

'The Pebble In Your Pocket' – SCRIPT – v3

R4 INTRO

Why do people love pebbles? What is it about their appearance, their texture, history and folklore that inspires so many of us? Well, now on BBC Radio 4, we meet people who work with, and are captivated by pebbles – their voices entwined with music, poetry, and pebbly sounds from the North East of Scotland to the South West of England. This is 'THE PEBBLE IN YOUR POCKET'.

0'00" INTRO MONTAGE

SANDRA: That one is very egg like, isn't it? But it's got that kind of gnarly bit there, with a lump, a sort of a growth on the corner, and you've got a little cut in the side – it's like a little world in its own right, really, all these colours bleeding into each other..... it's just so beautiful!

MUSIC: Morcheeba – The Sea

MARGARET: This one, for instance, its lovely textured surface is just like a bird's egg. And this one, is like a piece of putty that you just squeeze, between your fingers!

ALEX: It's almost like a piece of sculpture that's just been formed! Sculptors, stone carvers spend a lot of their time trying to make that, and yet the earth's done it already.

MARGARET: It's got two perfectly round eyes in a round head. It's grey and beige, like the lovely owls you get around here. It just sits there staring at you!

NEIL: It's been moved around by water, and beaten against other pebbles to attain that shape, that kind of, the attrition of some of these pebbles... (FADES OUT)

ALEX: ...you look at the side that hasn't been broken – it has all these smooth undulations...

SANDRA: ...I just love the patterns on here, these little indentations and marks...

MUSIC / WAVES UP

MARGARET: When you find something that attracts you visually – the colour or the shape, the feel – it just gives you pleasure.

ALEX: Everyone loves a pebble, don't they?!

1'30" STONE SPEECH POEM

Crowding this beach
are milkstones, white
teardrops; flints
edged out of flinthood
into smoothness chafe
against grainy ovals,
pitted pieces, nose-stones,
stoppers and saddles;
veins of orange
inlay black beads:
chalk-swaddled babyshapes,
tiny fists, facestones
and facestone's brother
skullstone, roundheads
pierced by a single eye,
purple finds, all
rubbing shoulders:
a mob of grindings,
groundlings, scatterings
from a million necklaces
mined under sea-hills, the pebbles
are as various as the people.

ALEX: No wonder people are still gathering them and thinking about them, and carving stone, and making artworks, and using it for inspiration for writing or making clothes, anything! It's all there!

2'35" MARGARET HOWELL

MARGARET: I'm Margaret Howell, and I'm a clothes designer, basically.

We're in Suffolk, where I have a small house near the sea.

You can see right across to Orford Ness, there...

Here the beaches are long shingle beaches, and they merge with the arable land on one side, and then you get the sea and these enormous skies and the changing light. So it's a lovely place to just get out there and walk and clear your head.

(WALKING FX) If we walk up to where one usually gets down on to the beach...

FX TIDE SWOOSHING

Yes, there you've got the bellowing, in those rocks – but here you can hear the shingle drifting, and being pulled back and forth.

FX BIG WAVES

It's a mix of greys, and ochres, and browns, and oranges isn't it? And stone, stoney colour...

MUSIC: Gang Colours – Pebble Dash

If you go looking you don't find anything – it's when you just spot a pebble, when you're walking the beach.

The sea is sandy coloured today, almost khaki colour, pale.

I'm probably more a beachcomber than a collector of pebbles, but I have a few that I play with, or rearrange from time to time... and I've – I'll show you some.

MOVES AROUND HOUSE

It's almost like little design exercises for me, putting them in a way that I find aesthetically pleasing.

Sometimes you collect something for fun and then it has a very different meaning.

This is my memorial to my son, Edward, who died tragically young.

I wanted something, that – you know, I was thinking, should I set them into the ground, in concrete or something – but no, I wanted something I could take with me and keep with me, if I ever moved. So that's why these are laid out like this, because it's his dates.

So it's 1981 to 2011. And he was 30.

This is a 3, number pebble, that is so – I think it looks like it's been etched or carved in.

