

The Orchard as Teacher. V2

Reflections from a regenerative inquiry into St Ives Community Orchard and the CORE Building

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I. Learning to See

"Every object, well contemplated, opens up a new organ of perception within us."

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, writer, scientist and philosopher

What if the most important thing growing in a community orchard isn't fruit?

That question stayed with me throughout much of 2025 as I participated in The Regenerative Practitioner programme with Regenesi Institute. Over six months, from April through to September, a small cohort of some 20 practitioners from across the UK, Ireland & northern Europe were invited to work alongside a live project in our locale, not to evaluate it, redesign it or solve its problems, but to use it as a lens through which to practise a different quality of observation. Generously, the St Ives Community Orchard and the CORE Building became that lens.

As we began exploring potential projects for our inquiry, the Orchard quickly captured our attention. Here was a community initiative from the Atlantic coast of Cornwall that, in little more than a decade, had grown from the rescue and relocation of a collection of apple trees into something far richer and more diverse. Perched on the slopes of Penbeagle Hill overlooking St Ives, it already felt like a place carrying a story worth paying attention to. The interplay between the Orchard itself and the recently completed CORE Building only deepened that curiosity.

Like many first-time visitors, we found ourselves drawn to the CORE Building. With its distinctive circular form and living roof, reminiscent of a Saxon roundhouse, it sits at the foot of the hill between the neighbouring industrial estate and the Orchard beyond. There was something immediately striking about it. At once contemporary and ancient in character, it seemed to belong naturally within the landscape whilst also signalling that something unusual was happening here.

Yet as our inquiry unfolded, it quickly became apparent that neither the Orchard nor the CORE Building could be understood in isolation. The building was not simply a building, just as the Orchard was never simply a collection of trees. Each had emerged through a wider network of relationships, conversations, partnerships and acts of participation accumulated over many years. The more closely we looked, the more interconnected everything appeared. What initially seemed like

separate elements of a successful community project gradually revealed themselves as expressions of something larger and more deeply rooted.

Perhaps this should not have been surprising. Orchards have always been places where relationships unfold over time; between people and land, between seasons and harvests, between patience and reward, and between present actions and future generations. Through subsequent visits, conversations and reflection, the longer I spent with the Orchard and team that leads it, the more I began to realise that these same qualities sit at the heart of what regenerative practice is really concerned with.

Over recent years, the word *regenerative* has increasingly entered mainstream conversation, often presented as the next step beyond sustainability. If I'm honest, this was largely how I understood it too. It seemed to describe a shift from doing less harm towards creating more positive outcomes. While there is certainly truth in that, the longer I spent with the work, the more incomplete that definition began to feel. Regeneration appeared to be asking something deeper; not simply what we do, but how we relate to the places, communities and living systems of which we are already a part - how we do things with reciprocity.

The intention of our inquiry was never to produce a strategy document or a set of recommendations. We were not consultants arriving with solutions, nor researchers attempting to remain detached and objective. In truth, we were relatively new to this way of working ourselves; apprentices of sorts, curious practitioners learning through the process and invited to enter into a relationship with the project rather than analyse it from a distance. This sounds like a subtle distinction, but it proved to be an important one. Again and again, I found that what became visible depended as much upon the quality of attention we brought as it did upon the Orchard itself.

Most of us have been trained to analyse, diagnose and optimise. We are encouraged to identify problems, define objectives and improve performance. These capacities are valuable and often necessary. Yet alongside them sits another way of engaging. Rather than beginning with what is wrong, we can begin by asking what is already alive. Rather than rushing towards solutions, we can spend time understanding the character of a place and the qualities already seeking expression within it. The work, I discovered, begins as much with observation as it does with action.

One of the things that surprised me most was how often the inquiry seemed to turn the spotlight back on the observer. I arrived expecting to learn about places and projects. Instead, I found myself paying increasing attention to my own assumptions, habits and ways of seeing. What captured my attention? What did I overlook? Which stories felt important, and why? Time and again, I found myself returning to the place, the conversations, the observations and noticing something entirely different. The process was less about gathering information and more about learning how to pay attention.

