

MELANIE COMBER

From this Land



21.12.2020 Winter Solstice (2022) H1200mm x W1700mm

The Walks Land Residency

SOLO EXHIBITION – MAY / JUNE 2022

GS

GALLOPER-SANDS

Fine Art & Artisan Crafts

www.gallopersands.co.uk

INTRODUCTION



Four Corners 3 (2022) H600mm x W800mm

This exhibition is the culmination of a year-long land residency with Melanie that followed the four seasons on one field at the farm called The Walks. During this twelve month period, Melanie visited the field at each of the four equinoxes, gathering notes, sketches, photographs and other material to take back to her studio. The residency traversed multiple lockdowns during the coronavirus epidemic of 2020 and 2021 - and one of the visits had to be done virtually through a live video-linked walk around the field.

The paintings that have appeared from the residency are magnificent. Some glisten and glow like gems - giving an imagined glimpse of morning light caught in frosted gulleys or the pale shoots of young crop plants. Others seem to dance with the grit of the sandy soil that makes up much of the field; or impart a sense of being airborne and gazing down on the land, be it from a microscopic elevation of millimeters or from a great height of hundreds of meters - from the air above or even from space.

They also feel symbolic of survival and revival : a celebration of Melanie's work as an artist and the ability of land and the arts to regenerate, hand in hand. Perhaps they also present agriculture in its truest sense - for the residency *From this Land* and Melanie's paintings unite farming and the arts in a very literal way. During the twelve month residency period The Walks field was home to large scale crops of sugar beet and fodder turnips. It also welcomed a new area of fallow for goldfinches, an experimental market garden, an osier bed and a flying flock of sheep - leaving their Golden Hoof behind. The field's cultivated and wild acres were also traversed by farm machinery, walkers, deer, hares, pheasants, rabbits, badgers and foxes all leaving their footprints behind.

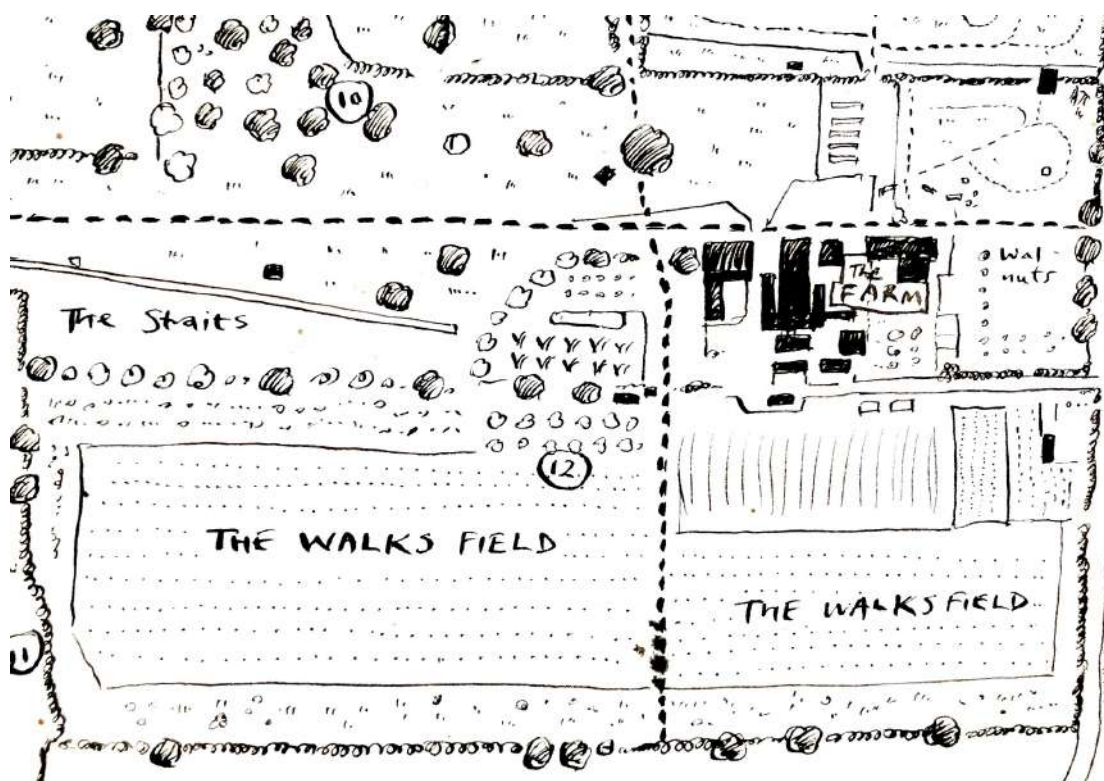
In one sense, the paintings which have arisen from the field through Melanie's residency have become another crop - and a very extraordinary and beautiful one. It is Melanie's largest solo exhibition for over a decade and we are delighted to be showing it here at White House Farm,

