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RIVER RUN

By

1806821

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I certify that I have acknowledged any assistance or use of the work of others
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River Run



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Abstract

'River Run' was born of my desire to explore the water courses that I have grown up in and around. I wanted to look deeper than the obvious, to look at how the environment and my engagement with it has changed, though my affinity with the waters has not. 'River Run' is a flow of consciousness throughout the whole that does not form a chronological narrative. I draw upon personal memories and family history to inspire my writing and examine the nature of memory placed in landscape. My focus in the piece on sewage and nuclear energy is driven by a curiosity about how things can be hidden in plain sight, things that we choose not to see, as we exercise a kind of blindness. Alongside that I examine themes of loss and change, of the seemingly limitless capacity of water to absorb our waste and I draw parallels with the unconscious and the changes in perception and memory that come with our ageing.

I consider childhood and parental influences on shaping 'River Run', and detail research methods used. I examine established psychogeographical and wild writing works set in this area and on this coast which are detailed and reflective yet seem not to mention the obvious. I include some unlauded works by local people whose affinity and affection for these waters equals mine. I will discuss the themes of loss and change as a thread through the piece.

River Run

Source

The Blackwater estuary is a live, glistening, salt fresh, and mud dark being. At its wide mouth, where the silts of its shallows meet the deeps of the North Sea, the monolithic twin blocks of Bradwell Power Station rise. The power station can be seen clearly from the house in Maldon that I grew up in. From its windows, we could see right down over the estuary and on clear days we could see the North Sea. The power station is visible from far out to sea and provides bearings for vessels to navigate by. It punctuates this landscape; its silhouette is vast and yet largely unremarked upon in narratives about this waterscape. It opened for nuclear power generation in the year I was born and has become a part of the estuary landscape these last sixty odd years.

Freshwater rivers, the Brain, Blackwater, and Chelmer wind smoothly through the valleys of central and west Essex and into the upper reaches of the estuary at Maldon and Heybridge Basin. The river Brain, a small sluggish brook, flows close to my house picking up effluent from Braintree town sewage works and joins the Blackwater at Witham. At Chelmsford, the Chelmer is fettered and becomes The Navigation, a series of lock gates and weirs running from the Baddow Meads down to Maldon. Their combined waters empty over twin weirs and raceways at Beeleigh Falls into the westernmost reach of the tidal Blackwater estuary, while The Navigation continues to Heybridge Basin and out through the sea lock into the shallow northern channel of the upper Blackwater.

This story charts some of my experiences over these different, connected bodies of water. These are the places I have played by and walked beside, these are the waters I have swum in since I was young. Fragments of memory mix with each visit, the changes in the landscape mirror changes in me. It is here that I come to renew, to unravel memories, it is here that I soothe my soul when it thins. This river run, its banks, shores and pathways are stitched through me.

Sweet Water

I am lost. The pale brick anaemic walls of Chelmer Village repeat in patterns that miss the mark of suggesting no pattern. It had been over three decades since I was last here. These spaces were fields then. The start of Brook End Road, the lane that lead down to the river, has been

swallowed by Chelmer Village, stripped of its hedges and trees. To the east of the lane fields still run down towards the river, but the river now lies just to the east of the A12 bypass. The bypass was built in 1986, and I remember my mother's sorrow for the scarring of the land she ranged over in her childhood.

The suburban sprawl of Chelmsford is encroaching over the low land where The Navigation starts. The 1931 census recorded the population of Chelmsford as forty thousand; ninety years later, it stands at one hundred and seventy thousand. Chelmsford's population is still growing. We predate the Earth's resources to service our need for energy to fuel our industry, commerce, homes and gadgets. With our growth the need to dispose of our waste increases. I became aware of the difficulties of disposing of human waste at Glastonbury Festival. People were brought up close and personal to that which they usually flush and forget. Glastonbury's 'long drops' were pits, tanks that gradually filled with excrement and urine. Festival goers flinched and crinkled their faces when the need called. The toileted areas of the site reeked, the coming and going of the shit sucking honey carts at dawn was heralded by a stinking miasma that carried on the wind, into my tent, into my clothes and hair.

I knew that the large round ponds with a rotary arm I had seen by the wide sweep of the A12 bypass at Chelmsford were to do with processing sewage. It's been the site for sewage processing for many years. I walked over the land and by the river with Mum when I was child. The Baddow Meads were my mum's playground. She told me about Paddy, her father's Airedale, and how Paddy went everywhere with her. On a faded card to her father, who was stationed on the 'MS Dauntless', she writes 'Paddy was so good Daddy, I accidentally threw Teddy in rather than the stick. And Paddy jumped in and brought Teddy back. Paddy is a good dog, and he misses you'. Paddy is in a faded family photo, sitting next to my teenaged mother as she stands on the front step of her house waving to the camera and shielding her eyes from the sun with a cupped hand, her gaze direct, her smile recognisable down through all these years.

Eventually, my curiosity brought me to Anglian Water's sewage farm on the Baddow Meads. Schools visit the centre as part of science and environmental learning. Kids learn about the process of cleaning the output that comes from the toilets they use every day. The classroom has cutaway pipes showing the route our waste takes and schematics of several ways of treating human waste.

My guide Caroline says that children are fascinated to be so up close to this much about toilets and excrement and enjoy the models that show how poo journeys there.

The cuddly toys of water dwelling micro-animals who eat bacteria in the treatment process include the Water Bear, or Moss Piglet. This animal has been found to survive for thousands of years frozen, desiccated, and even in space. They've survived 5 mass extinctions, and I suspect they'll be here long after we have gone. The e-coli soft toys are disarming sausages with fur and long tendrils that look quite appealing. E-coli live in the gut making up about 0.1% of intestinal flora. Not all strains cause disease, but some can cause severe illness leading to death. E-coli thrive for up to 3 days in untreated excrement.

The sewer pipes run into a large open tank. The water in the tank is churned brown, and there's surprisingly little solid in it. The pipes have labels; 'Chancellor Avenue', 'Springfield Rising Main'. Caroline said that at eight in the morning the flow is at its peak, and on hot days it really smells. That day it did not. 'Rag' is dealt with first, the effluent churns through combs that take out wet wipes, cotton buds, condoms, sanitary towels – those things that shouldn't be there in the first place. 'Rag' is the things some do away with quickly, consigned to the toilet regardless of pleas to bin it. We have become squeamish and careless.

The settling ponds are the circles I have seen from the road. Inverted cones, the solids collect in the bottom, as they are stirred at the top. The solid is recycled into fertiliser after being baked in kilns. There is a giant fan oscillating over these ponds. When I ask, they tell me that new housing is now close to the facility, and when the wind is blowing towards the estate, the fans propel deodorant over the ponds to prevent nuisance.

Perfumed shit.

Sewage works are nearly always hidden, not obvious, though our need is. Most species have an instinctive disgust around excreta; it is toxic, it does bring risk. In the western world we have the luxury based on our wealth, to forget about it. However, in India, for example, where open and random defecation is common, there is no such luxury. The round, conical structures of the settling tanks are our oubliettes where we hide the realities of our existence, transforming the unmentionable into useful material in their depths. The food that has travelled through and nourished us has been drained of its value to us. This thing we don't want to see or deal with settle

to the bottom. We forget about it, and trust that in the depths of the cone a transformation will take place without any effort from us; no burying, no exposure to foul smells, to flies and maggots, or to disease. We see only a round pond without looking further, and our eyes slide away. So it is with our psyches. The indigestible rag of our memories is combed out and discarded, and the settling tank of the mind transforms, rationalises or obliterates toxicity, concealing it deep under the surface. These ponds sanitise, as do our minds.

On the secondary settling tanks, a family of mallards are swimming and eating. Over the primary tanks, flocks of crows feed on the surface, sitting black-cowled on the stirring booms. I'm told they are not eating the effluent, but the algae that thrives there.

I see a hare running.

The land is rich with wildlife and wildflowers and plants. It is undisturbed here, nature thrives. With the increase of automation and as processes become slicker, the works have just one full time operative.

The final open channel of water runs clear towards a high-tech hut on the edge of the site. Here it is sampled through tubes and gauges once every thirty seconds for purity. E-coli is sampled for, outfall should have little or no e-coli by the time it leaves the works. All effluent is subject to an Environment Agency discharge permit, which specifies acceptable levels of contaminants. The effluent is still called effluent, even when it leaves the site in a treated state.

There is a black and white photograph in the classroom dated 1930, it shows fields of leafy vegetables and the men who worked that land. The solid matter from the sewage works manured the land that they farm. The labourers are smiling, their grainy faces worn through work. They wear caps and waistcoats; their white shirtsleeves are rolled to the elbow. Their sharp bladed wooden handled shovels are held in wiry hands. In the background, the broad backs of working horses bear loaded paniers, the man at their head has his hand laid gently on one of the great beast's cheek. I sense the photograph was taken in the early morning, as the mist blurs and greys the poplar trees in the distance. The men's eyes gaze outward from the past. Perhaps they stand in the same space as a garage, kitchen or living room of one of the houses that now grow here. They stand on the fields where my mother played as a child.

When The Navigation was built in the seventeen-nineties, it turned the swift flowing river into a slow-moving canal that bore the brunt of partially or totally untreated sewage outfalls from the towns and villages along its length. It was only in 1925, following plans to abstract drinking water from the canal downriver at Rushes Lock, that Chelmsford sewage effluent was piped all the way down to Maldon, below the abstraction point. The effluent is hidden, travelling nine miles down to the Blackwater Estuary, down to where the fresh of the river meets the salt of the sea, down the river valley, by the towpath, and under the oak.

After the visit, I glance up towards the Maldon Road to the house my mother grew up in. Her father, Herbert Harold Chaplin, served in the Royal Navy and in both Wars. My only memory of him is a grey man lying in a high bed, eyes blue and shining as I stood twisting a grubby foot behind me. My hated red plastic sandals were discarded and my feet bare. His smile lit the room. I was soon chased out by my Nana into the back garden where the sycamore dropped helicopter seed. Grandad Chaplin used to cycle the 20 miles and back to Bradwell at the mouth of the Estuary to help with the harvest, long before Bradwell Power station dominated the area. Mum said he would turn his hand to anything, and he was never idle. He died of lung cancer when I was two.

