

Creative Decommissioning

artworks on
Chatterley Whitfield
West Burton
Fawley



Urban Wilderness
Dana Olărescu
Chu-Li Shewring and Adam Gutch

with

Ben Anderson Matthew Kelly Ceri Morgan
Katrina Navickas Ian Waites

About the project

Creative Decommissioning came out of companion projects, Decommissioning the Twentieth Century and Planning Creativity, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Led by Dr Ben Anderson, the projects aimed to find ways of involving local people in communities affected by the decommissioning of large industrial facilities as the UK adopts different ways of generating power. The focus was on three sites at different stages in the decommissioning process: Chatterley Whitfield Colliery in Stoke-on-Trent, West Burton power station near Gainsborough, and Fawley power station near Southampton.

We know that buildings and other features that might have been controversial and contested when first constructed can become loved landmarks for workers, residents and visitors of and to a region. Decommissioning the Twentieth Century and Planning Creativity sought to offer spaces for sharing emotions, memories, stories, and thoughts about what should happen in or to the sites in the future.

Covid-19 forced a redesign of certain aspects of the projects, as social restrictions and isolation measures meant that the workshops originally planned could not take place. Instead, three artworks were commissioned – one for each site.¹ Here, the artists involved in those commissions share some of their thoughts and experiences of working on the projects, and with local communities near Chatterley Whitfield, West Burton and Fawley.²

Ceri Morgan

¹ Urban Wilderness, a partner on the project from the outset, were commissioned to select and recruit the artists for the West Burton and Fawley sites.

² Based on interviews I undertook with the artists in 2021 and 2022.

Chatterley Whitfield

The site

The complex of pithead winding gear, offices, fan housings and workers' service structures that stand over the Whitfield Valley in Stoke-on-Trent constitute the 'most comprehensive example of a deep mine site in England' (Historic England). The heritage here is multi-layered, with structures both above and below ground mirroring the history of coal since at least the late eighteenth century, while the site has a unique story of memory innovation – a museum that featured both real and 'fake' descents into the workings themselves ran from soon after the colliery's closure in 1977 until 1993, and an impressively active 'bottom-up' heritage centre led by the Chatterley Whitfield Friends, who are key partners on Decommissioning the Twentieth Century.

Chatterley Whitfield forms an emotional anchor with the past for much of the region; an integral part of a landscape shaped by a long history of mining and industrial production in which Potteries residents have substantial pride. The Friends have salvaged its archive and many objects, establishing a visitor centre and organising site visits, but the site requires significant investment and careful management to assure its future. Though many of its buildings are either scheduled monuments or grade II/II* listed buildings, most are in a dangerous state of disrepair that has rendered the site largely inaccessible. Regeneration plans emerged in 1995, 2000, 2009, and the site is now the focus of a new, but unfunded 'vision' document. The Whitfield Valley, adjacent to the colliery, and the previous site of its railway and spoil tips, is now a valued nature reserve, and a small part of the area nearest the site entrance is home

to several businesses as well as the visitor centre, but the rest of the site has been neglected, to the benefit of some wildlife, but not local communities, such as Fegg Hayes, Chell, Norton and Ball Green.

Chatterley Whitfield's experience can tell us enormous amounts about past successes and failures of decommissioning. Its museum, and now heritage centre, demonstrate the wealth of feeling attached to these monuments, but also the challenges that emerge when protected structures are allowed to fall derelict. Unlike Fawley and West Burton, meanwhile, the challenge here is how best to involve local people and stakeholders in decisions about sites whose steady, and progressive, ruination has become normalised, and whose regeneration is not necessarily a priority for many living in their shadow.

Ben Anderson

The artwork

The Museum of Possibilities *Urban Wilderness*

As Urban Wilderness, the three of us work collaboratively and co-creatively in everything that we do, often based on a place. What we do is change behaviours, give performative acts of permission. It's really important for us that the activities we do happen face-to-face and in a space, so that the knowledge is discovered through action and through relationship. Although we carefully plan the parameters of what we're going to do, we want the knowledge, understanding and learning to come through an authentic, embodied experience of people in place, connected together. We always work in specific

sites, and they are often spaces which are accessible to the public. But they're often places in which, subconsciously, we have particular behaviour patterns. What we like to do is create a space where you just open up the possibility of different behaviours.

A lot of sites that we work in are fairly open spaces without structures and buildings. As Chatterley Whitfield is a colliery, it holds a lot of memories and heritage for people who live nearby. What attracts us to some of the other sites is that they can be interpreted as a bit of a blank canvas, a bit of creative – we use the word 'wasteland', so a bit of creative wasteland – but Chatterley Whitfield is almost the opposite. It's very structured, the buildings have got meaning, and while they don't have the same purpose any longer, the original purpose is still present in the site.

