

'The Creek', a practice-based research project with accompanying critical commentary.

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'Every place has ongoing stories, recognized, concealed, and lost'
(Spirn 1998, p.160)

Abstract

This critical commentary addresses the completed work, *The Creek*, a 42-minute documentary film (link [here](#) to the work*). The film is the first sustained investigation of the lived experiences of a vernacular, working-class fishing community in Teesside that existed for approximately 80 years. As such the work adds to the presently limited research regarding the working-class cultural history of Teesside. The film also examines the work of the notable photographer Ian Macdonald, specifically his work made at Greatham Creek in the 1970's that has been previously unresearched, despite being held in national collections. Following a survey of known works and published research regarding the Greatham Creek community, the commentary is divided into two chapters, firstly a critical consideration of the methodology and rationale for the practice-based approach to the research and a consideration of affordances of documentary film, thereby contributing to the discussion regarding documentary film as a mode of academic research. Also considered are the approaches to research, use of archive material and the development of the cinematic approaches. Secondly, the research findings are critically examined in a variety of contexts; the relationship of the Creek community to the emergence of the plotlands movement nationally, the socio-economic context of Teesside during the period the Creek community existed (from its emergence to its decline), gender roles and depiction of working-class men. This second chapter sustains critical reflection upon practice established in the Methodology chapter given that the research findings are embedded within practice. The work concludes with future possibilities for further research regarding vernacular working-class culture in Teesside.

*The film has been deposited [with the](#) Yorkshire/North East Film Archive making it publicly and freely accessible.

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Introduction

This critical commentary discusses the practice-based research project *The Creek* (documentary film) undertaken between 2016 and completed in 2019 at Teesside University. Whilst there is a small, existing body of image-based work made about the community at Greatham Creek, the community itself has not previously been investigated regarding its lived experience in any sustained academic enquiry. The published working-class cultural history of the Northeast region mostly favours Tyneside, Wearside, and County Durham (Green and Pollard, 2007), with the city of Newcastle upon Tyne most prominent (Coll and Lancaster, 2001). Furthermore, the culture of the northeast is characterised as that of Tyneside, rather than reflecting the variety of cultures within the region (Vall, 2007). Where Teesside's working-class culture is considered, it is via Middlesbrough's economic development and decline with no published research regarding the modern history of Teesside. This situation is amplified concerning the North of England, where Teesside is a marginal region, with little consideration beyond the rapid growth of Middlesbrough along with its attendant pollution and social problems, described as hellish (Faulkner et al, 2010) with other areas of the region given more prominence, Kirk, 2000). Recent research maintains the focus upon deindustrialisation and its consequences (Warren, 2017). The completed work's findings reveal a specific and unresearched aspect of working-class cultural history of Northeast of England and so further develops the current limited body of work regarding Teesside specifically. The findings connect Greatham Creek to the plotlands movement and so extend the research in this area. There is no other published academic research/sustained enquiry or oral history that has investigated the experiences of the community. In 2014, landscape realignment works commenced, and by 2016 much of the site became inaccessible to the public. As such, the research is the first sustained academic investigation of the Greatham Creek community, producing an in-depth biography of place through collaboration with members from the community, giving them agency. The work was instigated by Macdonald's Cote Hill Island photograph, on first viewing it raised immediate questions of who made the structures and why, as well as its location.

The completed work has been exhibited and discussed with both public and academic audiences; for the residents of Greatham Village (2018), a public screening at The Arc Cinema in Stockton on Tees (2019), a public screening at Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art as a work selected for the Middlesbrough Art Weekender (2019). These events attracted a combined audience of approximately 225 people. The audiences have been a mixture of people previously unfamiliar with the culture represented, but with an interest in either local history or vernacular culture, as well as those either familiar with Greatham Creek or with some form of connection to the period itself through the landscape or community in which it was based. The work was selected for the closing event of the Landscape Research Group's 2020, online, annual symposium, 'Landscape and Goodness' (audience numbers unknown), here finding an international academic audience. These events to date have resulted in high public engagement with the research, both in terms of audience numbers and discussions regarding the work. In March 2022, the film was deposited with The North of England Film Archive in order to ensure public and academic access, available to view free of charge online. The work has also been critically considered within *Revolutionary Romanticism and Cinema: Country, Land, People* (Dave, 2020). Findings from the research have influenced the production of other works through collaboration. The 'Boathouse Theatre' project (Adams and Scott, 2019), commissioned by River Tees Rediscovered, a temporary live performance situated in Stockton, was informed by the research as the basis for its production. I was also part of the judging panel that awarded the commission. Also in 2019, I collaborated with the artist Laura Harrington, along with five other artists/practitioners, in the production of text drawn from the research findings for inclusion in the pamphlet 'Downstream, River Tees, Field Guide' (Harrington, 2019), as well as working with Harrington to deliver a guided daytrip of the Teesmouth landscape for members of the public that included visiting an accessible section of Greatham Creek where visible ruins remain. Harrington's project formed part of the 'Fragile Earth: seeds, weeds, plastic crust' exhibition at the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art in 2019. These activities have sustained high levels of public, academic and practitioner engagement through discussion of the work's findings. The work remains the subject of ongoing public and academic interest.

This commentary commences with an overview of known works related to the Greatham Creek community, then proceeds to the two main chapters: the methodology of the practice-based work, and a consideration of the research findings in their historic cultural, social, and economic context. The methodology encompasses the rationale for the practice-based approach to the research, the formal choices and design of the film, as well as approaches to primary research in working with the interviewees and archive material and the fieldwork undertaken in the landscape. Film as a research method is considered and as such, the chapter contributes to the discussion regarding approaches to film practice-based research. The contextual chapter considers the work's findings at both a macro and micro level. The macro sets the findings in a broader cultural context by examining the research within the plotlands movement and the attendant conflicts related to landscape usage. The findings are also situated within the region's socio-economic development during the period the community existed (as discussed in the film). The micro consideration considers the themes discussed within the work by the interviewees as well as the emergent issues relating to the depictions of a specific working-class masculinity and gender roles. Also discussed are the issues of nostalgia and remembrance given their centrality within the work. Methodological discussions are continued into this chapter where relevant in order maintain the connection to practice where required. The research findings are examined across the entirety of the commentary in order to maintain a close connection between the work and the sections of the commentary, rather than attempt to treat the content and themes in isolation given the interconnectedness between content, context, and practice. The commentary draws from discussions held at the public screenings as an extension of the research findings.

Review of Existing Works

Whilst there are published accounts that indicate the presence, and it being undesirable, of the community at Greatham Creek (Heslop-Harrison, 1918), the activities related to the community (Brewster, 1829), and an archaeological survey (Rowe, 1999), the Creek community is not the primary focus of these accounts. A survey of the marshes undertaken in 1897 (published in 1906) considers Greatham Creek but makes no mention of the presence of the community (Lofthouse, 1906). There is no published academic research that either draws from primary research regarding the lived experiences of the community itself or seeks to develop knowledge of the community. Published accounts written by residents are limited to two articles written by Bill Blackwell, the second of which was written in response to a letter from Nancy Moody published in the Evening Gazette's 'Remember When' local history supplement in 2010 and 2011 respectively. Both of Bill's articles (illustrated with some of his family photographs used in the film) reflect some of his experiences as told in the film. Macdonald's published work in collaboration with the painter Len Tabner (1989), contains his Greatham Creek work amongst other subjects within the Tees estuary. This account (circa 800 words) gives a historic account of the Creek community, drawing from Brewster's history of Stockton on Tees (1829) as well as knowledge gained from former residents of the Creek whilst undertaking his work. This account is possibly the only published work that draws together images and text that contextualise the community within the Teesside landscape that encompasses a concern for the natural landscape, impacts of heavy industry and a concern for the working-class. A selection of Macdonald's Greatham Creek work is held by Amber (online, no date), the Newcastle-based film and photography collective, who commissioned him to undertake further work in the Tees Estuary. In 2016, Bill Blackwell's posted comments were present for the Cote Hill Island image outlining the story on the Amber website of the receipt he had for his father's purchase of the cottage. These have now been removed. Amber's description of the collection is limited to a brief overview of the Creek and its decline.

The artist Steve Empson has sketched images of the boathouses and cabins based on his visits there approximately 40 years ago but knew very little of the community (Empson, 2015). Colin Abbot, a local amateur photographer has published a selection of images taken in 1981 (Abbot, online). This work is comprised of 49 images of the structures and vessels. The accompanying text outlines a general, brief history that contains the same facts as those presented in Macdonald's publications. As with other works, the material elements are the focus, the community is not present. These works are the totality of published works regarding the community at Greatham Creek, with the predominant works being image-based.

There are five films, all documentary except for one fiction film, that feature Greatham Creek. Ridley Scott's 1965 Royal College of Art graduation film, *Boy and Bicycle*, shot in black and white, utilises a boathouse in Greatham Creek as a final location. Here the Creek is a cold, damp, muddy, rain-sodden place. A Dickensian atmosphere of dread drips from every shot. The titular Boy encounters a resident of the Creek as a towering, threatening presence, whose cabin the boy has entered without permission. Another student-made film, *Estuary, three aspects of the River Tees* (1973), is a documentary shot during the same period that Macdonald was producing his body of work and depicts the Creek in same mood and tone as *Boy and Bicycle*, but in a contrast to Macdonald's work, chooses to show greater dilapidation than the life and activity that Macdonald's portrays. Rain drips from decaying structures at dusk and we see two men repair a boat, labouring in the wind in an inhospitable landscape (fig 1), the mood enhanced through the grainy black and white 16mm film stock. As with Scott's mise-en-scene, the Creek is unwelcoming and dilapidated, far from that explored in *The Creek*.



*Figure 1 image from 'Estuary, three aspects of the River Tees'. D Eadington, 1973.
By permission.*

The Birds of Teesmouth (1966), a documentary made by the RSPB film unit explores the birdlife of the Tees saltmarsh landscape and considers the impacts of the surrounding heavy industry upon this environment. The film contains one wide shot with vessels and boathouses at the Creek visible in the background, with no mention given to it. However, a longer version of the film deposited at the North of England Film Archive, viewed during the research phase of the project, contains a scene in which teenage wildfowl hunters armed with a rifle are shown setting up a makeshift hide from an old oil barrel in the marsh landscape on an overcast, grey, autumnal day. In the final shot of the scene, one of the boys throws a dead fox that he has presumably shot, into a pond. The narrator, given the context of the film, is less than impressed. These three films present the place as outside of the norms of everyday life. In the two student films it is presented as otherworldly, or 'out of this world' as June remarks in *The Creek*. In Scott's case, sinister, and in Eadington's, a place of decay, but still in use. In *The Birds of Teesmouth*, the activities of the teenage boys are a blight in the marsh, just as they are in Heslop-Harrisons' survey,

where the landscape is ‘hopelessly spoilt by the *picturesque* “house boats” of the numerous “gunners” who live here during the weekends...’ (1918, p. 92, original italics). ‘*Come in if you can get in*’ (1982), the film used in *The Creek*, offers a much more positive view of the Creek due to it being a portrait of Macdonald and his work, as well as showing members of the community in a positive way though their activity and representation. However, both this film and *The Birds of Teesmouth*, are colour, but shot in overcast autumn conditions, with ‘*Come in...*’ still showing the Creek as far from the idyl that *The Creek* portrays given the dilapidation and overcast mood. ‘*Greatham Creek Conversation*’ (2018) is a short, illustrated interview with a local man (never shown on screen) about the Creek that mentions the community as well as other historic details of the surrounding landscape. The black and white location footage is of the present-day Creek but does not show the ruins and has a woman viewing the location in varying shots who then narrates a short poem. The interview makes basic points about the community but from a remove, they are comments ‘about’, without advancing understanding, that seem to draw from the thumbnail facts contained in the previously mentioned works. However, as with the other films, the community is again presented as outside of the norm by the interviewee stating is the community could have been from Dickens’ *Great Expectations*.

Beyond his own published works, research regarding Macdonald’s photographic work is very limited despite the regard in which his work is held. The Victoria and Albert Museum hold the Cote Hill Island image in their permanent collection and other notable British photographers see his work as of significance (Roberts, 2010). This is perhaps because Macdonald has not sought to build a more prominent profile, having been described by the photographer Martin Parr as ‘the quiet man of British documentary photography’ (Parr, 2020), in his foreword to a major retrospective of Macdonald’s work. The documentary *Shooting Time* (2010) produced by Macdonald’s son Jamie, is the only published, in-depth consideration of Macdonald’s practice. Within this film, there is an interview with the then Head of Photography at Sotheby’s regarding the importance and power of Macdonald’s work and a brief consideration of the Cote Hill Island image, (2010). The now defunct *Creative Camera* journal featured Macdonald’s work in at least five editions, but these are unobtainable and so any reviews of his work are unknown (Hamman, 2020). The largest collected body of published images of the Creek, *Greatham*

Creek 1969-1974 was published in 2018 by Café Royal Books, with no accompanying text, in an edition of 250 copies. There is no published account regarding the production of Macdonald's work at the Creek. Whilst limited, the above body of image-based work made at Greatham Creek is unified by the isolation and idiosyncrasy of the place. Of course, Macdonald's work typifies this and was what influenced my research. The community in this work is made visible mostly through its vernacular structures, with few published portraits of people (there are only two of Macdonald's portraits published in *Image of the Tees*, but the book includes two archive photographs). The community themselves have no agency outside of Bill Blackwell's two articles. In the moving image works they are mostly silent, subjects to be watched only, not engaged with.