appropriately, in the early 19th century Threshing Barn : the building in which all the farm's most valuable cereal crops were once stored prior to threshing.

From this Land also marks a shift to a new way of being open at the farm. The lead-time for planning large public festivals was usually 8-10 months. During the winter of 2021/22 we didn't feel sufficiently sure of what lay ahead to plan for an ordinary Alde Valley Spring Festival. After two years of being in an emergency survival mode, it felt best to do something quieter and more rooted. Hence the Galloper-Sands Residencies - and quiet year round exhibitions. It is a delight to step into this way of being with this truly wonderful exhibition.

Jason Gathorne-Hardy. 2ND May 2022. White House Farm, Great Glemham.

MORE ABOUT THE WALKS FIELD



Every field on the farm has a name. The Walks is one of the largest : a broad expanse of soft, flinty sand and sandy loam that sweeps across the horizon north of the farmyards. Its agricultural mapping code is Field TM 3562 2815 and it embraces 22 acres of land. Almost all of this was cultivated until 2009, when White House Farm, as part of a larger family owned farming business called Great Glemham Farms, entered a ten year Higher Level Stewardship agreement with Natural England. This helped finance the introduction of a wide range of conservation projects, all designed to boost biodiversity and restore landscape features.

On the The Walks, these interventions included the creation of a 6m grassy margin around the field, a new one acre woodland and two acres of Wild Bird Seed Mix : an annual crop of millet, mustard, fodder radish, triticale, sunflowers and *Phacelia* planted to provide food for

songbirds in the winter months, with nectar in the summer for pollinating insects. In 2016 a 6m grass margin planted along the northern edge of the field was attracting skylarks – the first I had ever heard singing over the farm. Their song, drifting down from the summer sky above the field felt like an adornment or blessing upon the land. But it was fleeting – there was not enough grass for the birds to safely nest in.

The following winter, we hand-seeded an extra 24m x 390m strip along the north edge of the field with drought tolerant wildflowers and grasses to create a much larger area of rough grassland. The skylarks came back and they now seem to be nesting there – whilst moths and other insects have returned in abundance. On another part of the field, we are teaming up with teacher and gardener Arthur Hobhouse and permaculture adviser Nigel McKean to explore market gardening for vegetable boxes and to test small plots of new food crops. Other areas have welcomed a tree nursery, an osier bed and a patch of fallow arable land set aside for goldfinches. In the meantime the remainder of the The Walks – a great sweep of free-draining sandy soil - is cultivated for crops grown by arable contractors FS Watts.

It is into this farming context that Melanie was invited for a year long Land Residency at White House Farm to observe, reflect and interpret the landscape on and around The Walks field. It follows on from a previous year long residency *Field TM 3562 2815* with the artist and bronze caster Kabir Hussain in 2016/17; and co-incided with a Wool Residency *Across the Plough* with wool researcher and artist Sarah Butters to explore folk lore and oral history associated with ploughing, through wool work using fleeces from the farm's small flock of sheep. Melanie's residency culminates with this magnificent Solo Exhibition of her work as part of our 2022 Galloper-Sands Spring Programme.