From the Meads, The Navigation runs through the fields and woods of Essex towards Maldon. Local and domestic sewage effluent discharges along the whole stretch of the canal. The outfalls are monitored, and presumably safe. I walk and swim here, as did my mother. Squared trunks of trees form the ponderous levers of the twelve lock gates, which drop the water level progressively through seventy-five feet from Chelmsford to the sea lock at Heybridge Basin.

At each lock golden tinged water spurts through the gates and shatters into the cut below, raising the scent of earth and loam. On the stretches between the locks, the dark glass surface reflects the poplars as clouds scud in its depths, and the flicker of the mirrored sun strikes jewels into the eye. Swans nest beside these waters, and when I see them out of the water they are bigger than I expect, the bulk of the bird is hidden as they dip and flex their necks. Fish swim amongst the broad-leaved weeds that glow emerald in the slanted sun.

Here I see the arrow pattern of the water rat passing, the bob of the moorhen and the glint of the mallard's sleek plumage. On sultry days I'll lie sweat frosted before sinking into the cool of the earth-smelling water, water that wets my lips and tastes sweet. As I ease into the river my body

turns pallid, the refraction of the water shortens my limbs. I become a creature turned brown to pale, from dry to wet and from gravity bound to weightless.

The river and the locks, the towpath and pools were my generation's garden. Our parents issued dire warnings about the dangers of the locks and the weirs, and we were careful there, but would swim without fear in the smooth waters of the canal. We'd climb the lock gates, and gaze into the poured glass of the falling water. Nearest to us was Beeleigh Falls, a meeting of rivers where weirs hissed and tumbled. Below the weirs the piped effluent from the Chelmsford sewage works falls into the tidal waters of the Blackwater from an outlet by the golf course and flows on past Maldon. The outlet bubbles and seeps through the mud. The location of the outflows all down the river are a matter of public record for those who seek; this one is obvious.

At Beeleigh a small wood is flanked on all sides by water and the meadows by the canals are soft and lush. The worn red brick chambers that are the remains of the Beeleigh Flour Mill fascinated us as children. My brother told me that one chamber near Beeleigh Mill was used to drown people. Years later, I walked there with my friend Steve who grew up in Maldon alongside me. He said he had been told that the chamber was a pen for a wild bear that tore the heads off unwary children. In truth, it housed a steam engine that augmented the water wheels that drove the millstones, but our memories of the stories we were told held magic and potency and were so much better than the truth.

The upper channel of the Estuary runs from Beeleigh to the Hythe Quay at Maldon. Steve and I walked along the southern bank from Fullbridge, passing the original site of the 'Maldon Crystal Salt Company', a smallish wharf where a steel barge serves as their salt pan, evaporating and filling with the water at each spring tide, then being pumped into settlement tanks before processing. Steve and I agreed that when asked where we were from, our response was always, 'Maldon – where the salt comes from.' We walked to the Hythe Quay, where the Queens Head does brisk trade in the summer, where Thames barges are moored and where the elegant mediaeval St Mary's church is set atop the hill of Church Street. I remember the Vicar, Father Andrew, hurrying down the hill towards the Queens Head after 11 o'clock mass on a Sunday, his cassock flying out as he strode. Sunday opening hours were twelve to two then, and congregations remarked that the end of the service seemed a little rushed sometimes.

In Maldon town, Steve and I visited the Promenade Park adjacent to the wharf and river. On hot summer days, my mother laid out a blanket under the hawthorn trees, and I pelted in and out of the saltwater bathing lake, which was filled and renewed with the high tides. I loved to swim. I sat on a wasp here, and another time a bee mistook my ear for a flower. The climbing frames in the children's playground were unchanged. The steam engine climbing frame was my favourite, Steve preferred the other one, he said, the snail. In fifty odd years I had not realised that the other one was a snail.

A dropped ice-cream on the pavement caught my eye.

We ended our day with a pint at the 'Queens Head'. At low tide, the dark mud was deeply channelled, oily and redolent. Craft sat in their own depressions in the semi solid muck. It poured with rain while we were there. The sun broke through and a strongly painted rainbow unfurled over the marshes towards Heybridge Basin that I somehow failed to capture in a photograph.

Fresh to Salt

The Navigation winds around Maldon from Beeleigh, its path describing a 's' curve past the burgeoning industrial estates and shopping malls of the town. This final stretch was constructed outside of the town's boundaries due to a dispute with Maldon authorities who demanded a higher price that the Navigation consortium wanted to pay. Eventually, the Navigation consortium simply purchased this land, extending the run to Heybridge Basin and avoided Maldon altogether. Along its length factory buildings and quays have been transformed into housing and parking, cottages back onto the canal, which runs sleekly past their back gardens.

The water traffic is now for pleasure rather than commerce. The fresh runs in a final mile long cut down to the sea lock and into the Blackwater estuary at Heybridge Basin. The sea lock stands 'twix fresh and salt', it's chamber brackish, mixing brine with sweet water with transitioning craft an hour either side of the top of the tide. Provision has been made with an 'easement' (that is, a right to cross land owned by someone else), for the effluent pipeline that outfalls at Beeleigh to be extended further down the tidal river to outflow at Heybridge Basin should Maldon District Council wish to reduce the pollution of the Blackwater at Hythe Quay and through the Promenade Park.

The ages of the Basin have been measured since 1796 by the tenure of the lockkeeper, a man of power in that community who juggled the admission of vessels into and out of The Navigation. Cecil Stebbens, my uncle Jack's cousin, held tenure as lockkeeper from 1942 to 1945. Uncle Jack was married to my mother's sister. I knew Cecil as 'Darbie' when I was a tiny child, he was old to me then, his face crinkled and weathered. He wore a faded blue canvas tunic, a rolled cigarette often in his hand, which he would switch to his mouth when he lifted me. He smelled reassuringly of salt and fish and mud, and his tobacco stained whiskers tickled.

My friend Em lent me a booklet written by a lifelong 'Basiner' about the Basin. I learned that nicknames were used for Basin families, one of the four Stebbens families listed had the nickname 'Darbie', the same nickname was used for all male family members, only transitioning on the death of the older male. There are eleven Clarke families, six Woodcrafts, and other duplicate family names so I can see why nicknames were used. The Basin is full of incomers now and the river traffic, coat merchants, wharves, ironworks and woodyards have gone. It won't be long before the names and nicknames are wisps of memory preserved in that booklet, in local history archives, and in the heads of those who remember, and they too will pass.

My family first came to the Basin to sail in the early 1960's. There was little commercial traffic left on The Navigation by then. The final ship unloaded at the Basin in 1972. The Marconi company based in Chelmsford, where my Uncle Jack was Entertainments Manager rented a barge, the 'Mamgu' in 1960. She was piloted from Tollesbury to Heybridge Basin by 'Darbie' and moored close to the sea wall in the sucking mud and became the club house for the Marconi Sailing Club. Challenged by the lowness of the tide, my father and other club members wrestled and squelched their dinghies to the water through sticky mudflats to sail. I was an infant; I remember little of those days. A family photograph shows me tied to Mamgu's mast, presumably to prevent me running and falling into the black mud, or into the ebb or flow of the tide. I am glowering and straining against my bonds, furious faced at my incarceration.

Em was born in Goldhanger and now lives in the Basin. We walk out over the marshes turned fishing lakes and wildfowl reservation, where canada geese, sandpipers and gulls flock and wheel. From the sea wall bounding the lakes, over the channel in the mud I see the rise of Maldon, the spire of St Mary's church and the Queen's Head pub. I see the kiosks and hawthorn trees of the Promenade Park and the ruddy barges on the quay. I choose not to return there much now, not

since Mum died in '94. The glass of time holds my memories, of childish glee, of drunken kisses, of beer and laughter, of anguish and the brittle confidence of my younger self.

I have adopted the upper reaches of the north coast of the estuary as my own. My childhood was largely spent on the southern side or on the water itself, at Stansgate, where the Marconi Sailing Club eventually bought land and established a permanent base. I washed up in Braintree eventually, so the southern coast of the estuary is less accessible now. From Braintree I can be at Goldhanger church in half an hour.

Em showed me 'the churchyard way' out and over the fields to the seawall. Great yews line the path to the worn gap in the churchyard wall, where the curved beams of the oak style are silvered by rain and wind and made smooth by steady hands and climbing feet. Starlings nest in the eaves of the church. Lichened gravestones droop and list. Paths lead out over the fields and stretch down towards the seawall. In winter, the wind is fierce on the face and the paths by the field edges turn slick and heavy, the land is cold and seems barren. Spring, and the land wakes first to the frostings of blackthorn blossom, then the green fuzz of hawthorn leaf showing, followed by the sweet musk scent of their blossoms. Strange galls, the birthplaces of wasps, show on the juvenile oaks at the creek edge. Later, hawthorn blossoms will have turned to papery brown, with the swell of the bullet-hard green haws beginning at their bases. Profusely growing chamomile releases a pungent piss-smell as it is crushed underfoot, and above, the scattergun song of the skylark. Summer, and the sun strikes the ground cruelly, drying the earth into ankle turning ruts beside the expanse of blue-green barley that stretch in wind driven ripples to the sea wall.

The seaward margins of the fields are bordered by dykes, stretches of still water that serve to drain the low-lying land and map the curves of the sea wall. A path leads to a small beach formed in a tiny bay where flood gates guard against spring tides heightened by gale force winds. This beach was the spot for parties in my youth. We would gather and drink, swim, love and get high. The beams of the flood gates are fenced and covered in injunctions not to climb, the stout wooden flood boards that slot down are off limits now. I walked along the top of those old boards one drunken night back then, my bare feet folding over the four-inch wide surface like a gymnast on a barre, arms wide, holding a bottle of cider in each hand, surrounded by cat calls and laughter.