MUSIC: Gang Colours – Pebble Dash

But I'm much more selective now – having found that beautiful '3', I want to find only that sort of special pebble.

I'm not technically knowledgeable about the actual stones, but you'll probably talk to someone who is...

6'35" NEIL DAVIES

NEIL: I'm Dr Neil Davies, at the University of Cambridge, Earth Sciences Department, and I'm a sedimentary geologist, so I look at the rocks that have been left behind by ancient sediments and ancient environments.

This is a roundish, large, egg shaped pebble. Inside it, a series of reddish lines against a white background. The pebble itself is likely from France. And these individual markings on there are burrows of small marine animals, of worms.....

This is classic kind of pebble – this is entry level pebble! (laughs) It's basically a grey pebble with a series of white lines, quartz mains – this is from the Culm Basin, Cornwall – forces have acted on that rock, at depth, to open fissures and cracks and plains inside there.....

This is a pebble inside a pebble, that's fallen out of an iceberg, almost a billion years ago, into the sea.....

This one's been shaped by the wind, this one's been shaped by ice, this one's been shaped by water – all these things operate to change the shapes and patterns that we see inside pebbles.

When we get an accumulation of pebbles in the rock record, and they combine together into a rock, we get what's called a conglomerate. These two blocks of conglomerate here, you can see it's made of lots of individual pebbles, of different types, you've got chunks of limestone, bits of quartz, bits of red ironstone there as well, all mixed together and mashed up into this one rock. So this itself – that's 2.6 billion years old. That's from near Yellowknife, northern Canada – those pebbles will have been knocking around, as pebbles, at 2.6 billion years old.

All the pebbles and all the rocks are pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that tells us – well, they're the only archive of historical events on earth. Those pebbles were here 2.6 billion years ago. And they're still here now. And we can look at those and we can get a window on to a past earth. And each one of these is a small, tiny little window on to part of that. Sometimes the stories inside them might be hard to translate, and sometimes of very little or niche interest! But in many instances, put together you get a broader picture of the way the planet operates through looking through these little vessels of history that are left around on the surface.

The basic definition of what a pebble is, is a piece of rock that's between 2 and 64 millimetres in diameter. It's nothing more complicated than that, it's based entirely on size – not material, not shape, only on size.

9'12" KETTLE'S YARD

MUSIC: "Sunday Morning" from Four Sea Interludes (Peter Grimes, Opus 33a) – Benjamin Britten

ANDREW: Here we are, in Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, England – and everywhere are pebbles! The more we look, the more you could really go round Kettle's Yard and pretty much only look at the pebbles! You can't really miss pebbles from the moment you come in. And what is that? Two pebbles – one with a very obvious hole in it, leaning against the whitewashed

wall, looking like a very minimal Barbara Hepworth – below it, we have another pebble with white..... (FADES INTO MUSIC / BELL)

BELL FX...

SABRINA: Hello, welcome everyone, do come in...!

ANDREW: I'm Andrew Nairne, I'm the director of Kettle's Yard at the University of Cambridge.

SABRINA: ...if you'd like to make your way into the sitting room...

ANDREW: Kettle's Yard is a beautiful house that's been open since 1957, created by somebody remarkable called Jim Ede.

JIM EDE – INTRODUCTION (1973) – FROM RECORDED INTERVIEW:

"Kettle's Yard might be called a museum, for there are a great many pictures, and much sculpture. But there are also a lot of pebbles."

ANDREW: Jim valued pebbles enormously – and he said: "pebbles are as important as anything else". And, we know Jim Ede, so he means anything else in the world!

SABRINA: ...hello! Welcome to Kettle's Yard everyone...

ANDREW: He also said "you find a perfect pebble only once in a generation".

SABRINA: ...Jim and Helen Ede lived here from 1957 to 1973...