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter discusses the rationale for the practice-based methodology chosen for the research and expands to consider the approaches to production; the primary research undertaken to locate former residents; the physical exploration of the landscape as a mode of research that informed the film's design and the cinematic approaches regarding the presentation of the current landscape. Parallels are drawn between documentary practice, ethnography, and oral history to situate the practice-based research in other traditions, and to justify my approaches. The film's narrative construction is considered along with the use of the incorporated archive material. Whilst these aspects are discussed in turn, they were developed concurrently during the development of the project. Sustained critical reflection upon practice is continued across the entirety of the commentary, beyond this chapter, to ensure the discussion of the film is not detached from other concerns. The chapter also adds to the ongoing discussion regarding the affordances of film practice-based research.

Documentary film as a mode of research

Documentary film as practice-based research has been recognised as an established methodology given its similarities with ethnography: the collection of data through qualitative interviews, as well as time spent in specific locations. These are very much the same approaches for documentary filmmaking in terms of the recording of data and subsequent analysis and presentation. Here, the key difference being the medium of film (Kerrigan, 2018). Documentary film as the methodology was chosen as my preferred mode of investigation given my professional and academic career (an undergraduate degree in Media Production between 1990-3, then a career in television documentary until 2002, when I joined Teesside University as a Senior Lecturer in Media Production). As such, it was a natural choice to conduct the research as a film, as well as the subject matter being fundamentally visual, and in my view, the most appropriate way of giving voice to the community. A written text may remove 'dialect and personal turns of phrase, suppressing its uniqueness' (Bornat, 2001, p. 225), whereas film makes accents audible, and in the case of this research, aids the representation of Teesside's

working-class culture by hearing what the people sound like. Film as a research method requires greatly expanded complexities (in comparison with text-based research) in choosing in terms of practice and the array of technical knowledge and application, along with logistics, planning, project management, exhibition (Gandy, 2021). However, if this is the researcher's familiar practice developed through experience, then it is less of a concern as they are equipped with the practice-knowledge (technical and craft) that make the endeavour a natural if not logical choice. Gandy is making a comparison between film-practice and written text which is still a challenging task, but one that is much less multifaceted. Primary data collection can also be just as complex as undertaking a film project depending upon the demands of the project. However, not all films are made in the same way and practice (determined by time, skill, and budget) is an open and developing arena where, given digital technology, anything is possible. Film is also a medium that is suited to visualising spaces that no longer exist, through the filming and assembling of imagery (Keiller, 2014).

I approach the world as a documentary cinematographer through training, professional practice and as a film production academic. As such I concur with Greenhalgh's observation that 'Cinematography is a particular form of thinking and collaborative activity, and a specific form of praxis that combines visual enskilment processes and a community of practice culture', where praxis emerges from practice, rather than through the integration of theory and practice. (Greenhalgh, 2018, p. 156). The methodology therefore does not work to construct a theoretical foundation that was consciously absent in praxis, and 'Avoid[s] using theory as an alibi for practice' (Glisovic,, 2018, p. 220). It may seem too simplistic, but it is nevertheless true, that conducting this project as a documentary film was determined by who I am, an academic equipped with practice-based knowledge and skills, who fundamentally sees the world as a filmmaker. There was no other way I could realistically have conceived of undertaking this research. As such, a documentary film was the only option to generate knowledge of a no-longer present community. Macdonald's comment in the film that a friend of his had remarked that they see 'people all over the [Cote Hill] photograph' was a comment I had made in my first meeting with him in 2012. If the people who built the structures and piloted the boats at Cote Hill were

alive and willing to engage with me, then it was possible to have them not just seen by others, but to be heard and understood in a film.

In attempting to locate my long-held sensibility and attachment to landscapes and ruins in the consideration of my practice (during the production of the film and in the writing of this commentary), Hauser's identification of what she calls the 'archaeological imagination' describes well my approach. Working from the neo-romantic topophilia of the 1930's, archaeology is used as an analogy for filmmakers and photographers such as Michael Powell, Bill Brandt and Paul Nash who were recovering pasts embedded in the British landscape that may have been no longer visible, but still present. For Hauser, the archaeological imagination conceives landscape as 'not so much as a vista, picture or space, but as *site*, the place where things have occurred, where certain individuals or groups have passed through or inhabited, or where something once was' (Hauser, 2007, p. 2). The opening text in the film that claims that the film 'is their story' in relation to the community is perhaps an overly neo-romantic, definitive statement to make, it is of course *a story*. Despite the neo-romance/anti-modernist sensibility, this approach to landscape is not to be connected to a preservationist nostalgia for the British landscape that emerged in the interwar years to prevent the perceived ruination of pastoral England (as discussed in *A Contested Landscape* in relation to plotlands developments that the Creek community can be framed within). There is a connection here in that the artists Hauser cites were objects of my study as an undergraduate student and remain important practitioners to me. Concerning the exploration of ruins in the north of England in the project, these were not undertaken in what has been described as the typical characterisation of northern landscapes of ruination: that they are primarily considered aesthetically and valued in romantically in relationship to former industries (McClanahan, 2014). The film and this commentary (chiefly in the *A Contested Landscape* chapter) considers how ruination can be understood in relationship to socio-economic, cultural, and political forces, rather than only aesthetically and romantically.

I would not wish to define the film beyond it being a 'documentary'. Definitions of what constitutes a documentary along with theoretical categories offers utility, but at the same time highlights that it is problematic to pronounce what a 'standard' approach might be given that documentary should be read as an open and continually evolving form (Ward, 2005). Whilst practitioners 'borrow from and bend the rules of specific sets of conventions' (ibid, p. 27) they do not, or at least it is difficult to determine, if they intentionally make films according to a theoretical category. *The Creek*, then is a documentary, and understood as such by the audience response to the text's filmic conventions, such as the interviews and archive images, 'what makes a film a documentary is the way we look at it' (Vaughan, 1999, p. 58). What the audience sees and hears is understood as signifying what it appears to illustrate (ibid). Whilst the film was not designed as an exercise in Bachelardian Topographical analysis, it shares characteristics with his philosophy as it engages the interviewees in a 'psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives' (Bachelard, 1984, p. 8), in the mapping of a place now lost through the recollections and archive images. In doing so, it can be seen as an attempt to portray recollections of senses, places and activities that cannot be 'reproduced in the present' that oral historians also undertake (Hamilton, 2016, p. 108).

My practice is grounded in the ethnographic tradition that peoples' stories matter. To take people's time as well as memories to produce one's work is a formidable exchange; my work could not exist without them. I use 'memories' intentionally, rather than 'data', as data to my mind divorces the person from the information. In this respect, the interviewee is much more than a source of data. This sensibility in part is derived from who I am, (my constructionist ontological position is evident from the approach to the research), shaped across my work in television where I experienced a broad spectrum of practice regarding the conduct of interviews; from a deep care and genuine engagement with people, to indifference where a mechanical approach was orientated to the extraction of information, to the unethical manipulation of subjects through the exertion of power and control. These experiences in my television career reinforced my practice; I knew what I did not want to be like which further defined how I would act in future.

Primary research – people

The search for former residents as both a means to develop knowledge of the Creek community as well as find potential interviewees for the film was very much a case of developing existing leads, starting with Ian Macdonald. In 2014 I sat amongst the remains of No. 8, the brick cottage on Cote Hill Island with Macdonald. We'd agreed to undertake the trip some two years previous but struggled to find a time. I'd first visited Macdonald in 2012 to talk about his work at the Creek as the first stage in considering if the project might be viable. Sitting on what was left of the walls of the brick cottage, I proposed directly for the first time since we first met that I would like Macdonald to appear in the film as well as requiring access to his archive of images made at Greatham Creek. The only person Macdonald remained in contact with was Bill Blackwell, who I subsequently visited to conduct an informal interview. At the same time, with the invaluable help from Teesside University's PR department, an article was written about the project and the search for former residents that was published in several local newspapers. Very soon, the calls and emails came, some to give me information and make clear that they did not want to meet, others, invitations to visit them. I knew I needed first-hand accounts in addition to Ian and Bill to work from as a rich a set of research materials as possible as well as make the film in the way I wanted, to give voice to a largely unseen and little understood community. During my first visit to Cote Hill with Ian, we met the local tenant farmer who had grown up on his farm and was very aware of the community. I enquired if there were any former residents of the Creek in Greatham. This led to my first meeting with Dobbin and John Henry, who in turn contacted Kenny Heslop. Nancy contacted me from reading the press article, and then put me in touch with her brother David. Dot, June, and Ann became known through a friend of theirs who was at the Creek, but who did not want to be filmed but was happy to talk. In addition to the former residents who all appear in the film, preliminary visits were conducted with eight other people who had been at the Creek but were not considered as interviewees as whilst they wanted to help me, could not articulate their stories, either through failing memory or an inability to define their experiences more clearly. It was readily apparent from the preliminary research meetings how much the experience of the Creek was central to people's lives as well as their families. Often

in these first meetings, I would not just be meeting with an individual, but with members of their families also present, either because they had been at the Creek also, or had not been but were keen to further understand the experiences of their family members as they already knew about the place through family history and so understood the place as an important factor in the lives of their relations. These experiences, with highly engaged, knowledgeable people developed my confidence in the viability and potential success of the project as a film at a very early stage of development.

As photography was central to the initial research aims (The Cote Hill Island image) and narrative, it was also a key aspect of the preliminary and filmed interview process as with oral history research (Summerfield, 2019). When meeting former residents for the first time they often had photographs arranged for my viewing. There was an enthusiasm to talk me through the images, 'have you seen this?', 'Did you know?' were common questions. Some homes had framed printouts of MacDonald's images on their walls, evidence of the importance of the place to people. These encounters and images I gathered from across my desk-based and primary research developed my understanding of individual experiences, community activity and the place itself, as photographs were used as 'a device...for opening up memory lanes' (Samuel, 1994, p. 251). The discussion of individual photographs provided insight, not just to the materiality of the Creek, but also of relationships, a sense of community and a considerable engagement between the interviewees and their experiences of the place. These discussions also helped to build rapport with potential interviewees. The experience of engaging in nostalgia for the former residents in the preliminary interviews and filmed ones provided a positive experience for them as can be seen in the film. Whilst nostalgia can be a bittersweet, negative experience, engaging in it can be of benefit to individuals as it enables a sense of authenticity and self-continuity by connecting lived experiences into a journey (Sedikides et al, 2004). Negative effects have been dismissed, and instead, individuals benefit from psychological well-being, that enhances the ageing process if nostalgia is frequently engaged in (ibid). As such, engaging in nostalgia can provide a means of understanding change (Kirk, 2007) with memory considered as an '...active, shaping force...a way of constructing knowledge' rather than a simplistic system of retrieval (Samuel, 1994, p. x). These accounts of the benefits of

engaging in nostalgia can be considered as evident in the film's content as well as the audience's positive engagement in discussions at the public screenings where knowledge was extended beyond the film's findings through further collective dialogue. The discussion of nostalgia and memory as a conceptual lens through which to understand interviewees' recollections of life at the Creek is explored fully in the 'A Contested Landscape' chapter.

Whilst these experiences, techniques, and strategies, are those encountered by oral historians (Yow, 2016), approaches for documentary film practice can differ significantly in the aspect of 'casting'. In these meetings and communications, the filmmaker must be constantly reviewing the interviewee as a potential 'performer'. Whilst casting is a factor in fiction as applied to actors, it is also vital in the realisation of an engaging documentary. Whilst conducting oral history interviews for purely textual data is a considerable challenge in both gaining access to subjects and conducting effective interviews, the filmmaker's project is entirely dependent upon the discovery of people who in addition to the previously mentioned challenges, will be effective on screen. When seen at cinema exhibition scale or on any size of screen, they operate with an emotional force that I would argue has a greater impact upon the viewer than reader of the written text, and this is a key affordance of documentary film as research as well as one of its key challenges, as previously discussed. Written texts can employ still images but cannot convey the sound of a voice where shifts in emotion are plain, a series of expressions visible in time (see figs 2 and 3). Whilst subjects may well be sources of considerable information, if they cannot convey that effectively on screen, then the filmed interview, film and overall research endeavour fails in this respect.