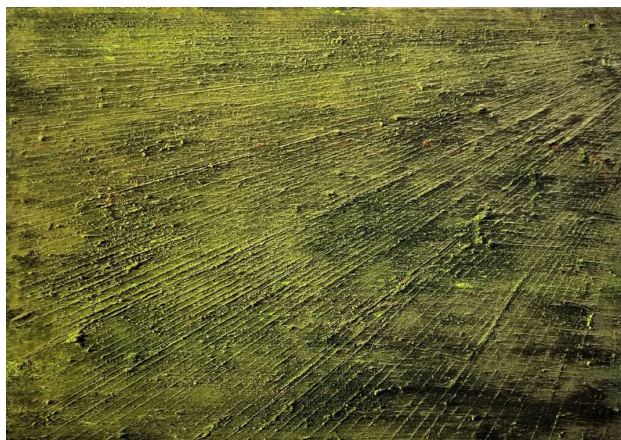
ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I was invited to work on a one year land residency at White House Farm during a year which has changed us all forever. Beginning the project between Covid lockdowns in the autumn of 2020, during a time when personal freedom was compromised and a fear of infection was ever present. The residency generously provided me with a way out of the smallness of the lockdown space that I had created for myself and gave me an opportunity to create work and have a reason to focus when it felt as though my everyday life had been tipped upside down. The opportunity to explore this large expanse of open field was emotionally heightened as a direct result of the events which were happening at that time. Reflecting now upon that time feels like another world, we have all moved on.

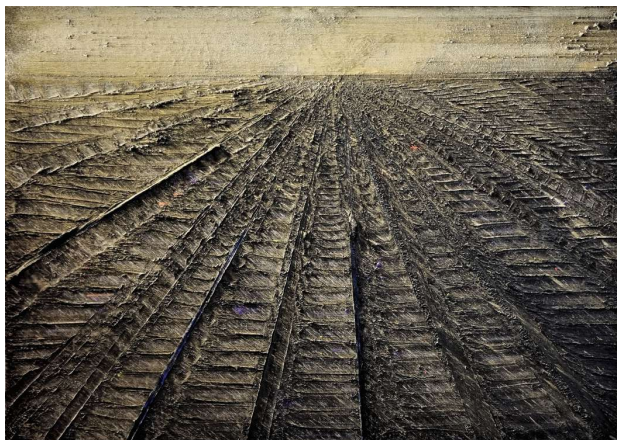
Preparing for the exhibition, and viewing the body of works that I made during, and as a result of this period, now act for me as a contained time capsule. The works are monuments to a moment in time. My recollections pinned down, my thoughts of that time captured. I hope the show will act as a visual diary of four designated visits and the four points of solstice and equinox across a planted field, spanning a one year period during a year that we will never forget.

Four large paintings provide the backbone to the show. For me, they embody the experience encountered during the four specific events, sketchbook drawings and the diary that I wrote after each visit influencing my mark making and shaping of the work made later in my studio

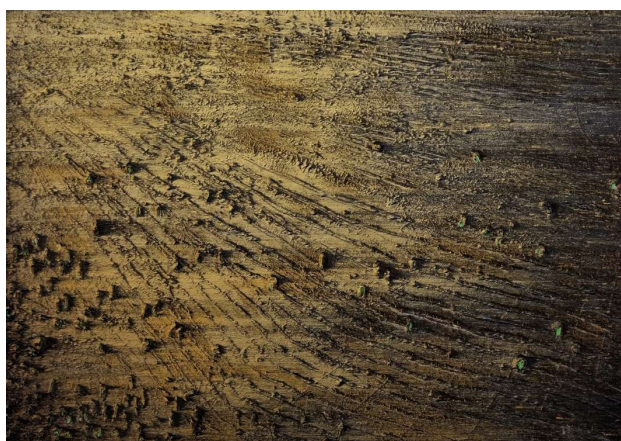
in London. The titles reflect the dates of the four experiences. I want these works to be about large expanses of space, overwhelming landscapes where one is not entirely sure about scale.



22.9.2020 Autumn Equinox



21.12.2020 Winter Solstice



20.3.2021 Spring Equinox



21.6.2021 Summer Solstice

Four smaller paintings ‘*Four Corners*’ record smaller events in the field: the scratching of an animal hoof or the curved line of the edge of a crop, the direction of the wind, or the sense of a captured sound, birds flying directionally overhead, ploughed tracks across soft turf. Five landscape shaped works on paper, *Legacy*, lean towards stories about this place. A family has lived here for several generations and their history, influence, and mark making is everywhere in this landscape. Although the space is vast, there is an intimacy to it. And a series of small works on paper, *From This Land*, attempt to capture so many glances of things happening at any one time in the field. Wild flowers, wet soil, dead animals, fallen sticks, pebbles and rubble, new shoots, rabbit droppings, thistle stalks, shiny beets, and shoots of growth from the spring to the gradual decay in the winter. Tiny fragments which all come together to make a much bigger picture.