Chatterley Whitfield has ancient monument status from English Heritage, and several of the buildings on it are listed, which means that there's a legal imperative not to alter the buildings and not to alter the landscape. From that point of view, it is very different from some of the other spaces that we work in, which are devalued. At Chatterley Whitfield, there is a community, but it's the other side of the nature reserve, and the people in it are very aware of the hidden heritage there. What we're trying to do is bridge the gap. From within the nature reserve, you're aware of the site. It's very iconic on the skyline. People within living memory are linked to working on the site – it's still very alive.

The site was closed as a mine over 40 years ago. So, there are two generations of local residents that we've worked with who don't remember it as a functioning mine. There were a lot of stories about breaking into the site illegally, and that being a rite of passage for local children. There's that kind of folk narrative about it. There are ghost stories connected to the site. These are a bit problematic

with people who did work on the site, because there were deaths connected to the mine, and there is an understandable feeling that it's disrespectful to prioritise ghost stories over the memories of the real miners, and real lives that were lost here.

A lot of these things and the way we understand them come down to access. People want to be able to access this site, explore it themselves, experience it themselves. That's clearly not possible because of the safety of the buildings. That means that people start to interpret things and act in different ways, because they're processing not being able to access the site. We wonder how much of those urban legends and myths come out of that processing of this eerie, derelict, empty space that people aren't allowed to access. In general, there are often a lot of superstitions around the action of mining, going deep underground. I think the ghosts aren't necessarily seen as scary. Mining is a very dangerous profession!

Part of the community has lived near Chatterley Whitfield for many, many years and has all these memories, experiences and ties with family that worked in these sorts of industries. And another section of the community is transient and hasn't lived in the area for many years because the jobs have changed. The jobs have left and are in different places. So, the demographic is varied.

We titled our work, *The Museum of Possibilities*, partly based on the history of the site. It was once a colliery. Later, it was a museum. The museum was very much focused on the industrial heritage, and the practicalities of running a colliery. We really wanted to broaden that into the idea of a longer, geological timeframe, as well as exploring what the potential future of the site might be. So, we devised three different public interventions. The first was looking at the site in relation to a longer geological timeframe, connecting it to nature and what's there. The space around the colliery was a slag heap, and

has now been landscaped into a nature reserve-style park. We found some areas there where the slag is at surface level, so you can very clearly see the rocks and minerals and stones, which were the reason why the colliery was there in the first place.

The whole project was of us taking on different roles within the museum, so our first roles were as workers taking part in a dig. We knew, within the constricts of Covid, that what we did had to be – we wanted it to be – very clear. We didn't want to invite people in with a long explanation about what the site is and what the site means, so we used a kind of theatrical approach. We very obviously looked like we were some kind of workers, with hard hats and big yellow wellies, safety boots and wheelbarrows. We cordoned off an area of the nature reserve and set up various kinds of scientific models of doing an archaeological dig, and invited the public to come and explore the site to discover what was of interest to them. So, to keep it very open. There was a kind of establishment of: these are the rules and parameters of the world that we've created in this public space. The introduction was to allow people to become part of our world: they had a sticker for the Museum of Possibilities, and we gave them various equipment they could use. We talk about our work in these spaces very seriously – we have a very serious attitude towards play.

A child participant found that what was of interest to him was the snail shells – a huge amount of snail shells – on site. Our practice was embodied in the worker characters devised for the project, but also followed our principles of facilitating other people's creativity. So, we spent a long time exploring the potential of this site through the medium of the snail shell: ideas about how many snail shells we could find in a particular area of ground, why they might have been there, whether we could measure the site in terms of snail shells,

what the snail shell told us about the history of the site. Through a child's perspective, really lovely questions were brought up, like 'what was there first, the snail shells or the colliery?' And that has given us a lovely perspective, questioning the permanence of this industrial heritage. Once you start thinking about the longer geological timeframe, and nature, the industrial heritage becomes a passing, fleeting moment.

We were working with academics on the project. Academics specialise in that drilling down to the most specific thing that you can. We were following those principles of inviting people in to broadly explore the site and what was of interest, and then once they'd found that thing of interest, then to really follow that. We wanted the work to be comedic and funny, but at the same time, reflect how scientific knowledge or academic knowledge is explored and presented as a kind of overarching truth, when it's actually just picking up on a very tiny bit of information from a large body of knowledge.