Figure 2 - Dobbin recounting his boat being burned out, image from film



Figure 3 - David, image from film

The above image is from the closing section of the film, where David struggles to put into words what his time at the Creek meant to him in a choked, emotional delivery, telling me 'It's something you can't, you can't explain...'. Whilst David cannot seemingly find the words, the images tell us much about what the Creek meant to him, invoking Polanyi's assertion that 'we know more than we can tell' (Polanyi, 1966, p. 4). Similarly, Bill says 'it's hard to explain really', but his narrative preceding this has told us much already of events and experiences but in a variety of emotional tones, shifting between seriousness, sombreness, and humour ('can't go wrong selling fish to Catholics on a Friday').

Although interviewees may possess the required knowledge and be able to articulate it for a film, it is highly unlikely that they will have been filmed before. Here, the researcher must develop a wide range of strategies to ensure that the approach to the filmed interview is conducive to eliciting an effective performance (Rabiger, 2020). As the film's cinematic approach to the interviews was highly specific and for visual reasons did not take place in familiar setting of the interviewee's homes, the locations chosen were all local to the interviewees which potentially reduced any possible nervousness in being filmed in what were studio-like conditions (as discussed in Cinematic Approaches). The technical approach to shooting the interviews (using large spaces, with minimal equipment and film-crew with the camera situated far from the interviewee) created a less technically cluttered and alien space for the interviewee. This approach, in my experience from previous practice and this project, reduces distraction for interviewees by minimising the amount of equipment and people near them, creating as much of a conversational space as possible within such an artificial one for the interviewee. In addition to the consideration given to which interviews could perform in the telling of their stories, my ability as an interviewer, the technical approaches, the development of rapport between myself and the interviewees both during the preliminary research interviews and the filming was a key factor in the overall success of the interviews. An example of this is seen and heard in Dobbin's account of his and Bill's trade of pigs for the boat. His smile, enjoyment in the retelling and near-laughter was elicited by my own incredulous reaction to his telling. This interplay between myself and the interviewees at the time of filming, and through deep engagement with their stories during preliminary interviews was vital to the film's success with audiences, given

that 'the final result of the interview is both the product of the narrator and researcher' (Portelli, 2016).

Primary research – landscape

The deep engagement with the interviewees and resulting narrative was developed through a sustained engagement with the landscape of the Creek. Each time I visited the Creek after periods of desk-based research and preliminary and filmed interviews, my knowledge continued to be constructed altering my understanding and experience of the being at the Creek. This process was always uncertain; trying to piece together a coherent sense of place and experience from accounts that did not always align and were sometimes contradictory, or simply unclear. I knew who built which structure having arranged a tour for my cinematographer Richard Johnston, Ian, and myself, with Chris and Steve Featherstone (former residents who did not wish to be filmed, but who provided the extensive archive of family photographs, fig 4), as well as ongoing meetings with Ian who would talk me through each of his images in detail, relating them to the owners, and expanding into his own recollections. Whilst material detail of 'who built what' or any sustained focus upon chronology are not features of the narrative (such details were difficult for the interviewees to be certain about), these experiences were formative in the development of the cinematic treatment of the landscape and overall narrative form of the film (As discussed in Cinematic Approaches).



Figure 4 - Chris Featherstone, Richard Johnston (cinematographer), Ian Macdonald, and Steve Featherstone. Image author's own

It was also not only facts, names, dates, and times that were producing meaning in order to make sense of ownership, use, geography etc, but remembrances of the interviewees that were demonstrating the value of the place to the once-present community. This 'associational value' held within landscapes (Readman, 2018) continued to inform me to the extent that my practice was entirely shaped by them in terms of the story the film would tell, as well as providing the answers to my questions raised by the Cote Hill Island image. Sebald's assertion that understanding of place happens '...only by actually going to certain places by looking, by expending great amounts of time in actually exposing oneself to places that no one else goes to' (Sebald, 2001) became central to my practice. This spatial research was also extended through an additional unforeseen method. All of Macdonald's prints used in the film were scanned at high resolution and where required, were 'cleaned up' in Photoshop given that the prints used were archival with some suffering the natural effects of time. Whilst this was a time-intensive

process, commencing initially as a practical, necessary, laborious task, soon transformed itself to an unforeseen element of the research. Once each print was scanned, it could be magnified and analysed in detail, allowing me to look at the Creek community from the 1970's in extreme close-up, searching for images within each frame of Macdonald's. Whilst I cannot say precisely how this adds to the film, this additional element of spatial and visual research developed my further understanding of the place in conjunction with the physical fieldwork.

I was alone for most of my visits to the Creek despite the colony end having a public footpath at the top of the revetment wall and is part of a nature reserve. Any of the few birdwatchers encountered from a distance never descended on to the Creek bank and then amongst the ruins; there are no fences, and the only prohibited activity as sign-posted is bait digging. The greater isolation of the Cote Hill location meant that during my visits I had the luxury of solitude, the place was mine alone to move around in as I pleased, undisturbed. In this regard, my practice was similar to Macdonald's where the solitude of the place helped him to order his thoughts regarding his work. This was a physical not just intellectual experience, 'the body is enlivened and challenged by multisensual effects' (Endensor, 2008, p.129), when walking through ruins, because what I was seeing, feeling, hearing was alive with the developing biographies from the primary research. This led to the space being remade to me on each visit, where I considered different physical approaches to the place than during previous visits, considering different views, angles to understand it more when '...the same ground is approached and traversed from different perspectives.' (ibid, p. 136). The landscape was configured as a story that 'enfolds the lives and times of predecessors who, over the generations, have moved around in it and played their part in its formation' (Ingold, 1993, p. 153). The combination of the desk-based research, preliminary interviews and location visits formed a palimpsest, a layered 'deep surface' (Ingold, 2019) of varied and conflicting uses and meanings, collapsed outside of time, yet given ongoing change, a 'space that is always under construction' (Massey, no date). This enabled me to consider a 'layer' of research within a 'simultaneity of stories so far' (Massey, 2005, p. 9), in order to explore and contextualise the resulting narrative and mood that the film conveys, as discussed in *A Contested Landscape*. The iterative process described above was vital as with each visit, the landscape talked back as part of the ongoing research

dialogue. This experiential approach, I would argue, is essential to any research that seeks to develop a deep understanding of landscape and a community that inhabits it and its layered meanings.

The experiences of the landscape and interviews did bring an emphatic sense of the accounts of the place that are found in the film; a separation, a place of one's own to enjoy at leisure, far removed from the familiar, an escape from the ordinary. Such experiences take root in the imagination, and it was very easy to identify with Nancy, Kenny and Dobbin, even though the place was devoid of useful habitation, utility and people. (My increasing understanding of the Creek through the above methods of research led to a deep attachment and empathy with the former residents in the film which strengthened the rapport discussed previously). Visiting the Creek remains to me '...a 'transition' from a known landscape... [to] somewhere where we feel and think significantly differently' (Macfarlane, 2012, p. 78). John Henry seems to articulate this sense of the affect of the Creek in the film's closing scene, 'You just draw to it', I ask him why (the only time my voice is heard), 'I don't know, it just draws you to it, it just wants you to'.

Narrative Construction

The film's narrative is constructed from three elements: the landscape cinematography, the interviews, and the archive material. The interviews, whilst telling a cohesive story of a set of lived experiences to address the research question, can be sub-divided between the former residents and Macdonald in terms of their separate experiences as well as function within the narrative. Macdonald's function is two-fold, to understand the production of his body of work made at Greatham Creek (which develops the minimal published accounts of his work as outlined in Review of Existing Works) and to provide an historic context of the Creek community's emergence. His commentary, along with that of the residents locate the community in a chronology from the inter-war period to Teesside's deindustrialisation in the 1970's. The narrative arc of the film employs a prologue through the opening text to establish a timeframe that the narrative takes place within and then introduces what we see as an abandoned site of ruins as a 'heaven' to set up the ensuing investigation. The film then explores the research question by layers; how it came to be and how it was constructed, the lived experiences and the reasons for the decline

- why we are seeing ruins and not a still present community in the landscape images. Visually, this arc, once the prologue and introduction are complete, takes the form of the period of a day, a natural chronological arc from birth to life through images of the landscape shot at across the day to sunset. Within this arc a 'common' narrative is devised to produce a coherent biography. It is difficult to determine the efficacy of the sunrise to sunset device with audiences, but the effect may be obscured given that the film does not start with images shot at sunrise. As the Cote Hill Island image was the basis for the enquiry, initial peer feedback regarding first drafts of the narrative structure proposed that the Cote Hill Island sequence that employs the archive of Macdonald to illustrate his recollection of making the Cote Hill Island photograph, should have been placed much sooner in the structure. This was considered, but I felt that the narrative was better served by establishing the former residents at the outset, then moving toward the image in the latter stages of the narrative given the thematic concerns of decline. Adding a reflexively focussed strand to the narrative with myself as a visible/audible agent had been suggested in the development stages of the research with peers. This was disregarded on the basis that whilst not present in the film, the researcher as the convenor of the knowledge did not need further agency within the work.

The editing process commenced after I reviewed each filmed interview and coded the content under labels to categorise the themes. This practice loosely shares its approaches in the analysis of qualitative data (Bryman, 2004), and is common in documentary practice. The themes were discussed with the editor, who undertook his own review of the material to validate, or not, my categorisation. We then worked together to decide which interviewee expressed best each theme or issue and then how to structure each thematic section of narrative from across the interviewees. The film was structured from the interviews, with the location cinematography and archive material then added. Material that required exposition was discarded given the interviewee-led approach to the narrative; I did not want to insert myself as an audible interlocutor simply to exposit information lacking in the interviews.

Use of archive material

It was without question that Macdonald's work would be included in the film given the aims of the research as well as the associated Tyne Tees film from the series 'Come in if you can Get in' that features Macdonald and his work at Greatham Creek. This material enabled the creation of an additional temporal layer in the narrative, showing the Creek still in use, Macdonald's practice, as well as moving images of Ken Robinson (the subject of Macdonald's consideration of working-class men). The images in this archive footage give a sense of decay and ruination, and although not dated, point to the coming decline).

As the preliminary research progressed, interviewees offered access and use of their family photographs for use in the film. This developing archive was very limited as whilst the images added additional visual material for the film, individual collections contained only small numbers of images and they were often small prints that had to be rephotographed digitally. The discovery of the substantial archive of family photographs gathered by Chris Featherstone was certainly serendipitous and added a significant narrative element to the film. Macdonald's and the Featherstone images are presented without captions; no attribution to separate Macdonald's 'professional' work from that of a family snap, nor any dates, however approximate. With family albums, this arises as such photographs are very rarely accompanied by captions, dates, titles or explanations. These details are held in memory only, and explanations may differ between people and across time (Chambers, 2003). The film employs them as illustrations, in places unreferenced to actuality, producing what has been defined as an 'allegorical space... allowing us to people it with our imaginings' that create a vanished arcadia (Samuel, 1994, p. 357). Macdonald's images are delineated not by captions, but through by the inclusion of his reflections on what his images convey, and his accounts of his work at the Creek, with his images used in these sections. For Macdonald himself, attribution was not a concern given the narrative construction as well as his own philosophy of the photographic image (he rarely offers detailed titles to his images), 'Photographs, being silent and still, preclude reality other than in that most superficial sense of the representation of an apparent likeness. In precluding reality, they fall into the realm of myth, where everyone is free to invent by association as they see fit, for the meaning of each photograph is conditioned by those personal experiences the onlooker takes to

viewing each image' (Macdonald, 1989). Further reflecting Samuel's allegorical space, Macdonald states that the photographic image transforms the everyday '...into something poetic, mysterious and significant through each of our own minds' (Ibid 1989, p9). The smiling human subjects of the family photographs used in the film engage the viewer in the stories being told; it is not just the interviewees smiling during their filmed accounts (they never directly engage the viewer in their look) but a variety of photographic images where the subjects are posed and smiling directly at the viewer as accounts of them or the interviewees own experiences are recounted. Whilst there are no captions on the photographs of people, they are linked structurally. When an interviewee talks of themselves or someone else and a photograph of someone is seen, the images are of those people. This engagement was designed at the editing stage in terms of the duration that archive photographs are on screen; enabling the viewer sufficient time to consider the image in detail and draw upon the spoken accounts either during or after, and sometimes with no audio, to heighten attention on the image to encourage a deeper engagement. The use of the archive material is further discussed in specific contexts, related to the themes in the A Contested Landscape chapter.

Cinematography - Landscape

This section discusses the rationale for the formal cinematic design of the film (including sound); why the film looks and operates in the way it does, how the film's 'rules' were developed including the influences upon my approaches (other film works, scholarship, and my previous practice in documentary television) that were brought to bear on the film. The chapter refers to established film practice where required, but largely seeks to explain and defend the confluence of ideas drawn from my own career in television, sensibilities and desk-based research that form the minimalist cinematic aesthetic of the work. The concept of authorship in a collaborative medium and how my collaborators were selected is also discussed. (An appendix at the end of the commentary lists technical details relating to the equipment used). The discussion also hopefully offers a starting point to others considering film as a research method from which they could seek to develop their practice.