Over time, I came to suspect that regeneration is often misunderstood. We speak about regenerating landscapes, communities and economies as though regeneration were something we do to them. Yet my experience of the inquiry suggested something rather different. What if regeneration is less about fixing and more about participation? Less about imposing change and more about creating the conditions through which life can continue to evolve in healthy ways? I don't pretend to have arrived at a definitive answer, but the Orchard certainly encouraged me to ask a better question.

What began as an investigation into a community orchard slowly became something else entirely. We certainly learned about the trees, the backstory, the community initiatives, funding, partnerships

and the practical realities of stewarding a place such as this. Yet over time, these became almost secondary. The deeper inquiry seemed to concern how places come alive through the people who care for them, and how those same people are shaped in return. The Orchard, it turned out, was not simply the subject of our inquiry. In many respects, it became one of our teachers.

II. Entering the Inquiry

The major problems in the world are the result of the difference between how nature works and the way people think. — Gregory Bateson, anthropologist, systems thinker and ecologist

One of the privileges of the process was the openness with which the Orchard team engaged in it.

Generously, Rupert, Phoebe, Phil and Elise allowed a group of relative strangers to step into the story of the Orchard and the CORE Building. We arrived carrying unfamiliar questions and a curiosity that occasionally felt difficult to explain. We were not there to evaluate the project, assess performance or develop recommendations. Instead, we were interested in understanding the character of the place itself and the role it appeared to be playing within the wider life of St Ives. What followed over the coming months felt less like a series of interviews and more like an unfolding conversation.

Many of the questions we brought were not the kinds of questions people are typically asked about a community project. We were certainly interested in understanding how the Orchard had evolved and what it had achieved, but we often found ourselves drawn elsewhere. What felt unique about this place? Why did people care so deeply about it? What role was it serving within the wider life of the town? What qualities seemed to be emerging through it? And what might become possible if those qualities were cultivated further?

These questions emerged from a regenerative approach to inquiry. Rather than beginning with problems to solve, regenerative practitioners are often encouraged to begin with potential. Not potential imposed from outside, but potential already present within a place, a community or an initiative. The aim is not to arrive with answers, but to develop a richer understanding of what is seeking to emerge. For me, this represented a significant shift in perspective. It required learning to pay attention in a different way.

What struck me throughout those conversations was the willingness of the Orchard team to meet such questions with equal openness. Stories surfaced that may otherwise have remained untold. Memories prompted new reflections. Connections began to appear between events that had previously seemed unrelated. There was a playfulness to parts of the inquiry, too. Rupert, Phoebe, Phil, and Elise consistently engaged with unfamiliar questions and reflective exercises with curiosity rather than caution, often discovering fresh perspectives through the process itself. Gradually, the project started to reveal dimensions of itself that extended far beyond the practical realities of running an orchard or managing a community facility. Some of the richest insights emerged not from definitive answers, but from the conversations that followed when people were given space to reflect more deeply on their own experience.

It soon became clear that the inquiry was not something being done to the Orchard. It was something unfolding between all of us. At times, it seemed to deepen understanding not only for those of us participating in the programme, but also for the Orchard team themselves. Different

perspectives came into view. Long-held assumptions were occasionally reconsidered. Stories that had always been present took on fresh significance when viewed from a different angle. In that sense, the process became reciprocal. The place was helping us learn about it, whilst simultaneously offering opportunities for those closest to it to see it afresh.

This quality of mutual learning sits at the heart of much regenerative practice. The inquiry itself becomes part of the system being explored. The observer is no longer standing outside looking in. Instead, understanding emerges through participation, conversation and reflection. Whilst this can sound abstract, the reality often felt remarkably simple. People sharing stories. Listening carefully. Following threads of curiosity. Returning to questions that appeared to carry energy and significance.

