
The Queer Archaeology of Green Gate: Interpreting Contested Space at Greenham Common Airbase

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The queer archaeology of Green Gate: interpreting contested space at Greenham Common Airbase

John Schofield and Mike Anderton

Abstract

This paper uses a well-known twentieth-century monument to examine contradictions in the material record and how they might be accommodated in protection and interpretative schemes at this and similar sites where contested space is represented. The archaeology of the later twentieth century at, and immediately outside, Greenham Common Airbase (Berkshire, England) is described as unconventional and atypical in its associations, mysterious and disquieting in its later Cold War context, as well as outlandish and unorthodox in what it can hope to achieve in terms of public perception and interpretation. Protest is the stuff of everyday life, yet it is rarely and barely recognised in heritage interpretation, particularly where opposition was directly aimed at the establishment view or government policy. This paper explores these related issues.

Keywords

Greenham Common Airbase; protest; heritage; interpretation; Cold War archaeology; incomplete narratives.

Introduction

Imagine a bomb up the bum of suburbia. But the bomb is made of organic flour, wrapped in ivy, painted in funky colours and thrown by pixies; half punk, half pagan. The spirit of the direct action protest movement is like this, half 'spiky', half 'fluffy' – half politically hard, half warmly, humanly, soft. The movement boils with life lived to the brink, to the full, it's emotion intense, raw and extreme.

(Griffiths, in Evans 1998)

This is a paper about opposition and protest, and how the materiality of opposition provides a necessary contribution to achieving a full and balanced interpretation of past events and social actions. Unlike Butler's (1996) survey of cultures of resistance on the M11 Link Road, the 'monuments' of which were destroyed in the road's construction, this



paper examines what survives materially both of the actions of those who protested against nuclear armament during the period of the 'Second Cold War' (Hobsbawm 1995: 244), and of the targets of those actions, and how that material culture should be presented to future visitors to the sites. There is also the point made by Uzzell (1998) that Cold War sites are different from those of other wars in that they are often not the scenes of conflict and death; their importance and value lies in what they represent and what might have been.

In all these senses we present an unconventional archaeology, atypical in its associations, uncertain (or at least debated and contested) in its meaning, mysterious and disquieting in its Cold War context, outlandish and unorthodox in what it can hope to achieve in terms of public perception and interpretation. Protest is the stuff of everyday life, yet recent examples are rarely and barely recognized in heritage interpretation, particularly when opposition was directly aimed at the establishment view or government policy. Here we make the point that protest in the form of direct action – violent or not – inevitably sets up a contradiction, a challenging dilemma, for heritage managers to confront, not avoid: conflicting archaeologies, if not archaeologies in conflict.

The example we use is the area either side of Green Gate at Greenham Common Airbase in Berkshire, England (NGR SU490646). It was one of seven gates – all named by protesters after colours of the rainbow – that surrounded the base and which each had an active and – for the Ministry of Defence, USAF, and NATO – disruptive Peace Camp with a distinct mood and atmosphere. Yellow Gate or Main Gate was the largest camp, had all the traffic noise, and had a 'special urban desolation that made it grimmer than the rest of the camps' (Blackwood 1984: 29). The women who lived at Orange Gate were squeezed up against the perimeter fence and were therefore nearer to the soldiers and their 'terrible sexual taunting' (Blackwood 1984: 23). Green Gate – 'the camp of intellectuals' (Blackwood 1984: 7) – lay immediately outside the GAMA site (Ground Launched Cruise Missiles Alert and Maintenance Area) which came to prominence at the time of the 'Second Cold War' of the 1970s and early 1980s following the announcement that Tomahawk Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs) would be deployed there.

The 'Greenham Women', whose members strongly objected to this deployment, and to nuclear weapons and technology in general, chose 'the power of non-violence to counteract the power of evil, generated from inside the base by genocidal nuclear weapons' (Hipperson 1998: 356). Some even described the base itself as a 'nuclear concentration camp, where preparations for mass murder are carried out daily' (Hipperson 1998: 356). Despite the strong emotional charge expressed in this language of protest, actions by the women were non-violent, and embraced an outlook or 'mood' close to that expressed in the opening quotation. Statements of opposition were maintained, and ideological and spatial positions were negotiated, as was the case with earlier political and environmental protests against nuclear armament that began with the Aldermaston marches in the 1950s, and span off into a range of environmental protests at Greenham, Solsbury Hill (1994), and the Newbury bypass (1996). Of course, these are all related and, in fact, Kate Evans's *Copse: The Cartoon Book of Tree Protesting* (1998) begins at Greenham Common's Violet Gate with childhood memories of bracken sunhats and picnics by the fence. But Greenham was different, in being consciously and deliberately women only (unlike contemporary peace camps at Faslane and Molesworth), and its agenda was wider as a consequence.