As a film concerned with remembrance of place, Bachelard's proposal that 'Memory – what a strange thing it is! – does not record concrete duration... We are unable to relive duration that has been destroyed' (1964, p. 9), offered a way to consider the cinematic approach. At an early stage of development, a Bachelardian and highly experimental cinematic approach was considered; with the work constructed from images and sounds that would drift tidally, offering slippery, possibly contradictory accounts of the experience of the community, offering a much more dreamlike experience. However, in order to address and engage an open audience (those interviewed in the film in addition to others), I utilised a range of familiar filmic methods (Interviews and archive material), within an overall experimental approach. From my meetings with Macdonald, well before I conducted the preliminary research interviews with former residents it was clear the Creek's community had had a deep effect upon him and continued to maintain an enduring place in his development as a photographer (as the film explores). My experience of finally being amongst the ruins on Cote Hill Island, after years of thinking about it, exploring the flotsam and jetsam; rusted wrenches, milk churns, torn fishing nets, a rotting sunken hull, the sleepers that Dobbin would later tell me would still be there, meant that I too succumbed to the place in the same way I did with the Cote Hill Island photograph. The visual properties and atmosphere of the post-industrial Tees

estuary landscape very much echo that of the Thames estuary at Essex, ‘...these post-industrial landscapes possess their own unique aesthetic, ruins of empire of another kind...of a life and culture that has now disappeared or been translated’ (Worpole, 2005, no page numbers). This elegiac sense of a particular and engaging aesthetic of such landscapes is very much at the centre of Macdonald’s practice, ‘within this sprawling complexity of industry and river margins there are times when light and atmosphere and the very nature of the industry come together to create a profound sense of beauty and richness which impresses on the mind something of the ingenuity of the achievements of man and which is itself so visually uplifting’ (Macdonald, 1989, p. 11). I share Worpole and Macdonald’s visual and emotional reactions to such landscapes, which is why the Cote Hill Island image engaged me in the way it did when I first saw it. Why I share the same appreciation I am uncertain, but it may well be founded in growing up near the Mersey estuary in Runcorn, a landscape of similar properties including the massive former ICI plant almost identical to that of the one in Teesside. These experiences reinforced the initial approach to the cinematographic style as best to convey mood and tone; the meaning of the film is carried not only in what is said by the residents, but by what is seen and heard of the place. The film produces an affective cinematic archaeology that imbues the presented film-space with the engagement conveyed by the interviewees.

The film’s cinematography was not designed to be illustrative of the material aspects of the community as told through the interviews. Chiefly this was because the remains are sparse, so shooting images as basic representational, factual illustration was not possible, or desired. On occasion the film does this obliquely, such as when Dobbin remarks that the sleepers of the slipway would still be there, and a shot is shown of the sleepers, but not in any detail. When Bill’s recalls the ‘shooting box on the corner’, the film does not then show the remains of the shooting box, what purpose would it serve other than showing the audience that the shooting box is there still? I did consider shooting matching images as close as possible to the family photographs to create a greater understanding of the geography of the community within the film, but this would have become far too restrictive by trying to connect the interview content to precise images. Peers had proposed the common approach to historical documentary whereby a historic image is mixed and faded

with a contemporary image to illustrate change. Whilst the film does this with the Cote Hill Island image, but without a mix or fade, it does not engage with the technique to any significant extent as a method. This is because I did not want the images of the Creek to be understood as illustrations of other images and therefore crudely depicting the passage of time. Materially, the images of the Creek are a record of the physical remains of the community structures and the geographic space of the Creek and landscape beyond it at the time of shooting in which they sit. Within these images, we see examples of the flora and fauna present, with the only human occupation being the traffic seen in the aerial images. More importantly, and through being disconnected illustratively from the interview content, they are free to be more associated affectively with what is being heard in the interviews. The cinematography is not simply illustrative of what is being told, but also contradicts it; the wide shots, devoid of people are imbued with a sense of loss, but also alive with the activities being remembered. The visual contradictions enforce the loss felt by the residents, but also expands the landscape in the imagination of the audience; the Creek is described elementally by David, 'Sea, land and sky' and matches what we are seeing in the aerial images. Nancy then tells us 'It was heaven', but we see images of decay, a make-shift footbridge and a semi-submerged rusting car wheel under an over-cast sky, old nails sticking up from a piece of timber. Such a sequence is designed to provoke the viewer to ask, what was it about this place that was so 'magical', as June describes it. The space is devoid of people, only their anonymous 'ghost-like' remains as her sister Dot thinks of them, and that the Creek was a 'jewel of a place' as Macdonald reflects on what it sounded like, 'to wake up and hear a curlew or a dunlin calling'. As Worpole continues in relation to Essex's very similar landscape, 'This sense of past lives and ways of doing things continues to haunt...making it even more precious, and to be cherished' (Worpole, 2005, no page numbers). Given the centrality of remembrance of the past, the landscape footage was graded to marginally desaturate the colours, resulting in a reduced visual difference between my footage and the 1980's colour 16mm filmstock in the 'Come in' archive footage.

Cinematographically, camera movement is normally dictated by action within the frame; the subject moves so the frame must also to accommodate it. Or the camera is moved in space or through panning or tilting from a static position to direct

our attention to something (Rabiger and Herman, 2020). To my cinematic sensibility, the space covered between two points without a subject to follow is made redundant, as it is an empty journey. I've never liked a pan or a tilt across space, when a static shot that encompasses the entirety of the space, or a close-up of a detail can be used. To move a camera slowly across a space is often simply not required and manipulates the audience in trying to manufacture some kind of unfolding revelation. Apart from the fauna (seals, birds, an occasional fox), the landscape of the Creek contains little activity to dictate camera movement; the camera would not pan with a fox or a seal, as they are not the focus of the narrative. Bachelard's claim that memory operates in flashes of remembrance, not in real time, shares much with the photographic image; a motionless exposure of a place, person or object that is fixed in time as well as chemically upon the paper. In this respect, the film, whilst not undertaking a Bachelardian approach as previously discussed, was in part influenced by his philosophy. These ideas were synthesised into what became a set of formal rules; chiefly that the frame could never move, but its contents could; a still, moving image. Every shot has a fixed point of focus (the plane of focus is not adjusted, 'pulling focus' achieved through mechanical movement of the glass elements of the lens), within the duration of the shot to direct attention. Zooms were also not to be used.

This static frame approach was also applied to the aerial footage; added as a response to a peer-review screening where those unfamiliar with the space could make no relationship to the Creek's environs, 'where is it exactly?' due to all of the footage shot up until that screening being shot from eye-level or below. Aerial footage from drones has become ubiquitous due the low-cost of the technology, with an emerging, almost-genre of the drone film; endless movement, that undercuts the precise dynamic effect it is trying to achieve; when all is airborne, the impact of flight is lost. The only images where the camera moves are in the 1982 Tyne Tees archive film footage, but that was then, when the Creek was just about still inhabited; when Ken Robinson (piloting the coble Macdonald is in) still navigated it.

Pace and 'Slow Film'

The film's landscape shots and some of the photographs used are held longer than they typically would be in a documentary film, to allow the viewer to interrogate them as one might a photograph; to explore the landscape and its features the interviewees' memories are connected to the landscape cinematography. Documentary films that take such a formal approach are considered part of a movement known as 'Slow films' and can be broadly considered as part of a continuum between moving image production in the visual arts, such as video installation to documentary and cinema (Pethő, 2015). The use of the tableaux long-take is designed to give the viewer a more in-depth understanding, insisting that time is needed to consider what is being seen as well as what is being spoken about by the interviewees. Time is given to develop an emotional identification, more than a shorter, illustrative shot would do (Ellis, 2012). This approach strips back techniques of fast-cut sequences and camera movement in order to reveal. The slow film aesthetic, allowing the viewer to survey an image, brings the viewer into the same experience as looking at photograph, time is given to consider the content of the frame, to look within it. Each viewer may find things significant to themselves that others do not (ibid). These conceptions of the possibilities of 'slow film' connect to Macdonald's assertion that photographic images 'need to be given both time and space' and that 'looking and reflecting will inevitably raise other notions, associations and feelings and so a process of enrichment goes on.' (Macdonald, 1989, online). Patrick Keiller's Robinson trilogy of films (Slow Films) were introduced to me at an early stage in the research process and the use of the long take in these works very much confirmed the rules I had decided upon; the landscape as the focus of meaning, to be filled with recollections, not simply a background to action and/or narrative. The Creek, as with Keiller's films, engage the viewer in looking at the same place, 'insisting that we look at the more closely for a second or third time' (ibid, p96). Reflecting on Keiller's cinematography, Massey notes, 'The camera does not film while moving. It films when it stops, and at each point when it does so, it dwells upon a story. These long takes give us, in the midst of the rush and flow of globalisation, a certain stillness. But they are not stills. They are about duration' (2008).

Where my cinematography is linked chiefly to the photographic image (the exploration of the Cote Hill Island image, and the centrality of family photographs) Keiller's approach is influenced by Turner's Picturesque Views of England and Wales series of paintings (again, a static frame, as places in which history occurs) as well as landscape photography (Daniels, 2012). Both cinematic approaches linked to the representational tableaux of photography and painting enable the 'foregrounding [of] the single, photographic frame in cinema', combining motion with stillness (Pethő, 2015, p. 98). Dr Simon Robinson's practice-based research further confirmed my approach prior to shooting. His film 'Estuary England' (2014); a static-frame cinematic exploration of the Thames edgelands at Thurrock is captivating in its simplicity; allowing the audience time to consider a carefully chosen frame. Robinson's locations are similar to the Creek in terms of the flora, heavy industry, and intertidal zones. I wanted to draw attention not only to the unrecognisable ruins of a community, but to open up objects to the imagination as things that had once had hands upon them, that *had* been built, had been designed for a purpose, and as Macdonald laments, a place that was built by hand, where 'the facility to do things for ourselves' had been lost. All of the close-ups in the film are of man-made objects; a rotting fishing net, a rusting wrench, a discarded medicine bottle, a corroded tin sign for Saxa salt, a section of hull from a part-buried fishing boat. These are the remains of what was introduced, transported; there are no close-ups of flora and fauna. The rusting bolt is a key example:



Figure 5, image from film

The image focuses the audience to consider that a hand once drilled this hole, fixed the bolt securely, and laboured to make the place what it once was. This is one of the objects that signifies the 'something' in contrast to having 'nothing' that June refers to immediately before this close-up is shown in the introductory section of the film. The accompanying images to Dot's remarks at the end of the film are of the 'bits of wood sticking out of the ground'. The silvered timbers remain driven into the ground, ruins remain here just as much as they do in one of Macdonald's images or the family snaps. This approach was influenced by Bachelard's conception of memories, that they are 'motionless, and the more they are securely fixed in space, the sounder they are' (Bachelard, 1958, p .9). The rotting hull in (fig 6) of the boat reminded me of a skeleton when I first saw it on a research visit, with the ribcage smashed. Just as the remains have been revealed by the tide, so are memories that have been excavated by the film.



Figure 6 - image from film

These images of the remains 'are no longer only geographic but also biographical and personal' (Berger, 1967, p. 15) through the editorial connections between what is shown and what is said by the interviewees.

There are no rules to dictate how long a shot be held in a Slow Film, and in comparison, to Keiller's Robinson films, *The Creek* could be considered as 'faster', in that its 'long take' shots, are shorter, but I do think that the duration of many of those shots could be held for a few seconds longer, but this critique has only recently developed in going back to the film to precisely consider this. However, this leads me back to the previous point regarding the public audience for the film and possibility of alienating viewers and not engaging as wide an audience as possible. The effect of the long take in the film is enhanced when no or very little dialogue accompanies it, there is nothing else for the audience to do other than engage with an image bringing to it everything they have heard and seen to that point. In any future film projects, the slow film aesthetic will be further investigated as an integral element of the research given the success of this work.

Cinematography - People

Continuing the relationship with photography, the filmed interviews were designed to reflect a photographic portrait; one shot size per image/interview. Conventionally in non-fiction as well as fiction cinematography, an interview will be shot in at least two shot sizes to allow for variety to create choices in the editing process (Lindenmuth, 2010). In the film, all interviews were shot in one fixed size. There are occasions in the film where interviewees lean forward, here a cinematographer may adjust through camera movement in time with the subject to maintain the original framing. This element of my training and professional practice was abandoned, static frames for the landscape, static frames for the people. The exact same focal length was employed for the interviews with the former residents (an 85mm prime lens), with each lit at low light levels so that the aperture would need to be set at its widest to achieve the shallowest depth of field possible, to produce non-distinct backgrounds. Only one key light (primary source) was used, with all other pre-existing sources in the location largely switched off where possible. This minimal, low-key approach offers an image entirely focussed upon the person. The key influence for this style was from my own on-the-job learning in documentary television as an assistant cameraman to two cameramen who worked in very minimal ways; choosing not to employ classic three-point lighting and adopting a 'less is more' as well as natural lighting philosophy, where artificial lighting attempts to obscure itself. This approach was also heavily influenced by the cinematography of Nestor Alemross in the film *Days of Heaven* (1978). The images are largely lit with natural light, and where required, artificial sources were employed, but used to give a natural effect (Alemross, 1984).

