

The Wizard of Oz in Somerset

Stepping through the gates of Somerset's reclamation yards is like walking into a real-life fantasy film

WORDS BY SAMANTHA WILSON

From every angle of these places statues and faces stare back, gargoyles of Medusa and giant cast iron lions peering out from the organised chaos of curiosities.

For decades these yards have rescued relics of the past, collecting everything from tiny iron farming implements to enormous bronze horses (and everything in between), and given them a new chance at life.

Reclamation yards are often associated with architectural salvage, where piles of flagstone flooring, roofing materials and old fireplaces await industrious developers. Yet a closer look reveals weird and wonderful collections of antiques,



Garden ornaments and quirky statues all find a home at Wells Reclamation

eclectic pieces and out-of-the-ordinary curios.

They are like haphazard museums and their curators like savvy collectors who dedicate their lives to ferreting out forgotten remains from across Somerset, the United Kingdom and the world.

To inventory the vast volume of items is impossible as Haydn Davies, owner of Wells Reclamation, expressed with a shrug when asked how many pieces he thinks are crammed into his five acre yard.

"How could I possibly know that?" he exclaims, gesturing around him at the tens of thousands of artefacts that are gathered in the open-air yard and jumble of buildings.

While beautiful vintage furniture, antique enamel signs and period fittings have more obvious functions, the family-run business certainly delights in the quirky. Through a forest of stone statues - from mythical gryphons to posing pigs, and busts of Elvis, Beethoven and Einstein - the truly bizarre rear their heads; a life-sized cast iron bull guards the entrance, a one tonne statue of the Thinking Man hailed from France, and even a 9ft-tall cast iron cockerel that makes guest appearances at the Glastonbury Festival. Joan d'Arc and Cleopatra stand alongside mermaids and Romans and an ark's worth of animals encircle sun dials, benches and stone pots. Even reclaimed doors are taken to a new level with an enormous pair of 18th century, ornate turquoise doors once belonging to an Indian fort on sale.

Perhaps the most unexpected sights to



While not for sale, 'Endeavour' the horse stands in Wells Reclamation as a tribute to the gallantry and sacrifice that horses have made to man throughout the years. It is made completely of reclaimed parts from around the yard

encounter in this fantastical corner of picturesque Somerset are the collection of military machines, amongst them a T34 Russian tank, a Cold War jeep and a World War Two anti-aircraft missile, which once protected the skies of London.

"I once found the body of a Spitfire on a farm in Wales" Haydn says of one of his many travelling forays (which have taken him to Russia, China and Eastern Europe). "The army never collected it after the war and it had chickens living in it".

According to owners, those who frequent the county's reclamation yards do so with open minds and creativity flowing. Antique commodes can become appealing chairs, church lecterns can make pious headboards and, according to Glastonbury Reclamation, an old pommel horse rescued from an abandoned local school makes a rather trendy addition to a dentist's reception room.

Like Glastonbury Reclamation, some yards specialise in local items, gathering relics from across Somerset and salvaging