Melanie Comber. April 2022.

ARTIST'S NOTES

April 2021

As a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, I decided to follow Government guidelines and work from home as much as possible last year. I have a process based method for making my work in my studio in London and I have spent the past year adapting that process to fit within my domestic setting, mainly working outdoors in the garden and, during the winter, in a pop up tent.

The opportunity to research and work on a land based residency was something that I seized with both hands. At a time when the space that I inhabited seemed restricted and contained, here was an opportunity to explore a large open expanse of land and use that experience as subject matter for an exhibition.

I immediately decided that I wanted this project to be different. I wanted it to be more specific in its subject matter than I would normally allow my work to be. The specification for the residency was that it was to be based upon one field and therefore I decided that I would make four contained, designated 'visits' upon the four dates of the The Autumn Equinox, The Winter Solstice, The Spring Equinox and the Summer Solstice throughout a one year period.

The specified area to which the work will directly relate is a field called 'The Walks', a 22 acre field which is divided into different sections of usage and has the ancient titles of Upper, Middle and Lower Walks. Alongside a main crop, the edges of this space are used throughout the calendar year as more experimental areas, with trees, wildlife schemes, market gardening and wild flower meadows bordering the perimeter.

As a result of this, the event of taking a walk around the area presents a mixed experience of viewing and recording growth, land formation and it reminds me of being rather like the way one might divide a painting space, as an experience of different surfaces coming together. Multiple events occur at the same time, Lines are created by animals and agriculture.

I have included my diary notes for the four main paintings across the year.

I decided that each visit would involve me walking around the entire perimeter of the field, preferably at the exact moment of the solstice or equinox. The enormity of that moment, time passing, seasons changing all weighing upon my thoughts.

During the experience of walking around the field so far, I have made notes, collected leaves, flowers or stones and taken photographs. The purpose of this information-gathering is to capture an experience, that I can then reflect upon when I return to my working space. These notes might reflect the way I am feeling, small sketches will help locate an idea to create the structure for a painting, gathered aide memoire that I might find in the space will help jog my memory and provide a lovely surprise when I open my notes upon returning home. Written notes will inform the titles of the works. I want to make four large paintings that will form the core of a solo exhibition at the end of this working period and a number of supporting works which will each relate to the experience of place at any one moment in time.

ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUE OF WORKS



22.9.2020 *Autumn Equinox*

Oil and Pigment on Canvas

H1200mm x W1700mm

£10,500

ARTIST'S DIARY

September 22nd 2020 Autumn Equinox 2.30pm

The field was awash with yellows and greens, The ploughed lines of the crop resemble an athletic track, the vegetation producing repeated horizontal lines as far as the eye could see. The shadows are long and the sun shines, allowing me to be in short sleeves. I collect wild flowers and press them in my sketchbook. I make notes about the weather, the plants, and some stories of the past, largely based on the poplar trees, which provide magnificent horizontals against the edge of the land. The earth is dry and loamy in texture. I leave the field with notes, photographs and pressed flowers to reflect upon when I am back in the studio. Soon after returning, Kent is placed into Tier 4 and I am forced to make work in the garden on paper.



21.12.2020 Winter Solstice

Oil and Pigment on Canvas

H1200mm x W1700mm

£10,500

ARTIST'S DIARY

December 21st 2020 Winter Solstice 10.02 am

Full lockdown, I am unable to travel to the farm. I feel disorientated and angry. Jason tells me he will call me and walk the field for me and relay all the information that he can via a video call. He wades across mud to reach the field at the moment of the solstice. I rapidly make notes and sketches to hang an idea of a painting upon. He describes the action of the grazing sheep and their movement across the land. He explains to me the sounds of the birds and the wind direction. The earth looks wet and dark and the carved lines in the soil are wide and gaping. This creates a very vivid experience even though I am not there in person, and this will hugely influence the painting . It is a magical experience, and lifts the darkness.