We were aware of the submerged outfall that lurks at the low tide mark down on the mud, crusted with furred weed, with a rank smell and leaking something we didn't care to examine. It's marked by an inverted black triangle on a pole and is an ideal objective when swimming at high tide. The output flows out into the river and is carried away by high tide. The appearance of a trail of scum on the surface of the Estuary is to be swum around, not through, though some swimmers simply plough on. The markers for discharge points are to be found the length of the estuary coast. CEFAS (The Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture) and The Environment Agency regularly sample the outfalls along the whole coast for levels of e.coli, often with reference to the farming of oysters and other shellfish. Thirty-five water company discharge points and Forty-seven private discharge points are listed in the estuary. CEFAS have produced reports for the decommissioning of Bradwell Power Station, surveying footfall in the estuary area and consumption of food products from its surrounds. In 2016 water quality surveys concerned the decommissioned Bradwell A plant, and the proposed Bradwell B power station, which is in the consultation stage at the time of writing.

I swam here in May this year when the prohibitions of our lockdown eased. It was with a desperate hunger that I drove out to these waters. The day was clear but blustery and the waves fierce at high tide. The water was topped with white horses running. In those waters, my body was challenged, the currents pressed on my muscles, unpredictable, powerful, all was move and change, a pulling of my limbs and pushing against my skin. Wind-blown and wild; exhilarating. The waves slapped stinging into my face and broke over my head. My breath was taken and my heart rate elevated. Through it all I whooped and grinned and exulted.

I have walked here for years now. It's my habit to be barefoot on the shingle beaches, and to swim, where modesty permits, in my skin. Sometimes I don't shower afterwards, so that I can lick my forearm hours later and taste the river. When I walk, I am loaded as lightly as I can be. I will swim in my skin or my underwear, I carry a light absorbent towel, water, tobacco, a snack, my camera, my phone. The strap of my bag still cuts into my shoulder. When I was a child ranging over fields, before the threat of strangers became a known thing, when I set off then, I don't recall carrying anything. My memory tells me I drank from puddles and streams, picked berries, nibbled hawthorn leaves - colloquially known as 'bread and cheese' - and pulled up crunchy sugar beet to gnaw on.

A few hundred yards further downriver, there's a long shingle spit, bordered on the landward side by a salt marsh, and to the seaward side by the silhouette of Osea island. At spring tides when the moon and the sun align to pull the earth's cloak of water elliptical, the tides rise high and the spit is wholly covered by the sea's swell. At neap tides when sun and moon are at right angles to one another, they pull to smooth the bulge of the tide and the end of the shingle spit is cut off at high tide. When I walked here with Em, she would stoop and collect holed hagstones from the shingle, finding them effortlessly time after time in one walk. Putting one's eye to those holes in the stones, the view is both restricted and sharpened, deepened in hue, and made otherworldly.

A few years ago, I came here with an oyster shell, it was one of a pair, the other fitted perfectly inside this one. The other I had given as a gift. I watched the rising tide, mud banks jutting from the shingle sank below the surface, scrubby bushes submerged. The waterscape over the spit stained with the colour of below, beige and dark green. Sediment drawn from the ground charted the shallows back to shore. The tide left me on a temporary Island of shingle and stone. A dingy came in close, crew revelling in the taut wind, sheets thrumming. There was a second look my way, a flash of white eyes in tanned faces, but they were too busy and too swift to take much attention from their running craft. On the horizon, the poplars on Osea seamed the sky. I walked out; the cold was shocking in its touch. Waves splashed in my face as I swam; salt stung in my eyes. The poplars on Osea were much closer. As I hung in the water the shell glistened white against the green. Slowly I let it go. It dropped away turning and growing dimmed as it faded into the river.

There was salt on my face.

I was heavy as I swam back, the ebb tide pulling. I changed tack aiming for a point upstream of the spit where I know the water will be slack, and the swimming easier. I have learned not to underestimate the shifting of water, even as I trust in my relationship with it. When I reached my island, a thin ribbon of dark painted shingle at the water's edge shone wetly. I trusted that the ebb tide would take my pain with it. That day, as I walked back over the spit with the tide flowing out, and the shingle glistening, I gathered several hagstones, and since then I have I have always been able to find them.

In nature, and in the river, which breathes and shifts and is a live thing, there is magic. The tides sweep in, out and into the ocean's global streams of currents, they strip away the artifice of

life. Swimming at high tide and staying there while the water starts to flow back out is symbolic, it cleanses me, makes me small, taking with its inexorable movement my cares and slights, my petty concerns and vanities. The waters are amniotic, they are the essential element of all life, they have been in our bodies, our breath, our excretions and sweat in ancient and unending rotation. Water makes us one with the whole, with each tree, animal, stream, river, sea, each mist, and cloud. The molecules we breathe have been breathed, transpired, used and recycled from the beginning. So it is with water.

In the saltmarsh pocket that lies between the spit and the sea wall, there's a large pipe deep in the channels of the marsh, and a pumping station on the landward side of the sea wall. This is an intake pipe for Maldon Salt Works second plant which I can just see a little inland. Salt has been produced on this coast for over a thousand years. Distinctive 'red hills' dot the marshes deriving their colour from the rubble of red-scorched clay structures used to evaporate sea water to make salt cakes. They date from the Bronze age, Iron Age and the Roman period. The salt from Maldon is said to be purer than any other, it's pyramid crystalline shape a product of the minerals in the waters caught and concentrated before being settled and evaporated to create the crystals. Residents of Goldhanger have been heard to mutter that the salt should rightly be called 'Goldhanger Salt', but since Goldhanger is in the Maldon District, and the original works still operate on the muddy banks of Maldon, its name is unlikely to change.

The river is worth its salt, it nourishes and cleanses our civilization, it gives us leisure and landscape, minerals and play. When I was a child, I recall seeing and collecting mermaids' purses, green and red filigree seaweeds, bladder wrack, and the spongy balls of the egg cases of whelk. Whelk shells, razor shells, limpets, periwinkles of all sizes and colours seem difficult to find on the beaches where I used to gather hundreds.

Further along the sea wall is Bullen beach, oyster shell strewn and rising steeply to scrubby marshland. It's marked as a private beach and has a sign on the gate to the jetty saying so. It is not marked as 'Bullen beach' on any map I know, but that is what Em calls it, and she learned that name from her Goldhanger-born mother. When Em first brought me here years ago, I asked about the sign. She said 'Bollocks to that. I've been coming here all my life, and so has Mum'. Length of residence confers rights to access. The beach and marshes are part of Lauriston Farm, a charitable community owned social farming business that operate on organic and biodynamic principles. I have

seen their rare breed livestock on the fields, but I have seldom seen another human being here, save for hikers and bikers travelling from Tollesbury to Goldhanger and back along the sea wall path.

Bullen's shells are from native oysters; the bivalve shells curved on one side and flat on the other are sometimes as big as my hand. They are rarely attached to their other half. They can be streaked orange or purple, and the inner surface that enfolded the animal is smooth as glass. An oyster lives on the bottom and is subject to the ebb and flow of the tide, and in storms must hang tight and endure. They turn grit to pearl. I collect their shells. They are farmed here, out by the low tide line in rows of racks and meshes. It is only on spring tides that the tide exposes them. Shellfish filter and ingest tiny particles to feed. Our appetite for these mollusc's slippery flesh and their reputation for enhancing sexual performance ensures their survival. Water quality monitoring protects the business of growing them, to ensure their flesh does not become contaminated with e-coli from our bodily wastes, or from the radiation we trickle feed out into the compromised, absorbing waters.

One late afternoon on Bullen beach, the estuary was still as dusk and seemed to momentarily breathe and heave. I'd swum in the quiet, and the water had held me in its mellowness. The turning tide was taking effluent and cares away. I could hear the grunt of motor craft from Bradwell Marina. A gull skimmed the top of the water close to shore, riding the cushion of air between surface and wing, twinned by its reflection. In the ringing of the still, a crunching of shingle came from the seaward end of the beach. A line of 20 or so shaggy horned beasts came in single file. They broke into a trot as they passed, shaking their curved horns and swivelling their baleful eyes. The oddness of their procession held me motionless. Later I learned that they were Lauriston Farm's North Ronaldsay sheep coming back from the marshes where they graze. I'd hadn't been to Bullen to swim at quite that time of day before, so had not seen them before.

After they passed, I watched the estuary. I scanned the skyline of Osea Island. In my growing days, I viewed it from the other side of the estuary glass, from Stansgate on the far bank, where my family sailed when I was young. Bradwell Power Station can be seen from here. Over the years I have watched it turn from grey to sepulchral white. In the power station's transition from active to being decommissioned, it has been clad in pale aluminium, and the corners of its silhouette have been softened.

A line of dark appeared on the skin of the of water. It moved towards me from the south-east. I stood in the motionless air and watched it come closer. Behind the line the water was dark, and in front mirrored. The line moved quickly, rushing over the surface, travelling at a speed that become more apparent as it neared. When it made landfall, the temperature dropped markedly, the water became disturbed and unquiet, and a stiff cold wind blew in my face.

Shifting Currents

Over the water from Goldhanger on the other side of Osea Island is the home of the Marconi Sailing Club. My family came here every weekend, driving from our house in Maldon through Mundon and Steeple. At the eastern end of Steeple village, a single-track road hedged with blackthorn, hawthorn, bramble and dog roses heads northward towards the sailing club at Stansgate. The road runs beside the meadows that border Lawling Creek. We spent the late summer days with stained mouths and scratched limbs collecting the fruit that the spring's blossom had promised.