How you present yourself makes a big difference. We thought a lot about how we were going to get a community, who essentially have no reason to talk to us, to want to talk to us. We really wanted to play with the power relationship, which occurs often between researcher and researched, especially when you're working with participatory work in communities, in that the power, the knowledge about what the project's all about, sits with the researcher, and that the person being researched is seen to just have to comply. We wanted to play with that. Our concept from the start was that we would present as people who were official through costume, but through our interactions, we'd make it very clear that we were idiots. So we would very quickly flip the relationship, and make sure that anyone who interacted with us was in the position of

telling us information that we didn't know. We wanted to play with that kind of officialness, to present as official through costume, yet to make sure that people we interacted with were in a position of knowing more than us, which in truth is actually often the way of participatory work.

The second element of our work that we wanted people to engage with was the colliery as a site. We've spent quite a lot of time there over the years. The voluntary group who maintain the site, Chatterley Whitfield Friends, are incredibly passionate about it, and we've learned a lot from them about what the buildings mean, and what the activities were that happened there. What we wanted to do was expand that to a non-traditional heritage audience. We wanted to bring people on site who wouldn't normally be there. We also wanted to see where there were different stories that we could encourage to come out about what the site means, rather than just the materiality and functionality of it. We put out a call-out to people to come on free tours, using images of ourselves looking comedic, so that we thought, 'well, this is going to appeal to people who are not after a massively serious heritage tour. This is going to appeal to a different kind of audience.' We arranged for there to be ex-miners there, who performed a living library for people who came on the tour, so that people could start to direct their experience of the tour a little bit; could find out information that was going to be of interest to them. And also: bring the experience of being in the site as a person, as a human being, a fully rounded human being with a family life, and all these other aspects of their life, onto the site.

We did bring in different audiences. We brought in an arts audience, who wouldn't have come there before, who really loved the beauty of the site, the decay of it, the fascination with the

unknown. There were some urban explorers who came with their professional photography equipment to document the site, because it's a really unique space. What we found was that people came with a whole bunch of different agendas. It was really lovely, giving the control of what happened there to the people visiting.

The site has a very particular problem, which is that it has been given ancient monument status, which means that you can't change it. You can't knock it down. You can't really preserve it, either. Its preservation is a state of slow decay. Artistically, that's a really interesting and beautiful thing to be able to see, but it also attracts quite a lot of contestation and different agendas. The heritage community want to preserve things. Stoke City Council, which owns the site, want it to become an economic hub in some way.

For stage three, we wanted to look at the future, do some work with young people. We went to a youth club where we've worked with young people before and presented them with the idea of what a museum could be. We went in mad scientist outfits, brought in trolleys with lots of arts and craft materials, and said, 'If you had a museum, what would you put in it?', to try and elicit from the young people what's important. The youth club is there on the landscape – the colliery is a really significant landmark. Members are children growing up in one of the most economically deprived areas of Stoke-on-Trent. Their perspective was incredibly beautiful – optimistic and lovely! They had a lot of ideas around homelessness, and whether a museum could be used to buy beds and food. They had some of their own aspirational desires around whether the museum could be somewhere you could put trophies and things that have happened that you're proud of. There was a general feeling about the museum being a place where the community could come together to do things they enjoy. There was an element of magic

that they wanted to have: wizards and wands and fairies. Quite a magical, beautiful place. But a very caring place. Caring for people, rather than things, was quite evident.



Urban Wilderness, *The Workers from The Museum of Possibilities*, 2021-2

Founded in Stoke-on-Trent in 2018, Urban Wilderness is an arts organisation run by co-directors Laurel Gallagher, Isla Telford and Jenny Harper. As a collective of artist practitioners we use costume and simple actions to disrupt public spaces and suggest alternative relationships between people, places and the environment. As a community interest company we share a vision of culture-led urban regeneration where wellbeing, environmental and economic sustainability are realised through people-led actions and transformational art experiences. Our values of collaboration, credibility and care uphold our approach, which is co-creative and socially engaged.

West Burton

The site

The power station at West Burton was built on the Nottinghamshire side of the River Trent, near to the market town of Gainsborough, Lincolnshire, between 1961 and 1969. West Burton is an iconic power station: not only was it the first 2000MW coal-fired station in Britain, it also ‘represented the first attempt to predict, in a comprehensive and systematic manner, the visual impact of a power station’.¹

The cooling towers, their associated chimneys and the turbine hall were all carefully and deliberately arranged within the site, and in relation to the predominantly flat agricultural landscape by the Trent, so that they would afford a variety of historically dramatic, formally abstract, and sometimes even picturesque elevations and effects from any vantage point. All this earned West Burton a Civic Trust award in 1968, when it was commended as ‘An immense engineering work of great style which, far from detracting from the visual scene, acts as a magnet to the eye from many parts of the Trent Valley and from several miles away’.²

Because of this, West Burton has become an established landmark and focal point for the people of Gainsborough and of the surrounding district. In addition to this, West Burton also had a part to play in the story of postwar Britain, and of a time when governments conscientiously planned for the future: in Gainsborough, a new council estate completed in the late 1960s had homes specifically designated for CEBG workers at West Burton; school friends in the late 1970s took up apprenticeships there after completing their GCSEs. But, and for obvious reasons in the time of a climate

emergency, coal-fired power stations are now being rapidly decommissioned and WB is due to be shut down and probably demolished by the end of 2023.

