

STILL CARRYING GREENHAM HOME

What happened after the missiles left? Greenham woman JILL RAYMOND tells the less well-known story of how the Common was reclaimed.

Forty years ago on August 27 1981, the 'Women for Life on Earth' walk left Cardiff, arriving ten days later at Greenham Common, Newbury, Berkshire. This year the walk will be re-enacted, with various encampments, events and actions planned. Many Greenham women still 'carry Greenham home', but few have heard of the successful sixteen year campaign to 'Reclaim the Common'. The fortieth anniversary is stimulating a reclaiming of our common women's story.¹

Scary Little Girls and The Heroine Project received Heritage Lottery Funding three years ago to interview Greenham women and create an oral history archive, in order to put Greenham Common Womens Peace Camp (GCWPC) back into the history of protest.

Current discussion of Greenham Common tends to be from a cold war, peace movement or anti-nuclear perspective. But the camps continued for a further eight years after the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty was signed and plans to remove cruise missiles and bases from across Europe began. These were the years it took to reclaim the common. Here is a brief history of Greenham Common and GCWPC.

The Common

Regular readers of *The Land* will be aware of the longer history of how the enclosures of the commons in England, and the clearances in Scotland and Ireland, set the format for British and European colonialism across the world.

Greenham Common survived as an open common until 1941 when it was requisitioned under wartime emergency powers for the RAF. In 1947 it was de-requisitioned, but not restored. Then in 1951, in spite of local protest, it was re-requisitioned for the United States Air Force (USAF). In 1960 the Air Ministry purchased 600 acres of the common and in 1966 it became a NATO standby base. In 1973 commoners registered their rights. Another local protest in 1978 forced plans to base US tankers to be dropped, but in 1979 NATO agreed to house nuclear cruise missiles across Europe, naming Greenham Common and Molesworth for their UK siting.

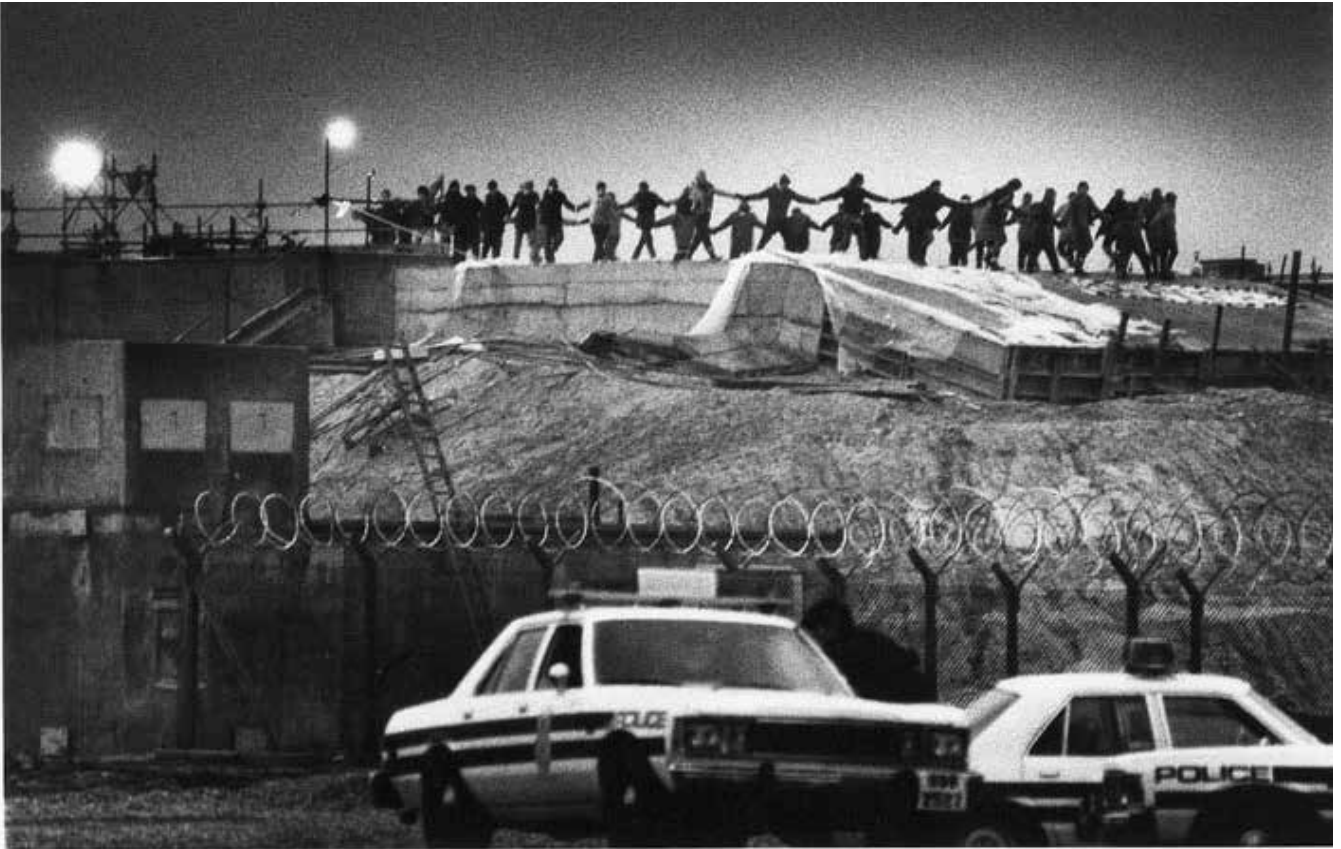
The stage was set for the world's largest mobilisation of women since the decades of struggle to achieve women's suffrage. The women, children and a few men could have had no idea what they were to start when they arrived and camped at the air base. By 1982 the camp had become permanent, and after a few months it became women only. Endless conversations about 'why women only' were had. Suffice it to say 'because that is what women wanted'. The few who did not want that left. Soon the peace camp at Molesworth was set up, with more to follow. Men continued to support GCWPC, knowing that they were welcome during the hours of daylight.