On my visit in August, I parked in a layby a little down the road and walked in on the footpath. I am not a club member but I feel that I have rights here that come with my memories: of my mum dishing out crusty rolls stuffed with cheese and fragrant tomatoes; of her being the first person to swim in April or May, walking into the water like a stately ship, sturdy and big boned, sinking into a graceful breaststroke with that smile; of the sound of halyards on masts; of our boat, a blue GP14 called 'Lady Clare' after my big sister. My dad had a wetsuit he made himself. When he was launching 'Lady Clare', he released the part of the wetsuit that passed from behind between his legs to secure the jacket to the trousers and let it hang like a broad tail. In the melee of dinghies being wheeled to the waters edge, he and his fellow sailors looked like upright running beavers.

The sailing club has a septic tank that discharges into the sea at the low tide mark on the eastern side of the launching hard. We all knew about it, but no-one bothered much. The discharge point is still there, but the septic tank has been replaced as club membership and facilities have grown. All Mum said when I was a child was not to swim through the scum that laced the surface of the water in an uninviting fetid plume.

I swam to Osea Island when I was quite small. My dad rowed alongside me, as we headed for the Osea pier, and for the buoy called 'The Doctor' that was shaped as a large black cone. It marked the start of the shallows on the southern shore of Osea. I was confident swimming and don't recall being tired. My dad ensured we started out on the turn of the tide from low to high so that the distance to the island was reduced by several hundred yards and the currents were running in such a way to take me inland, and not out to sea.

On that visit I fell to talking to a club member, Roy, who is about my sister's age and remembered my family. He told me 'I left the club to bring up my family, and I re-joined six years ago when I retired. I never got sailing or the salt out of me, and I'm happiest here'. I asked him to point out 'The Doctor'. It's a small orange buoy now, and the shallows have altered, so it's in a different place. I told him about Frederick Charrington, a disaffected member of the brewing family, who established a home and treatment centre for alcoholics on Osea Island in the early 1900's. Local people used to tie alcohol to that buoy and the inmates in rehabilitation would swim out pick up the consignments of 'medicine' and so it was named 'The Doctor'. Roy called over another club member and asked if he knew the story. He didn't know it, so I told it again. Roy remarked 'You learn something every day!' Both were chatty and interested to know about my family. Roy knew my dad had died but didn't know my mum had too. I told Roy I was here to revisit childhood places and was interested in the power station. He laughed and said, 'Oh yes, we had all those weird shaped fish washing up on the beach, do you remember?' I nodded; but I didn't remember that. I asked him if he remembered that there had been a red post-box outside Tony Wedgewood Ben's home, Stansgate House, and how we could see it when we peered over the sea wall when we were kids. He didn't remember, but said, 'Well he might well have had one 'cos he was an MP'. I don't remember the fish; Roy doesn't remember the post-box.

My parents moved to Maldon in 1960. They were anti-nuclear campaigners and must have balanced the desirability of the river, sailing and the countryside against the ongoing construction of Bradwell Power Station. From Stansgate, the twin blocks were grey and glassy and lit at night; they dominated the shoreline. The vast barrier wall off Bradwell was the intake and outflow point for water used to cool the Magnox reactor. My brother and I would sail up to the barrier wall at Bradwell and collect winkles there. They were larger than those at Stansgate. We took them home with us in a bucket of sea water. My mum disliked cooking them; she said she could hear them

screaming in the pan. We pricked them from their shells with a pin and ate them with malt vinegar and ground pepper.

On this visit, I wanted to walk near the low tide line to see how much the seashore had changed. The tide dropped, and I walked over the furred stones as a curlew called from Lawling Creek. The surface gives and yields under a covering of bladder wrack. The stones are dotted with mussel, cockle, and oyster shells. Some still contain animals and anchor seaweed that lies like wet hair over the boulders and stones.

As the water recedes, the estuary flesh is drawn away from her bones.

Ponds form as ripples of waves break in small foam. The shore changes moment by moment. A gull bobbed in the rising light of the water. The wind was brackish to taste, seasoned by the sun on damp seaweed. The mud seeped over my sandals and wetted my feet with rich oozes.

The child I was back then turned rocks to find crabs; my responsible adult self no longer interferes with habitats. I saw a crab two inches across on the stones. I poked it with my pencil. It was dead. A jellyfish had been stranded by the tide. I scooped it up along with the portion of beach it lay on with my hands, driving grit and small stones under my nails and I floated it in the tiny waves, getting my feet and hands wet with mud and silt. It didn't swim, but it is hard to tell with jellyfish if they are alive or dead. There were a few razor shells and a scattering of limpets on the rocks. I am no longer so sure that the sea margins are less diverse. I wonder if the changes I think I see are simply that my adults' eye does not see with the clarity that I had when a child. Perhaps I have forgotten how to look without filters, how to marvel and to wonder.

Along the sea wall to the east, there's a World War Two pillbox. These dank caverns of thick concrete are filled with bramble and the detritus left after temporary occupancies and are dotted all along this coast. On this one sits a hut and flagpole. This is the race box, where an invisible line was drawn in the water as the start and finish line of dinghy races, where small craft jostled and jived in a clatter and whip of sheet and sail as they waited for the starting gun. I watched the water as the moored cruisers and yachts began to turn on their moorings. My sister and brother and I scattered our parent's ashes out there. Dad died fifteen years before my mother so when she died it seemed fitting that we mingle them in the river that they loved. They returned to the pull and suck of the

tides, their water had evaporated in a furnace, their atoms thrown to the sky in smoke, and the chips and dust of their bones joined the mud and the currents of the worlds watery mantle.

In that blowsy end of August, a cohort of swallows battled the wind and perched on the tight wires of the flagpole. Smaller ones had trouble perching there on their tiny legs and feet. Adults with spotted flares under their forked tails flanked the youngsters as they struggled in the breeze, marshalling them to the wire. The larger birds exhorted them to twist and spin, to strengthen their wings and stamina. They seemed to fly for sheer joy, but the need for them to find their wings before their migration back to Africa was urgent.

Downriver I could see Bradwell Power Station's whiteness, changed from the blue-grey of its pre-decommissioning years. Emissions no longer rise to the skies and the warm water output from cooling the reactors does not pour into the sea at the estuary mouth. The cladding has tempered their outlines rendering them smooth and unsullied. They are tombs containing reactors now cased in concrete, the legacy of their operational lifetime. From this vantage point I saw the blocks face on. Their paleness is a screen upon which the clouds cast their shadows, billowing a smoky moving picture, a movie screen of the sky. I am pleased at their transformation from dark to light.

I envisioned the image of a mushroom cloud projected in light upon them from miles away.

In March 2017, proposals to dissolve low grade radioactive material in nitric acid as part of the decommissioning process, and to discharge the resulting fluid and radioactive particles into the River Blackwater at high tide were approved by the Environment Agency. Monitoring levels of radioactivity was left up to up to Magnox, the operators of the site. In 2009 Magnox were fined £250, 000 for allowing a radioactive leak from one of its holding tanks at Bradwell to go unchecked for fourteen years. In February 2009, The Guardian reported that the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate said it was not possible to "inspect or check every feature of a complex plant".

The Ecologist Magazine's Chris Busby reported in 2016 that the area was already suffering from excess cancers. The surveys carried out by Magnox differed from those carried out independently. Information is either convoluted or is heavy with technical jargon. Reports suggest the public are given incomplete or indecipherable information about emissions, discharges and cancer surveys. Chris Busby reports that local papers were reluctant to run the stories about the discharges, telling him that they would 'only worry people'.

I saw Bradwell's potential future in 2019. I had emailed both the Nuclear Decommissioning Agency and Magnox seeking to arrange a visit to the nearly decommissioned site at Bradwell to no avail. Eventually, I approached Sizewell B's visitor centre. They have a Magnox reactor of the same type as Bradwell that is about two years behind in the decommissioning process. Sizewell B started generation in 1995, a PWR (Pressurised Water Reactor), it uses a different type of fuel and cooling mechanism to Magnox reactors. The principle of all reactors is that the heat created by splitting uranium atoms turns water into steam that drives turbines to produce energy. My father told me how hydroelectric power generation worked when I was a child, but he didn't talk about the nuclear method.

A security check was made before I visited. As I drove in, I noticed a small sewage treatment plant tucked away at the end of the carpark. My guide, Anna, a nuclear physicist, was every bit as enthusiastic as Caroline and Nicole at the Water Recycling Centre. She talked me through how the PWR works, and stressed the multiple layers of fail safes, policies and procedures that govern the operation of the plant, saying 'Nuclear safety is our overriding priority'. I could not take a bag or my camera with me on the tour, and the security search at the gate was stringent. Inside the complex there's a fire station, a permanent police presence, a canteen, training facilities, offices, a gym, a health centre, and an engineering warehouse. It's a small city. They have 528 staff, 250 contractors and sixteen apprentices working on the site. Wages and benefits are high to attract high quality workers, engineers and apprentices to a sensitive industry. I remembered our neighbour in Maldon who worked at Bradwell, and how we joked about him glowing in the dark.

We walked on cross hatched areas only. The site was immaculately tidy and in excellent repair. There is no room for any nuclear installation to be other than this. Anna told me that that we would not be visiting the reactor building or control room. I learned that the intake from the sea is three times removed from the reactor core, it has no direct contact. A ferris wheel sized drum of mesh turns at the water intake, filtering out fish and returning them to the sea mostly unharmed. Fish are attracted by the warmth of the outflow. Anna told me that CEFAS sample regularly and that the environment is quite safe.

Anna pointed out the fail safes, secondary and tertiary water supplies and emergency provisions. She's proud of the plant, and I respect her pride and technical expertise. My assessment of risk from a lay viewpoint is different. I am torn between her persuasiveness and certainty and my

distrust of nuclear systems given that human and mechanical error can never be fully mitigated. I don't mention this to her, I came here to experience and to learn, not to argue.

We entered the turbine hall at ground level through a small door that opens into a cavern 30 stories deep and as wide as the Albert Hall. I stepped out onto a mesh platform and looked down. The view dropped away several stories into the ground taking my stomach with it. Anna asked if I'd prefer to take the lift, but I shook my head and puffed out my breath. The space is laced with insulated pipes, levers, gauges, twisting walkways and staircases, but most of it is space. There are notices all over the place about safety. Anna pointed to the far end of the hall and told me that the closed steam feed from the reactor comes in there. We climbed; the tingling in my limbs abated a bit.