The ecological thinker Gregory Bateson once suggested that wisdom resides not within things themselves but within the patterns that connect them. This notion became central to our inquiry. As conversations unfolded and reflections deepened over time, stories and observations often took on new meaning. The challenge was less about gathering information and more about learning to recognise the relationships already present.

Over time, it became increasingly apparent that we were never really studying an orchard in isolation. The trees, gardens and buildings were certainly part of the story, but they were not the whole story. What fascinated us most were the relationships extending beyond the site itself. Relationships between people and place. Between community initiatives and local identity. Between past decisions and future possibilities. What had first appeared to be a project gradually revealed itself as part of a much wider ecology of relationships unfolding across St Ives.

This became particularly evident when we began to consider the Orchard in its geographical context. The Orchard sits within Penbeagle Hill. Penbeagle sits within St Ives. St Ives sits within the West Penwith Peninsula and the wider Cornish story. Cornwall, in turn, exists within broader cultural, ecological and economic currents extending far beyond its coastline. Each layer influences the others whilst also retaining its own distinct character. Within regenerative thinking, these nested relationships matter. No initiative can be fully understood in isolation from the wider contexts that shape it and are shaped by it in return.

Seen from this perspective, the Orchard begins to feel like more than a local initiative. It becomes a meeting point. A place where ecology, community, culture and history intersect. A place where larger patterns become visible through the life of a seemingly simple orchard on a hillside above the sea.

III. The Orchard and the Character of St Ives

"If we want to make the world a better place, we have to make the place better."
— *Bill Reed, regenerative development pioneer and co-founder of Regenesiis*

One of the most striking discoveries concerned the Orchard's own evolution.

While the original impulse involved the rescue and relocation of a collection of apple trees, the site has never remained solely an orchard. Over time, additional tree species have been introduced. Educational growing spaces have emerged. Herb gardens have been cultivated. Wildlife habitats

have expanded. New ideas, skills and forms of participation have become woven into the life of the place.

The original apple trees were themselves transplants, relocated to Penbeagle Hill after their previous home, the hamlet of Castle Gate near Penzance, was lost. It is difficult not to notice the parallel with St Ives itself; a town continually shaped by arrivals, where people, ideas and influences from elsewhere become woven into the character of a place over time. What began as an orchard is increasingly becoming an ecosystem. In retrospect, the Orchard was already teaching one of the inquiry's central lessons. Living systems do not remain static. They diversify, adapt and evolve through relationships. In many respects, St Ives itself operates in much the same way

For centuries, the town has been shaped by arrivals. Fishing families, miners, artists, visitors, surfers, entrepreneurs, seasonal workers and newcomers have all contributed to its evolving story. Like any healthy ecosystem, its vitality emerges not through uniformity but through diversity, adaptation and exchange. The town has continually welcomed new influences whilst maintaining a character that remains unmistakably its own.

The Orchard mirrors this pattern beautifully. The original apple trees were themselves arrivals, rescued and relocated from elsewhere in Cornwall before being joined by other donated and transplanted species. New habitats have emerged, educational gardens have taken root, and fresh opportunities for participation continue to unfold. Volunteers, visitors and local residents bring new experiences, skills and perspectives into the life of the place. Rather than diluting its identity, this continual process of integration appears to strengthen it. In regenerative terms, diversity is not simply a feature of healthy systems. It is one of the conditions through which resilience develops. The Orchard offers a tangible expression of this principle.

Standing on Penbeagle's hillside on a bright autumn morning, with the harbour curving around the bay below and the Atlantic stretching beyond Godrevy Lighthouse, it becomes easier to understand St Ives as something more than a picturesque destination. From this vantage point, the town reveals itself as a place shaped by movement and exchange. The sea brings visitors, opportunities and ideas. Generations leave and return. Some people arrive seeking work, others seeking inspiration, adventure or rest. Some remain for a lifetime, whilst others pass through briefly before continuing their journey. Yet all become part of the story in some small way.

