

Night arts event proposal

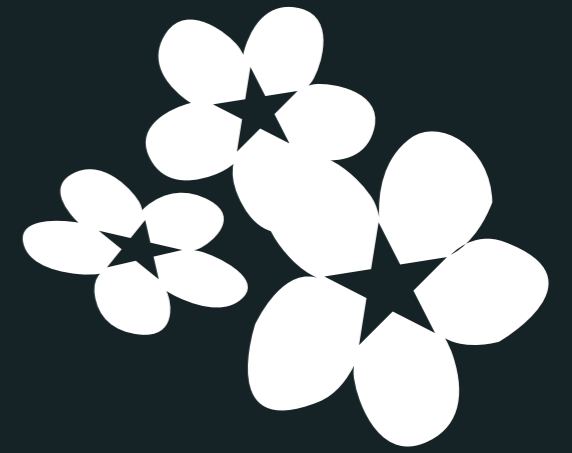
Briony Hartley • September 2025

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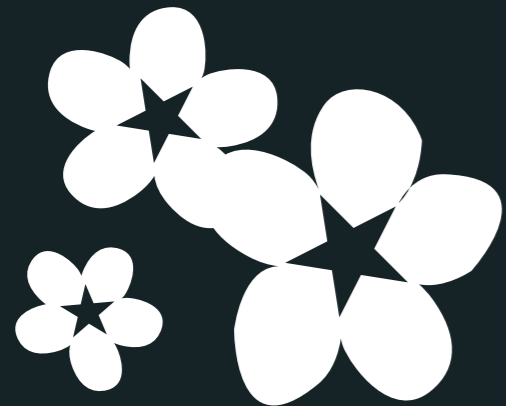
NOCCOURNE

SEIZE THE NIGHT





HUMANS + CULTURE + NATURE + NIGHT = NOCTURNE





Humans are losing contact with natural darkness,
spending their evenings isolated at home
staring at electric light on screens.

They are forgetting the magic of nature at night
and are missing human connection.

Barriers to nature at night



No barriers to nature at night



How can we move from here to here?