The place is vast and humming.

We stopped beside a long cylinder on its side, it's easily the length of a bus, maybe more, and it's twice my height. It's drones, hums and the platform at my feet had a slight tremor. Anna told me it's one of the two turbines, and that it is generating enough power to supply half of East Anglia. She leant on it with her hand and nodded at me. I spread eagled myself tight against the turbine, my cheek against the warm insulated casing. The warmth, vibration and hum filled my body. I was the closest to concentrated raw power than I had ever been before. It was thrilling, I was awed by that power.

Each turbine is connected to a generator that produces electricity at 23.5 kilovolts, fed through thick wires to the step-up transformers, huge structures of wires, metal and glass insulators. They are humming like angry bees as they work. They raise the voltage to 400 kilovolts. Anna said raising the voltage reduces the energy lost in transmission as electricity passes into the national grid. I took her word for this.

The pylons string out and away inland.

A few days later I talked to a friend who had worked in HR at Bradwell Power Station for the latter part of its operational life. Nancy had worked at Dungeness power station and also had HR responsibility for Trawsfynydd Magnox power station in Snowdonia. She said Trawsfynydd had ugly grey walls set against the stark backdrop of the mountains which to her had seemed like a 'dark

satanic place'. She said when she transferred to Bradwell she found its expanses of glass that were lit at night quite beautiful and likened it to a lighthouse. She worked there throughout the decommissioning operations. She said that she and her husband had taken a trip there recently, just to see how it was now. She had wanted to cry as she remembered the community of workers, she could hear their voices and see their faces. As she looked at the site, levelled all but for the reactor buildings and store she had felt a sense of pride that the area had been returned to nature, and that she had been part of that. She'd talked with the security folk there who remembered her and told her that the peregrines that still nested on the Reactor Building 1 in boxes provided by Magnox as part of the decommissioning. She was sad that she had not seen them on her visit.

I visited Bradwell A shortly after my visit to Sizewell. I had not been up close to the structure since I'd sailed up there with my brother. The World War Two airfield was still accessible, with its concrete runways, control tower and abandoned Nissan huts. After my dad died in '79, my brother took me there to practice driving. I taxied our gold Vauxhall Viva on these wide spaces. The control tower on the perimeter road is a house now, it's flat roof and observation platform converted into a sunroom.

The runway is overgrown, a farmer has built a large haystack on it and stands of weeds have sprouted between the blocks. Agricultural debris, wire and stones have collected on its surface. I felt it prudent not to take my car for a run up the slabs for old times sake but I conjured my brother and I ghosting along in the Viva, and superimposed behind us aircraft flying in the war years. I sent a picture of the runway to my brother. He sent back a message with smile and said that the Viva's paint colour was 'Honey Starmist'. My brother remembers visiting Bradwell Power station in the 60's, donning soft socks and walking on the top of the reactor core, a treat that was not afforded to me at Sizewell in 2019.

I drove past ranks of cruciform struts standing stark against the sky. These led from the transformers to the pylons. They have no wires, but they and the pylons still stand. The area was designated as a potential site for a nuclear new build in 2011, eight years before Bradwell A had been put into a decommissioned state of 'Care and Maintenance'. The planning process for the construction of Bradwell B, with its twin reactors and an operational footprint 10 times the size of the existing site has started in earnest. During construction, the site would extend right out to The Orthona Community and St Peters. The first public consultation process was concluded in July this

year, much of it on conducted online as public events were cancelled due to coronavirus. Maldon District council refused planning permission for preliminary works in July 2020. Local and national opinion is divided, the economic benefits and safety precautions weigh against concerns about environment, safety and health. I wondered about those struts, and why they were left intact.

I walked to the beach on the footpath that skirts the high grey perimeter fence. Bradwell beach is made of shells and steeply sloped. Out in the channel the remains of the barrier wall is no longer the long structure it was. Its wings have been demolished. I swam, but I don't know these waters well, I'm careful of currents I don't know. Birds hung near the whited cliffs of the twin blocks, riding the currents. I looked in vain for the peregrines and their boxes. The blades of Turncole Wind Farm turned in the distance inshore, and far out to sea I could see the spikes of the Gunfleet Sands offshore windfarm. A high yellow sign on the beach amongst the scrub warned 'POWER – XXXX – CABLE'. The middle word is scratched off, I thought I could make out a D. It is too tall for idle intervention.

The perimeter fence is punctuated with signs. One declares 'Nuclear Installations Act 1965 (as amended) Bradwell Site, Licenced site boundary'. Others warn that CCTV is in operation, and that flying drones over the site is prohibited. The rabbit fencing at the bottom of the palisade rattles and echoes. Some kind of device on waist high poles are placed unevenly inside the fence. I speculate they are motion sensors, but I can't be sure. The site is almost completely levelled around the blocks, and there is a secondary fence around them. Weeds and shrubs have taken hold inside the fence. I pushed my phone up to the gaps in the palings to take photographs. I heard a whirr as a camera rotated towards me and felt overlooked and uncomfortable. There was no obvious security presence to contact when I got to the front gate.

There was a dead tree in the car park, it's spring buds frozen at the point of blooming. It was just that one tree.

As I prepared to drive away, two security guards in fluorescent jackets hurried into the car park. I got out of my car. I said, 'I'm terribly sorry, I should know better, I used to work in Airport Security'. The man was stern, telling me 'this is a nuclear site'. I said it was sheer curiosity as I've grown up with this silhouette in my landscape. I gave him the name of the person at Magnox with whom I emailed last year, and I gave him my driving licence and passport before he asked. He passed

them to his colleague who patted herself down and said to him, 'Er, have you got a pen?' The man felt around his pockets and with a slightly sheepish air shook his head. After a few moments I suggested they photograph the documents with a phone. The man told me that a married couple who used to work at Stansted worked security on his team. He said the name of the man, I told him the name of his wife. Tensions reduced significantly. I resisted the urge to ask about those sensors. They didn't ask me for my phone or my photos.

As I drove away, I slowed and looked over my shoulder. Birds dipped and curled in the updrafts against the sheer sides of the naced twin tombs glowing in the lowering sun.

One seemed to me to be a raptor, but I was too far away to see.

The redundant pylons stood waiting.

Outfall

Perceptions change. Things that were hidden are uncovered with a little research. My child-self had no concern for the effects of human activities on these waters and landscapes, accepting the abundance of each day without care. These stretches of water are one of a multitude of gleaming, shifting bodies that play out into the wider ocean. Some other rivers run foul and stinking into an ocean that already bears the burden of our growth. Here on the Blackwater and the rivers that feed into it, it seems the damage is slight. So far. We continue to grow, to consume. This is not a new story.

The rivers and the estuary carry my memories, with the flow of the water and the passage of time those memories change. The fragments of remembrance that turn and eddy with the tides change a little each time they come to my mind. No visit to the estuary or to my remembrances is ever the same.

The estuary feels different now, changed by what I know about it, but no less cherished. The energy output from Bradwell power station started over the Easter weekend of '63, as I turned and moved in my mother's womb. It generated power for nearly fifty years. Now in the mausoleum lies material with half-life, radioactivity is measured by the click of a Geiger counter. The runways where

aircraft ghost by will fade and die, whether Bradwell B is built or not. They are already being absorbed by grass and scrub.

From radiation emissions over the period of operation of Bradwell A power station, to the unseen and uncommented upon sewage discharges, it seems that both I and this river have much that is hidden to take away.

The tide rises and falls, birds flock and breed and the shimmer of light upon its surface still enthrals me.

Personal and Critical Commentary

The inspiration for this piece is found in the love I have for the waters that link me to my past. The stillness of the fresh water and the changes in the ocean-linked estuary all hold memory. My childhood was spent in and around water, I hold rich recollections of the canals and rivers of the Blackwater estuary. Personal recollections from childhood surfaced as I wrote. The realisation that the waters were allegories for my memories emerged. Each turn of the tide and storm changes the contours of the riverbed a little, just as years change memories. Much writing by local people, who have the salt of the estuary in their veins, is unlauded. Their accounts, stories and poetry speak from a personal relationship with the waters.

With my memories and travels in and around the estuary landscape comes an unease about the purposes we use it for – not the benign activities of walking, sailing and swimming, of sailing fishing and beachcombing - but also some of the things we use water for, to cleanse us, to drink, to carry away and absorb our waste. I am interested in the things that the rivers and the estuary hide. I observed that the presence of Bradwell power station is seldom explored in writing about this landscape, it seems hidden in plain sight. I also wanted to investigate and bring to light the volume of effluent that flows into this body of water.

One of the first poems I learned by heart as a child was Masefield's 'Sea Fever'.¹ 'The lonely sea and sky', 'Grey mist on the sea's face', 'Shaking sails' and 'white clouds flying', became internalised and welded with my experiences of beachcombing and swimming. The poem had direct relevance to my experience. I did not understand the last lines, or of their reference to death. The poem featured in a poetry book given to me by my parents in 1978, a year before my father's death. At his funeral, the vicar read Tennyson's 'Crossing the Bar'², 'But such a tide as moving seems asleep/Too full for sound and foam'. The poem speaks of a full tide to carry the traveller away.

¹ Philip Larkin, ed., *Oxford Book of 20th Century Verse*, vol. 148 (Oxford University Press, 1973).

² Alfred Tennyson, 'Crossing the Bar', Poetry Foundation (Poetry Foundation, 15 September 2020), <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/>, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45321/crossing-the-bar>.