The Orchard occupies this perspective both literally and metaphorically. Looking out across the town from the hillside, it becomes easier to step back from individual projects and events and begin noticing larger patterns unfolding over time. Within regenerative inquiry, considerable attention is given to understanding these wider contexts. Any project, organisation or initiative can only be fully understood through the larger systems within which it participates. The Orchard helped us practise this way of seeing.

From the hillside, St Ives begins to appear not simply as a place of beauty but as a place of flows. Flows of people, creativity, knowledge, attention and investment. Some of these flows remain for generations. Others pass through in a matter of days. Yet together they shape the character and future trajectory of the town. This observation gradually led our inquiry towards a deeper question.

St Ives is undoubtedly thriving. Every year, the town attracts visitors from around the world who come seeking beauty, creativity, restoration and connection. Yet these successes do not translate to the notion of vitality through a regenerative lens. The more time we spent exploring the Orchard and the wider story of St Ives, the more a series of questions began to emerge. What would it mean for St Ives not simply to thrive, but to continually regenerate itself? How might the extraordinary

movement of people, ideas, creativity, knowledge and investment flowing through the town each year contribute more directly to its long-term vitality? How might transience become a source of renewal rather than extraction?

Places such as St Ives now find themselves balancing increasingly complex tensions. The qualities that make them attractive can, if left unattended, place strain upon the very character that created their appeal in the first place. The question is no longer whether St Ives is successful, but how that success can continually contribute towards the health of the place itself. These reflections are not intended as criticisms. Rather, they are invitations. Invitations to consider a word that sits at the heart of regenerative development: potential.

Bill Reed often speaks about the importance of recognising the unique potential already present within a place. The task is not to impose a vision from outside, but to reveal and cultivate what is already seeking expression. This idea became increasingly meaningful as we spent time with the Orchard. Seen through this lens, the Orchard and the CORE Building become more than community assets. They become places where people are invited into deeper participation with the life of St Ives itself. Through growing, learning, gathering, volunteering and creating, residents and visitors alike are offered opportunities to contribute to the ongoing story of the place rather than simply consume it.

Perhaps this is where the significance of the Orchard extends furthest beyond its boundaries. Not because it provides answers, but because it invites a different quality of participation. It creates conditions in which people can move from being observers of a place to becoming contributors to its unfolding future.

IV. The Ecology of Participation

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." - Margaret Mead, cultural anthropologist

Throughout our conversations, another theme repeatedly surfaced: the remarkable capacity of the Orchard team to recognise possibility and act upon it.

Again and again, stories emerged of funding opportunities pursued, partnerships cultivated, permissions secured and ideas finding their way into reality through persistence, trust and a willingness to begin before every detail had been resolved. What struck me was not simply the number of initiatives that had emerged over the years, but the attitude underpinning them. There was little sense of waiting for ideal conditions or complete certainty before taking action. Instead, there appeared to be an ongoing willingness to work with what was available, take the next step and trust that new opportunities would emerge from there.

Phoebe described how many ideas found encouragement through Elise's instinctive response of *"Why not?"* rather than *"Why?"* It sounds like a small distinction, but it surfaced often enough to feel significant. Possibilities were given room to breathe before being evaluated. New ideas were welcomed into the conversation rather than immediately filtered out. Some flourished, while others evolved into something quite different from what had first been imagined. Looking back, it became difficult not to see this openness as one of the defining characteristics of the Orchard's evolution.

Within regenerative thinking, considerable attention is given to the conditions that allow life to express itself more fully. Healthy living systems rarely emerge through rigid control. More often, they develop through responsiveness, experimentation and an ongoing capacity to adapt to changing circumstances. Listening to the stories of the Orchard's development, I often found myself thinking that this was exactly what had happened here. Rather than following a fixed blueprint, the project appeared to have grown through relationships, opportunities and many small acts of courage accumulated over time.