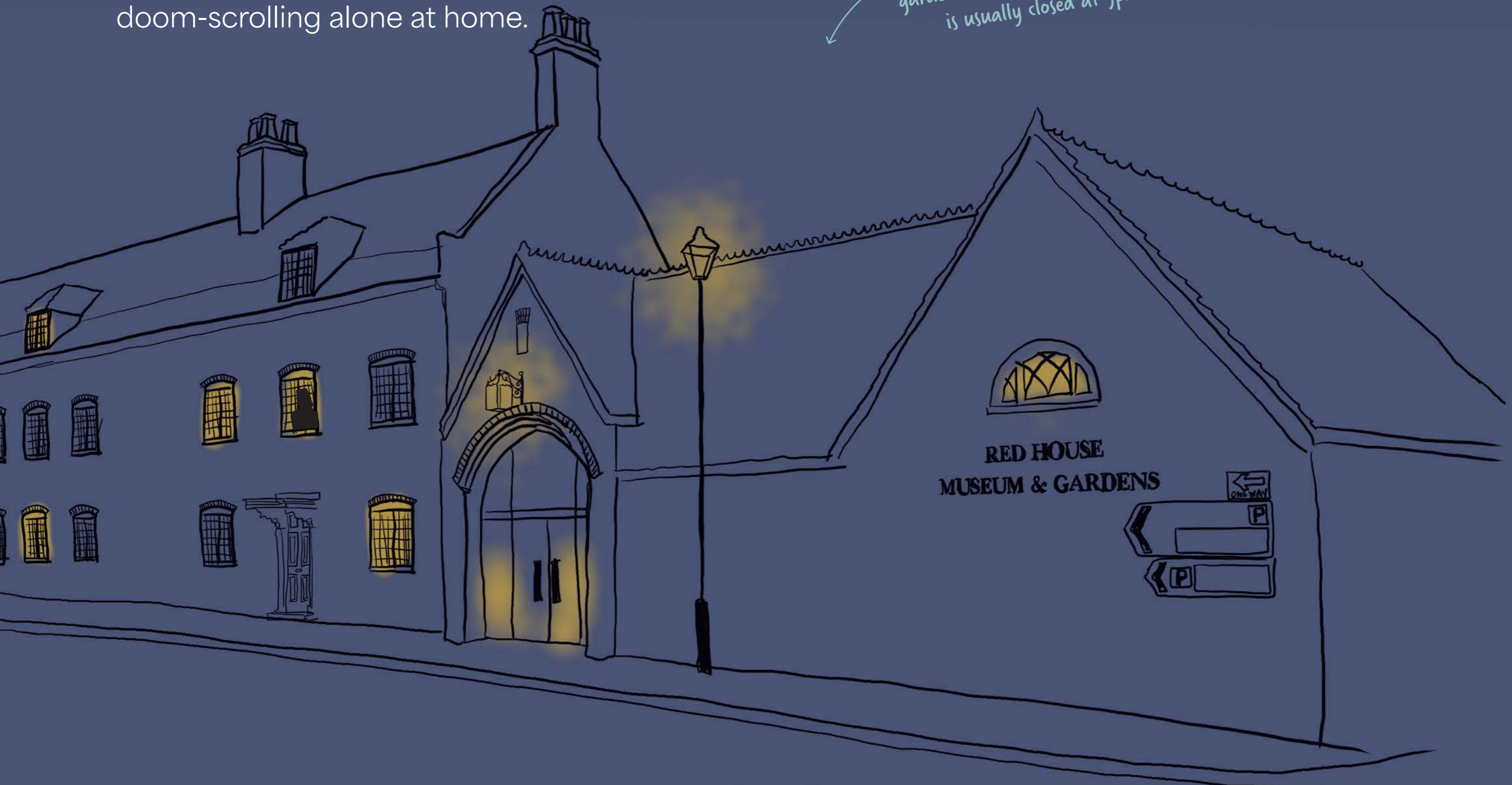
Problem

- ▶ UK adults and teens spend several hours a day looking at screens, particularly at night.
- ▶ Staying home, isolated on technology at night, has negative impacts on mental health, community, connection and creativity.
- ▶ In an era of rapid urbanization, with fewer people owning gardens, access to safe green space is in decline. The trend of indoor isolation after dark will worsen in the coming decades.
- ▶ People are afraid to leave their homes after dark in urban areas as public spaces feel unsafe, while acres of secure green spaces in the heritage sector remain closed to the public at night.

Solution

Open heritage gardens at night, providing safely enclosed green space in towns and cities for residents to enjoy after dark, as an alternative to doom-scrolling alone at home.

The large, peaceful moonlit garden behind this old workhouse, is usually closed at 5pm



Benefits of opening after dark

1. Mental health and well-being

- Time in natural settings boosts mood, reduces anxiety, and enhances creativity. Experiencing nature by night is restful, awe-inspiring and provides an antidote to digital addictions.

2. Safe access to green space

- Private heritage urban gardens tend to be enclosed by walls and fences, allowing restricted, monitored access to create safe access to green space for women, helping them to reclaim the night.

3. Build community connection

- Local residents and visitors can meet in the gardens at night, share their night memories and stories, work on shared night projects and experience art and culture together after dark.

4. Widening access and inclusion

- Night opening helps people who work shifts, have care-giving responsibilities, or prefer the cover of night for cultural, neurodiverse, or personal reasons.

5. New and repeat visitors

- From sound installations, music and moonlit tours to poetry readings and nature watches, the night garden opens new programming possibilities. These events can attract younger audiences, local communities, and repeat visitors looking for new experiences.

6. Supporting conservation

- Evening events would be designed to protect wildlife through education and eco-friendly lighting. Community moonlit meadow planting projects could raise awareness of declining moth populations and boost nocturnal biodiversity.

7. Awake the Wild Self

- Darkness provides space for our 'Wild Self' to be liberated from the constraints and expectations of daytime work and responsibilities. This creative, intuitive part of the human psyche can find freedom at night. Visitors could find peace and inspiration in dark skies, deep chats and time reflecting away from the glare of electric light.

8. Reveal hidden narratives

- What happened here at night? Opening after dark provides opportunities for new stories to be told in familiar places.

9. Align with cultural values

- Museums and galleries are custodians of beauty, reflection, and meaning. Opening heritage land at night reinforces the mission to inspire and nurture culture, curiosity, and consciousness.

10. Increased income

- Time is an untapped resource for heritage spaces. Using hours of darkness to host memorable, magical events could bring new income streams.

How could NOCTURNE work in an outdoor space?