I read 'The Bird of Dawning,'³ delighting in its raw descriptions of sailing and sailors and marvelled at Heyerdahl's journeying aboard the 'Kon-Tiki'⁴. Grahame's 'The Wind in the Willows'⁵ thrilled me with the animal characters but also for his capacity to describe what I knew of freshwater movement, 'This sleek, sinuous, full-bodied animal... All was a-shake and a-shiver – glints and gleams and sparkles, rustle and swirl, chatter and bubble.' O'Dell's 'Island of Blue Dolphins'⁶, a narrative of a young woman abandoned on a desolate island off the California coast is dog-eared and creased through repeated reading. Bach's 'Jonathan Livingston Seagull'⁷ ostensibly about flight and transformation was about seabird's flight and striving over the water. Baring-Gould's dark tale 'Mehalah'⁸ brought a darker side to the estuary to mind, I liken it to Dickens in mood. 'The Observers Book of Sea and Seashore'⁹ accompanied my family to the sailing club at weekends. I was not allowed to take the book out over the beach and mud. I would find something and race back to my mother to look it up. The book 'The Pebbles on the Beach'¹⁰ said that the Essex coastline had little to 'appeal to the collector until we get beyond the mouth of the Thames', but the pebbles on the beaches I knew held quartz or granite or flint, and I collected them avidly. The books form a part of the emotional and experiential texture that underpins the piece.

My mother, born in Bradwell of a Naval father and Essex born mother, grew up in Great Baddow above the Chelmer Valley. From her I gained a love of my local environment, as I walked and played with her through the woods and coastlines of Essex. She knew the names of plants and trees we passed and could identify most bird song. My father was an engineer, and through his influence I carry a fascination for how things work and curiosity about mechanisms. In the narrative my father tells me how electricity is generated, but he taught me much more, from attending air shows to visiting The Stour Valley steam railway. I gained a respect and awe of power and technology.

³ John Masefield, *The Bird of Dawning*, 1st Edition (Penguin, 1968).

⁴ Thor Heyerdahl, *The Kon-Tiki Expedition* (Unwin, 1950).

⁵ Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows*, Illustrated Edition (Collins, 1968).

⁶ Scott O'Dell, *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (Penguin, 1965).

⁷ Richard Bach and Russell Munson, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull: A Story*, New, Illustrated Thorsons Classics edition (London: Harper Collins, 1972).

⁸ Sabine Baring-Gould, *Mehalah* (Chatto and Windus, 1969).

⁹ I. O. Evans, *The Observer's Book of Sea and Seashore* (Frederick Warne & Co. LTD, 1968).

¹⁰ Clarence Ellis, *The Pebbles on the Beach*, (Faber & Faber, 1974).

Our sailing days and weekends at the Marconi sailing club gave me a close relationship with the river. The turning of the tides and the seasons mattered for sailing and swimming and over those years were embedded in me. Studying the run of the tide, anticipating currents and being alert to them whilst swimming is second nature to me. Swimming and beachcombing on the exposed shores became a lifelong pleasure.

My parent's involvement in environmental campaigning influenced my adult outlook. I read Schumacher's 'Small is Beautiful'¹¹ from their bookshelves and was struck by his assertion that 'In the excitement over the unfolding of his scientific and technical powers, modern man has built a system of production that ravishes nature and a type of society that mutilates man'. Writing in 1972, Schumacher argued that the economy was environmentally unsustainable. Schumacher held that resource availability must constrain economic development. He advocated a shift in lifestyle to embrace small scale living and subsistence. He said that nuclear energy creates the 'accumulation of large amounts of highly toxic substances ... that remains an incalculable danger to the whole of creation for historical or even geological ages', poses an unacceptable risk against humanity and is an act of 'transgression against life itself'¹². Bunyard's 'The Green Alternative'¹³, suggests individuals can choose to 'alter this tide of destruction'. In 1990, the concept of 'sustainability' was embryonic. The 'Green Alternative' postulated that it was not yet too late to prevent the collapse of the environment. The book addresses the generation of nuclear power, its inherent risks and lasting pollution, and the disposal of sewage waste, water quality, and the build-up of hormones and drugs in our wastewater. These texts set the scene for my awareness of our effect on our environment.

The work I intended focussed on environmental control of human waste and energy generation, using the estuary as a focal point and connector between the two. I envisioned exploring the estuary landscape through poetry, photography, local stories, interviews and personal vignettes. The circumstances surrounding this year prevented wider ranging interviews.

I wanted to better understand the processes around the treatment of human waste – I knew through talking with a friend that the waste did not go directly into the canal at Chelmsford but was piped down the valley. I discovered exactly where it did flow out into the tidal river through further

¹¹ E. F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as If People Mattered* P126 (New York, N.Y: Abacus, 1974).

¹² Schumacher P121.

¹³ P Bunyard and F Morgan-Grenville, eds., *The Green Alternative Guide to Good Living* (Mandarin, 1987).

research, and another visit there. Following the visit to Anglian Water, I used internet resources, and sought out newspaper articles around sewage.

Sizewell B gave me a flavour of how it felt to be in a nuclear installation. The narrative reflects the sensitivity of the installation. The trip to Sizewell B became part of the story as a premonition of Bradwell's future. The Bradwell B Inaugural brochure¹⁴, sent to me by Magnox evoked a period of hope and technological advance following the post war years. It provided me with a historical layer about my birth and the opening. My field trip to the fully decommissioned site was made in August this year.

I visited the meeting of the rivers at Beeleigh with my friend Steve. I incorporated his story about the bear in red brick chambers, the dropped ice cream and my lifelong blind spot about what the climbing frames represented. The walk past Maldon Salt and the visit to the Queens Head are constructed from memory. I walked and swum at the beaches mentioned in the narrative. The accounts of swimming recounted are things that happened but can only happen once. The conditions are different each time they are repeated.

The visit to Stansgate is laden with memory. It was the first time I seen the power station buildings from that spot since they had been clad. The swallows practicing flying seemed a counterpoint to the scattering of my parent's ashes and to the twin blocks. I had been convinced that the shoreline would be less rich when I walked there but came away wondering if it was my perception that was different and sewed that into the narrative.

On each field trip I made, I stepped away from myself into a reflective place and was receptive to my surroundings and what came up in my imagination and consciousness. On one walk at Goldhanger, a local woman walked with me for a way and chatted. The company was welcome after the isolation of lockdown, but I was glad when she parted from me and I was able to be still. That trip fleshed the description of the walk through the churchyard and over the fields. I wanted to show the seasons, the changes I see as the year turns.

Some interviews that yielded anecdotes were unexpected, such as meeting 'Roy' who remembered my family. Other chance conversations gave me sources to follow but were not

¹⁴ The Central Electricity Generating Board and The Nuclear Power Group, *Berkley and Bradwell Nuclear Power Stations - Inaugral Brochure*, 1963.

recorded as 'interviews', rather I followed the leads afterwards but without recounting the conversation or the encounter. Gaining consent from a stranger about a distanced conversation on a windy sea wall was not always practicable. Primary interviewees were the staff at the facilities I visited, my family, my friends 'Em' and 'Steve', and 'Roy' whom I quoted directly or indirectly.

Em supplied local publications about the Basin, Goldhanger and the Chelmer Valley which provided insights into local life that I would not otherwise have been able to access. The use of nicknames in the Basin came from a booklet¹⁵ she provided. She was a resource who spoke of the areas I wrote about from a personal and local perspective. My brother, a sailor on the estuary and a repository of information about technical matters contributed family recollections, technical information and memories from his childhood. He corroborated accounts of gathering crabs, sailing to the power station and the nostalgic information about the colour of our car.

Images of the places I visited formed stimulus and research material. I recall the feel of a place upon reviewing photographs. My notes made good reference materials. I learned over the course of this project to keep just one notebook, with date and location clearly noted. On occasions my notes were made on the back of a receipt or on a napkin, I learned to be prepared with writing equipment. My notebooks have become better ordered through my experiences with the project.

I attended a Wild Writing workshop in March 2018. Part of the Essex Book Festival, it was held at the Jaywick Martello Tower and was run by Wendy Constance and Judith Wolton. The workshop focused on absorbing the coastal atmosphere and bringing things back from the beach to write about. When I walked on the beach, I saw the build-up of plastic, I felt a sense of shock that there was so much of it. I brought back a lot of plastic and my poem, 'Beach Spoil' was a lament for the sea I loved – 'Bilious with sickly indigestion/She oozes soured sweat from her grey face/Spewing our waste with an injured moan.'¹⁶ The workshop built upon my concern for our environment and helped to shape the direction of 'River Run'. I felt that much writing on landscape and this specific coastal environment focussed on wildness, wind, water and history, but in many cases simply ignored the environmental aspects of our impact on the waters.

¹⁵ Denys Harrison, *Heybridge Basin - The Story of a Waterside Community* (Self published, 2002).

¹⁶ 'Beachcombing Wild Writing', *Wild Writers* (blog), 12 May 2018, <https://wildeasters.wordpress.com/2018/05/12/beachcombing-wild-writing/>.

At times, during the constraints of lock-down, research by traditional routes was challenged and so I turned to my own library and the internet. I used JSTOR, online publication and previews of books. I tried to confine my internet sources to government, BBC, Guardian, newspaper, educational and established and recognised bodies. Local websites, such as Goldhanger's virtual museum¹⁷ and local blogs written by local people with a love of their area helped inform and give further texture to the piece whether the material was directly incorporated or not.

I was poor at determining when enough was enough research and kept amassing more. I needed to sift and sort the information I had and decide what was relevant and what was not. When writing my first drafts, I found myself double checking the material I already had and following further links. This was not helping my writing process, I was prevaricating, my faith in what I knew and had planned was weak. Emma Darwin suggested 'It's very easy to use research as procrastination and never start writing at all' and said that the only way to start writing, was to write.¹⁸ I made a timeline of target dates for completion of sections of both creative writing and commentary. On this I wrote in big red letters 'No More Research'.

I had planned how research would fit together but I not yet written any part of the creative project. Julia Bell, writing about starting says 'The reams of sentences, the characters, the ideas that drove you to the page in the first-place wither into nothing. Suddenly the whole project becomes impossible and your desire to write remains just that'. She goes on to say, 'The only way to overcome this problem is to write'.¹⁹ I emailed my supervisor two weeks later and said that I had started to write at last. My writing was random and had incorporated much family history. I had not written about the trip to the sewage facility and had left a gap to put it in later. My supervisor suggested I needed to decide if I was writing a family history, cathartic and potentially of interest only to me and my family, or a narrative about the bodies of water including snippets of personal history, with a universal theme running through it which addressed environmental concerns. I started to think about the themes that I was writing about. I decided that like the river the themes were fluid, but would be around memory, loss, change and hidden things.