This quality is perhaps nowhere more visible than in the relationship between the Orchard, the CORE Building and the educational herb garden. Phoebe spoke passionately about wanting the garden to exist not as a separate feature but as an extension of the CORE Building itself. Rather than creating a boundary between architecture and landscape, the aspiration was to create a permeable experience where the inside flows into the outside and the outside flows back into the life of the building.

The more I reflected on this, the more it seemed to echo a pattern appearing throughout the wider project. It became difficult to separate learning from growing, growing from conversation, or conversation from action. New ideas often emerged through participation itself. Relationships generated opportunities. Opportunities invited new people into the story. The distinctions between inside and outside, landscape and community, became less important than the quality of exchange moving between them. In many ways, the Orchard appeared to be demonstrating this principle rather than simply talking about it.

As our inquiry continued, it became increasingly difficult to determine where the Orchard ended and the wider community began. The Orchard team spoke about music drifting across the hillside during summer gatherings and the energy of seasonal celebrations that bring people together throughout the year. They shared stories of workshops, educational programmes and handmade scarecrows standing proudly amongst the planting beds, each carrying the fingerprints of community participation. We heard stories of local residents becoming volunteers and volunteers becoming stewards. Children learning to grow food. Artists finding inspiration amongst the trees. Visitors discovering a different relationship with St Ives through their encounters with the place. Even the neighbouring skatepark began to feel connected to the same unfolding story.

Viewed individually, these might appear as separate initiatives serving different purposes. Viewed collectively, they begin to resemble something larger: a growing ecology of participation. A cultural ecosystem where creativity, stewardship, learning and belonging continually reinforce one another. What emerges is not simply a collection of projects, but a living network of relationships capable of generating new forms of connection, contribution and possibility.

Throughout the inquiry, I often found myself wondering whether the Orchard's greatest achievement might not be anything materially visible at all. Many of its successes are easy to point towards: the fruit harvest, the CORE Building, the workshops, events and educational programmes. Yet some of the most significant changes seemed to occur in less tangible ways. A volunteer discovering confidence through contribution. A visitor becoming a regular participant. A child seeing food, wildlife or growing differently.

This may seem a subtle shift, yet it carries profound implications. Much of modern life encourages us to consume places, experiences and communities. The Orchard appeared to be quietly inviting something different. It offered opportunities for people to see themselves not simply as visitors, volunteers or residents, but as active participants in the life of a place. Once that shift occurs, entirely new possibilities become available.

Throughout the inquiry, I occasionally found myself thinking about the mycelial networks that exist beneath a forest floor. Hidden from view, they connect trees, move nutrients and contribute to the resilience of the wider woodland. The Orchard often felt similar. Its visible outputs are easy to identify, yet much of its deeper contribution seems to lie in the connections it creates, the trust it builds and the opportunities it generates for people to become involved in something larger than themselves.

As we moved deeper into the inquiry, these less visible exchanges became increasingly difficult to ignore. The significance of the Orchard seemed to reside not only in what happened there, but in what moved through it; ideas, friendships, encouragement, knowledge and care. The Orchard was no longer simply a place where things happened. It was becoming visible as a place through which relationships flowed.

V. The Whole and the Parts

"The pattern which connects is a metapattern. It is a pattern of patterns. It is that which connects." - Gregory Bateson, anthropologist, systems thinker and ecologist

As our inquiry deepened, I found myself returning repeatedly to a deceptively simple provocation, one that has become something of a favourite within the Regenesys approach to inquiry: *How big is here?*

At first, it sounds almost childlike, the sort of question that can be answered with a map. Yet the more time we spent with the Orchard, the more challenging it became. Where exactly does the Orchard begin and end? Initially, the answer appeared straightforward enough. The Orchard could be defined by its boundaries: the land itself, the trees, pathways, educational gardens and the CORE Building. A line could be drawn around it. Yet the longer we spent with the project, the less convincing those boundaries became.

