

THE WOOL ALIENS (AND OTHER FILMS)

by Julia Parks, commissioned by Alchemy Film & Arts

The Wool Aliens was a residency project undertaken with **Alchemy Film & Arts** by **Julia Parks** between April and October 2022.

Four films resulting from Julia's residency received their world premiere at the thirteenth edition of Alchemy Film and Moving Image Festival in Hawick, Scotland, on Saturday 29 April 2023.

Encompassing research, sound recordings, analogue filmmaking and community engagement, the project investigates the relationship between plants, people, animals and textiles making along the Teviot and Tweed Rivers, with specific interest in wool aliens and the stories of migration they tell.

Julia's residency was part of **The Teviot, the Flag and the Rich, Rich Soil**, Alchemy Film & Arts' programme exploring the borders, boundaries and lines of Hawick and the Scottish Borders.

While the films complement and speak to one another in a variety of ways, they can be screened individually, or across a Festival's discrete programmes.



Image: Bea Ward / Alchemy Film & Arts

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PREVIEW COPIES



The Wool Aliens

28 minutes / 16mm transferred to digital / 2023

Link: <https://vimeo.com/796326071>

Password: woolalien



Tell Me About The Burryman

9 minutes 30 seconds / 16mm transferred to digital / 2023

Link: <https://vimeo.com/758782345>

Password: burryman



Burnfoot Grows

9 minutes / 16mm transferred to digital / 2023

Link: <https://vimeo.com/758741359>

Password: burnfoot



All Flesh Is Grass

9 minutes 30 seconds / 16mm transferred to digital / 2023

Link: <https://vimeo.com/742335256>

Password: grass



Images: Sanne Gault / Alchemy Film and Moving Image Festival 2023

SCREENINGS

April 2023 Alchemy Film and Moving Image Festival 2023 Hawick, Scotland

PRESS

The results [of Julia's residency] were among the highlights of this year's Alchemy Film and Moving Image Festival. The gala Saturday night screening was the world premiere of a quartet of films Parks made around the Borders, exploring themes of nature, industry, folk traditions and community. All four are wonderfully evocative and gorgeous thanks to Parks' tactile 16mm photography. The best was also the longest: the poetic documentary *The Wool Aliens*, which explores the way that the once booming textile industry of the Borders has significantly changed its natural habitat.

- [Jamie Dunn, *The Skinny*](#)

In Julia Parks' *Burnfoot Grows*, Alchemy's 2022 artist in residence documents the revitalising work being done by volunteers and staff at the eponymous community garden. Parks' work with several nearby communities was evident across the four films she presented in a solo screening at the festival, but equally it shone through in her exhibition *Cultivate!* which was made in conjunction with a group of young people from Hawick.

- [Ben Nicholson, *MAP*](#)

The film blends archive, interviews and Parks' evocative 16mm film footage. We learn about Ida Hayward, the woman who, in the early 20th century, was among the first to identify the strange new species that had cropped up on the banks of the River Tweed and the Gala Water. In the modern-day, a man in a hazmat suit chops down 15ft stalks of Giant Hogweed and a woman gathers up armfuls of the pervasive Pirri Pirri plant. But the film goes to lengths to demonstrate these 'wool aliens' have their uses, such as dyes or medicinal purposes... These films have an otherworldly quality, tapping into themes of migration, pagan ritual and climate crisis.

- [Julia Parks interview, *The Skinny*](#)

PROGRAMME NOTES

by Rachael Disbury, Alchemy Film & Arts Director

Julia Parks began a six-month residency with Alchemy Film & Arts in April 2022, undertaking collaborative research, interviews, site visits, sound recordings, analogue filmmaking, and community engagement along the Teviot and Tweed Rivers. This suite of four new films resulting from the project investigates the always complex, often contradictory, and sometimes comical relationship between humans, plants and animals in industrial and social contexts.

In *The Wool Aliens*, Julia traces the footsteps of botanist Ida Hayward (1872 – 1949), capturing and juxtaposing the ecologies of a river as well as the rhythms of its working mills. Julia focuses on varying tensions and harmonies between plants and labour through interviews and contemplative imagery: plants thriving in abandoned mills; close-ups of teasel-heads mechanised for the brushing and finishing of woollen garments; workers battling burrs and giant hogweed on the banks of the Tweed.