¹⁷ 'Goldhanger Virtual Museum', accessed 27 May 2020, <http://www.churchside1.plus.com/Goldhanger-past/Museum.htm>.

¹⁸ Emma Darwin, *Get Started in Writing Historical Fiction* (Hachette UK, 2016).

¹⁹ Julia Bell and Paul Magrs, eds., *The Creative Writing Coursebook: Forty Authors Share Advice and Exercises for Poetry and Prose* (London: Macmillan, 2001). 3

I split the work into three geographical sections from the canal down through the estuary, making a distinction between geographical locations. I gave myself some guidelines for my writing: 1) action and anecdotes must be things where I am present or must concern places where I was or am present, 2) be at the edges of the water not inland, 3) keep aware of my themes, 4) Inclusion of interesting tales, 5) being aware of tense and point of view 6) ruthless editing. I wanted to keep anecdotes from the past related to me, not my ancestors. I wanted to keep my narrative close to the river. I undertook a major edit of section one stripping out nearly all my family history. These sections are retained in my files, but they don't fit this piece. Stephen King says the best advice he had about editing was to 'Kill your darlings'²⁰; to remove self-indulgent irrelevancies. I retained my mother smiling and my grandfather as those were remembrances that gave continuity into subsequent sections.

Three of my peers on the MA course, with whom I had worked in seminars and workshops over the course of our study invited me to join a virtual workshop to critique upon each other's work. This opportunity galvanised me to further work on section one, and to write most of section two. I shared the unfinished section two with my peers. Because of our work together and interest in each other's writings, we had developed trust and honesty between us. Bell says 'A workshop is an acknowledgement of a readers perspective, an admission that you are trying to communicate and that you might not be the best person to judge the effectiveness of your own work'²¹. Their feedback included that the work felt natural, but it lacked a focus, something bringing it all together, the theme was weak. One identified that I was writing about loss and change. After the workshop I worked more on the section, finishing it and adding material around the hidden outfall, and ending the section with an account of a cold front coming in.

For section three, I made detailed a plan of what I would write. The first location was the sailing club, which held many memories. I found much to write about but redacted some of it as I was again at risk of writing a personal history that was not relevant to the piece I envisioned. I retained some events that were directly relevant and which defined my emotional and historical association with the location. I reviewed all three sections and for spelling, grammar and punctuation, and joined them into a single manuscript.

²⁰ Stephen King, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (London: New English Library, 2000). 226

²¹ Bell and Magrs, *The Creative Writing Coursebook*, 294.

My friend Em proofread the creative manuscript for readability and coherency. Em made some factual and stylistic suggestions and pointed out some areas that lacked clarity. I edited the draft considering the suggestions she had made. I sent it one of my peers to read and feedback. She observed that the sewage works section seemed incongruent with the rest of the piece. I reviewed that part of the creative piece, and subsequent references to human waste. I made changes as a result, but judged the section was needed, and that it being incongruent and was my intention. I took the learning point that the account was insufficiently linked into the main body of the creative work.

The narrative is designed to link backwards and forwards through the parts, to give an impression of looking forward and back and over the river. In 'Sweet Water' Bradwell appears as a place my Grandfather cycled to. The remainder of 'Sweet Water' runs in a linear way as does a river or canal. The saltworks and the reference to Heybridge Basin takes the reader out to the north coast of the upper Blackwater. 'Fresh to Salt' and 'Shifting Currents' reference back and forth across the river, to the wharf at Maldon, to Stansgate, to Goldhanger, and up to Bradwell. The power station is a presence throughout the second two sections.

The sections of the piece delineate between fresh and salt water, north and south bank of the estuary and the liminal spaces in between them. They draw a line in attitude and the different voices from my past. The progression of the piece is geographical rather than chronological, each vignette comes at the place it occurred. For example, at Stansgate memories from childhood and an account of a recent visit co-exist. The intention is to present a patchwork of memory underlying the core narrative.

Word count limits aided me to be exacting in editing. I retained the sections as part of the structure rather than running them into an unbroken piece. The introduction is named 'Source', term for a radioactive material that produces radiation, the start of the flowing of a body of water and the start of something. My initial name for section one had been 'Below Rohilla'. This referred to my mother's childhood house in Great Baddow, but I had moved away from family history, it no longer fitted. 'Sweet Water' came to me through Reepicheep the mouse who declares the water 'sweet' when he falls in²². I named the middle section 'Fresh to Salt' as it marked the transition at

²² C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of The Dawn Treader* (Fontana Lions, 1980).

the sea lock from fresh to salt water. In the pamphlet about the Basin²³ the lock is described as 'Twix Salt and Fresh'. It also pertained to the saltworks at Goldhanger. 'To have salt' is a term around a grudge or indignity. For the last section, I settled on 'Shifting Currents' bringing together electricity, water, memory and time. For the summation at the end I decided on 'Outfall', the name for water that falls into rivers and seas at the end of its journey, and the term used for sewage outlets. Transposed it is the word 'fallout' meaning radioactive particles that are carried into the atmosphere but also meaning the results of an event or action. In this title both environmental elements are brought together.

Feedback about my work in other assignments had identified that I did not use dialogue often and suggested that I try to do so in future pieces. I revisited the narrative and added some dialogue in section two. I decided that as the piece is essentially a musing, further direct conversations would not enhance it. The visits to the sewage facility and Sizewell B may have lent themselves to direct dialogue, but I wanted to recount them through my personal viewpoint.

The piece contains detail designed to inspire confidence in the expert nature of the writing. The accounts of the visits to the installations are factually accurate. Inclusion of historical detail such as the past industries at Heybridge Basin have been taken from research. Inclusion of local tales such as the story of 'The Doctor' and the nicknames for families at the Basin create additional interest for the reader.

Sensory descriptions of the areas bring the localities to life. For example, the sound of halyards on masts, the brackish taste of the wind, and the grit driven under my fingernails at Stansgate. The description of the paths leading down to the sea wall from Goldhanger Church contain rich colour such as 'The scattergun song of the skylark'. The sections that describe the landscape are persuasive. This reflects my familiarity with and attention to the small things in the landscape such as the oak galls and the way hawthorn hedges change with the seasons. One of my peers fed back that he could see the places I was writing about.

²³ Harrison, *Heybridge Basin - The Story of a Waterside Community*.

I experimented with breaking the text up after noting that the words on the page were blocky. I adapted some of the text, split some paragraphs and left some lines out on their own on the page to bring more power to the flow of the text.

The title page orients the system of rivers from the top of the page to the bottom mirroring the geography of the flow of writing. Pretty's 'This Luminous Coast'²⁴, sets East Anglia on its side presenting an altered perspective on the region. I found and traced a suitable map on greaseproof paper, photographed it and printed the image, wrote on it then photographed it again. I was reminded of Sebald's²⁵ 'weathering' of images as I did this.

In the shaping of the material the properties of memory and family history, of the way that memory changes over time and with losses came into the piece. Memory is unreliable, the memories depicted may not be exactly what happened and may seem different to another person who experienced the same event. This is overt in parts of the narrative when considering if the shoreline has changed, when comparing memories to other people's memories and when revisiting locations that hold memory. For Gillian Clarke, memory is difficult to properly gauge and define. Her poem, Cold Knap Lake²⁶, captures the essence of a memory, using the 'troubled surface' of the lake as a metaphor for the hidden unconscious, the things that can't be remembered or seen. She asks, 'Was I there?'. The passage of time in the piece suggests that memories I recount are not fixed but fluid. I use the metaphor of the sewage treatment plant as a sink of memory, where the unpleasant is filtered out and discarded as toxic, and the clean consciousness is retained. There is a suggestion that unprocessed memory is toxic, that the psyche cleanses memories to render them safe.

The theme of change and loss is contained in the text. There is a wistful quality to the remembrances of my childhood and my younger self. Parts of memory have become unclear, that is the product of my ageing and the overlaying of newer experiences separate from my preceding life chapters. My parents run through the piece. The landscape and my upbringing are interwoven and thus there is the implication that the loss of both of my parents is a part of the landscape that I identify with. Solnit feels that loss can result in good, that the passage of time can bring richness in

²⁴ Jules Pretty, *This Luminous Coast: Walking England's Eastern Edge*, Reprint edition (Ithaca, New York: Comstock Publishing Associates, 2014).

²⁵ W. G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn* (London: Vintage, 2002).

²⁶ Gillian Clarke, 'Cold Knap Lake', accessed 21 September 2020, <https://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/uk-now/literature-uk/cold-knap-lake>.

loss. 'Of course to forget the past is to lose the sense of loss that is also memory of an absent richness and a set of clues to navigate the present by; the art is not one of forgetting but letting go. And when everything else is gone, you can be rich in loss.'²⁷ There is an acceptance in the text about the deaths of my parents, the mingling of their ashes and carrying away into the waters, the having been returned to the whole. The parts of the story concerning my parents are laced with love illustrated in the account of scattering their ashes.

The constancy of the water and its psychological importance to me runs throughout. The story of the oyster shell illustrates an affinity with the waters, and an occult relationship where the power of the natural world is respected and called upon to cleanse. The themes are loose and fluid, water is the metaphor used to carry this through the piece. The narrative is fragmentary. Water is presented as bearing magic carrying away ashes, hurt and waste. The capacity of water to self-renew is questioned as the narrative returns to signs and concerns that the environment is being changed. For example, the revisiting of sewage outlets through the locations, facts about the power station's radioactive leaks, wondering who or what took the word 'DANGER' off the sign on the beach, and musing on infrastructure that has been left at Bradwell. Changes over time are introduced, the growth of Chelmsford, the changes at the Basin, the changes in the shoreline, the eroding of local knowledge, and the dilapidation of the airfield.