BY NIGHT

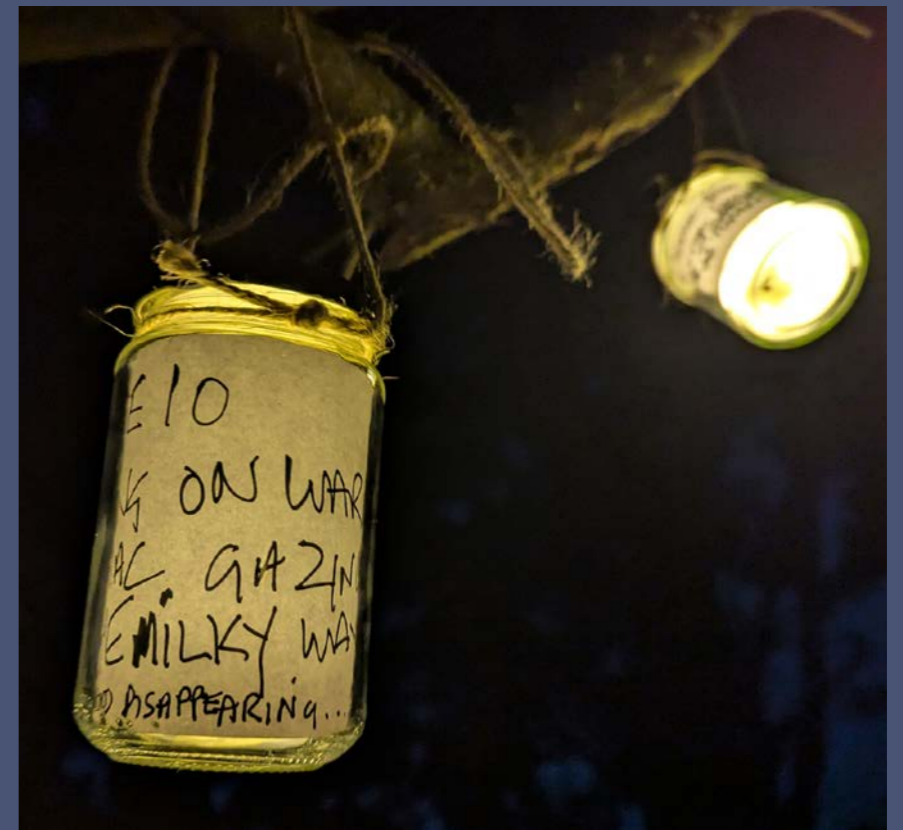
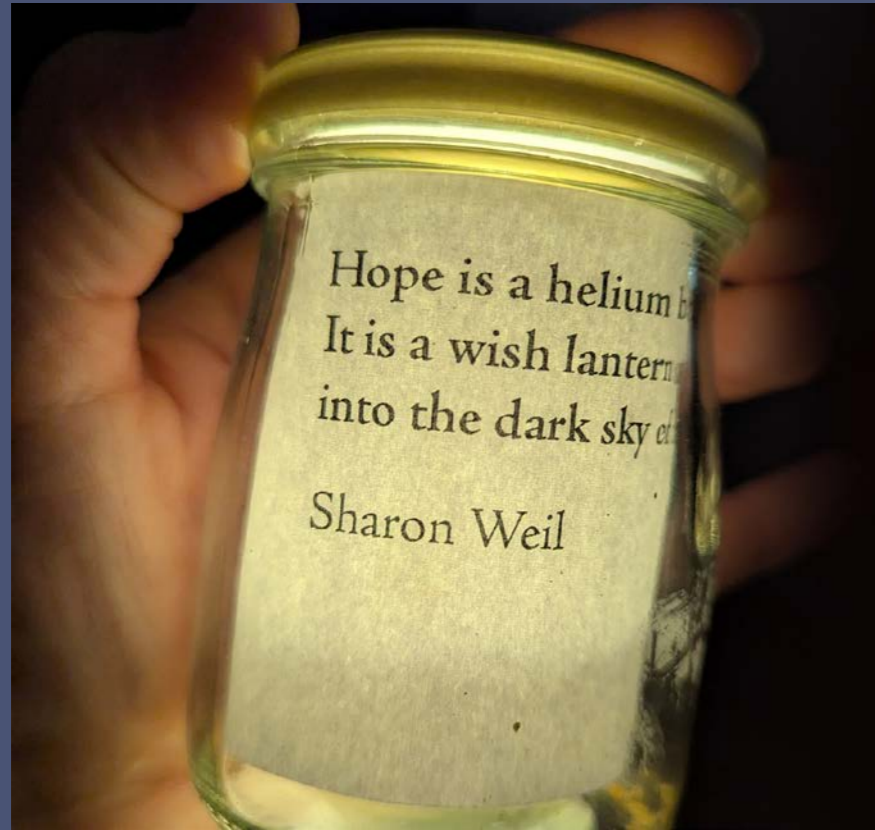
1. Gardens open late: green spaces opened until 11pm for walks or simply sitting and resting in