For example, the Greenham campaign had strong links with other causes such as the Prostitutes' Collective, and miners' wives groups during the 1984 coal strikes. There were also the symbolic aspects of 'women's space' and protests against patriarchy, which for some women were equally if not more important than nuclear disarmament.

The paper has its context in two related areas. First, there is now a general interest in the politics of non-violent protest, in a period when non-violent protest and 'direct action' is commonplace (cf. MacArthur 1998: *passim*) and when interest in the materiality of the recent past is increasing (Schofield 2000). Second, and more specifically, there is now a concern for the future of the GAMA site, about to be disposed of by the Ministry of Defence, and in particular how its archaeologies are to be presented and interpreted for future visitors, assuming that a sustainable future can be found for the monument and some physical preservation is achieved. In short, can these contrasting and conflicting archaeologies – all of which may be considered 'queer' depending on one's political and ideological stance – be presented and interpreted together in a meaningful and cogent way for the benefit, education, and enjoyment of future visitors?

Cold War archaeology and Greenham Common Airbase

Anachronistic in normal periods, in peacetime, the bunker appears as a survival machine, as a shipwrecked submarine on a beach. It speaks to us of other elements, of terrific atmospheric pressure, of an unusual world in which science and technology have developed the possibility of final disintegration. If the bunker can be compared to a milestone, to a stele, it is not so much for its system of inscriptions as it is for its position, its configuration of materials and accessories. . . . The monolith does not aim to survive down through the centuries; the thickness of its walls translates only the probable power of impact in the instant of assault. The cohesion of the material corresponds here to the immateriality of the new war environment; in fact, matter only survives with difficulty in a world of continuous upheaval. The landscape of contemporary war is that of a hurricane projecting and dispersing, dissipating and disintegrating through fusion and fission as it goes along. With the passage from molecular arms to nuclear arms, what happened in test tubes at the microscopic level of chemical and biological reactions is happening from now on in the macroscopic universe of human territory. A world of moving particles – that is the inscription of these concrete steles.

(Virilio 1994: 39)

Cold War archaeology is new territory for archaeologists, and specifically for those engaged in heritage management, and has been since the Berlin Wall was dismantled in 1989 (Cocroft and Thomas *in prep*; Dobinson 1998). What were until recently military installations, some highly secretive, are now being recorded or preserved as historic monuments, and are presented to a public who are increasingly aware of the significance of post-war politics, and the symbolism of Cold War structures such as the GAMA site, in shaping the modern world. They are also interested in experiencing such secret and mysterious worlds for themselves. (This interest is also reflected in historical research where the availability of documents can now ensure the publication of more informed

accounts than was previously possible [e.g. Gaddis 1997].) Hence the interest in the Nevada Test Site (Johnson and Beck 1995), Orford Ness (Wainwright 1996), the USAF Airbase at Upper Heyford (Hinchliffe 1997), and the concerted attempts to have Minuteman Missile silos at the Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota preserved as 'historic monuments' so that 'the Minuteman story can be told' (Wharton 1999: 48). Motivations for presenting and interpreting the GAMA site at Greenham Common have much in common with all of these examples.

The airbase at Greenham Common (Plate 1) has a notable history (and it is interesting to draw contrast here between attitudes to Greenham's Second World War role – consensual, uncontested, and mostly approving – and its Cold War significance, where opinions regarding the morality and the cause, let alone the means, are less clear-cut). Greenham originally became an airbase in May 1941 when the airfield opened as a satellite to RAF



Plate 1 A general view of Greenham Common Airbase in 1997, from the west. The GAMA site is in the foreground (Crown copyright: NMR 15691/03).