As previously discussed, specific locations were used that were familiar to the interviewees, but the size of the room was also important to achieve the visual properties previously described. To create a soft, indistinct background, subjects needed to be at a distance from the surfaces in the rear of the shot (therefore interviewees, apart from Macdonald's were not shot in their homes). The camera and mic placement in fig 7 was the same for all interviews. In this location (Greatham Village Hall) daylight could not be eliminated due to the large windows, and the interviews could not be shot at night due to some interviewees being unable to attend during the evening. Daylight was minimised by the 'flags' used. The large

black drape reduces ambient light and creates contrast on the interviewees faces, whilst the flag on the stand in the top left of the image blocks daylight from another window that would have lit the background.



Figure 7 Dobbin/Kenny interview set-up. Image author's own



Figure 8 Dobbins's interview. Image from film.

The exception to the above approach to the interviews is Macdonald's. Shot in his studio (at his home) under natural light, with the background clearly in view (fig 9). Macdonald's narrative offers a different thread to that of the others as previously discussed. He sits in higher-key daylight, not in the low-key locations of the residents, separating Macdonald from the former residents visually. He is linked visually to the Creek through the painting of a river made for him by one of his grandchildren visible in the background. Whilst this interview uses natural light, it still maintains the same approach as the resident's interviews, one source of light, maintaining the previously stated naturalistic approach to the cinematography.



Figure 9 Ian's interview. Image from film.

Sound

The absence of music was also part of the overall formal approach to be similar to the photographic still image and Bachelard's claimed properties of memory. When asked about music in formative peer-review screenings, I could not find any rationale for why it was needed. There was simply no need to add anything to the human or avian voices and wind to heighten atmosphere or manipulate an emotional response. The birdsong and wind offered the soundtrack to the Creek; some recorded on location, other sounds from library sources of the species mentioned by Macdonald (Redshanks, Curlews, Dunlins). During one public screening I was told by a former resident (not featured in the film), that there was not enough birdsong in the film, because 'it was deafening' in the past. Perhaps so, perhaps Bachelard's definition of memory and the possibility of 'rose coloured spectacles' that Ann was only too aware of in her own account was at play. However, the natural soundscape of the Creek was manipulated. The sounds of traffic on the busy road that runs close to the eastern most remains of the community, carried by the prevailing onshore wind shatters any atmosphere of Macdonald's place that was 'full of solitude', were not recorded. The traffic and road are visible in the aerial images, but distant enough for an audience not to expect to hear them. To the west, not far from Cote Hill Island, is Bell's Tip, an open-cast waste facility that emits constant vehicle reversing alerts. Given these unwanted

sounds of the space, no synchronous sound was recorded for the landscape images. In these choices, the aural reality of the Creek is adapted to suit the recollections and mood. On one level, this reflects the sound that was closer to the period being recollected, as well as the experience of the place that is being remembered in the film. In my own experience, even after a short period of time there, the mechanical sounds rapidly slip away. This sound design aides the isolation of the place from its surroundings and fixes it closer to the recollections than the filmed actuality.

Film as collaboration

The formal cinematic 'rules' enabled me to select suitable collaborators (Richard Johnston, Cinematographer and Matt Dennis, Editor) whose previous practice made them suitable, as well as giving them a set of pre-determined constraints, but creative freedom to work within them. The rules also established a framework for the approach to the film that I had established that defined a model of practice for the collaborators to operate within. This is important given the collaborative nature of film production when considering the work as my research. Had any anxiety regarding authorship overly concerned me, then I could have taken on the roles of cinematographer and editor, but this would have been to the detriment of the work; creative collaboration made the work stronger due to constant, on-location critical peer discussion regarding images choices (cinematographer) and then in the structuring of the material (editor). Undertaking all of the work myself would have also made the process too lengthy to undertake and diminished the work in the pursuit of a misguided way to prove 'it's all my own work'. In order to further engage my collaborators, both visited the Creek and spent the best part of a day there (the cinematographer prior to any filming). This fieldwork had a valuable impact upon their work in understanding the accounts in the interviews, but also making sense of the place for themselves, as well as in relation to the archive material. The order of shooting was scheduled so that the location cinematography was undertaken once all of the interviews had been shot, so that we had in mind, as well as in notes, those recollections when making images.

An example of the value of collaboration can be found in the opening sequence of the film. In Fig 10, Macdonald seems to be reflecting upon his experience of the Creek as we hear others telling us what it was like. In reality he's looking out of his window whilst waiting for the sound of a passing aircraft to diminish. In this example,

the editor imbued meaning to an image that was not designed to be used. An editor will approach material in ways that non-editors may miss, entirely separating images from actuality and employing them in ways not envisaged at the time of shooting to create new associations.



Figure 10, image from film - Ian Macdonald's interview

Conclusion

Whilst this consideration of the rationale for the cinematographic approach to the film details the aims for impact and immersion through the 'rules' and pace of 'slow film' approach, the success can only be judged through audience engagement via exhibition, which to some extent are beyond the control of the filmmaker. It is unknown to me how you may have watched the film, if by the online link, then it is doubtful that you have watched at cinema-scale. Was it watched in one sitting, on a phone, with others, on a large TV at home? How was it heard, through sophisticated audio equipment or low-quality earphones? In order to fully immerse the audience within the landscape (both location footage and memory), and enhance affect, the film was designed for cinematic exhibition, anything smaller, such as televisions or hand-held devices significant detracts from the impact of the film. In this case impact of the film is reduced or enhanced through the scale and technical standards of its exhibition (Gandy, 2021). This discussion demonstrates the interplay and connection

of a set of choices influenced by professional practice, technical decisions, use of material, influences from other texts (written and filmic), feedback from peer-review at formative stages of development and the choices made for the most suitable collaborators for the project. These factors (possibly without recourse to experience from professional practice) are recommended in the undertaking of film practice-based research. The development of such a set of 'rules' as discussed above, enable the researcher to maintain an overall approach to a film across the period it takes to produce (which can be lengthy, and problematic given the complexity of variables inherent in film production) to produce a coherent project that effectively communicates its findings to the intended audiences.

A Contested Landscape – The Creek’s findings in context

Introduction

This chapter is structured around two key objectives. Firstly, ‘It was Heaven’, considers the macro historical setting of the Creek community to locate it within a cultural context examining its relationship to the development of vernacular plotlands in England, as well as the socio-economic development of Teesside that the film indirectly addresses. In doing so it offers a critical consideration of landscape as contested palimpsest with attendant conflicts of usage and control that link the experience of the Creek community to the emergence in the early 20th century of the plotland movement. Secondly, ‘That’s how we lived’ considers the micro, the specifics of the location and experiences of the community, the built and inhabited spaces, activities, and dynamics of social life as well as the ‘...sights, sounds and indeed smells that constitute its specific ambience’ (Ingold, 1993, p.155), that the film explores. Also discussed are the relationships between people, objects, and practices that the film focusses upon as well as considering the issues of gender; the experiences of women and the depiction of a specific working-class masculinity (both within the film and archive employed in the film), and a consideration of how remembrance and nostalgia are embodied in the film. Accounts from the former residents of the factors leading to the demise of the community are set in the economic period that the film reflects. Throughout both sections, the film’s narrative is considered, along with critique of my practice. Findings from preliminary research interviews as well as screenings are employed to illustrate how the film’s narrative was informed in the research phase, and how public engagement has further developed the research. Both sections are linked through discussion of how the film indirectly reflects regional and national development from the interwar period to the period of industrial decline commencing in the 1970’s.

1. 'It was heaven'

In addition to Nancy's definition, others in the film describe the Creek as a place of freedom, as full of solitude, as a place of retreat, where they owned their own fishing bases cum holiday homes. There is a very strong sense of belonging, amplified by the sense of loss, with the place somehow still being connected to people, 'it still draws you to it' as John Henry remarks, but unsure how. However, the place of the Creek will be analysed in terms of space being conflictual where different demands and commands collide, raising questions of agency (Lefebvre, 1991), where who the place belongs/ed to is considered prior to a sense of belonging (Massey, online, no date)

The development of the Creek community coincided with the emergence of the 'plotlands' movement that found its self-build communities amidst conflict and concerns of rights, ownership, and access to the landscape in which they built their rural and coastal homes (Hardy & Ward, 1984). As plotland communities expanded in the pursuit of individual freedom, and a desire for a more pastoral, rural home away from urban centres in the 1920's and 30's, opposition to them did likewise based on notions of preservation of the mythical and unblemished English landscape and so a need to prevent ruination. Whilst acknowledging the desire for escape from the urban environment and ensuing industrial pollution, Steers' 1944 survey of the English and Welsh coastlines found such communities to be 'hideous settlements' that were a 'shocking desecration' of the natural landscape' (Steers, 1944, p. 11). As detailed in the Desk-based Research chapter, 'A survey of the flora and fauna of Tees marshes', conducted in 1918, by Heslop-Harrison showed no welcome for the presence of the Creek community in the marsh, and *The Birds of Teesmouth*, a documentary produced by the RSPB (1966), draws the same conclusions as Heslop-Harrison, those who would inhabit the Creek to shoot and hunt, (such as Bill's dad) were deviant and wholly unwelcome. As Bill recalls his first visit to the Creek, 'My earliest memory of going down the Creek...to the shooting box on the corner' (fig 11), and the sound of the clunk of his dad's gun when being loaded.



Figure 11, Remains of the Shooting Box. Image – author's own

Similar accounts from the 1920's regarded the plotland communities as spoiling the natural landscape in which they were erected as being unsanitary eyesores, (Hardy and Ward, 1984) because the more hand-built, vernacular architecture is, the 'less conventionally attractive it is to outsiders' (Worpole, 2015, p. 32). Planning legislation in the 1920's and 30's was ineffective in stemming plotlands developments, until enhancements to planning acts legislation in the 1940's introduced the sought-after protections. Even then, developments continued through the enterprise of private landowners seeking to make small parcels of land available for holiday homes into the 1970's (Hardy and Ward, 1984, Mann, 2003). Plotlands developments were characterised by being situated in landscapes peripheral to existing centres of housing, holiday homes owned by the same family that became permanent residences which over time become suffused with childhood memory, and habitations that were constantly improved over time by the residents as and when means allowed. (Hardy and Ward, 1985) These characteristics reflect well the variety of habitations at the Creek, including the biographies of childhood memory that the

film explores. The Creek environment was perhaps more extreme regarding the challenging estuarine location they were situated within due to their original use as bases to fish from but developed as seasonal holiday homes for the families. Many other plotlands developments were coastal and as such, were also subject to challenging conditions, most notably the storm and ensuing flood at Jaywick in 1953 (Worpole 2013). These peripheral locations, whilst providing freedom, escape, and adventure (as discussed in the film), 'are challenged and even mocked by the dangerous unmanageability of the sea' (ibid, p. 50).

There were some claims in the preliminary research interviews that there were on occasion a small number of permanent residents. In the film, Dobbin claims that a man named Jossie May 'lived down there', but the community itself as represented in the film cannot be considered a permanently occupied settlement. However, many plotlands did develop from seasonal labour practices, such as tents erected during the harvest seasons by workers developing into permanent homes along the river Thames (Szczelkun, 2020). The tidal nature of the landscape also meant that any permanent dwelling would have been very difficult, as Bill points out when he and his father had to wait out a high tide, amplified by the wind, that came up into the cabin. Ann recalls the tidal environment in her remembered delight when she and her sisters had to stay a little longer until the ebb tide revealed the walkways. The location itself presented the impossibility of utility services ever being available (water, power etc). These factors may explain why the community never encountered any direct intervention from authorities. As explored in the film, the cabin or boathouse was a temporary place of escape from the routine of home either in nearby Greatham or the surrounding towns; a place and places journeyed to from home and stayed in for specific periods where 'you did what you liked' (Bill). Family visits were seasonal, and linked to holiday periods coinciding with fishing seasons, and the works' fortnight. The specific economic context is distinct from the plotlands; established as a base to fish from, with the site considered as the remnant of a fishing industry (Rowe, 1999). Certainly, the scale of the structures as seen in the archive footage, such as the jetty are considerable, and striking when one considers that these were not commissioned by the local authorities and erected by civil engineers, but recreational fishermen. It remains opaque whether any permissions were sought or needed for these structures. In terms of land ownership or

permission, the findings are opaque, with only Bill commenting that a '*they*' allowed boats to be kept at the Creek as well as the erection of the boathouses and cabins. Who '*they*' were could not be established during the research.