The visual and physical presence of West Burton within and across the Trent valley has, over time, led to a perception of familiarity and attachment for the local community. People seem to generally accept the need for coal-fired stations to be decommissioned and for cleaner alternatives of power generation to be used, but they also express the sense of loss they would feel if the power station was demolished, and if the cooling towers and chimneys disappeared from their horizon. So there are many questions to be asked here. What is the visual and imaginative impact of West Burton? How might the community feel if it comes to disappear? How far is West Burton a 'work of great style'? In what ways does it act as a magnet to the eye across its hinterland, and how differently does it appear from a number of vantage points? But also – in the final analysis – would the demolition of West Burton matter if, as one local person put it, 'it has not ALWAYS been there'.³

Ian Waites

¹ Jonathan Clarke, *'High Merit': existing English post-war coal and oil-fired power stations in context* (Historic England, London, 2013), p.46.

² *Keeping the lights on: Celebrating 40 Years of Electricity Production at West Burton* (EDF Energy, West Burton, 2009), p.18.

³ *Gainsborough Past and Present Facebook Group*, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/429691967471233>.

The artwork

How to Say Goodbye to a Power Station Dana Olărescu

I'm a socially engaged artist interested in issues of social and climate injustice. What I find is that people either work on one or the other – social injustice or climate injustice. When I saw the call out for the art commission, I thought that it might be the perfect intersection of those elements, where you could try to speak about climate justice while bringing in the communities who have suffered huge injustices in a particular landscape. What I was most excited about was creating a bridge between the conversations of the communities who never really have the opportunities to speak with stakeholders, and stakeholders who are often, unfortunately, uninterested in what local communities have to say about their projects and ideas.

I hadn't been to West Burton before. I was conscious of holding everyone's memories and understanding that these are very meaningful sites for people. But from a climate perspective, we can't get rid of these industrial monuments soon enough! I was really interested in that tension: what does it mean to hold all these feelings at the same time? We cannot use fossil fuels anymore, but these sites are so important for people.

I grew up in Bucharest, and I actually lived on a street with a power station. I remember looking at it from my bedroom window every day when I was a kid. I didn't really make much of it. My parents didn't explain what its function was. It was just sort of there, always part of the landscape. And, one day, it disappeared, and we hadn't been told; no-one had been told. The people who are literally the closest to these industrial monuments, who build special relationships to them, despite what the monuments' usage is,

are never really told what goes on. All I remember is that one day, they blew up the power station, and that was it! I really wished I'd had the opportunity to say good-bye or have some sort of closure.

On my first visit to Gainsborough, I simply tried to be the ears and eyes of the site. I'm against an extractivist way of drawing information out of people. It was a bit tricky to interact on the street during the pandemic: what I wanted to do was hand out flyers, but obviously there was an element of fear. It was a bit of a strange moment, but then the work developed into a series of in-depth conversations with people that would just happen at the place where I was staying, perhaps. And one person would know someone else, and I would end up speaking to that person. I also did a series of walks towards the power station.

My first idea for the project was to have a procession so that people could say goodbye, because what I found on those first few visits was that not many people knew that the power station was being decommissioned – they would hear it from me first. And I was just a stranger in the landscape. It seemed incredibly unfair. I wanted to find a route for us to walk from Gainsborough to the power station.

There's actually no way to go from the power station to Gainsborough by following the river. Yet everyone had said that they all remembered doing that walk from the town to West Burton. The path still looked like it was public, but it wasn't any more. In the end, the stakeholders at West Burton didn't allow me to go and visit. They kept saying, 'it's a pandemic. We're only allowing key staff'. By then, I'd found the communities to work with, but it seemed a shame.

I had conversations with people on the street or online. I was just trying to find out whether people were attached to West Burton, and that information was not coming out initially. Obviously, these

sorts of connections need to take a long time. Then I started running workshops. It was already maybe two months in, but that's how long socially engaged projects take. As soon as people started coming along, things were completely different – people shared their stories.

For participants to open up, they really need to build a relationship with the artist; it needs to grow over time. It takes a lot of work on both sides, and a lot of commitment. But I don't think you can do it any other way. I ran a series of workshops. These were all about mapping out memories, but also mapping out the future of the landscape, and how locals envisage this landscape in 100 years' time. Everyone was saying, 'the decommissioning is only happening next year, so people don't really have a reason to talk about it now'. But it ended up being a good preamble to other interventions in the decommissioning process by members of the community and community groups.