ANDREW: By the time he created Kettle's Yard, him and his wife Helen Ede were in their 60s, they'd had an extraordinary life, lived through WW1 and WW2, living in Tangiers, Morocco and France, actually very international. But also Jim was already famous, or known, because he was really the first modern art curator at the Tate Gallery in London in the 20s and 30s. And it was at that point that he met Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore, Ben Nicholson, and many of the most exciting of the avant garde British artists. Now, those very artists were also extremely interested in pebbles! And, interested in the sense that pebbles were found sculptures – these were naturally beautiful objects. And in a way, the challenge for the sculptor, for Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, was to make something that was somehow worthy of the pebble, something that could even be seen as matching the quality of the found pebble.

MUSIC: Baltic Fleet – Pebble Shore

SABRINA: Jim started collecting modern art in the 1920s...

ANDREW: Pebbles for that generation of artists, after the First World War, were in some senses an inspiration for the simplicity of their modernist forms. So they were looking at these pebbles, among other things, as a way of trying to strip out the gloss and virtuosity of

the Edwardian period, and trying to make the world anew after this horror of the First World War. How can we get back to nature, how can we get back to simplicity, how can we make sculpture that speaks to people about a new era?

SABRINA: ...stones and shells and pebbles and driftwood and fossils, and as you go round the house...

ANDREW: We're standing in Jim Ede's small bedroom, just through from the sitting room – and on the table we have the Spiral of Pebbles. The Spiral of Pebbles at Kettle's Yard has become quite famous in its own right. And they start on the outside as small, and become larger and larger, but incredibly gradually, as you move towards the centre of the spiral...

JIM EDE (on the Spiral of Stones) (1973) – FROM RECORDED INTERVIEW:

"These are pebbles I picked up on a Norfolk beach. You have no idea how hard it is to find a really spherical pebble, round as a billiard ball, one of which we have at Kettle's Yard. I made this spiral in 1958, really as a way to see the stones without taking up too much space – perhaps an example of necessity as the mother of invention."

ANDREW: We have this wonderful small pebble, carved by one of the collaborators, Ian Hamilton Finlay, a great Scottish artist. The carved inscription says, and this is just as you walk into Kettle's Yard – *"Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, England, is the Louvre of the Pebble"*.

SABRINA: People notice the tranquil calmness of the place, and the natural things, the pebbles. The natural things, to Jim, were as important and as valuable as the paintings. And how the two things relate to each other and harmonise.

ANDREW: There's a final thing that Jim says late in life about pebbles, which I do think is rather profound: "it is salutary that in a world rocked by greed, misunderstanding and fear, it is still possible and justifiable to find important the exact placing of two pebbles".

SABRINA: My name is Sabrina Rippon, and I've worked at Kettle's Yard for 20 years, and it seeps into your blood, this atmosphere. I go home, I arrange a mantelpiece at home, and I think, oh, Jim would like that – perfect! And my husband comes along with his rock samples, and puts them everywhere, and it's gone! You know?! The whole thing is a clutter!
(LAUGHS)

MUSIC: Ella Fitzgerald – Gotta Pebble In My Shoe

FX – WALKING ON SHINGLE

14'20" ALEX WOODCOCK

ALEX: Anyone can connect with pebbles. You can bring to it whatever you like, and it can connect you to science, art, literature, whatever your interests are, they're a starting point for all of that kind of thinking and exploration.

It's a sunny, very blustery day in March, high tide, tide's just going out I think. And just walking down to the beach we've already found a few holed stones...

I'm Alex Woodcock, I'm a writer and stone carver, and here we are in Bexhill on the coast of Sussex.

Oh, is that – that's a good one – that's your sea sponge fossil, cos it's got a little dent at the bottom. And it's almost perfectly spherical. So, good find!

Holed stones we get quite frequently along these beaches around Bexhill, Hastings, Eastbourne. They're known as hag stones, or witch stones, or adder stones, depending on what part of the coast you're from, and this is associated with their longstanding connection with the supernatural, specifically to ward off evil, and forces of the occult. And there's something about it as a connector to other worlds – the folklore is, if you look through the hole in the stones you're supposed to be able to see other kingdoms.

Ah yeah – see, there's one with a little stone in... KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK... this is what I did with the other one, and I broke it – the one that I glued back together! (laughs) So, try to be very careful to get the tiny little stone that's wedged into it out – but there we are, that's almost come out. That's quite a nice one, that!

