



WHAT MAKES YOU WHO YOU ARE

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What makes you who you are? How much of our lives are predefined by our DNA? How far are our destinies and our temperaments predefined by genetics? We often associate genetics/DNA with our health but how often do we associate our DNA with our personalities?

My project looks at the cyclical nature of family issues and how the consequences change due to time and social views. With an interest in genealogy and psychology I have been researching my family tree, looking at the similarities and reoccurrences with myself and my ancestors. Concentrating on my maternal line who were based in Derbyshire. I have photographs, jewellery, embroideries, and clothing that have been passed down over the years and are held dear and through these items I can see that I have similarities with the people who originally owned them. Either through taste or the enjoyment of making. Using my heirlooms and research findings as inspiration I have created a family tree of objects that relate to a selection of my maternal ancestors that I relate most to.

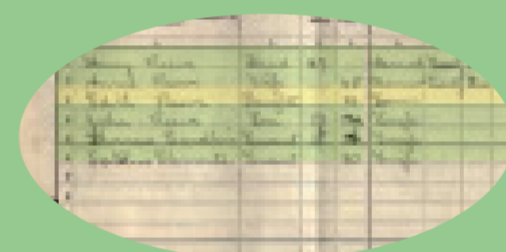
'I remember through heirlooms... The ring I played with while on my grandmother's finger, fascinated by the markings, that I now wear. The Christening gown made from the wedding dress of my grandmother three times removed and worn by each generation since. Items that long outlived their original owners but tell a tale of times past.

A little girl in a black and white photograph that looks just like me dressed in 1920's clothing. How similar are our lives?

My Grandmothers hands mirrored in mine; our facial expressions passed down over time.

The craftsman, the miner, the bootmaker, the milliner, the teacher, elements of each embedded in me.

My great Grandmother born illegitimately in 1882 to a servant girl aged only eighteen the stigma surrounding this at that time causing so much shame that her illegitimacy was unknown by her children until the day of her funeral, yet today the stigma surrounding this has all but disappeared. Issues that now seem minor yet one hundred years ago, ruined a young girl's life'.



While doing my research into the Victorian era and the cyclical nature of families, I found an article called The Cyclical Nature of Time- or What an Oak Tree Has in Common With Human history with the following quote feeling very relevant to my research and I liked the use of a tree as a metaphor,

'Just like those leaves on my oak tree, which (regardless of personal distinctions) always have a form in common which marks their species, so too are their basic commonalities in human nature. We all dream —and always have. We all cry —and always will. Do not lament that our species will never outgrow heartache: the natural complement of this idea is that we will always maintain our capacity for love'.

Acorns inevitably grow into oak trees: they never become willows or sunflowers. With the seeds of all our ancestors' passions within us, is it any wonder we share their challenges? This Victorian Life. (n.d.). The Cyclical Nature of Time —or, What an Oak Tree Has In Common With Human History. [online] Available at: <http://www.thisvictorianlife.com/blog/the-cyclical-nature-of-time-or-what-an-oak-tree-has-in-common-with-human-history> [Accessed 26 Apr. 2023]

Retracing the footsteps of my maternal ancestors, through genealogy websites and Derbyshire records office, I have compiled addresses, maps, occupations, and life stories for everyone taking the eras of which they lived in into consideration to gain a wider perspective of what their lives were like. With my Christening gown as my central source of inspiration I have focused on some relatives that wore it, and two that didn't but resonate with me for personal reasons. I have visited Derbyshire to retrace footsteps, collect information, photographs, marks, materials, and soil specific to each area. For testing I have buried scraps of fabrics and various metals in tubs of soil and compost that were scattered around my garden which I have monitored which helped inform me on the best materials to use for each piece, with the metals, so far proving the most effective. My findings have helped inform my making and the objects I have created. The objects have been buried in a place or in soil from a place specific to the ancestor the object was created for. My aim is for the object to absorb the place and create surface design, becoming a 'part' of a place my ancestor once lived. When looking at other makers I have found Adi Toch a great source of inspiration focusing on patination and contemporary forms and is the only maker I can find that has buried their work and focuses heavily on patination. Through print and etching I have transferred images of findings from my research onto silk, copper, gilding metal, and silver. The objects have been created in memory of each individual and are inspired from either personal memory or research findings. A ruler for the headmaster, a ring for my grandmother, a wheel for the coachbuilder, a rattle for the infant who passed before her first birthday, a box for my mother with images of her childhood home etched onto it, a chain for the servant girl, a brooch for my great grandmother, a cuff for my aunt, a bowl for my great grandmother who is remembered for always being in the kitchen..

My main problem has been time as I need to leave my pieces in the ground or placed outside for as long as possible to create the best effects. This meant that my pieces needed to be made early on for the burial to be effective and some pieces have been helped along by using vinegar or bleach before burial.

By combining genealogy research and craft this could become a practice that helps people recover from trauma or just inspire others to learn a craft and make something while learning about your ancestral line. My findings have uncovered generational problems with the 'father' figure, inherited illnesses, a strong line of teachers and makers and a greater understanding of what makes me who I am.