While working with participants, I realised that no one was really interested in a procession. It was something I brought into the project that had nothing to do with the site. I just switched the idea, turned it into a demolition party. I thought that what people would really want to do was to have a demolition party, where they could come and smash things, where community members would have the right to press the button, because they never really do. And also where they could reflect on renewal, and what that meant for their communities.

Always, with art projects, there's never really enough time. For me, it really boils down to holding the space for people to actually do whatever it is that they need to do in that space.

My question to participants was: 'would you like the building to stay and be repurposed? If so, what would you like it to be? Or would you like it to go?' Absolutely everyone said, 'we would like it to stay, because it's our building. But we would definitely like

it to be something else'. Participants had all these ideas, ranging from 'please give us homes for homeless people', to 'can we turn the site into a huge aquarium or a vertical gardening project?'

My work was all about just listening to the place. What is the place and where do people gather? How do people interact with the space? What is it? And how do you then adapt to that? I think everyone had all these incredible stories of community in relation to West Burton, which is something that doesn't really ever get talked about when it comes to these huge monuments to industrial heritage. No one ever wants to talk about the communities that were born on those sites.

I was asking participants what they would like, how they would use the space differently. People would just honestly come up with their craziest – or tame – ideas, everything from 'we should use it as a rave venue, and then people would put us on the map', to kids wanting to use it as a skate park. Everyone wanted a nature reserve. Locals wanted access to the lake in between the two power stations. They used to go and fish there. And in the past 10-15 years, they have not been allowed to. So, they just wanted that back. For some people, it was just these very simple things that could be put in place for them to enable them to feel like it was their space again.

Part of best practice is an understanding of what will happen to the work, where the work goes, and what the actual outcomes – for lack of a better word – are for the people who are participating. So, it's not just something you've done in that moment of time.

Dana Olărescu is a London-based, socially engaged artist with a focus on challenging minority exclusion and environmental injustice. Through participatory methodologies that democratise access to art and knowledge, she aims to give agency to underserved migrant groups so they can become active co-producers of culture.

POWER OF FUN

Waterslides into the lake,
where residents can also fish again



Dana Olărescu, *Power of Fun*, as part of *How to Say Goodbye to a Power Station* publication, 2022

Fawley

The site

In 1947, the British government made a compulsory purchase order for a large stretch of land on the west bank of Southampton Water. The land comprised approximately a third of the Cadland Estate, the remainder of which lies in the south-east corner of New Forest National Park. The Fawley oil refinery and industrial works were built on the site, followed in 1971 by an oil-fuelled power station. Cadland House, including parkland landscaped by Capability Brown and forty estate cottages, were lost to the development.

The site was chosen for its proximity to the refinery and the coast. Imported oil fuelled the boilers that heated the water that produced the steam that turned the generators. Enormous cooling pumps and the strong currents of Southampton Water meant cooling towers – and therefore a much later site – were not needed.

Despite the pride taken in the station's 2000-megawatt capacity, Fawley rarely worked at full capacity. Coal was cheaper – the timing of oil shock of the early 1970s could not have been worse – and the power station tended to be fired up when there were shortages in the national grid. Notoriously, it plugged gaps during the 1984-5 Miners' Strike, but perhaps its finest moment came in October 1987 when herculean efforts by power workers got the boilers fired up in record time after the Great Storm put much of the grid in southern England out of action. Despite this, the European Union Large Combustion Plant Directive (2001) ensured Fawley's demise. It was finally decommissioned in 2013, after a working life of a little over

forty years. The lifecycle of Fawley power station now seems emblematic. What, in the 1970s, was promoted as the UK's most efficient power station, was soon after condemned as its most polluting.

Like much modern energy infrastructure, the significance of Fawley power station was never just about power output. Its iconic chimney, used as a navigation aid by sailors in the Solent, circular control room, a favourite for Hollywood location scouts, and great glass façade, mirroring the cruise ships, gave the power station a commanding presence in local land and seascapes. Now, a new Fawley is in the offing. Hampshire County Council has granted planning permission for a fiercely ambitious masterplan to transform the site into a new business and residential complex, a new town according to the promoters. Fawley Waterside, fuelled by venture capital, promises a transformation just as significant as the high modernist, statist developments of the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

At the time of writing, only the control room remains, but like the chimney and the glass façade, it too faces demolition. All trace of the power station will soon be gone, though the pylons cutting their path through the New Forest will remain, carrying electricity imported from France. Attempts to make sense of the site's changing presence could not be timelier.

Matthew Kelly

The artwork

Fawley Adam Gutch and Chu-Li Shewring

Chu-Li: My background is as a filmmaker, but also as a sound designer. And I'm a lecturer at Goldsmiths University.