This was Thatcher's Britain. Protests and campaigns proliferated, many overlapping with Greenham, notably the miners' strike and Women Against Pit Closures, the Troops Out Movement (British troops came and went between Greenham and Northern Ireland), CND and Nuclear Power No Thanks. Socialist, radical lesbian and eco feminists were drawn to support Greenham women. Adding to the mix of policing challenges were the illegal encampments of traditional and new Travellers, who had a habit of camping on the peripheries of many a common, including Greenham.

In January 1982 Newbury District Council (NDC) served its first eviction order on the illegal encampments at Greenham. Soon a full-time team of bailiffs was employed to carry out violent evictions on a daily basis, ably protected by Thames Valley Police. A permanent team of fence menders became necessary to cover the nine miles of perimeter fence. It was impossible to keep us out of the base. The sheer novelty of the Greenham women squatting in the mud, the endless non-violent blockades, hundreds of women arrested, and women dancing on the silos being built to house the missiles gave us all the publicity we needed. Activists, donations and journalists came from all over the world. Despite the misogynist vilification of Greenham women by most of the press, it proved that no publicity is bad publicity.

The missiles arrived in 1984. In 1987 the INF treaty was signed, and on a local level Ministry of Defence (MoD)



This grainy but iconic photo shows women dancing on missile silos at Greenham Common, in the early hours of New Year's Day 1983.

bylaws were challenged and judged invalid in 1988, which led to women's convictions being quashed and compensation claims being made. That same year USSR inspectors visited Greenham and Molesworth prior to the cruise missiles leaving, swiftly followed by the USAF personnel. Then in 1989 the Berlin Wall fell.

Are They Still Here?

For eight years nearly all Newbury residents had hated the dirty women squatting in the mud. There were some local supporters, and notable exceptions including the Empire Grill tea rooms and Newbury Quakers, but even the Friends and CND could not understand why women stayed when the missiles left. However, this was still the longest military runway in Europe, and the common had not been saved.

In 1993 the MoD put the airfield up for sale. In 1997 Greenham Common Trust bought the base for development, and NDC bought the common for £7 million. The fence was removed, the runway dug up, and the site decontaminated. Free roaming cattle returned in 1999, while the silos gained historical monument status and became open house for bats. Finally in 2001, the Greenham and Crookham Commons Act re-established public access and commoners' rights. Greenham women are remembered with the Peace Garden near Yellow Gate.

Where are the Nukes now?

The British nuclear deterrent became Trident submarines based at Faslane, where there has been a peace camp since 1982. This siting is a hot topic for the SNP. CND, Trident Ploughshares, Aldermaston Womens Peace Camp and

From Greenham Newsletter, Summer 1992

"Jubilation when Judge Lait ruled on 18/5/92 that the Greenham fence is illegal, during Georgina Smith, Jean Hutchinson and Sarah Hipperson's appeal against convictions for fence cutting back in 1987.

But this does not mean the fence will be taken down. Women don't have 'locus' (legal standing) to demand that. Only the Commoners and the District Council do, and they don't have an immediate interest in it, partly because they are not in the business of embarrassing the MoD and partly because they are scared of an invasion of travellers.

The rights of the 30 or so commoner households at Crookham Common are still intact. The MoD paid over £80,000 to the Greenham Commoners committee last year and all but three of the commoner households have accepted their share of the money. Two of the remaining three cut the fence in February, and got charged with criminal damage in order to declare in court that the extinguishment procedure was illegal, and that since they have accepted no money their rights are intact. The case still has not come to court, and the MoD are in no rush.