2. Outdoor 'Nocturne' events: hosted in garden after dark.

Ideas include:

Poetry readings, sound installations, sharing night memories, silent disco, dancing, fire gatherings, music eg. Chopin's *Piano Nocturnes*, Dylan Thomas' original audio *Do Not Go gentle into That Good Night...*





Nocturne, 7.30-8.30pm 23 September at Entry Hill, Bath, Forest of Imagination 2025

How could NOCTURNE work in an indoor space?

BY DAY

- 1. Night narratives on display:** additional captions to night themed objects in museums
- 2. Temporary exhibition:** displays of night-themed art/photography to inspire day visitors to seize the night. eg. Whistler or local artists
- 3. Merchandise in gift shop:** glow-in-the dark prints and book of night memories

Caption card

 NIGHT NARRATIVES

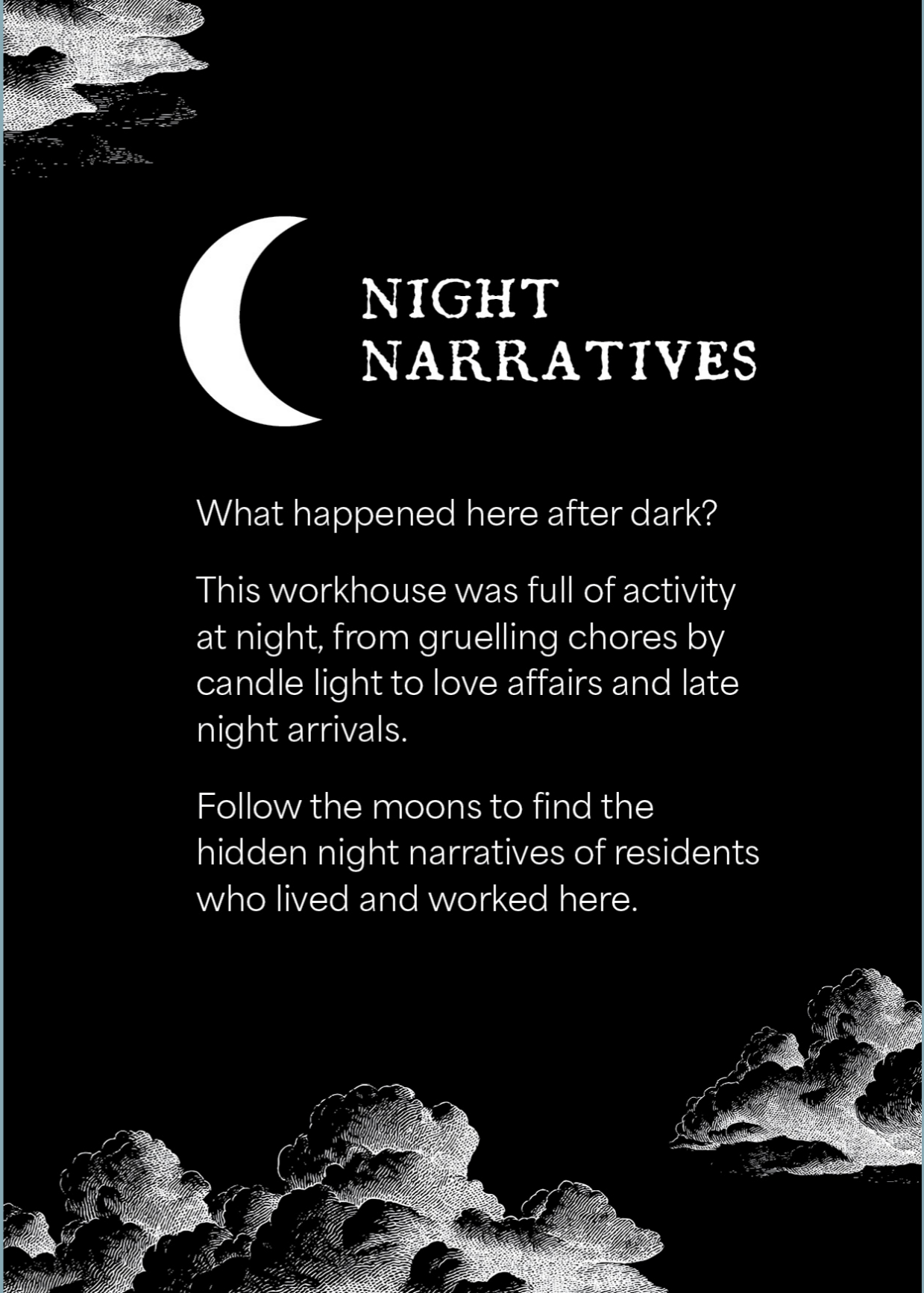
Police bulls-eye oil lamp, 1896
Pewter and glass