Adam: I'm the other half of the filmmaking team. I'm an artist filmmaker with a background in documentary.

Adam: We saw Fawley every day from going out on walks. We live on the Isle of Wight and it was there, just across the Solent. That 650-foot chimney was still visible even from miles away, and we were drawn to it because it was part of our landscape and our psychogeography. We were fascinated by what would happen when it suddenly disappeared from the skyline and how that would make people feel.

We love the idea of a building having a spirit: the spirit of all the people who worked at Fawley, but also a spirit from other people who lived and worked nearby in the shadow of the chimney.

Chu-Li: Every time we used to leave the island, we would drive through the New Forest and see this beautiful parallax movement of the refinery and the power station's chimney in the distance. That was always something that we would look out for.

I would say in our past projects, we tended to have a kind of fascination with nature, how to create nature documentaries in a slightly different way. The fact that Fawley is

surrounded by this area of outstanding natural beauty, but within it, there's this Brutalist presence – we were interested in that contrast. And also, the idea that things change. Fawley power station was built in the 60s and now it has gone, only 60 years later. So, landscapes change and nature changes with them. Generally, things just keep going. That's what we were interested in – this idea of how we perceive change. Actually, that's a very human-centric view of things. In our film, we try to flip that a little bit. There's this idea of the presence of change because of all the voices in the film. But what we see is almost oblivious to the whole thing.

Adam: When we featured human forms in the film, we deliberately made them very small in the frame, so their drama and thoughts play out on this broad canvas. There's a tendency for us to put ourselves at the centre of the universe, even though in the grand scale of things we're actually small and insignificant. And so, we often play with scale in the film. There are a few references to the cosmos and to energy and the power station. Even though it's a man-made thing, its origins are natural and cosmic.

The William Golding quotation at the start of the film: 'They've begun to sing', 'Have you never known a building sing before?'¹ – that's a question to get people thinking along the right lines, to ask the audience to consider whether there's a spirit or an agency within a building, within its physical structure.

¹ William Golding, *The Spire* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964).

Adam: It constantly moved me, talking to participants, how open they were, and their memories and how present those memories were in them still. Even though they hadn't worked there for a long time, they were so connected to that building. It was a spiritual connection, I think.

Chu-Li: Like what Adam is saying, you can draw these plans and they're still in our minds, but once a building is out, it's kind of away from us, especially when it's on a really big scale. When it comes to that stage, it's not that you worship it, but there's a slight reverence that physics allows this to happen, that you can build this huge structure and it's there, and it's there for all to see. There's something about being there for all to see that gives it some kind of power.

Chu-Li: One of the places that we loved when we were filming, Ashlett Creek, is this concrete area that became overgrown. It was where people camped while they were building the power station. And there was one section which was a runway. At the end of this runway, you saw the chimney, which really focused your eyes, and gave the landscape a focal point. Once the chimney disappeared, it just became another bit of derelict landscape. There was no focus there anymore.

Chu-Li: We knew that we wanted to use archive in the film. We were interested in the passing of time, and how we could use archive – the different textures, the quality of the footage – to help create that.

There was a long process of looking for visual archive. For Fawley itself, there was very little.

Chu-Li: We searched for archive material that somehow echoed ideas or complemented ideas that we had at the planning stage. Then we began filming.

Adam: First of all, there was a lot of telephoning and emailing. We were keen to avoid being a camera crew that descends, just takes what it wants, and leaves. We wanted to build relationships with people. We wanted to gain people's trust, to earn the right to ask questions, because we always felt the voices were going to be a backbone to the way we told the story of Fawley.

Adam: We knew where the story was going to end – with a demolition. We had this endpoint, which is always helpful, especially in documentary.

While Chu was researching archive, I went off to interview people. From early on, we liked this idea of voices in a landscape and of weaving a tapestry of voices in that landscape. So, we made the decision that we wouldn't film the interviews and we wouldn't bring a camera, which is quite bold because normally you'd film them. What really helped with that approach was being able to set up an audio recorder so you could sit with someone and have a real conversation without a camera in between you. You're talking eye to eye, and you can just let it roll. Hopefully, what comes across is that the conversations are natural and intimate. It felt quite brave at the time, because we hadn't done that before.

We knew archive and other filming was going to create the visual element – it wasn't going to be people's faces.

But we liked this idea of voices or really small human forms set against a wide landscape.

Chu-Li: The filming was very much an organic process. First and foremost, we were led by the interviews. We were forensic with the interviews, we would pick out sections, words – not just for what they were saying, but for rhythms and sounds. And we then picked sections that we liked, and started to organise them into themes, ideas, or feelings.

We would create a structure from the voices and then we would try, using archive, to think about what we needed to film.