20.3.2021 Spring Equinox

Oil and Pigment on Canvas

H1200mm x W1700mm

£10,500

ARTIST'S DIARY

March 20th 2021 Spring Equinox 9.37am

Still in lockdown, but able to travel for work, and using the excuse of delivering work to the farm, I visit, although not early enough to capture the 9.37 am deadline. I make my walk around the field. We now have a new puppy, and his fur is the colour of the ploughed earth; a dry madder brown. The field has been emptied of crop and there are huge tractor lines across its surface. I make notes, and collect leaves, I write down how I am feeling as this will influence the work. I feel like it's very difficult to experience so much space after being restricted at home for so long. I hadn't anticipated the range of emotions that I would feel throughout this period with regards to the confinement of lockdown and the overwhelming experience of space during these visits. This time, I find it hard to really look .. as though I have grown lazy while being at home. I force myself to really breathe and to let the space in. On returning, I make works on paper in the pop up tent in the garden.



21.6.2021 Summer Solstice

Oil and Pigment on Canvas

H1200mm x W1700mm

£10,500

ARTIST'S DIARY

June 21st 2021 Summer Solstice 04.31am

The final visit will be on June 21st 2021 Summer Solstice

We stay at the farm in order that I can wake to view the dawn,. It is the first time that we have been away from home for many months. Creeping out across the farm with my drawing book in hand and my clothes on top of my pyjamas, I set up a camping chair in the middle of the field. I feel high expectation of what the dawn might bring. Rather than the explosion or breaking of light that I have long hoped for, my experience of the dawn becomes entirely about the build-up of sound from the birds. I can feel their anticipation and excitement as a wave of sound which swells until the moment of the dawn passes and the new day floods in. Small hoof prints scar the soft earth beside me in the rows between the crop and a gradual progression of light highlights the rows and rows of planted vegetation. It's an overcast day. I have completed the circle.