This type of oil-fuelled light was used by police officers for several decades. The lights were often referred to as dark lanterns due to the ability to rotate a shield or cowl to obscure the light, allowing officers to approach unseen and then quickly reveal their presence.

The lanterns used a wick and a reservoir of oil (often whale oil, kerosene, or a mix) to produce a flame.



A4 welcome sign near entrance of museum



 NIGHT NARRATIVES

What happened here after dark?

This workhouse was full of activity at night, from gruelling chores by candle light to love affairs and late night arrivals.

Follow the moons to find the hidden night narratives of residents who lived and worked here.

Exhibition and workshop ideas

EXHIBITIONS

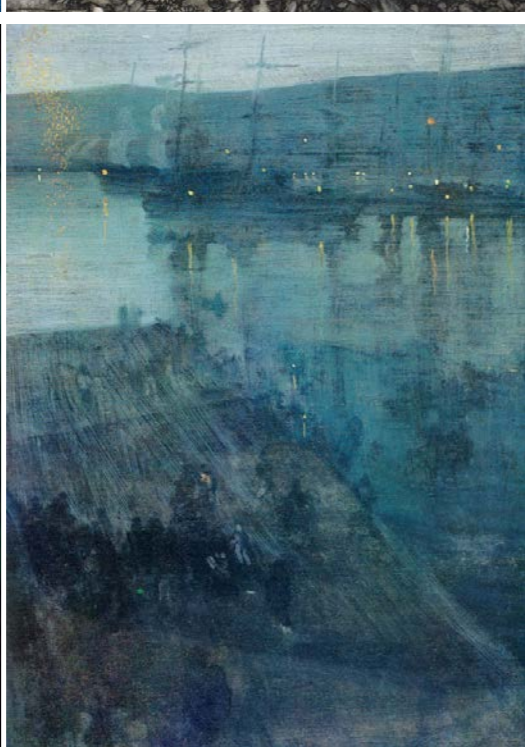
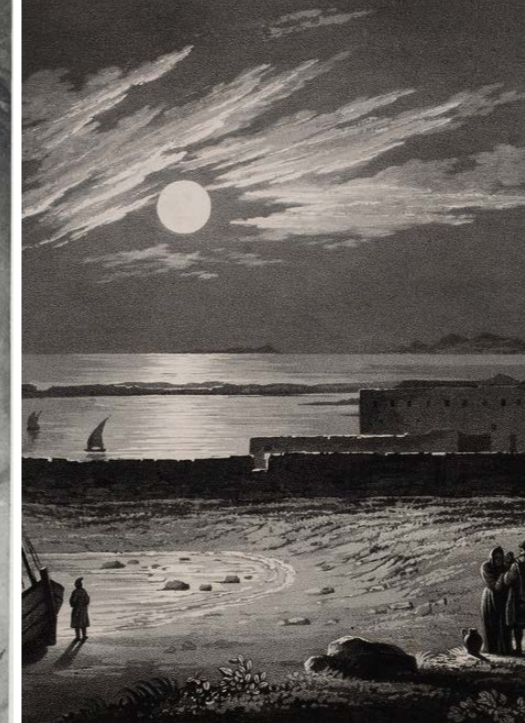
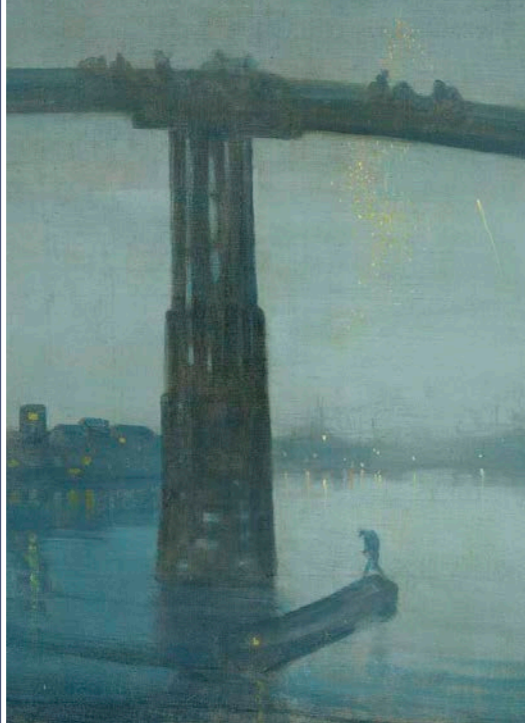
- 1. Curated nocturnal art** from the Nocturne host museum's own collection.
- 2. Art from public domain** such as Whistler's *Nocturne* series of night paintings
- 3. Exhibition by local artists/or school children** with night at as the theme