The distances travelled by the families to visit for their holidays, give a sense of expansive spaces in direct contrast to the 'curtailed space' of being with others in their town-housing (Tuan, 1977, p. 59), where a greater sense of freedom was experienced, a place for Ian that was 'full of solitude' where thoughts could be ordered to create photographic works, where he was able to '...relish the very special silence of the various retreats of solitary daydreaming' (Bachelard, 1958, p. 9), and something special that nobody else had (June). The desire for escape to a more pastoral setting was what drove the plotlands movement, supported by landowners and philanthropists who envisaged better, more wholesome models of living (Hardy and Ward, 1984). The accounts of the Creek as a place of retreat given in the film needs to be understood in the context of the industrial complex of Teesside itself, where any sense of a curtailed space was more amplified here than possibly many other areas of the UK. A survey map of the region in 1944 indicate Stockton on Tees, Thornaby and Middlesbrough as 'Industrial Areas' (marked in black), surrounded by 'Residential or other built up'. The Tees saltmarsh to the north of these combined areas are defined as 'Hinterlands of Good Scenery' (Steers, 1944). This appreciation of the scenery contrasts with a survey in the early 19th century (the heavy industry yet to emerge) when it was considered 'An unwholesome marsh' and 'in a state of much decay' (Skirne, 1801, p. 81).

By the mid 1970's, Teesside was 'an industrial region, no more, no less' and given its industry-centred urban development was a region of company towns that did not cohere as well as other urban areas in the UK (Gladstone, in Beynon et al, 1994, p. 22,). The landscape was a tapestry constructed of physically injurious, highly polluting heavy industry comingled with housing for the manual, male workforce. The rapid expansion of heavy industry in Teesside in the mid 19th century saw the marshland landscape covered with blast furnaces, foundries, and shipyards. By 1871 there were 90 foundries and coking ovens in the region, with expansion continuing until the 1960's. The sheer concentration of blast furnaces and foundries resulted in high levels of air pollution (Beynon et al, 1994), referenced in the film

through Bill's account of his father's use of the Creek as a place to recuperate due to his chest condition. This specific setting may well account for the strength of emotion and sense of escape that the film communicates; a place made more valuable because the massive contrast to the landscape of heavy industry, rather than the constraints of a British town or city.

Between the 1950's and 60's, the Tees saltmarsh landscape increasingly succumbed to unchecked pollution from industry, with concerns and complaints suppressed by local councillors with close connections to industry. Whilst the area was within was a Site of Special Scientific Interest (now a designated as site protected under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance), unions and employers ran collaborative campaigns for continued industrial growth with 'Jobs not Birds' as a slogan in the 1970's, with Hartlepool Borough Council campaigning to protect the habitat. (Beynon et al, 1994). The pollution from the local water treatment works releasing sewage into the Creek exemplifies these attitudes to the natural environment, the Creek as no more than a natural a means of practical waste discharge (an 'open sewer' as June states, that 'killed it stone dead', as Kenny remarks) to the estuary and North Sea. Another account of pollution was given in the research interviews; that the open-cast tip used by ICI in the same period (still in use today as a landfill site to the south of Cote Hill Island) was used to dump Cyanide that was not of sufficient commercial grade. At one public screening I mentioned this account and my uncertainty regarding it, immediately an audience member remarked, 'That's true'. When I asked how they could be certain, they replied 'because it was me who was dumping it Warren' (Audience member, 2019). In the preliminary and filmed interviews (although unused due to the inability to substantiate the claims) matching accounts were given of Hartlepool Borough Council (HBC) unofficially arranging for the last remaining, dilapidated cabins (seen in the archive film of Macdonald arriving in the Creek in Ken's coble) to be razed at some point in the 1980's, presumably to erase them permanently in defence of the natural habitat. The Creek community until this point was subject to indifference rather than any direct intervention to remove them from the landscape. This issue was explored in the preliminary research interviews, but none could recollect any organised, official opposition or attempts at eviction or prosecution.

Whilst pollution was cited as a critical factor in the decline of the community, the film's discussion of household economics reflects the increased prosperity of the working classes from the post-war era onwards as an additional contributing factor, linking these with reflections on shifts in lifestyle and the diminished appeal for contemporary families, 'people had more money' as Bill remarks. With increased affluence from the 1950's, package holidays, colour televisions and cars were a distinct possibility (Benson, 1994, Brook, 2001), resulting in the Creek becoming less desirable with escapes possible even further away from the highly industrialised complex. Both Bill and David's accounts reflect a shift in attitudes across this period with their beliefs that it was 'a place of its time' and would not appeal to today's families. These remarks were knowingly made in the context of the Creek no longer being polluted, as illustrated by the presence of seals in the film's landscape footage.

In his analysis, Dave sets the film in the context of Brexit and the promise of a better, freer, restored England (the film was in production during and after the referendum), and therefore an escape from a stifling, unwanted past (Dave, 2020). Pro-Brexit campaigners presented the break with Europe as the opportunity for the 'recovery of the national landscape from the dismal grip' of the European Union, invoking visions of the pastoral English countryside to be somehow restored and returned to its former, ancient glories (Wright, 2017). Here again the preservationist, or restorationist urge remains. However, England's rivers are subject to increasing levels of pollution. with only 14% of English rivers meeting a good standard, in part due to funding cuts to the Environment Agency. Water companies have increased raw sewage discharge into rivers and are misreporting such activity. Industrial and domestic discharges are also contributing to the problem (UK Parliament, 2022).

Bill charts the shifts in the British economy through his accounts of inter-war and possibly later experiences where the Creek provided a means to supplement income for families by catching and selling fish and shellfish as 'you got nothing on the dole'. Kenny also talks of the poverty of the families and the Creek as an economic necessity, with Nancy continuing this theme with her story of helping her grandad to sell cockles from the Creek around the streets of Stockton on Tees. This subsistence at the Creek was recorded in the early 19th century, with the poor of Greatham allowed to collect cockles for themselves as well as for sale (Brewster, 1829). For the Creek community, this 'living off the land' was enhanced by the nearby Cerebos Salt works (becoming Sharwoods Foods), and their disposal of unwanted foodstuffs near to Cote Hill Island kept the residents supplied in variety of free goods. Accounts of this activity were omitted from the film as it would have required too much detailed exposition based on the interviewees not giving sufficient context. These accounts point to families who had the knowledge and ability to extend or replace their natural domestic means of home when away from it, as well as periods of needing to do it due to economic hardship as Kenny points out. As well as pollution and increased affluence, a shift in local attitudes seems to have emerged at an indeterminate point, the community started to be vandalised, exemplified by Dobbin's visible upset at the fate of his coble, 'They set me boat afire, that was it'. Given the location of the community, this could have only happened from people living locally. It would be a considerable leap to understand the emergence of vandalism to the fracture of working-class traditions through increased affluence (Brooke, 2001), but this should not be discounted as a context.

The physical reworking of the landscape over time has both contributed to the possibility of the building of the Creek community as well as its recent inaccessibility. Fig 12 shows the man-made embankments ('Revetment Walls' as Macdonald calls them in the film), constructed in the late 19th/early 20th century from slag from the regions' iron works (Latham et al, 2013). The raised grassy embankment on the left was the public footpath linking the main road between Seaton Carew and Middlesbrough to Greatham Village. This footpath was used by families from the surrounding towns (Middlesbrough, Stockton on Tees, Thornaby) to access their cabins or boathouses, most often arriving by bus (as David says).



Figure 12, Aerial image from the film

The breaches in the wall visible in the top left quarter of the image were made in 2012 to provide flood alleviation to the industrial complex, by reopening the natural, pre-existing arteries (known as 'fleets' locally) of the Creek, whilst at the same time expanding the nature reserve managed by the RSPB (Latham et al, 2013). The land to the left of the revetment wall, was once the salt-extraction works of Cerebos that ceased production in 1970 that the wall was created for (Rowe, 1999). The wall made possible the creation of the Creek community, by forming an artificial bank, resulting in what Macdonald describes as a 'safe place' for mooring boats that over time evolved into the boathouses and cabins. Unused in the film, Bill spoke of his disdain for the two breaches, wanting '*them*' to put in footbridges to retain access, despite him admitting he was too old to ever go back, but wanted to know it was still possible for others to if they wished. Many of those interviewed understood the need for the changes, but still saw them as unwelcome and this realignment of the landscape certainly informs the strength of feeling of loss that is so prevalent across the film. I was acutely aware of this in my first meeting with Bill and then across my preliminary research interviews with former members of the community. An audience member at one screening remarked that those responsible for the breaches were 'bloody do-gooders Warren!' (Audience member, 2019). '*Them*', the '*Bloody do-gooders*' are evidence of the divide regarding usage and access. This arises from the RSPB now managing the restored wetlands on behalf of Natural

England, therefore expanding the wetlands for the bird populations and birdwatchers; a restored place, as Heslop-Harrison would have no doubt approved. An architectural survey of the Creek in 1991 found one seaworthy coble moored at Cote Hill Island, by 1992 all the houseboats and cabins were gone (Rowe, 1999). The only public access today is to the 'Colony end' as seen in Fig 12. When I screened the film to the residents of Greatham village in September 2018 I was told by residents that access to Cote Hill Island is no longer possible due to further realignment works on behalf of Natural England. The image of the old fallen sign used in the introductory section of the film 'Site Closed to Public' (Fig 13) becomes more true for the Cote Hill Island location as the landscape continues to be remade and repurposed.



Figure 13, 'Site Closed to Public', image from film

Landscape is ever in flux, always becoming. The Creek community, unlike many plotlands developments from the same era that remain, was as provisional as Iron age communities traveling in the area by dugout canoe, Bronze Age settlers and Roman salt extraction (Fell and Robinson, 2018). Each curtailed by phenomena outside of their control. As Readman argues of the eighteenth century rings true here, that a landscape that shapes identity is much more varied and complex than what we accept as 'the epitome of Englishness...the pastoral south country' (2018, p16), and that the value of landscape 'depends on factors other than its perceived

physical properties' (Ibid, 2018). Of course, 'outsiders' are a question of perspective and landscape should be considered as 'a tapestry of woven contexts: enduring and ephemeral...' (Spirn, 1998, p160), with perceptions differing between who is walking in it (Lefebvre, 1991).

2. 'That's how we lived'

In common with plotlands developments, the Creek community repurposed structures as well as building their own dwellings, such as the white painted brick cottage that had been a former dug-out with a make-shift roof. The repurposing of boats into boathouses at the 'Colony End' such as June's former lifeboat, chimes with the re-use of railway carriages, wagons, and buses common in plotland developments (Hardy and Ward, 1984) as the low-cost foundations for a new home. Each building was a simple practical choice fitting to location and means of transportation to the chosen site; it was easier to get a boat down the Creek than any other structure given the location and tidal conditions, into the 'safe place' that the Creek became through industrial interventions that Macdonald outlines. Whilst the film does not dwell upon the exposition of historic and chronological detail, given the focus upon the lived experience of the community, the brief discussion of Macdonald's was employed to explain why and how the community emerged and extends the opening text explaining the period of habitation and original use.

Macdonald's appreciation of the aesthetics, linking back beyond plotlands to early modern practices, where communities only recourse to dwelling was to build it themselves, forces a contrast to the film's melancholic mood drive by Macdonald's narrative of what we have increasingly lost in terms of hand-skills in the post-industrial era, to build something 'you could live in'. The community (chiefly the men) were employed in manual work, mostly the surrounding heavy industry, as were many of their fathers, so these skills would have been naturally transferred to the construction of the buildings at the Creek. The film's exploration of the day-to-day routine of maintenance (a man's work) and how the community communicates the experience of their cabins, not just in what is said, but how it is said; with affection, care, etc illustrates the point that even though these structures are long-gone, they hold a vital and enduring presence in memory (Bachelard, 1958).

The only material available from Macdonald's archive of interior images of the dwellings was very limited, with only one image to use (although a couple more emerged from his archive after the film was completed), and family photographs gathered across the preliminary research interviews only depict exteriors. The only way to explore the physical interiors was through memory, and the accounts of the interiors stitched together in a singular narrative flow. In this respect the film explores the 'interiors' of memory, largely through exterior imagery so that the landscape becomes populated by the accounts of yet another layer in the palimpsest of the Tees saltmarsh landscape. June, Dot, and Ann's account of the interior of their boathouse, and the pleasure they take in recounting the details works cinematically as we can see and hear the expression in the faces and voices and contributes to the consideration of female experience (as discussed below).

The everyday pursuits of foraging, gardening, children's play activities, 'flatty-stabbing', amongst others offer a varied view of what life was like outside of the male pursuit of salmon fishing. As with the ability to build a dwelling, the ability to live from the land offers a stark contrast to our present lifestyles; these are experiences now far removed for many of us. The film does therefore celebrate this enterprise and ability, that we may well have lost and/or that is not possible due to the culmination of the planning legislation undertaken to avert the growth of plotland development previously discussed, along with the loss of a commons due to the needs of capitalism (Dave, 2020). Such places are a 'beacon in an economic system that has almost eradicated the language of livelihood and self-sufficiency from the political vocabulary' (Worpole, P32, 2015). Here the definition of commons is not to be confused with a shared landscape, but as primarily an activity that occurs in social relationships that are indivisible from the relationship to nature (Linebaugh, 2008). In this respect, the film, whilst focused upon a specific community area of the Teesside landscape resonates globally in terms of the loss of the commons to the requirements of capitalism.