Aldermaston. The USAF took over, and in 1942 it was the headquarters of the 51st Troop Carrier Wing during Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa, while in 1944 the base was involved in the preparations for, and the execution of, the D-Day landings. General Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces, visited Greenham on 5 June 1944 and gave his 'the eyes of the world are upon you' speech to the men of the 101st Airborne Division; and later that year Greenham was also involved in the airlift for the Arnhem landings. After reverting to the RAF in June 1945, closure in 1946, and the land passing back to Newbury Borough Council in 1947, the Air Ministry announced its intention to re-acquire the site – the reason being the increased East–West tensions following the Soviet blockade of Berlin in 1948. The USAF took over the base again and embarked on a programme of enlargement and significant alteration; and from January 1958 until the base closed in 1964, Greenham was part of the Reflex Alert Scheme, whereby B47s armed with nuclear weapons were on stand-by for immediate take-off. The base was then de-activated in June 1964 and returned to the RAF.

The most recent period of the history of Greenham Common Airbase begins in 1968 with its reopening as a USAF stand-by base. In 1979 NATO, responding to the build-up of nuclear weapons by the USSR, decided to deploy intermediate-range nuclear weapons in Europe. This led, in June 1980, to the announcement that Tomahawk Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs) were to be deployed in Britain at both Greenham Common and Molesworth (in Cambridgeshire). Construction work on the new installation at Greenham began, and the Alert and Maintenance Area (GAMA) was built partly on the site of the 1950s Strategic Air Command nuclear weapons storage 'igloos' at the western end of the runway. In July 1982 the 501st Tactical Missile Wing was activated to operate and maintain the GAMA site. The base became operational again in June 1983, with the first sixteen cruise missiles arriving in November. The GAMA site was completed in 1986 and by June there were six flights of GLCMs, with a total of ninety-six missiles (and five spares) stationed at Greenham. On 12 December 1987, the USA and the USSR signed the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, the provisions of which included the elimination of all cruise missiles from Europe. This meant that, between August 1989 and mid-1991 the cruise missiles were shipped out of Greenham in stages, being taken back to the USA for destruction. In 1992 the USAF left Greenham and the base was closed.

What survives within the former airbase are solid, military remains representing all phases of its use. The GAMA site forms a parallelogram, covering an area 495m east to west by 450m north to south, defined by three fences topped with razor-wire, lighting, and surveillance cameras (Plate 2). The area was (and continues to be) dominated by the six GLCM shelters (Plate 3), arranged in two rows of three, while to the west are the 1950s nuclear weapons storage igloos, which were refurbished as part of the GLCM deployment. This was functional architecture in the extreme, existing only with a view to 'doing' something: waiting, watching, being watched, warning, and threatening; then acting or, rather, reacting (after Virilio 1994: 43). The shelters each had three lanes inside – designed to hold two mobile launch control centres (LCC) and four transporter erector launchers (TEL), each of which carried four GLCMs. The lanes had their own doors, front and back, that were operated by hydraulics and which, when open, covered a deep trench in front of the shelters. Each shelter had a massive concrete roof and was grass covered. Only the



Plate 2 Aerial photograph of the GAMA site in 1997, following its closure (Crown copyright: NMR 15691/05).

main – or Quick Reaction Alert – shelter, the northwestern of the group, was designed to be permanently manned and had domestic accommodation attached. The area also had a Reserve Fire Team Facility (RFTF), missile store, a maintenance and inspection building, for undertaking works to vehicles, a control room and entry control point, with a bus stop beyond the gate at the outer fence. All of this remains, though in five of the shelters (excepting the Quick Reaction Alert shelter) the hydraulics have been removed. In all six shelters the doors are in the down position. Much of the equipment has been removed, with just occasional fixtures and fittings, and a few scattered and generally insignificant artefacts, remaining.

But that, of course, is not the full story: although less monumental, the archaeology of Greenham Common Airbase extends beyond the militarized landscape referred to here. This site, like so many other monuments, has multiple histories to be considered – histories that are not always obvious through physical remains.

‘Queer’ as in peculiar: life beyond the fence

‘I was considered unusual and queer, you know, queer in the sense of the word peculiar’ (in Junor 1995: 296) – so Teresa Smith sums up the judgement of her middle-class neighbours about her alternative views on life. These views saw Teresa take part, along with



Plate 3 One of the six GLCM shelters, looking north-east towards the former airfield (photo: John Schofield).

her 7-year-old daughter, in the Greenham protests during the early 1980s. She was one of the many women who participated in something that, from small beginnings as a march from Cardiff to the USAF base in 1981, became a major, long-term action. Some of the participants stayed only a few hours, others were frequent visitors, for example at weekends or for special events, while others became permanent residents and remained for several years. They all left their mark on the base in some way.

