

Labels

In the early 1980s I began to save the card labels that commonly came with bunches of watercress. As well as the grower's name and location, the roughly uniform strips would often state the watery conditions of 'purity', and 'coolness', necessary for commercial production and distribution. Each label—Kingfisher, Lustrepress, Sylvasprings—tethered the cress to a typical and identifiable landscape: a clay and chalk valley with water from a spring, or raised from boreholes, channelled to flow gently across wide beds of screeded concrete and gravel. Seen from above, these planned rectilinear forms impose upon and contrast with the undulating topography on the ground.



But some time recently such labels have disappeared, along with the rubber band, as the packaging of watercress has changed almost entirely to sealed plastic bags, chilled and loose, and kept fresh at fridge temperature. As with much cultivation, larger sites have been developed and many smaller farms have given up or been absorbed, the number of growers declining in response to the exacting demands of the centralised market. It became clear that there was finality to this collection of ephemera, as examples dwindled from occasional to almost none. No longer is it possible to identify and connect similarity and likeness; the diversity of layouts and colours—these printed landscapes—are now gathered and fixed to the activity and geography of their time.

A facsimile edition of the fronts and backs of thirty labels (shown here) was made in 2005 (*Bunch*, 52pp, 90 x 130, inkjet on white cartridge, brown cloth-covered casebinding, pasted label; 100 copies, Axminster, 2005); graphic versions published as 'English Handwriting Models', no.6: *Recto/Verso* (1998); and transcriptions of the texts included in *Distance etc.* (1999) and *Englishpublishing* (2004). The commentary above the entry 'Collection' in *Anticipatory history* (2011); and in *Printed landscape* (2019) along with greyscale versions of the fronts and the backs.