Dobbin's account of the barrel-cum-bathtub, and Bill's recollection of his dad using fish guts as fertiliser, both told with great humour and affection are quite possibly alien to many viewers of the film. These accounts of activity are certainly romantic and were very much part of the original attraction for the plotlands movement. Again, the romance of a rural, pastoral retreat and the challenge and confidence of self-builders was at the same time the same romance held by those seeking to stop such communities from establishing themselves. Such 'wild' pursuits have become recast and sanitised for the middle-classes; foraging for 'wild' food has been popularised by lifestyle television (See *The River Cottage* television series for example) and linked to the sustainability agenda with growing interest leading to a proliferation of books, magazine articles and attendant specialist clothing and equipment vital for such pursuits. These interests are interwoven with the ongoing growth in demand for allotments that local authorities have been hard-pressed to manage given available land, for the reasons of perceived well-being, environmental concerns as well as offering more affordable food. (Local Government Authority, 2015, online). Other examples of the pursuit of a 'wild' lifestyle are seen in the growth of 'wild swimming', and as with foraging, has led to a growth in consumer goods at a time when we espouse the ethos of sustainability. The residents of the Creek simply didn't have this taxonomy; 'it's how we lived' as Dobbin remarks. Whilst for many of limited financial means the ability to build a dwelling away from home is now prohibited through increased legislation, land ownership, cultural norms (as discussed previously), as well as expense, such pursuits have found a new, more affluent market of those who want a place of their own to find '...one's own wholeness' (Hardy and Ward, 1984, p. 27). *Cabin Porn*, a book and website is 'A valuable reference for both the cabin builder and everyone seeking perspective on how to create spaces that just work — the ones that spellbind us in their warmth and ingenious simplicity' (*Cabin Porn*, ND, online). Both the Creek community, the plotlanders and those featured in *Cabin Porn* pursue the same arcadia, with the makeshift boathouses a more 'downmarket response to more general demands for leisure space' (Hardy and Ward, 1984, p. 24), from the economically disadvantaged to the advantaged of today – only those with financial means, rather than time, materials, and savvy, can now enjoy that wholeness it would seem.

The vernacular architecture and related practices are a key theme of the film, and are celebrated as such, but the film dismisses enchantment to an extent by discussing the labour and challenges of the Creek location; Fred's annual tarring of the boathouse roof (as June emphasises) and Bill's account of an unexpected high-tide that rose within the cabin resulting in him and his father having to wait until it subsided before leaving (as Ann recounts also). These accounts limit the romance of a trouble-free pastoral habitation; where the boathouses of the Colony End were continually subject to tidal conditions and had to be designed and built appropriately. Such challenges were widespread amongst plotlands communities, little or no sanitation and other services, difficult terrain and poor roads were all part of the challenges in many developments. Whilst only briefly touched upon, there is a discussion in the film of community and support; Dobbin's account (verified by Bill in his preliminary research interview) of the need to sell some pigs to obtain a coble for Bill, and the internal market for property in Bill's account of his dad buying the brick cabin from Kenny's dad. This is not as comfortable a place and existence that is perhaps dreamed of, or that which is espoused by Cabin Porn. Another issue indirectly referenced in the film is the seemingly unachievable political promise of an expansion of sustainable and affordable housing, as well as the shift to upcycling, re-use and re-purpose (as Dot and her sisters did by hauling timbers up the Creek after a ship launch). Proponents of self-build communities maintain the socio-political benefits realised by the Plotland movement, seeing them as a bulkhead against soulless urban development through communal building that fosters a renewed sense of social belonging and thus a revival of positive working-class identity (Szcelkun, 1993). At public screenings, audience members did comment on how the film provoked considerations of sustainability and the problems of affordable housing. The primitive vernacular transformed into premium-price prefabrication shaped by the hands of another, sent by ship or plane, conforming to British Safety Standards, continues the fault lines laid bare by the plotland pioneers, the conflict capsized, and the landscapes recolonised by a new breed of affluent 'anarchist' living a sanitised, centrally heated life away from home, or the romance found by many in pilgrimages to Jarman's Prospect Cottage at Dungeness.

'It was a man's place, really'

Nancy's statement sets the Creek community apart as a microcosm of Teesside's strictly gendered culture during the period the film's narrative is set within. The dominance of male-centred, physically demanding, and dangerous work in heavy industry in the 19th century resulted in minimal employment for women and set a template for gender relations into the mid 20th century (Beynon et al, 1994) as well as exclusion from certain settings, such as working men's clubs (Massey, 1994). Whilst gender roles from the 1950's onwards became increasingly less fixed through the breakdown of segregation in work between men and women (Brook, 2001), traditional gendered divisions remained at the Creek due to the specific heavy industrial context of Teesside that differed greatly from the rest of the UK at the time. These historic divisions were transplanted from the urban to the peripheral rural. Whilst the Creek was unique, this place of escape does not seem to have resulted in any pioneering change in gender relations, ('the lads slept on the top, the lasses slept on the bottom' as David remarks, which can be read as a comment on ongoing gender inequalities) with the freedom apparently less rewarding for wives and mothers than their children or men. Nancy's account of domestic activity illustrates the gendered division of labour; helping her granny with the cooking, and her brother helping his grandad to shoot 'pheasants, or whatever it was they brought back'. As Dot remarks, it may not have been an entirely liberating experience for the women.

Given the male-dominated imagery employed in the film of Macdonald's photographic work made at the Creek, as well as the male-centric existing representations and accounts (the ruinous 'Gunners' would have been men in Heslop-Harrison's survey), I was surprised that so many women contacted me to discuss their experiences and am indeed grateful as this opened an unforeseen investigation of women's experiences. Indeed, the main source of information within the film of men's activities comes from the women, other than men restricting themselves to discussion of fishing and shooting (the primary reason for the establishment of the community). It is important to consider that the women's discussion of these issues is largely a reflection upon the experiences of their mothers than any hardship endured by themselves. June remarks on Fred's required maintenance (the annual roof-tarring), but the film does not explore her experiences as a wife at the Creek. These issues were not explored during the interviews and is a

flaw in my interviewing technique; I had not followed June's shift from a child at the Creek, to a wife at the Creek during the interview; this could have further enriched the consideration of women's experiences. The men fished, maintained, repaired, and built, (the film is full of accounts of things that grandads, dads, brothers, and husbands made). The women looked after the children and fed their families using scant facilities, as Dot remarks, seemingly incredulous to how her mother could cook a Sunday roast on two primus stoves; life was indeed harder at the Creek than at home for the wife and mother, with June remarking that her mum slept on a wooden bench when there were too many kids staying in the boathouse. Photographs of their mother show her rarely smiling, but staring intently, at who we might guess to be her husband taking the picture. These domestic arrangements during holidays are entirely familiar to me from my own working-class childhood, the men and children always afforded far more leisure time due to the expectations of the role of the mother and wife as a domestic aide despite being 'on holiday'. (Never made clear in the film, apart from their account of the interiors, but Ann, June and Dot's accounts are all of the same mother and boathouse; they are sisters. David and Nancy are siblings).

One issue that remains problematic for me is the use of Bill's response to the question of the main activities of the women, 'gossiping' delivered with a chuckle and smile, which is cut against Nancy repeating the response, again with a laugh, a reinforcement of the traditional stereotype related to the strong gender divisions in the region previously discussed. This continues to concern me as I'm uncertain as to why I used these two responses. There is also a concern of how this reflects upon myself, and any possibility that my own views of women are being communicated; I made the editorial decision. Nancy's agreement with Bill could be read as justification for the remarks as well as evidence that women did indeed spend time gossiping; it's routine. Nancy seems to mean this as a joke, and she then goes on to explain the women's activities, after seemingly correcting herself with a 'no', after she says they were gossiping. The film then moves into the exploration of how hard life would have been for the women, whilst the men were following their pursuits as learned from their own fathers. There is no disdain for the woman's lot, but rather a pause to consider the experience of the women at the Creek. Family photographs used show the women posing with the husband's catch of the day, no doubt for a

meal (again, women's work), the man as the hunter, the women as cook. The inclusion of the photograph of the man hanging out his washing was used to gently undermine the narrative of men's work and what we might typically imagine that to be. One interesting aspect of the women who appear in the family photographs is their attire; many are very well dressed as if for a night out, sharply contrasting with the pitch-black structures. This seems paradoxical, given that you apparently didn't need pretty at the Creek, as Ann remarks of her mother's use of ribbons on old blackout curtains. However, these families will have had their homes in the heavily polluted and dirty towns of the region, a clean dress for a holiday retreat in a cleaner, unspoilt place. However, images are held for long enough for the viewer to consider these unusual juxtapositions, especially when compared to the work-gear attire of the men that we see throughout the film. Here a traditional femininity is on display, despite the hardship and challenges of domestic life at the Creek. I did not use the family photographs with all the interviewees during preliminary meetings in order to develop memory and association and this was a missed opportunity to take the exploration of the female experience further.

'What it is to be a man'

A very specific masculinity is defined in the film, the working-class man of heavy industry; the capable, resourceful breadwinner (yet as fathers, dependent upon women to take care of the children to continue their pursuits). The film, through Macdonald's discussion of men, reinforces a 'Rugged Manliness', defined by physically demanding, dangerous work, and potentially dangerous leisure activity and a male-centric recreational culture of the 19th and 20th centuries (Huskins and Boudreau, 2016), yet intensified in Teesside due to its massive industrial complex. Macdonald's remarks regarding his portraits of John Allison and Ken Robinson and their lives at the Creek as 'what it is to be a man', and what he loves about men particularly; 'their clothes, their stance, their attitude', along with praise for men who could make things with their bare hands and who had time to do so, reflect his greater concern with the depiction of the lot of the mostly male, working-class labour force that Teesside's prosperity was built upon until its demise in the 1970's. Macdonald's published works focus predominantly upon the heavy industry of Teesside, featuring often anonymous, unsmiling portraits of the men of heavy industry; *Blast Furnace* (1986), *Smiths' Dock Shipbuilders* (1987), *Images of the*

Tees (1989) and *The Blast Furnace* (2010). His images depict 'A sense of hard work, pride and a nobility of spirit' of the working man and his workplaces (Macdonald, 2010, online). The pride, nobility and hard graft enables these working-class men to consider themselves more powerful than the middle-class man - their workplace superiors (Nixon, 2009). This is typified in the portrait of Dobbin used in the film, standing in front of his moored coble that towers over him, flat cap on, shirt unbuttoned, hand on hip, staring at us, straight-lipped, hard and capable. The unsmiling portraits (staged, rather than observed by Macdonald) can be understood as attempts to convey the power and seriousness of these men. This admiration of the working-class man is also seen in the '*Come in...*' archive film. Ken Robinson is shot from a low angle against the sky, suggestive of power and authority as he pilots his coble, the image is almost Soviet in its construction. In another scene employed from '*Come in...*', we see Ken and another man having their portraits taken, and whilst we do not see Macdonald's final portrait, the filmed image conveys the same admiration. However, in conjunction with the testimonies of the men in the film, these identities are developed, we hear their accounts with humour, and we see their smiles, but these are associated with the Creek, not their employment or lack of it. Macdonald's depictions are contrasted using the family photographs gathered across the preliminary research interviews. As he remarks, these images are 'full of joy' from being at the Creek, and as he states are very different from his own melancholic images that convey the trauma of economic collapse that the region experienced in the 1970's when they were photographed. The family photographs were most likely to have been taken during earlier periods of regional prosperity, as well as the previously discussed escape from the industrial/urban, typified by the child being launched in the air. Crucially, Macdonald's images of the Creek used in the film and those published do not contain women, either in portrait or within landscape images. The existing moving image works discussed previously are also empty of women; the Creek is depicted foremost as a 'man's place', as Nancy states, the film makes clear, through the inclusion of family photographs and testimony, that it was a place made possible by the centrality of women in terms of its function as a place of escape.

From the late 1940's to the early 1970's, Teesside was one of the UK's most economically prosperous regions, with unemployment at 2% in 1966. Rapid economic decline due to recession, hastened by the inability of Teesside's largest employers, as well as the UK economy at large to remain competitive internationally, resulted in massive redundancy. The 'job for life' (mostly male) came to an end, traumatising working-class communities and decreasing living standards that at one time seemed unshakeable. (Macdonald & Shildrick, 2018). From 1966 to 1985 unemployment in Teesside increased rose to 23%, with some urban areas above 40% (Beynon et al, 1994). Macdonald's discussion of the 'ragged and falling to bits' Cote Hill Island with its ominous sky as symbolic of the national decline, ('we'd had all those strikes in the seventies...three-day weeks') functions within the film to situate the experience of the Creek within the specific economic context of the region.