At issue in this section is how archaeologists can understand ways in which these marks can be identified and worked with. An alternative form of protest, with its commensurate, 'queer' approach, has left us with the challenge of how to interpret, and engage with, this queer/peculiar form of modern archaeological material. If, as Junor (1995: xi) suggests, an 'incalculable' number of women passed through the camps at Greenham, what is there to show of their presence?

We could attempt to examine the physical remains of the peace camps in order to understand what happened at the base. However, as we have already seen, the surviving physical remains at Greenham are largely those of the military base. Outside the fence there are very few physical reminders of the camps and their occupants. A single caravan, still occupied, and a memorial garden, stands at Yellow Gate. At Green Gate you can just see the remains of painted graffiti on the road surface and on walls within the GAMA site, while in the woods around the perimeter slight earthworks and clearings are visible. Also, in some parts of the woods, pits and other cut features will probably still survive.

Caroline Blackwood, in writing of her associations with the camp at Blue Gate, shows



Plate 4 Bender at Greenham in the mid 1980s (photo: Cathy Stoertz).

us why so little remains of a physical nature. She describes how, on her first visit to the camp, she arrived at night to find what appeared to be a discarded, mud-spattered plastic sheet lying nearby (Blackwood 1984: 6). On closer inspection she realized that this sheet, and a great many other sheets of plastic, actually had women living in them. They were, in fact, a series of flimsy and easily replaceable living-structures called 'benders' (Plate 4), each consisting of several branches bent into a hooped-frame and covered with plastic sheeting (hence the term). They were sturdy enough to keep the wind and rain out (most of the time), but they left no impression in the ground once they had been removed, as was obvious after every eviction by the authorities. Caroline Blackwood described her return to the camp shortly after an eviction thus:

When I next went back there, the benders had ceased to exist. It was hard to believe those squalid little colourful dwellings had ever been there. There was now only a lot of churned up mud, and the odd piece of newspaper and the odd trampled plastic spoon.

The perimeter now had an unsullied, unchallenged greyness. It looked triumphant and immovable as it reigned over the countryside with its rolling entanglements of barbed wire.

But although the camp had been wiped out, a little group of Greenham women were still there. They were sitting in a circle in the mud. As usual, it was bitterly cold.

They didn't speak very much. They just sat there as if they were having a make-believe

picnic in mime. The food and the fire all had to be imagined. In reality they now had nothing except mud.

(Blackwood 1984: 79)

This latter point is important as, without any prominent traces in the ground, we would be unlikely as archaeologists to know that a reasonably large group of people (let alone the fact that they were all women) actually lived near the outer perimeter of the base over a period of several years. The only substantial, remaining physical element that may be seen, and which has a consistent, easily identifiable, reference to the women and the camps, is the base's perimeter fence itself. This physical and mental boundary acted as a continuous focus for the protesters, in a dualistic sense, throughout the time the camps were in operation (Blackwood 1984; Junor 1995). It was frequently cut in order to gain access to the base and its shelters (*ibid.*), and it still bears the scars of these actions today (Figs 5 and 6).

The fence also attained a quilt-like colourfulness on occasions too – albeit for short periods. The women took to ‘darning’ the fence with brightly coloured wools in a symbolic form of protest – an action through which they ‘begged that they be spared from nuclear destruction so that they could still patch up the holes [that] men had made’ (Blackwood 1984: 28). It was an ironic symbol that was lost on the soldiers guarding the base though, and they were quick to bring down the women's handiwork. In addition, the fences were often decorated with symbolic items, notably children's clothing and photographs, as well as with placards and leaflets.

Documentary and oral evidence (Blackwood 1984; Junor 1995; C. Stoertz personal communication) also describes other symbolic actions that have left no physical trace at the site. Some women, for example, held mirrors up to the base in order to ‘reflect [its] evil back into it’; and ‘webs’ were woven that were hung on the base's perimeter fence (Blackwood 1984: 7). These webs were not mere ‘decoration’ however, but rather an example of the strength and unity shown by the women – a symbol of the stand against the bombs and oppressive authority at the base and around the world. They portrayed in a visual form how one strand alone (that is one single protester) may appear weak, but how many strands (the women together) were united within a more complex, and less easily destroyed, whole (Blackwood 1984: 7, 21; see also Junor 1995: 299). Of course there was a more straightforward motivation: to subvert the fence; to make it less male, less military, less functional . . . and more ridiculous.