Adam: The pandemic is an interesting factor too. All the conversations that we finally recorded were in people's gardens. On the soundtracks, you can hear birds and nature in the background, just because of where we were recording those conversations.

And because we were emerging from lockdown at the time, I think people were keen to talk and connect face to face, and that helped the project.

Chu-Li: I think participants were very happy to talk, sometimes getting quite emotional. Just sitting down and talking to someone was a bit of a release. It was very poignant.

Chu-Li: We were really sensitive to people being as natural as possible. With some people who are used to presenting, the performative voice comes out. I'm probably doing that now! But the people who don't have performative voices, who just talk normally, those are the interesting ones for us. Just very normal, natural. That's where the poetry is.

- Chu-Li: If you're worrying about both image and sound, you're not always present. What we wanted to do was to be really present when talking to people. You're not just thinking about the next question, you're trying to react and let the conversation go in the way that it needs to go.
- Adam: Being able to talk to people eye to eye with nothing in between was crucial. Also, the locations: recording in participants' gardens or somewhere they knew well and felt comfortable.
- Adam: The extent of the archive used was new in terms of our practice. We were careful not to use archive in a simply illustrative way. It had to create a mood and a feeling.
- Chu-Li: A lot of it is feeling, I suppose, trying lots of things out and playing, trying not to be too prescriptive.
- Adam: Another thing that was totally new was using a drone. We're slightly anti-drone in a way, because it's everywhere, it's used in everything you watch on telly. Drone footage is often stunning, but the ubiquitousness of it makes it lose its magic.
- Adam: We wanted to use drone footage to mimic the flight of birds or explore the shape of the chimney, revealing it in ways that people hadn't seen, and using it together with interesting sounds or music. Often, drone footage is used with grand orchestral scores...
- Chu-Li: My instinct was to make sound really quiet. I always have this belief that quietness actually draws us in more.
- Chu-Li: There's one section where we were inspired by *The*

Shining, where the drone is moving along the undergrowth. The idea was that it's this presence moving along the landscape, almost like a spirit, or some kind of creature.

Chu-Li: It was good for me to watch the film with an audience. That made me aware of things that needed changing. The film did create ideas and thoughts and got people talking. It is a very emotional subject: how we use power, and how it affects everybody.

Adam: I hope that the film encourages discussion and debate without being didactic.

Chu-Li: Ultimately, there's going to be this new development built on Fawley. There's a lot of tension in the area between the locals and the developer, who is also a local. And a participant was saying, 'if this film can encourage a more positive feeling amongst the developers, they might try and do something within the new site that is more conducive to some kind of symbiotic relationship between the development and nature.'

Although on the surface, you feel like a power station is quite a brutal thing, because it's static and it's just there, nature sort of works with it.

Adam: You get the falcons nesting on it...

Chu-Li: Bees swarming – stuff like that. And one of the worries with the development is: is it going to be like that, because of footfall, with people going in and out?

Adam: The film ends before we get to that question but that wasn't just us copping out. We didn't want to go to the

developer and talk to him about his plans, because we always felt that as a powerful, rich businessman, he'd always have a platform to share his ideas. We were keen that all the voices in the film were of people who don't usually get to be heard.

Chu-Li: Including the creatures!

Adam Gutch and Chu-Li Shewring are graduates of the National Film and Television School who live on the Isle of Wight. Their first film, Semangat (2010), was produced for Channel 4 / BritDoc under the creative guidance of Oscar-winning director Pawel Pawlikowski. Their work has been nominated at international film festivals, including The London Film Festival, IFF Rotterdam, Edinburgh IFF and Images Toronto, where they won a Jury Prize in 2011. (flyingant.org.uk)



Still from *Fawley* (Adam Gutch and Chu-Li Shewring, 2022)

Creative responses to the project and artworks

Fawley

We are but dust and to dust we shall return.

We are but nature and to nature we shall return.

We are but energy and to energy we shall return.

The film starts and ends with birdsong. A wren. A chiff-chaff.

The birdwatcher tramps around the edges of the power station site, halting to step over mounds of grass. This is marshy scrubland, but not edgelands. The chimney still stands in the farground.

Fawley chimney was not edgelands. It was a focal point, a beacon for navigation for sailors on the Solent, for locals driving home. It was home for the birds too. Before and after the power station and the oil refinery, the birds were here, or flew here.

The birdwatcher collects. He collects bird names, birdsong. He places them in a taxonomy of things.

Nature collecting used to be a trope of English natural history; it is again. 'Slow television' on the mainstream channels. The nature lover, singularly wandering across a field or along a river, usually in southern England. The birdwatcher isn't like this. He is part of the landscape. Tim Ingold has written of 'dwelling', of being part of the landscape by using it, working it, walking it.¹ One cannot do the same with a power station chimney, though workers did climb it from

¹ Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000).

the interior, and film makers could film it from above with a drone. When the oil burners fired up, former power station workers and Fawley residents told us, the sound was huge. Mechanical yet organic. Part of the landscape. Stillness. The chiff-chaff can be heard.