A closer look at burrs drives *Tell Me About the Burryman*, an affectionate portrait of the centuries-old annual Burryman's Parade in South Queensferry. Against the backdrop of a sunny Forth Bridge, we trace the event from the foraging of burrs to the long procession of the Burryman, a person covered head-to-toe in 'nature's Velcro'.

Julia developed many relationships with people and groups across the Scottish Borders – notably, an affection and admiration for the work of staff and volunteers at Burnfoot Community Hub and Garden. *Burnfoot Grows* was made with workers and community groups at the space, which cultivates vegetables for the onsite café and wider Burnfoot community.

In *All Flesh Is Grass*, Julia contemplates the complexities and contradictions of the local area's relationships to land and animals – from the more sterile apparatus required of ecological study, to roadkill, to the sight of Hawick's Cornet dipping his flag in the Teviot as a recording of the Scottish ballad 'The Twa Corbies' plays out.

At the end of *The Wool Aliens*, an archival recording of 'The Rolling Hills of the Borders' is heard over a sustained shot of the Tweed, the river into which Hawick's Teviot flows. The song concludes, but the film doesn't, inviting us to contemplate the river's continuation. The film's extensive network of contributors begins to appear – underpinning the collaborations that made Julia's residency possible.

THE WOOL ALIENS

28 minutes / 16mm transferred from digital / 2023



A cinematic journey, filmed on 16mm, into the historical and tactile entanglements between sheep's wool, migrant plant seeds and the River Tweed in Scotland.

In the early 20th century, a botanist named Ida Hayward discovered more than 300 migrant plant species growing on the banks of the River Tweed in Scotland. The plants had grown from seeds that had been washed from the local woollen mills as part of the region's world-famous textiles industry.

Ida's research and the seeds' story are told through a journey along the river network to find out about the plants - told through the eyes of people who work with them today.

Link: <https://vimeo.com/796326071>

Password: woolalien

TELL ME ABOUT THE BURRYMAN

9 minutes 30 seconds / 16mm transferred to digital / 2023



An affectionate portrait in 16mm of the Burryman - a long-lasting tactile tradition in South Queensferry, Scotland, in which a man dresses in a head-to-toe outfit of sticky burrs and parades the streets for one day each August.

Filmed over a week, the film follows Andrew - the current Burryman - in his journey to collect the burrs, make the outfit and parade the South Queensferry streets during a single sun-soaked day in August 2022. We learn why he does it and speculate on where the tradition might have started, where it might be headed, and why it is important to the town.

Link: <https://vimeo.com/758782345>

Password: burryman

BURNFOOT GROWS

9 minutes / 16mm transferred to digital / 2023



A collaborative film portrait of Burnfoot Community Garden, and its dedicated team of staff and volunteers, in the Scottish Borders town of Hawick.

Link: <https://vimeo.com/758741359>

Password: burnfoot

ALL FLESH IS GRASS

9 minutes 35 seconds / 16mm transferred to digital / 2023



Filmed over four seasons, *All Flesh Is Grass* explores the contemporary and ambiguous relationship between animals, human customs and the so-called natural world of the Scottish Borders.

Through sounds, songs and images, the film looks at the relationships between conservation spaces, country shows, traditions and the natural world.

Link: <https://vimeo.com/742335256>

Password: grass



FURTHER INFORMATION

Julia Parks is a Cumbrian artist filmmaker exploring the interrelationships between landscapes, plants, people and industry.

She works with experimental documentary forms often using 16mm film, archival footage, poetry and song. Julia's six-month residency with Alchemy Film & Arts in 2022 encompassed collaborative research, sound recordings, analogue filmmaking and community engagement, investigating the relationship between plants, people, animals and textiles making along the Teviot and Tweed Rivers, with specific interest in wool aliens and the stories of migration they tell. Julia is currently based in Hawick.

Alchemy Film & Arts is based in the Scottish Borders town of Hawick. We work with communities and artists both locally and internationally, using film as a way to come together, have conversations and strengthen community.

Across a year-round programme of screenings, workshops, residencies, community filmmaking and the internationally renowned Alchemy Film and Moving Image Festival, we strive to create spaces in which collective expression, creative learning and critical thinking can take place.

The Teviot, the Flag and the Rich, Rich Soil is an Alchemy Film & Arts programme of residencies, commissions and community engagement exploring the borders, boundaries and lines of Hawick and the Scottish Borders.