Though these decorations are no longer physically apparent (except in a very limited way, for example on the anniversaries of significant events), just like the benders at the camps, the knowledge of their existence leads us to recognize the role of social interaction and human agency beyond the mere physical nature of the structures and fences at the site. Students of prehistoric archaeology are now familiar with the ideas of the social nature of monuments and their surrounding landscapes, and the symbolism and esoteric knowledge that may often be associated with them (*cf.* Barrett et al. 1991; Tilley 1994), but can we see these same ideas at a very modern Greenham? The examples presented above suggest we can read the alternative narratives that the GAMA site presents.

There is also another symbolic form to consider that is familiar to students of prehistoric archaeology – one which revolves around issues of structure and agency – that is, the

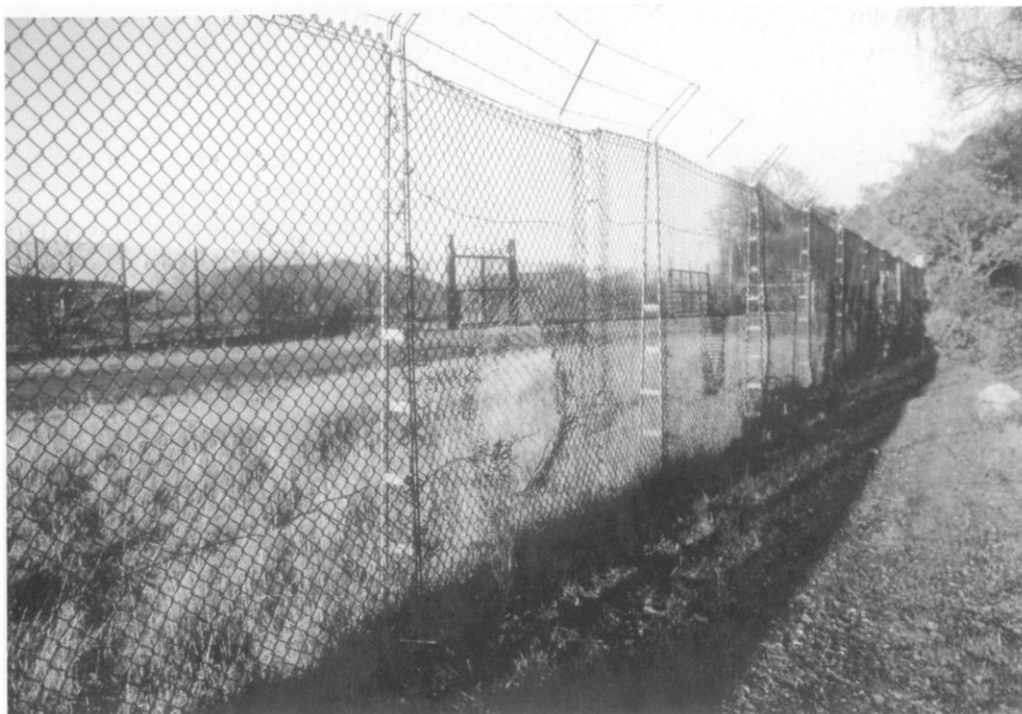


Plate 5 Two examples of cuts to the fence at Green Gate, and subsequent repairs (photos: John Schofield).



Plate 6 Green Gate, with the shelters and maintenance and inspection building beyond (photo: John Schofield).

women's views on the nature of the land itself. If we are to observe the fence and the military base we may, taking a prehistorian's approach, be able to observe the juxtaposition between the land without and within the perimeter fence in the following terms:

public space: private space
civilian: military
female: male
life: death
hope: fear
peace: war

We may also be able to observe that the damaged fence had been subject to some form of opposition to the dominant ideology of the base through observing the attempts to break through the physical and mental barrier. What we do not see without the documentary and oral evidence of the women is the idea of what the land at Greenham symbolizes for this group. The women came to see the land at Greenham as their land in a very spiritual sense (Junor 1995: 20, 25, 55). In opposition to the dominant ideology of the base as a functioning, asocial military site, they saw a 'sacred land' being defiled by the missiles (Junor 1995: 55 and *passim*).

