

The Honorary Graduand: Steve England

Master of Science

I've loved the outdoors for as long as I can remember. Growing up in Bristol's Lockleaze, with Stoke Park and Wallscourt Farm as my back garden, I spent my childhood roaming those fields, woodlands and hidden corners of the estate. I'd head out at dawn and return when the street lights came on with pockets full of feathers, leaves and curious finds, my notebook crammed with sketches, tree cuttings and observations. Those long days building dens, teaching myself to light fires and learning bird calls set the course for everything that followed.

My fascination with the natural world led me to study horticulture with the RHS, adding formal training to years of self-taught exploration. As my wanderings expanded across the parks, green spaces and nature reserves of North Bristol, so did my interests, into ecology, local history, geology and eventually wild foods. The idea that I could forage a meal from the nature around me was irresistible. That curiosity grew into a broader understanding of how our local ecosystems sustain us through food, craft, fire, medicine, and connection.

Wallscourt Farm, in particular, has always held a special place in my work. Its hedgerows and remnants of old farm life are more than familiar ground; they're a living record of the people, practices and stories that shaped this part of Bristol. I believe it's vital that we remember and protect that heritage. Understanding where we've come from helps us value what we have now, and it strengthens the connection between community, land and history.

Around 20 years ago, I began sharing what I'd learned with friends, neighbours and my local community. Teaching quickly became one of the most rewarding parts of my life. Whether guiding people through local history, edible plants, explaining poisonous species, demonstrating fire-lighting techniques, identifying birds, butterflies and bats, or uncovering the deep history of North Bristol, I come alive when I'm in front of a group. Watching people light up as they learn something new never gets old.

Over the years, I've been fortunate to receive several awards for my work, but this one feels like the icing on the cake, something I never imagined achieving. It's a reminder of how far a childhood spent exploring the woods of Lockleaze can take you.

Today, I continue to teach, explore and champion the woods and fields that set me on this path. My work is rooted in a simple belief: nature isn't distant or remote. It's right here on our doorstep, waiting to be noticed, understood and celebrated. Sharing that with others isn't just my job; it's who I am.