But there are ghosts. There is the Hum. The pylons remained after the chimney, the last remnant of power, went.

The Hum runs through the film. It comes and goes, like a memory. Energy surges and reclines.

Sailors still look for the chimney from the Solent. Drivers from the road out of Southampton. They still hear the Hum.

Katrina Navickas

West Burton

Three memories of West Burton



1. In my final year at primary school, I painted a picture of West Burton at night. I used a big piece of dark blue paper which stood for the night sky, and a small roller to create the curves of the cooling towers. I remember painting bright orange dots up and down the chimneys to represent the lights. My teacher entered it into a Lincolnshire Schools Art competition, and it came third.

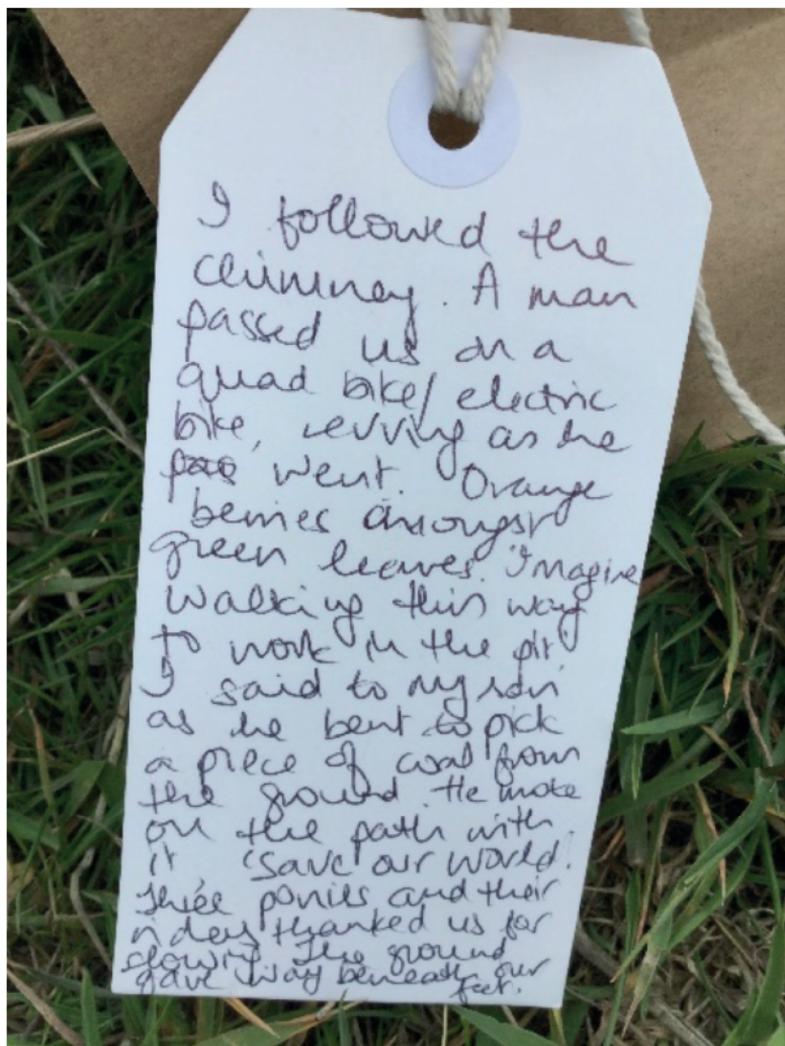
2. When we left school during the hot summer of 1976, my two best friends immediately took up apprenticeships at West Burton, so I spent most of that summer on my own. At this time I lived on the very outskirts of the town, in a council house that overlooked open countryside, and I recall spending most of that time keeping cool in my bedroom, playing *Tubular Bells*, and scanning the fields beyond with a pair of binoculars for a barn owl that kept appearing from a nearby woodland.

3. On Saturday morning, I used to walk down the hill to my Nana's for dinner (not lunch). My Dad would bring us fish and chips on his way back from doing an extra Saturday morning shift at Marshalls. On that walk, West Burton power station was always on my horizon. It is still there today, and even now I still feel the same boyish, kinetic excitement at seeing the silver railway line snake over the town and towards those iconic cooling towers in the distance, just as I did back then. Soon, those towers will disappear from my horizon, and I will miss them. But then I realise that the landscape there will just return to how it used to be, before I was born.

Ian Waites

Chatterley Whitfield

I followed the chimney / Save our world



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