They've had numerous uses, as far as I understand. There was a writer, a Sussex writer called Cecile Woodford, who wrote about holed stones being used for healing purposes – so in a kind of a Shamanic way, to remove illnesses from people. And I guess this relates to this idea that they're a boundary, a stone on the boundary between this world and another world.

FX FADES OUT

I've got really selective about what I pick up from the beach now, and if it doesn't look like a miniature Barbara Hepworth sculpture. I'm kind of not interested!

What was that thing Barbara Hepworth said about, when you go for a walk, especially on the coast, and you pick up a pebble and you hold it in your hand for the day, and it makes sense to be holding that pebble, and then that pebble comes with you for a bit of your life...

(FADES INTO)

BARBARA HEPWORTH – from 1961 BBC TV film:

“Many people select a stone or a pebble to carry for the day. The weight and form and texture, felt in our hands, relates us to the past, and gives us a sense of a universal force. The beautifully shaped stone, washed up by the sea, is a symbol of continuity – a silent image of our desire for survival, peace and security.”

MUSIC: “Sunday Morning” from Four Sea Interludes (Peter Grimes, Opus 33a) – Benjamin Britten

17'30" SANDRA FRESHNEY

SANDRA: "...washed up by the sea, is a symbol of continuity – a silent image of our desire for survival, peace and security."

That's lovely – that sort of sums up how I feel, in many ways.

I'm Sandra Freshney, and I'm the archivist at the Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences at the University of Cambridge. And...I do love my pebbles!

When you pick up a pebble, you sort of naturally feel "grounded" – and it brings you back to reality in a way.

This one – just holding it – it's just so calming. And for me, a lot of collecting that I do is, is for my mental health in many ways, it keeps me quite calm. (laughs) And it's very mindful, I find it very therapeutic.

Erm, I've always been a very anxious person, ever since I was a young schoolgirl. Um, and I had anxiety growing up. And... I knew from a very young age that life can change, really, in a moment. Sadly I had a brother I never knew, who passed away a few years before I was born. And so, I was very conscious of that growing up, which I think in some ways led to me wanting to collect things, and to preserve and remember. So I think a lot of that probably comes from that knowledge.

And then growing up I've, I've had episodes – and, back then we didn't really talk about that kind of thing, but as I've got older obviously people talk a lot more about mental health, which is fantastic. We all have good days and bad days. I've had depression a couple of times in my life, and I'm still managing my anxiety, but one of the ways that I manage my anxiety is definitely pebbles. Definitely, yeah.

When you pick up a pebble it just reminds you of your – in some ways your insignificance, but also of your significance as well, and what you're then maybe capable of doing.

FX CHESIL BEACH

That sound is so powerful, so loud! And you're hearing the water coming over, and then back again, and then up again – it's so strong and powerful isn't it? And yet, these little pebbles, they're just these little tiny things!

20'00" THE RULES

ALEX: I don't know what the rules are on gathering pebbles – I certainly don't hang on to them, I sort of use them to think with, and think about, and as pieces to think about for sculpture or writing projects, things like that. So, they play a very valuable part in my

imaginative life – but they do get returned, fairly frequently. So you know, I don't think I'm contravening any (LAUGHS) laws! ... (WHISPERS) I hope not!

MUSIC: MJ Hibbett – The Pebble and the Boulder

NEIL: There's definitely signs posted at Budleigh Salterton that say you shouldn't take pebbles from the beaches – I believe that's resulting from the 1990s when people were taking huge amounts of pebbles to put in their gardens. So, there's definitely laws in certain parts of the country that say, do not take pebbles from these beaches. Pebbles are important components of coastal beach systems. So, if pebbles are in a place, they'll be doing something to buffer against the effects of waves and storm damage and wind damage.

21'10" PEBBLE DASHING

JOHN: In Scotland, we probably suffer the worst weather in the whole of the UK, and so as a result a large amount of our buildings are protected by an additional layer of material that we refer to as "rough cast" – it's commonly referred to down south as "pebble dashing".

