats there are:***

**FLINTS:** Flint tools and weapons have been found at the site dating from Mesolithic (over 6000 years ago), Neolithic and Bronze age times. Particularly exciting was an arrowhead which had been deliberately struck in half (possibly as an offering) along with other scrapers and tools. Cissbury nearby was an important centre for flint mining in Neolithic times, so this is part of a bigger Sussex story.

I made a little spearhead in a flint knapping workshop that I attended during the project – it was surprisingly difficult!

**THE KNUCKER:** Knuckers are watery dragons that live in deep springs that rise in flat areas of the chalk landscape, particularly in Sussex. The most famous is at Lyminster nearby. There is a ‘knucker hole’ spring very close to this new river, which I have seen some time ago. Although it is quite small, the water is so deep that you cannot see the bottom and if you look in, it seems to pull you down. The knucker may eat a few children and animals to survive but its scary presence does also save the majority from drowning in the spring. I see it as a life force and guardian of the water source as well as a threat. Much as nature can be cruel to find a positive balance.

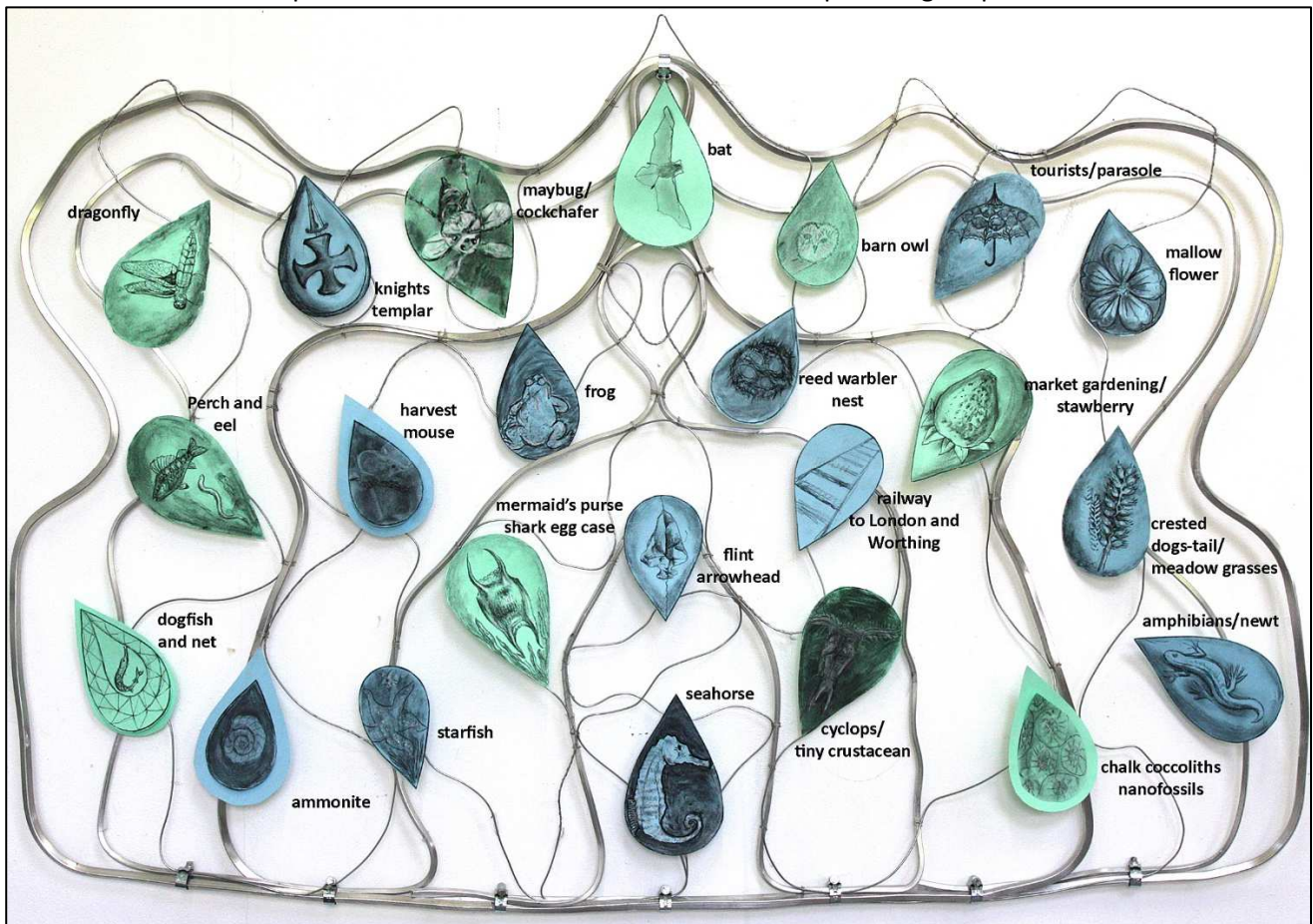
**A SHOE:** If you can find it.. There was a story of a shoe that got lost in the knucker hole by a young lady many years ago, and it could never be retrieved as the water is so deep and the knucker so dangerous. This was told to me by one of the EPIC team during our workshops, who was told by a local person, so it must be true.

**FOSSILS:** Sompting was underwater when the sea came up this far and fossil urchins have been found in Sompting gardens and at the EPIC site when it was being excavated in 2019

## What do the droplets on this side represent?



All the cement droplets on the bench were made by local people during workshops, except samples made for the project. The droplet shapes represent the water falling as rain or rising upwards as spring water or mist. The white colour is to represent the chalk landscape, the green celebrates organic elements. This picture below shows in words what each droplet image represents



### UNDERWATER

All the themes come from elements of the site. Most themes relate to the fact that this site was originally under the sea. They celebrate the things that have and could be found here. Many are easy to identify.

#### BUT SOME SPECIAL IMAGES ARE:

#### COCOLITHS

#### CYCLOPS

#### PERCH/EELS

#### TOURISM

#### RAILWAY

#### KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

These are plankton fossils that make up the structure of chalk but also look amazing. A microscopic organism that lives in water and also looks wonderful. Well, at least to me. These are on one droplet as they had been found at the site when the river started to flow. Horse drawn coaches brought tourists from London to Worthing around 1800 onwards, railways took over mid century. As well as sea bathing, pleasure parks and boating lakes were constructed very nearby (Homefield 1876), all of which transformed the area. Was built from shoreham to Worthing in 1845. Apart from increasing tourism it also started increasing the numbers of people living and working all along the coast spreading out from the resort of Worthing and the port at Shoreham.

Became a conversation twice in the workshops as they have been a significant force in the area as well as a source of much mythology. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century they funded chapels in the Sompting church. Their spirits are said to defend their property from the church graveyard to this day. I was told that there are still freemasons in the village today.