A 'sacred land'; a site occupied for over a decade; peaceful, physical protests and symbolic actions. We can see little of these issues within the currently available physical evidence; and this is, surely, very surprising as we are dealing with a relatively recent

archaeological site. At Greenham multiple histories abound, and we are, here, within the realm of 'incomplete narratives' (Scott 1997: 1) where, without care, we risk portraying only one side of the story.

Interpretation and future management

Since the closure of the airbase in 1992 discussions have been taking place over its future management. Some decisions have already been taken and much work has been completed. The runways, for example, have been removed in order that the airfield can be returned to common land, as it was before the Second World War. There were proposals to retain the central part of the runways, where they form a cross, as a symbol of the site's former use and significance, but this did not materialize. However, one proposal that should soon be implemented concerns the conversion of the air traffic control tower for use as a visitor centre. The tower stands fairly central to the newly re-created common, and its glass observation room will provide an opportunity to view the former airbase. Three aspects of interpretation are proposed for this facility (from ground level upwards): natural history; the history of the common; and its Cold War associations. The shelters of the GAMA site would thus be visible in the middle distance from the observation room and its Cold War interpretation facility at the top. By contrast, the area south of the runway and inside the main gate – the so-called Area E – now functions as a business park, many of the buildings here having been adapted for new uses.

So, with the exception of the air traffic control tower, and one or two buildings in Area E and elsewhere, much of the appearance of the Cold War airfield will in time be altered beyond recognition. We would argue that, for a site of such significance, in social, political, military, strategic, and technological terms, some symbol of the power and of the contradictory and conflicting stances the site represented in the later twentieth century should be retained. The most powerful and meaningful symbol of all is the GAMA site and the 'archaeology of protest' that existed immediately beyond its boundary, and it is this element which, we believe, holds the key to the site's future management. A short description of how such a message of contradiction and conflict could be conveyed, and how a balanced interpretation of the GAMA site can be presented in an objective, though not dispassionate, way given pragmatic considerations of sustainability and monument management, is therefore given below.

One immediate question concerns the matter of exclusion and site security. For a site known for its exclusivity and secrecy, is it appropriate to provide open access for visitors; should there not be some token 'security check' to enable people to pass through the gates to the 'restricted area' within? There is much to be said for this though, equally, removing part of the fence could serve to demonstrate the GAMA site's role in ending the Cold War, not just in propagating it. A compromise seems the obvious solution and would have practical benefits: in a relatively remote area, adjacent to common land, and for a site already vulnerable to vandalism, sealing it off completely for long periods and giving controlled access would prove unpopular, and may present a financial burden that the likely number of visitors could not sustain. Rather, providing open access to much of the site and some of the shelters and associated buildings, while retaining significant stretches

of fenceline (particularly that section from the control room, around the eastern end of the GAMA site, to a point west of Green Gate) would retain the site's original appearance and atmosphere – conveying an element of menace, security, and secrecy. This section of the fence provided a focus for anti-nuclear protests; it was decorated by protesters, and now has the appearance of a patchwork of cuts, repairs, and counter-cuts (Fig. 5). This 'stratigraphy' tells us much about the history of opposition at Green Gate and should be retained in some form, and preferably *in situ*. Interestingly, cuts continue to be made, presumably by protesters as symbolic statements of opposition, actions that are likely to continue as tradition if nothing else.

Removing the fenceline at the western end of the GAMA site would have two further advantages. First, the vegetation on the site – predominantly grass, originally mown – could be maintained by grazing, and without a full circuit any animals grazing the common could have open access to the GAMA site from the west; temporary fencing could, of course, be introduced for closer stock control. Second, visitors will access the site predominantly from the east (having first visited the facility in the former control tower). Retaining fencing on the GAMA site's eastern side would ensure those visitors experience the site as it was, passing along the fence before entering through the gate. Providing a low-key interpretation (with site plans and some photographs) in the control room, serving as the essential introduction to the GAMA site, would further ensure most visitors enter this way. If transport is to be provided from the control tower, there is a certain attraction in using the original bus stop (complete with shelter) outside the site's main gate, and the turnstiles by the entry control post for access.