FX – TROWEL SCRAPE

JOHN: My name's John Heenan, I'm one of the plastering lecturers at the City of Glasgow College...

ROBBIE: My name's Robbie Blake, and I'm a plastering lecturer here at City of Glasgow College, and we're here to throw pebbles at the wall!

ROBBIE: Eh, we've got a bit of render on the wall, ready for pebble dashing – just waiting on it tightening up a wee bit, before we throw some pebbles at it!

JOHN: The chips I'm holding at the moment, are about 4mm-6mm. And some of them are whiteish, some are fairly golden in colour. They look in the hand like very rough oatmeal. So in actual fact, if you're preparing porridge, realistically what I have in my hand is what would be referred to as a very rough grade oatmeal.

ROBBIE: So – the material's been applied, and we're going to apply a layer of the chips... working round the edges, and then into the centre...

FX THROWING STONES

JOHN: The idea is that that the whole thing should start to amalgamate into one surface, where the different textures and colours start to blend into one another. The idea is not for it to look rough, the idea is for it to be decorative, easy on the eye, and therefore not to have any aspects that attract your specific attention.

FX THROWING STONES

JOHN: Pebble dashing, it's an ancient craft, in terms of the physical hand skills and the techniques that are used have been around for a very very long time. But, we still teach it, we still practice it.

ROBBIE: There is a technique, and there is a practice, and it usually just takes a bit of practice.

MUSIC: MJ Hibbett – The Pebble and the Boulder

FX THROWING STONES

JOHN: When it comes to domestic dwellings, certainly within the West of Scotland here, I would say that potentially as much as 70 or 80 per cent of the properties do have pebble dashing, a rendering system of one type or another.

FX THROWING STONES

ROBBIE: We're getting paid to throw stones at walls, and round about windows!

BOTH: That'll do... yeah, that looks good!

24'00" POEM – DOVER BEACH (extract)

SANDRA READS:

"Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in."

SANDRA: That's from "Dover Beach", by Matthew Arnold, 1867 – wow! That sounds like Dover! (laughs)

MUSIC: Jenna Reid – Su-a Song

SANDRA: I haven't been to Dover for a long time, but it takes me back actually, yeah.

FX WAVES, WALKING, RUNNING, GATHERING

24'55" FINAL BIT

ALEX: Plenty of people have been drawn to the coast at particular moments in their life. And I think there is some comfort in geology – it outlasts us. Our lifespans, compared to the lifespan of this holed stone, are vastly different. This has lasted, or been created, millions

and millions of years ago, and is still kicking around on the beach. I think if you ARE kind of faffing about in your life, the beach is a good place to come, because it's just – ok, I should be getting on with something, these things are here, and have been here for millions of years, and it just confronts you with that.

FX WAVES

MARGARET: I find that – that rhythm that goes on, when you're just lying on the beach after a swim, and you're just hearing that – it's very therapeutic. It's very... one never tires of it, it's endless, and it's quite, it can be emotional, depending on your mood and various things. There's something about it, isn't there, that's always there. (PAUSE) Well, I hope it's always there!

SANDRA: When you look at something like a pebble, and you can see what it is, and how beautiful it is, and the structures and the patterns – in some ways it's quite inspiring, to think, I could really, I could really do something exciting! (laughs) Sometimes it's quite empowering, when you look at the natural world like that. Cos I think we forget, as humans, how extraordinary we all are, and how unique we all are. And sometimes just picking up a pebble can remind you of that.

ALEX: It's a meaningless pebble, being washed around in the sea, like it has been for millions of years – but we bring the meaning to it. You know, the folklore is there, the stones are gonna long outlive us, the waves are certainly gonna continue pushing them about... so, it's what we bring to them, essentially, our own meaning.

27'33" ENDS

R4 OUTRO

'THE PEBBLE IN YOUR POCKET' was produced by Steve Urquhart. It was a Rosa production for BBC Radio 4 – and you'll find details of the music and poetry on our website.