Local writers draw upon their deep personal relationship with the estuary and surrounds. My ongoing relationship with the landscape I grew up in, and the emotional associations it has are mirrored in the writings of others. Judith Wolton's self-published booklet of poetry, 'The Edge'²⁸ shows strong affection for Point Clear, on the northern mouth of the estuary. It celebrates her connection to and love for the wilds, beaches and inlets of that place. Her poem 'Sea Lust' describes swimming as the tide comes in 'I wait for the tide to roll me under and over, carry me, lift me, fling me like flotsam onto an altered beach.'²⁹ Wolton describes the changes that she feels when she swims, she likens herself to a stretch of beach that is changed at each turning tide into something different. She references the 'Strandline's litter and scratch, away from the rubble and rocks the debris of plastic and rust'. Thus, she keeps the magic of her communion with the sea whilst acknowledging the effects of our habitation. Her relationship with the landscape is underscored in

²⁷ Rebecca Solnit. *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. Cannongate Books Ltd, 2005. 23.

²⁸ Judith Wolton, *The Edge*, ed. Tony Anderson (Judith Wolton, 2016).

²⁹ Wolton, 13.

the final poem in the collection 'Burial of a Marsh Woman': 'The wind will float a plainsong soft through a curlew's skull. Redshanks will pipe a high retreat as my soul flows out with the tide'. The poem 'Marshland Magic'³⁰ written by 'MF', a Goldhanger resident, says 'Through the kissing gate and o'er the stile – We'll go the churchyard way' and further evokes a sense of connection to a loved landscape: 'We'll walk along the rutted path/With flowerstrewn, grassy edge,/Beside the rustling, life-filled ditch/'Neath sheltering, tangled hedge;'. 'The Marshman'³¹ is a death poem echoing Masefield's 'Sea Fever'³²: 'To walk the lonely sea wall paths/To feel the salt lash sting/To hear the wild north-easter blow/ And make the marshes sing..' These writers have written through lifelong association with the estuary, and show the familiarity, affinity and love that I have endeavoured to show in 'River Run'.

'Est'³³ is a collection of writings about people, history and memories by people with an interest in East Anglia. David Southwell's 'Empty Quarter' touches on Bradwell power station, and he says that the wind teaches lessons: '...that force you to accept that we are products of the landscape, our stories are so intertwined...'³⁴. Wendy Mulford's poem, 'The Stars Shout Back' is shaped like waves and says 'hard to imagine water that was mud become water stealing back by the diktat of moon-pull...'³⁵ She likens the movement of the tide to death. Melinda Appleby writes of time and memory in 'A Remembered Landscape'. She says of a mounting block that it is '... a reminder of the effects of time and memory, on materials, on the land.'³⁶ Rosie Sandler's poem, 'Water Birth' tells of how her origins in the north must have seeded her sense of belonging in the estuary. 'strange how I belong here – as if those northern factories stitched flat skies and seeping pores through the textures of my skin'³⁷. Each contributor comments on belonging, memory and change associated with the landscape, as does 'River Run'.

Blackwaterside³⁸, performed at the Essex Book Festival on 13th March 2020, is a collage of music from Ultramarine, words from Phil Terry and photographic images from Ian Cooper focussing

³⁰ MF, 'Marshland Magic', *Goldhanger Parish Magazine*, 1992.

³¹ Tom May, 'The Marshman', *Maldon and Burnham Standard*, 2000.

³² Larkin, *Oxford Book of 20th Century Verse*.

³³ Chris Petit, Martin Newell, and David Southwell, *Est: Collected Reports From East Anglia* (Dunlin Press, 2015).

³⁴ Petit, Newell, and Southwell, 27.

³⁵ Petit, Newell, and Southwell, 45.

³⁶ Petit, Newell, and Southwell, 78.

³⁷ Petit, Newell, and Southwell, 209.

³⁸ Ultramarine et al., *Blackwaterside*, 2020.

on the Blackwater Estuary. I was captivated by the images, words and soundscape which brought the otherness of the estuary to me. A curlew called in the soundtrack as monochrome photography of mudflats and estuary scenes transitioned on the screen. Terry's words, fragments whispered over the ethereal music in fragments, created a hypnotic and resonant sensory membrane. I noted the high flute, distant light, holy retreat, river meets sky meets land, meets marsh. I noted the distant oily water, and a joyous rhythm and circular melody. The performance got to the heart of something of the Blackwater for me. I recognised the sense of remoteness it evoked and it influenced the way in which I wrote 'River Run'. Terry's poetry, written to an exacting sonnet-like Oulipian form is extracted from his work, 'Quennets'³⁹. The publication of *Blackwaterside* comprises the musical soundtrack on vinyl, and a booklet with the images and words. The booklet mentions 'a brooding nuclear power station in its introduction and says 'Most days the estuary feels remote ... offers up differing landscapes, slowly changing with the shifting light and the movement of the tides' All the contributors spent time in and around the estuary to produce the work.

Morpurgo writes of his return to the village of Bradwell and to his memories, despite his inner caution 'Never go back'⁴⁰. He writes 'That was the part of the reason for my going back that day, to discover how intact was the landscape of my memories'⁴¹. He remembers the place and the people and recounts 'That the more I walked the more vivid it became: the people, the faces, the whole life of the place where I'd grown up'. He illustrates that places hold memory and bring back childhood, as does 'River Run'. His child-self met Mrs Pettigrew who showed him the paradise of the land 'It's a wild and wonderful place, where on calm days you can hear the sea breathing gently beyond the sea wall ... where larks rise and sing on warm afternoons, where stars cascade on August nights'. The paradise is threatened and the hopeless fight against the building of the power station, and the grief of losing that fight is compounded by Mrs Pettigrew leaving and dying of a broken heart. Morpurgo's return to Bradwell brings both painful and glad memories from 50 years ago. He feels the loss of the landscape "Beyond the bungalow, there it was again, the power station, massive now because I was closer, a monstrous complex of buildings rising from the marsh, malign and immovable. It offended my eye, it hurt my heart'⁴². Morpurgo shows the desolation that comes through losing a landscape, and the memories he holds of his childhood. His visit to those inner and

³⁹ Philip Terry, *Quennets* (Carcenet Press, 2016).

⁴⁰ Michael Morpurgo, *Homecoming* (Walker Books, 2016), 7.

⁴¹ Morpurgo, 8.

⁴² Morpurgo, 85.

outer landscapes is difficult. Memories recounted in 'River Run' have similar bitter-sweet associations and foreboding for the future.

Nan Shepperd's 'The Living Mountain'⁴³ is a tribute to the Cairngorms. Her narrative is rooted in her familiarity with the area and in her striving to become one with it. She states her affinity in the first passage 'However often I walk on them, these hills hold astonishment for me. There is no getting accustomed to them.'⁴⁴ Shepperd knows her mountain and her knowledge of the natural world spills into her stories, the mountain is holy to her. She says of her child-self discovering the mountain that 'I drank and drank. I have not yet done drinking that draft. From that hour I belonged to the Cairngorms.'⁴⁵ My narrative shows a similar mystical union with the landscape I belong to. Shepherd shows her need to be in the wild, to be physical and to let the senses take their time. She stops hurrying over the course of the book, she savours the mountain. River Run shows times of quiet and reflection, of being in the estuary landscape without hurry or pressure.

My writing about this place and landscape intertwines history, musings, memories and fact to form a whole. Sebald's⁴⁶ writings range over locations and stories tracking the itinerary of his journey and speak of things seen and people met along the way, while including a range of memories and reflections. Jamie⁴⁷ is alive to her connections and surroundings, but mindful of moments of human poignancy: the deaths of her parents; her children leaving home. Solnit weaves through history, politics and art, wandering from subject to subject, switching from one thing to another. She describes her dreams, old friends, some walks, several snippets of family history, a love affair, and a play that she started writing but never finished. These writers blend subjects, history and memory and was a was a style I sought to incorporate in the writing of 'River Run'.

Rivers and coastlines are rich inspiration for writers, with water comes the fascination that I feel. Oswald writes of the Dart,⁴⁸ tracing it from its source down to the ocean and incorporates into her poem the mythical voices of the river, and conversations with river people. Pretty⁴⁹ writes of the

⁴³ Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*, Main-Canons Imprint Re-issue edition (Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd, 2011).

⁴⁴ Shepherd, 1.

⁴⁵ Shepherd, 107.

⁴⁶ Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*. (Vintage 2002)

⁴⁷ Kathleen Jamie, *Findings* (London: Sort Of Books, 2005).

⁴⁸ Alice Oswald, *Dart* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002).

⁴⁹ Pretty, *This Luminous Coast*.

East Anglian Coast from the perspective of growing up in the area, and yet he says that he has found places he didn't know were there. He opens by saying that the coast is about to be lost to erosion caused by global warming and says the coast feels partly like his land. His aim is 'to interweave stories of the land and sea with people past and present'⁵⁰. He describes the waterscapes he walks and says that he has the coast in front of him as he writes, embodied in collected items from the beaches and land. He knows where each came from, the rusty nail, hagstones, a stone from Orford Ness. Ken Worpole writes of changing landscape spirit of place, belonging to a place and about childhood memories in 'The New English Landscape'⁵¹. It contains photography of desolation and dereliction, and an essay that concerns land and people. It forms a rich reference to the coastline I have worked with and in.

This piece came into being because these shores hold memory, they make up part of my inner landscape, and they nurture my wellbeing. This is not a family history, a historical work, a travelogue, an autobiography, or an environmental manifesto. Rather it is a celebration of the river, given with both concern and joy, drawing on pieces of history and fragments of memory, and the very present effects of our habitation. It is a snapshot of my experiences, a collage of my memories, a recognition of its importance to me and to humanity. As Nan Shepperd does to her mountain, I belong to my river.

⁵⁰ Pretty, 15.

⁵¹ Jason Orton and Ken Worpole, *The New English Landscape*, 2013.

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