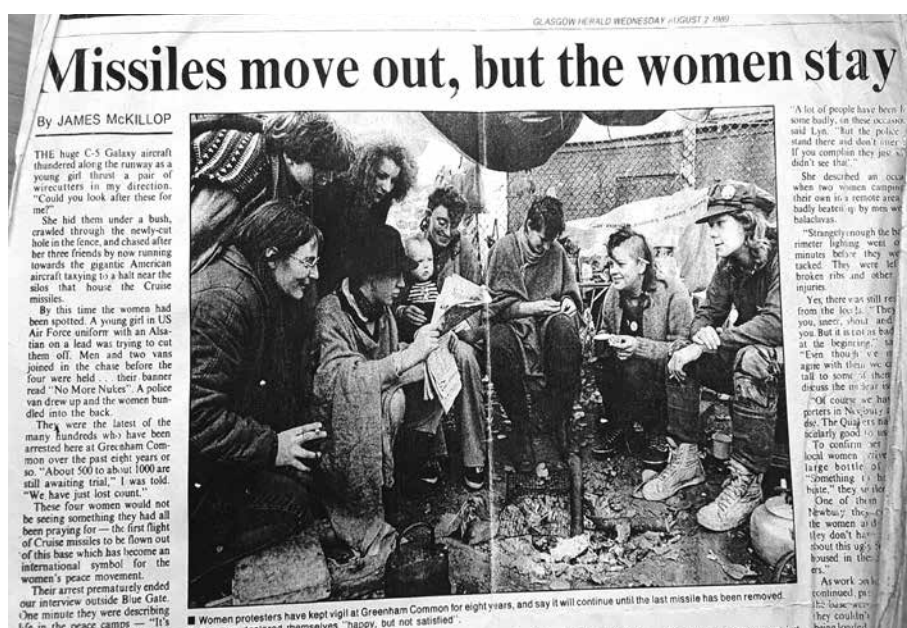
If the commoners win the case it would mean Greenham Common is still subject to Section 194 of the Law of Property Act of 1925. The clause which says no structures or fences on commons where there are commoners rights. So this affects the fence, base and army. If it fails the MoD could sell the Greenham end to parties other than the council, eg the Army. The Crookham end no one but the council will be interested in, since it can't be built on, so it is likely to return to public usage. Styming the extinguishment of Crookham rights was significant, because it put half the runway out of use, leaving the other half useless. That was achieved by constantly finding complications.

After the US and RAF leave (quite shortly) there may well be no budget for repairing the fence. Evelyn."



international anti-nuclear campaigns continue to protest and to make the link between nuclear power and nuclear weapons. Early generation nuclear power plants continue to leak, break down or worse, as well as producing depleted uranium (DU) for munitions. The DU dropped on Iraq drifted across Europe, monitored at Aldermaston Weapons Establishment where this century's warheads for Trident have been developed.

One proposed future use of nuclear power waste is for fuelling space operations. The heavily subsidised nuclear power industry, outsourced to EDF, SERCO and the like, is still indirectly subsidising the war machine.



Good News

The good news is that the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was ratified in January this year, recognising that any use of nuclear weapons would cause unacceptable humanitarian and environmental catastrophe. This was of course the same argument so many convicted anti-nuclear protesters made when pleading 'Not Guilty'.

Unfortunately, the 70 or more years of uranium mining in Namibia and elsewhere, the testing of weapons on land and undersea, their deployment, and the military spend on them, have already caused irreparable damage. The problem of nuclear waste remains unsolved. The extraction and destruction caused by wars has never stopped, and yet anti-nuke and peace campaigns seem to me to be marginalised in contemporary environmental activist coalitions.

1. For more information about this year's walk, including options to join in, see <https://www.facebook.com/GreenhamWomen> or <https://greenhamwomeneverywhere.co.uk/march>

Some current anti-nuclear campaigns

Aldermaston Womens Peace Camp
aldermaston.net

<https://www.facebook.com/Aldermaston-Womens-Peace-Camp>

Faslane Peace camp

<https://www.facebook.com/faslanepeacecamp>

WILPF Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

<https://www.wilpf.org>

Women In Black

womeninblack.org

SWAN South West Against Nuclear

<https://www.facebook.com/southwestagainstnuke>

Against Sizewell C

tasizewellc.org.uk

<https://stopsizewellc.org>

STAND (Severnside Together Against Nuclear Development)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/492981964066492>

PAWB (People Against Wylfa-B)

<https://www.stop-wylfa.org>

CND - Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

<https://cnduk.org>

ICAN - International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons

www.icanw.org/