So far as presenting the interior is concerned, retaining the overall character and symbolism of the site may be more important than preserving every detail of the individual structures. For example, maintaining all six shelters would be unsustainable and is unnecessary – keeping one in full condition, while reducing the others to their basic, robust form, may be more sensible. The five shelters which have already been fully de-commissioned could be stripped bare of fragile fittings in order to ensure a minimal maintenance burden. They could then be presented as robust, low-maintenance monuments with open access (though accepting that some safety measures may need to be put in place, such as sealing off internal doors and reinforcing guard rails, measures which would themselves symbolize the act of disarmament). The Quick Reaction Alert shelter with its accommodation block could be the one example retained more completely. This was not de-commissioned and could be put back into working order. The doors could be kept closed for security and safety, but opened for accompanied tours, the opening and closing of the shelter being the event that 'sells' the full tour to those who could otherwise enjoy open access to the remaining five shelters. There could be scope for interpretation in the accommodation block, although it may be preferable to resist this, and allow such interior spaces to speak for themselves; for the present time their significance is that they are disused and abandoned.

The level of interpretation provided for visitors is an important consideration in view of the base's multiple histories. Assuming that contextual material will be provided off-site in the interpretation facility in the control tower, much of the GAMA site could be left bare. Some photographs and plans in the entry control post could be accompanied by limited text to describe the main components of the site, emphasizing both what lay within

the fence and what was beyond it. Green Gate, leading onto the public road, could be left open, allowing visitors to walk along the outside of the fence, and to view the shelters through the patchwork of the outer fence (Fig. 6). Another possibility is to use one of the lanes in the Quick Reaction Alert shelter as an art and/or artefact gallery, if correct conditions could be ensured. Part, or all, of the Turner Prize-nominated Wilson twins' video sculpture 'Gamma' (Corin 1999), which investigates the themes of power, surveillance, and paranoia through photographs, performance and installation art and was recorded and filmed at the airbase, could perhaps find a permanent home here. Another possibility would be to use work produced by the peace women and their supporters. These, less official, views of the site and what it stood for could then be seen in the very place that inspired them. This is particularly relevant as alternative political views are often lacking in official heritage venues (Frank Casey's sculpture representing an episode from the miners' strike in the City Museum, Stoke, being a notable exception); the situation at Greenham provides a rare opportunity to redress this imbalance in some way.

Conclusion

We argue that to present the recent past at Greenham Common Airbase as it was, and not in some diluted, biased, or sanitized form, is desirable but difficult. It requires an approach that welcomes opposing viewpoints (including those of local residents, and the personal views of US service personnel and their families, which have not been examined in this paper), not presenting them as some side-show or adjunct to the main attraction. In that sense Greenham is unusual: many Cold war sites were sufficiently remote or 'secret' enough not to be affected by the actions of protesters. To present that opposition in a visual and affecting way requires the preservation of sites such as the GAMA site, in order that visitors can experience this significant episode in world history and international geopolitics through the unbiased and balanced presentation of views and actions. Hobsbawm has said that: 'people in the twenty-first century, remote from the living memories of the 1970s and 1980s, will puzzle over the apparent insanity of this outburst of military fever [and] the rhetoric of apocalypse' (1995: 247); he did not say that people may not even see the opposite face, that of peace camps and protest, woven webs and mirrors – and they will certainly have difficulty recognizing the full complexity of their meaning and symbolism. Heritage 'attractions' such as the GAMA site, with engaging interpretative facilities, will at least give an impression of the political atmosphere in which the arms race escalated – as well as the social context of protest and opposition, and the materiality of a rather queer contradiction.

Postscript

As we complete this paper, the Greenham Women's Peace Camp has begun to close down after eighteen years' continuous work. To mark this event, the women submitted a planning application in 1999 for a 'Commemorative and Historical Site', next to the main entrance to the airbase at Yellow Gate, to 'acknowledge and preserve [the Peace Camp's]

unique part of history [and] as an inspiring contribution towards a world without nuclear weapons'. The press release, issued by the Greenham Women, stated how they:

Envisage the site as presenting the community of Newbury with an opportunity to heal the breach that has developed over the siting of Cruise Missiles. The vision of a circle of standing stones, we believe, will endow the area with a spiritual and healing influence and be seen to embrace the historic facts of the situation.

The site, which features information boards, a herb garden, water feature and the stone circle, provides historic information in a setting which encourages spiritual contemplation. Approval for these plans was granted on 3 November 1999. It is hoped that future visitors to the airbase will have the opportunity to view iconic monuments of the Cold War, alongside this commemorative memorial. At the time of writing, information on these proposals and about the Peace Camp itself, can be found at <http://www.web13.co.uk>. It is one of over 800 websites that refer to Greenham Common, demonstrating the level of interest in the site's past and future.

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