WORKSHOPS

- 1. Make some night art** - print natural objects eg. leaves in white paint on black card
- 2. Creative writing by candlelight**
- 3. Story telling in the dark** using sound to amplify experience



'Nocturne in Black and Gold', Whistler, 1875

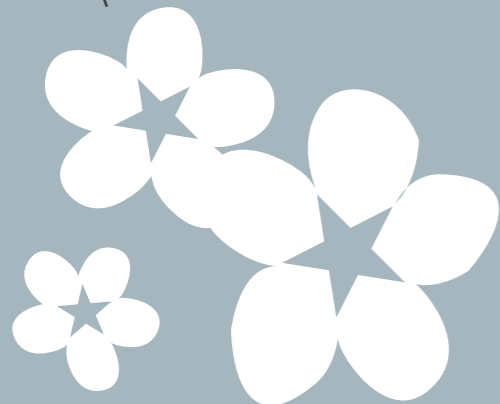


Project summary

So Nocturne is:

- night outdoor community events and gatherings in nature after dark
- a campaign to remind people of the wonder of night time and motivate them to go outdoors into nature at night
- hosted on safe, secure private land usually locked after 6pm, from small courtyards to vast fields, landscaped parks and woodlands
- ethical, sustainable and positive for nocturnal biodiversity

White flowers look great in the dark!



Event ideas:

- Chopin piano nocturnes performance
- poetry readings in darkness
- hosted silent night walks
- singing in the dark
- midnight feast (imagine a grand table in the woods with candelabra and candlelight)
- bird watching/listening
- firegazing
- a party
- a retreat
- music and dancing
- stargazing on blankets
- white dress code (bodies visible without electric light)
- creative writing by candlelight (find your wild self)
- planting moonlit meadows
- nocturnal art competition/workshops
- simply open the space and let people wander quietly around it

Associated materials:

- Art exhibition of beautiful/eerie night-themed paintings and photography
- Temporary exhibitions at heritage venues exploring their own night time narrative - what happened in this place after dark?

Merchandise:

- Books: Many lovely children's books and novels about night, and books on night walking and stargazing. Could create a new *Memories of Night* anthology of poems about night
- Possible gift ranges: branded bed time eg. pyjamas, eye masks, toothbrushes, bookmarks, mugs, alarm clocks; night walk accessories eg. beanie hats, gloves, scarves, umbrellas, dog leads, bags, torch, whistle
- Glow-in-the-dark postcards and posters

About the artist

Briony Hartley MA FRSA MISTD is a designer and lecturer in BA (Hons) Communication Design and Strategy at Arts University Bournemouth. She heads her own graphic design business, Goldust Design, creating books, branding and interpretation for the publishing, arts and heritage sectors including Buckingham Palace, Windsor Castle, Houses of Parliament and Russell-Cotes Museum.

Coincidentally, she designed the National Trusts' 'Night Time Adventure Notebook' as a freelance book designer for Pavilion Books.

She has just completed an MA where she explored 'how we use night' as a theme which has led to this project, seeking to bring communities together after dark.

She hosted her first *Nocturne* event at Bath's Forest of Imagination 2025. She is a confident communicator, a regular speaker at the Bournemouth Writing Festival and loved being a guest on BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* talking about family camping.

Briony lives near the beach in Bournemouth and is passionate about the power of design to make the world a better place.

Design work: www.goldustdesign.co.uk





NOCTURNE

**Do you have access to a green space
which could host a Nocturne event?**

**Let's bring people together in nature
after dark and seize the night!**

Contact Briony Hartley
briony@goldustdesign.co.uk