The Island as an England in miniature must be understood as post-rationalisation; as Macdonald readily states, 'what it came to mean' to him. This 'what' needs to be de-coupled from the 'why' he was making the work, which seems less post-rationalised. The work was an attempt to document a way of life that was about to be lost to a period of 'rapid' and 'vast change'. Macdonald's sense of loss has been consistent across his practice, 'So many of these jobs that required hand to eye intuition, produced a sense of pride and achievement, a sense of community and family spirit have gone by the board...links with the past have been whittled away' (Macdonald, 1989, p. 11). The specific plotland vernacular aesthetic and lifestyle 'where things were eloquently put together' (by the men he so admires as previously discussed), a version of *an* England 'then' that was 'jumping out from the past' had to be preserved photographically because it was important and was soon to be ruined. This need for preservation because the images were conveying something vital was shared by Chris Killip, one of Macdonald's early collaborators 'I made those photographs [Tyneside shipyards] with a sense of urgency, as I thought it wasn't going to last' (O'Hagan, 2020). Both Macdonald and Killip, when producing their work, were not intentionally making overt political statements. As Macdonald, states in relation to the Cote Hill Island images, he was not addressing deindustrialisation through that specific image. Likewise, Killip 'didn't set out to be

the photographer of the English de-Industrial Revolution. It happened all around me during the time I was photographing' (ibid). This perceived need for a photographic preservation of a landscape and a specific people reflects, although through a different political position, the same instinct of those who sought to defend the English countryside from urban expansion as previously discussed.

It has been argued that Macdonald's reflections on the Cote Hill Island image as a metaphor for England are a problematic, not fully articulated set of ideas and philosophies (Dave, 2020). There is a sense that the impending change was something new, but the rapid expansion of Middlesbrough and Teesside as an international centre for heavy industry demonstrates such change as a constant in the region. However, this may be because Macdonald was talking to me, with the interview being based on our mutual understanding and relationship formed since we first met in 2012 and then developed from our trip to Cote Hill Island in 2014. Here, there should be critique of my interviewing and consideration of the argument Macdonald was making and how it would make sense to anybody else, I did not step outside of this conversation at the time as effectively as I should have. Additionally, this may be the same issue the residents grappled with, how to tell one's story with certainty as contexts continually change.

'I'll never forget' - nostalgia and remembrance

Nostalgia can be defined as a desire to return to a historical past or cultural setting that was better, where people felt more at home (Albrecht, 2005) a 'painful longing for a lost home, a yearning to return' (Bradbury, 2012, p. 343), and an idealisation of a personal remembered past (Batchko, 2013). Although the film operates as an excavation of memory, of family, childhoods, and adulthood now lost, it cannot be considered as purely an exercise in 'elegiac nostalgia', as it balances the escape and freedom found in 'a heaven' with its demise. The film these 'holds the two points of reference, commons and industrial context, in a careful state of tension, braced against one another' (Dave, 2020, p. 111), and avoids an idealisation of a personal remembered past. It achieves this by disrupting the reminiscences of a 'heaven' as the film progresses to the accounts of the challenges of poverty, ill-health, and eventual abatement (the sunset at the end of narrative arc). To have constructed the narrative purely as an overly sentimental account (the sentiment of the preservationist) would have been to rob the interviewees of agency. The film is constructed to show that the interviewees understand these issues; they know they cannot return as it was 'a place of its time' (Bill) and in this sense is no longer possible (they had 'had the best of it' as Kenny remarks) due to socio-economic development. There is a realisation that the remembrances of the Creek are both fixed in time and no longer possible materially. Even if one does go back, it is not the Creek of *then* and as such it is no longer *the* Creek, 'it's ghost-like because it's not there' (Dot). This is nostalgia as felt absences in the present (Samuel, 1994), of places we can no longer return to where lives once had home (Casey, 1993). Casey's definition is helpful as it expands the definition of a singular home to encompass other places, given that the film is accounting for a what was both a working place for fishermen and a holiday retreat for their families away from their nearby urban homes.

Albrecht's definition of Solostalgia of 'place-based distress...connected to powerlessness' (2005, p. 44) is concerned with the experienced present effects on a community of ongoing transformation of a place during habitation. The previously discussed accounts of the factors that led to displacement (pollution, vandalism, social attitudes) occurred during the interviewees' time at the Creek that the

residents were powerless to stop suggest Albrecht's Solostalgia was what was being experienced by the former residents. The responses to the transformation of the Creek after the community has long departed illustrate an ongoing deep attachment to place that is still contested. These transformations continue to adversely affect former members of the community as previously discussed in relation to the landscape realignment and increased access restrictions to the place. Dot's remarks that the Creek is no longer the Creek as it is all gone is certainly an absence of her boathouse and the associated social activity once enjoyed, but the reactions to the ongoing transformation the landscape long after the community has departed from the place it made suggests a strong remaining attachment. This illustrates the assertion that nostalgia emerges as people continue to struggle situate themselves in a changing and disruptive present (Batchko, 2013), and that rather than it simply being 'the longing for home, for the past, can be interpreted as about more than physical place and pivotally entails a *longing for be-longing* (Bradbury, 2012, p. 344, original italics).

The interviewees are not represented as unknowing victims of flux, they are aware of themselves in relation to time, place and the attendant shaping socio-political forces. In this regard, nostalgia is not a sentimental false-consciousness and should not be derided as or mistaken as such as it can provide people with a means of understanding change and is constructed from and within a social context. (Kirk, 2007). Whilst the film does not make clear the physical and spatial inter-relationships between the interviewees when at the Creek, it is evident that their remembrances are shaped by social groups and activities and space and place. This shaping is also determined or rather amplified by the film's narrative construction that intercuts interviewees accounts into singular narratives, forming a collective set of memories by making connections between individuals across time and space.

Nostalgia as being the domain of lost youth (Bradbury, 2012), beyond the self and rooted in family and community (Kirk, 2007) is prevalent throughout the film's narrative. The theme of family, especially the presence and influence of fathers was not anticipated at the outset of the project, but rapidly emerged in the interviews. Many of the interviewees were essentially second-generation residents having spent their childhoods there and then remained, with the men raised as fishermen by their

fathers. Both Bill and Kenny's earliest memories were of being transported by their fathers (on dad's bike or shoulders respectively). David's remarks at the end of the film exemplify the force of lost youth, 'If I could have my time over again, it would be childhood'. Other former residents that I spoke with but did not film also shared this experience, with one recalling being with his mother at night watching the search lights from Middlesbrough during an air raid in World War Two. John-Henry is perhaps the exception, although Dobbin seems to have been a father figure to him given John-Henry's remarks about Dobbin looking after him. These accounts whilst not specified by the interviewees take place across a period of up to 40 years. This is perhaps why there is such a sense of belonging communicated, which in turn aids the audience engagement with the film. These are attachments to family as well as place developed over time with which we can identify.

Conclusion

As discussed in this commentary and evidenced in *The Creek*, the *archaeological imagination* is fundamentally a way of seeing landscape (Hauser, 2007). In my practice this has been realised by developing a set of narratives drawn from the experiences of a specific community from a highly specific place (Greatham Creek) across a defined period of time, their representation in Ian Macdonald's work, their own family photographs and my own specific cinematic approach to this material. The narrative that is, as previously discussed in 'A Contested Landscape', embedded in the landscape of memory and place, and excavated by the film, references a broader set of issues beyond the confines of the Creek:

regional economic history and its impacts upon community and environment in the national economic development of pre- and post-war Britain, gender relations and representations in working-class culture, and the connection of the community to the plotlands movement and therefore develops the body of scholarship concerning this subject. As stated in the introduction, the work also makes contribution to the scholarship regarding the working-class experience of Teesside as distinct from the Tyneside-dominated conception of the North-east of England. Regarding gender, the film re-balances the male-dominated representation of working-class culture within Macdonald's depictions of the Creek and the centrality in his practice of the depiction of working-class men (as discussed in the film and shown in his images), by giving an account of women's experiences. Furthermore, the film develops new knowledge regarding Ian Macdonald's practice as a photographer through the exploration of his work and relationship to the region and the Creek itself.

As a way of seeing, my archaeological imagination worked from a distinct and selected range of methods to realise the above embedded narratives in producing what I have stated earlier in this commentary as an 'affective cinematic archaeology' (P. 31). Operating in indivisible conjunction with the palimpsest of narrative themes that the findings explore, the film draws from and combines a variety of cinematic and ethnographic practices and as such contributes to both documentary film-practice methods and consequently further develops the utility and advantages of film practice-based research as distinct from solely written text-based outputs. The affective cinematic archaeology integrates traditional, mainstream documentary

approaches as well as more experimental techniques. This fusion of aesthetic approaches has enabled the development of a broad audience for *The Creek*. As discussed previously, the film has been engaged with by a variety of specialist (cultural history, geo-humanities, documentary practice) and general audiences, rather than an adherence to one audience that may be less engaging to another.

The use of filmed interviews is a traditional documentary narrative device (although as discussed in the Methodology section, these are stripped back from a range of conventional techniques employed, to a much more minimal technique), and themselves relate directly to visual ethnographic research practice (here, two methods are fused). In contrast to the traditional device of the filmed interviews, the film operates experimentally in several ways: the use of long-take, static shots and the re-purposing of archive material to different ends than originally intended (Macdonald's account of the making of the Cote Hill Island image, intercut with the archive film of him on Cote Hill Island), are more redolent of artist's films/video installation practice and connect to the more experimental *slow film* approach as discussed in the 'Pace and Slow Film' section. In addition, the approach to aerial imagery offers an experimental dimension than that typically utilised in traditional documentary practice. The cartographic aerial images (the landscape filmed directly from above) are distinct from the more typical images shot at an angle to the landscape to illustrate the environs of the Creek. These vertical, aerial images are part of a strata that operate between the camera shooting at ground level amongst the flora, flotsam and jetsam, to eye level and to raised positions above the Creek when shooting Cote Hill Island. This ground-level stratum of images move horizontally across time through the use of archive imagery, (moving and still images) in contrast to the present-day location footage. The combination of the strata of landscape images and interviews adds a further dimension; the interviews as personal accounts from memory as an 'interior' of the exterior landscape images that they are interlaced with. Here, remembrances are material drawn out of the landscape imagery we are presented with. Alongside the visual material, the film's soundtrack is constructed of layers (wind, birdsong, human voices, and silence), and operate similarly to the strata of the visual images. The audio corresponds to the 'inside' of memory through the human voice and re-creates the sounds of the Creek to align to the remembrances rather than the present-day actuality of the Creek. The

absence of music (another traditional documentary element that was purposefully avoided), heightens the focus upon memory by not determining mood through my selection of music. The film's archaeological imagination therefore operates on two axes; the vertical and horizontal, with each designed to excavate the embedded narratives. This combination results in an immanence of the cinematic material to the film's narrative concerns, and this should be of paramount concern to other scholars wishing to undertake film practice-based research; how to design a cinematic approach to the research material that not simply enables illustration, but instead embodies it. It is recommended that such work also considers its design in terms of audience engagement given the centrality of impact measurement for research outputs.

Here then, is my practice developed through *The Creek* and explored in this commentary as 'affective cinematic archaeology'; a specific approach to film practice-based research and documentary practice. As such this work (the film and commentary) contributes to knowledge regarding the possibilities for documentary film-practice and cultural history research, as well as above stated contribution to knowledge regarding the findings presented in *The Creek*.

Further research related to other since vanished vernacular communities in Teesside in order to extend the investigation of plotlands communities beyond the Creek is possible. Seaton Snook, or The Snooks, were a collection of fishermen's cabins built to the east of Greatham Creek on a beach in the Tees Estuary, now since washed away, but with one remaining above the dunes in the shadows of Hartlepool Nuclear Power Station (Fig 14). Former residents of this community contacted me during the research phase of the project.



Figure 14, abandoned fishing huts. Image author's own.

In Aislaby, a small village in Stockton on Tees, on the banks of the river Tees remains at least one holiday cabin from a small community identified in Hardy and Ward's survey (1984). Also in Stockton on Tees, near the river Leven (a tributary of the Tees), was a collection of huts used for holidays, including re-purposed railway carriages, in use as early as 1930. The remains are no longer present, yet interestingly is now a site of permanent holiday chalet-style bungalows. As with Greatham Creek, these examples can be considered as some of Worpole's beacons (2013), that have not been considered as an important aspect of the working-class cultural heritage of the region, and so worthy of further investigation. As with the Greatham Creek community, there is a lack of previously published research regarding these settlements.

Technical Appendix

Camera:

Canon C300 (shot in RAW)

Lenses:

Canon 24-70mm L for landscape images

Zeiss Compact 85mm and 25mm for interviews (25mm for Macdonald's only)

Microphone (interviews):

Sennheiser 416

Lighting:

Lowell Rifalite

Aerial cinematography:

DJI Inspire (shot in 4K)

Postproduction:

Off-line – Final Cut Pro

On-line – Premier

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