Four Corners 1

Oil and Pigment on Canvas
H600mm x W800mm
£4,250



Four Corners 2

Oil and Pigment on Canvas

H600mm x W800mm

£4,250



Four Corners 3

Oil and Pigment on Canvas

H600mm x W800mm

£4,250



Four Corners 4

Oil and Pigment on Canvas

H600mm x W800mm

£4,250



Legacy 1

Oil and Pigment on Paper - Framed

H300mm x W800mm

£1,500



Legacy 2

Oil and Pigment on Paper - Framed

H300mm x W800mm

£1,500

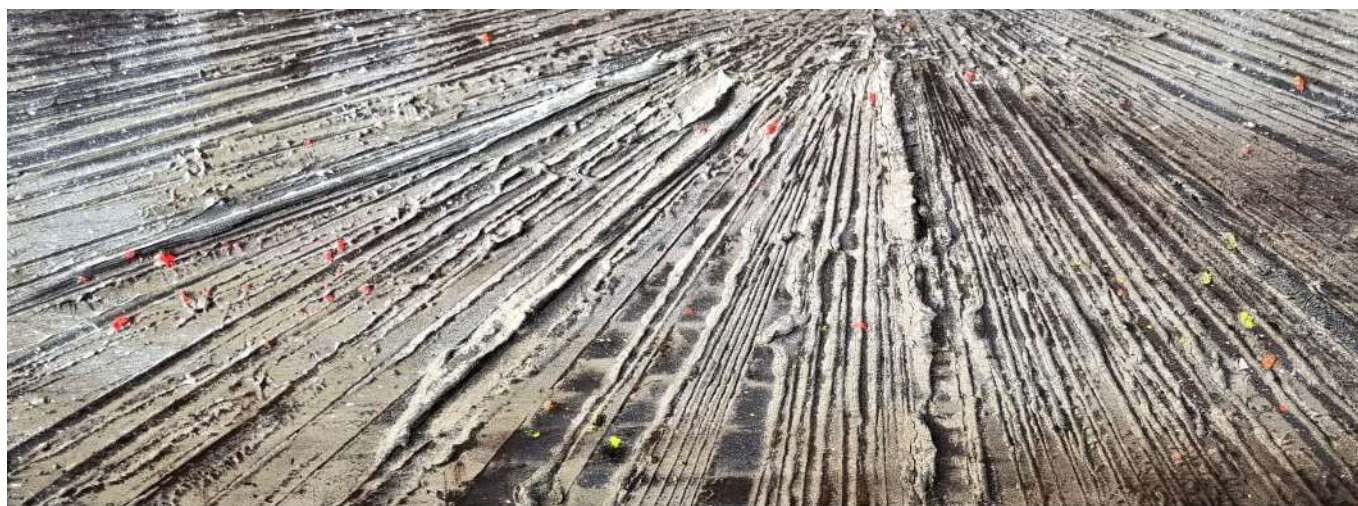


Legacy 3

Oil and Pigment on Paper - Framed

H300mm x W800mm

£1,500



Legacy 4

Oil and Pigment on Paper - Framed

H300mm x W800mm

£1,500



Legacy 5

Oil and Pigment on Paper - Framed

H300mm x W800mm

£1,500



From This Land 1

Oil and Pigment on Paper - Framed
H180mm x W300mm
£500



From This Land 2

Oil and Pigment on Paper Framed

H180mm x W300mm

£500



From This Land 3

Oil and Pigment on Paper - Framed

H180mm x W300mm

£500



From This Land 4

Oil and Pigment on Paper - Framed
H180mm x W300mm
£500



From This Land 5

Oil and Pigment on Paper - Framed
H180mm x W300mm
£500



From This Land 6

Oil and Pigment on Paper - Framed

H180mm x W300mm

£500



From This Land 7

Oil and Pigment on Paper - Framed

H180mm x W300mm

£500



From This Land 8

Oil and Pigment on Paper - Framed
H180mm x W300mm
£500



From This Land 9

Oil and Pigment on Paper - Framed

H180mm x W300mm

£500

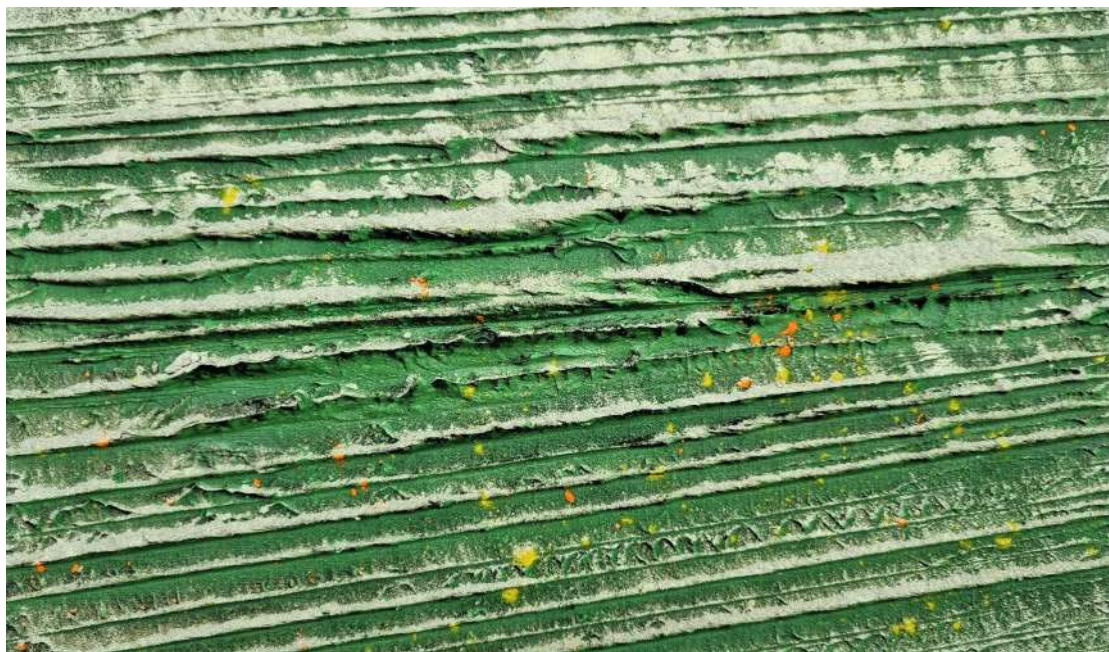


From This Land 10

Oil and Pigment on Paper Framed

H180mm x W300mm

£500



From This Land 11

Oil and Pigment on Paper Framed
H180mm x W300mm
£500



From This Land 12

Oil and Pigment on Paper - Framed

H180mm x W300mm

£500



From This Land 13

Oil and Pigment on Paper Framed
H180mm x W300mm
£500



From This Land 14

Oil and Pigment on Paper - Framed

H180mm x W300mm

£500

Galloper-Sands is the online gallery for The Alde Valley Spring Festival Ltd

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