The influence of the Orchard extended well beyond the site itself. Conversations initiated there continued elsewhere. Relationships formed there led to collaborations that unfolded beyond the hillside. Learning undertaken there found expression in schools, homes, businesses and community initiatives. Ideas travelled. People carried experiences away with them and returned later with something new. Gradually, the Orchard appeared less like a place contained within a boundary and more like a centre of influence whose effects radiated outwards through the wider life of St Ives.

This observation led towards one of the most valuable insights of the entire inquiry. Modern thinking often encourages us to understand things by breaking them down into their constituent parts. We catalogue the trees, the buildings, the volunteers, the programmes, the funding streams and the outcomes. Each contributes something important and tells us something useful. Yet none of them, individually or collectively, fully explains what the Orchard has become. The deeper significance seemed to reside somewhere else. Not in any single element, but in the quality of connection between them and in the patterns that emerge when they are viewed together.

This perspective is not unique to regenerative thinking. Ecologists have long understood that the vitality of an ecosystem depends not simply upon the organisms within it, but upon the quality of relationship between them. A woodland is more than a collection of trees. A coastline is more than sand, sea and cliff. In living systems, the health of the whole emerges through countless exchanges that are easy to overlook when our attention is fixed only on the individual parts.

The Orchard increasingly appeared to operate in much the same way. Its significance did not arise solely from the trees, the CORE Building, the herb garden, the volunteers or the events. Rather, it seemed to emerge through the connections between them. Through the movement of knowledge, encouragement, trust and care. Through the countless exchanges that often remain unseen but nevertheless shape the wider life of the project.

This began to change how I thought about value. Much of what contemporary society measures is visible: visitor numbers, attendance figures, produce harvested and funding secured. These things matter and should be celebrated. Yet some of the most important things happening at the Orchard seemed remarkably resistant to measurement.

Over the course of the inquiry, I became increasingly aware of these quieter forms of value. A volunteer discovering a renewed sense of purpose. A conversation between strangers gradually becoming a friendship. Knowledge passing between generations during a workshop. A child developing a lasting connection with food, soil or wildlife. An idea sparked during a community gathering that later finds expression somewhere entirely different. These moments rarely appear in reports or funding applications, yet they felt deeply significant. The longer we spent with the Orchard, the more they seemed less like by-products of the project and more like part of its deeper contribution.

Pamela Mang often describes regenerative work as *"increasing the capability of living systems to evolve."* During the early stages of the programme, I understood this largely as an interesting idea. By the end of the inquiry, it had become something I felt I could recognise in practice. Perhaps the significance of a project cannot be understood solely through what it produces. Perhaps it can also be understood through what it enables: the capacity of people to contribute, the strength of relationships within a community, and the conditions from which new initiatives, opportunities and forms of participation can emerge.

Seen through this lens, the Orchard and the CORE Building begin to appear less like destinations and more like catalysts, quietly strengthening the wider capability of the community around them. Their value resides not only in what they provide, but in what they make possible.

The conventional image of the consultant or practitioner is often that of an expert arriving with answers. One of the gifts of our learning journey with Regenesys, through the Orchard as our muse, was the gradual recognition that regenerative practice asks something rather different of us. It asks us to participate before we presume to advise, and to listen for longer than feels comfortable. It asks us to remain curious. Much of the work involved learning to sit with uncertainty a little longer, resisting the temptation to diagnose too quickly and paying attention to patterns that only become visible over time. Rather than imposing solutions, regenerative practice seeks to strengthen the conditions from which healthy outcomes may emerge.

In my own mind, I frequently returned to the image of an ecological acupuncturist. Not someone directing the system or controlling the outcome, but someone paying close attention to where life is already seeking expression and helping to strengthen the vitality already present. Looking back, this feels remarkably similar to what the Orchard team have been doing all along. Their work has never seemed driven by a desire to dictate the future of the place. Instead, they have continually created conditions in which people, ideas and opportunities can find one another and grow.

Perhaps that, more than anything else, is what the Orchard helped us learn.

VI. The Work Between Harvests

"The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The second best time is now."

— Cornish Orchard Proverb

Like all orchards, however, the deepest lessons offered by this place may be found between harvests.

When people visit an orchard, their attention is naturally drawn towards the trees and the fruit they bear. Yet every orchardist understands that harvest is merely the visible expression of countless unseen processes unfolding over time. Beneath the surface, roots extend through the soil. Winter pruning shapes future growth. Pollinators move quietly between blossoms. Observation, patience and care accumulate season after season. Even periods of apparent dormancy are often periods of preparation. The fruit is real, tangible and worthy of celebration, but it is never the whole story.

This may be one reason why orchards have occupied such a powerful place within human culture for centuries. To plant a tree is to participate in a future that extends beyond oneself. There is something inherently generous about investing time, energy and care into something whose fullest expression may be experienced by future generations. Orchards invite a different relationship with time. They encourage us to think beyond immediate outcomes and invest ourselves in futures we may never personally witness.

While nobody articulated this directly during our conversations, it felt woven throughout the story of the Orchard itself. What emerged through our inquiry was not simply a story of development, infrastructure or community programming. Beneath those visible achievements sat something quieter: a belief in the future of a place, a belief in the capacity of community, and a willingness to invest in possibilities whose full expression may only become visible years from now.

Over six months, my own understanding of regeneration shifted considerably. I arrived imagining it as a methodology, perhaps even a collection of tools that could be applied to projects and places. I left with something far less tangible. What stayed with me was not a framework or a process, but a different quality of attention. A greater appreciation for the role relationship plays in the life of a place, and a growing recognition that meaningful change rarely happens in isolation. The Orchard did not simply reveal more of itself. It quietly altered the way I was learning to see.

I am not sure our inquiry ever truly concluded. If anything, the opposite occurred. The longer we spent with the Orchard, the more it resisted being reduced to a project, a building or a collection of trees. New questions continued to emerge. New connections revealed themselves. What had begun as a case study increasingly felt like an ongoing conversation, one that stretched beyond the boundaries of the site itself and into wider questions about community, stewardship and the future of place.

What remains with me most strongly is not any single conversation, project or event. It is the sense of a place that continually brings people into relationship with one another. The Orchard, the CORE Building, the educational gardens, the gatherings, the workshops, the music and the countless conversations unfolding between them all contribute to that story. Yet none of them fully contains it. What is taking shape on Penbeagle Hill feels larger than any individual initiative. It feels like a

culture of participation, one that continues to evolve through the contributions of the people who care for it.

During our conversations, I often found myself thinking about the original orchardists and foresters who played such an important role in the Orchard's beginnings. Many would never know the people who would one day gather beneath the branches of the trees they planted. They would never hear the conversations, attend the celebrations or witness the countless encounters that would unfold there years later. Yet they planted anyway. There is something quietly profound in that gesture. The willingness to invest in a future beyond one's own horizon may be one of the most regenerative acts available to us.

Perhaps that is what the Orchard has been teaching all along. Regeneration is rarely something we do to a place. More often, it becomes possible when we learn to recognise, strengthen and participate in the relationships that allow a place to become more fully itself.

As our inquiry drew to a close, I found myself returning to the question that had accompanied us from the beginning: *What if the most important thing growing in a community orchard isn't fruit?* After close to six months with the Orchard, I am not sure I can answer that question definitively. But standing on Penbeagle Hill, looking across the town, the harbour and the sea beyond, it seems entirely possible that what is growing here is something much less tangible than fruit and, in the long run, far more valuable. A community continuing to discover its capacity to care for a place and, in doing so, for one another.

"All flourishing is mutual."

- Robin Wall Kimmerer, botanist, professor and author of Braiding Sweetgrass