



Four Shores

artworks for the Isle of Sheppey



FOUR SHORES

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The *Colours of Sheppey* on pages 12, 24, 36 and
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taken by the artists on the island. Inspiration
came from a variety of objects and locations.

The film stills on pages 13, 25, 37 and 49 are
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Introduction

Work on this project began in 2003 when we asked Stephen Turner to explore the idea of how we might work with artists to reveal the natural history and cultural legacy of the Isle of Sheppey on four existing public rights of way between Sheerness, Minster, Leysdown and Harty.

Stephen's research revealed a real need for initiatives which provide local people and visitors with art and recreational opportunities that raise awareness of important cultural and environmental issues.

There is a potentially large local audience of 36,000 people who live on the island, 11,000 in Sheerness (a figure that doubles in the summer with many holiday makers from mainly low earning families from east London). Most of the population lives in the main urban areas. Thousands of new homes may eventually be constructed as a part of the development of the Thames Gateway. Yet, the island has an essentially rural character with small communities scattered over a large area of grazing marsh and inter-tidal salt marsh. Whilst there are pockets of relative affluence, Sheppey on the whole suffers from high unemployment, poor health, below average educational performance and other social problems.

However, Sheppey is rich in maritime history, its geography and geology are fascinating and the flora and fauna are richly diverse. Its very neglect has created habitats for wild life and private contemplative landscapes for people to wander in relative isolation. The island is mostly unpopulated and has a stark beauty.

We decided to follow Stephen's advice and employ a creative team to explore the distinctive features of the landscape, arouse the curiosity and interest of residents and encourage understanding of the rich relationship between local people and their land. This led to a Grants for the Arts application to Arts Council England, South East to match our European money.

Stephen's team included a poet, a filmmaker and an architect in addition to himself, to bring out a wider variety of approaches and responses to the place, as well as a project manager of great experience in Frances Lord.

The artists were asked by the MSEP to consider how the detail and patina of each walk contributes to the character of the island experience. Their challenge was to make work

that draws attention to existing views, creates new distinctive landmarks, or feeds on traditions and histories passed down through time. We at MSEP feel they have been hugely successful and that the film, poetry book, and created work along the different routes will give great pleasure to many for years to come.

Sarah Draper

Medway Swale Estuary Partnership

Acknowledgements

The process of getting from starting point to launch and project catalogue stage has been, perhaps like all commissioning projects, a complex one. There has been considerable 'behind scenes' activity over the last two years and the Four Shores team would like to acknowledge the wide network of advice, support and expertise received.

The Four Shores Project Steering Group was instrumental in guiding and advising on the project's development, especially at its early stages: Tony Clayton, Medway Swale Estuary Partnership (chair); Geraldine Bassett and Linda Daniels from Sheppey College; Simon Farrow from Swale Borough Council; Councillor Gerald Lewin; Seafronts Manager Mike Williams and Jamie Wylde from Arts Council England, South East (observer).

We are grateful to the support and advice received from both the Environment Agency and Swale Borough Council's planning department. Early discussions about proposed artworks and potential sites were helpful in developing ideas through to the full proposal stage.

The project would not have been possible without generous funding from Arts Council England, South East; SAIL 11 European Development Fund and Kent County Council.

The project team would like to thank many local people including Mavis Burden, Fred Clouter, John Cooper, Mick Crawford, Madhura Dickeson, Father Frank, Sharon and Terry Munns, Alf Packham, Mark Pattinson and Wally Newby and the Sheppey and Sittingbourne Writers Group, all of whom have contributed their time, knowledge and enthusiasm to the project.

Some of the above, and others, joined the Four Shores project team on a 'walk and talk' event organised to coincide with Architecture Week in June 2004, in so doing helping shape ideas for the project and the proposed artworks. Following this event an exhibition of initial design ideas was held at Sheppey College, Sheerness in October 2004. The positive feedback from those who attended fed into the next stage of applying for planning permission for the more permanent artworks such as *Shellcretes*, *Razor Form*, *End of the World* and *Wing*.

Others who have contributed towards the project are Nicola Barker who wrote a fitting and 'up to the minute' afterword for this catalogue; Jeremy Brook of Graphic Ideas who

designed this catalogue and the other Four Shores publication: Ros Barber's book of poetry *'Not the Usual Grasses Singing: A journey around the Isle of Sheppey'*; Sarah Heyworth-PR who has promoted and publicised the project; stonecarver and calligrapher James Honeywood who carved the letters on the found objects along the foreshore between Minster and Warden Point; Dylan Woolf who, while coincidentally photographing the Isle of Sheppey for an independent project, has taken atmospheric photographs of finished works and portraits of the artists.

Stephen Turner has been assisted by Steven Mace and had additional advice from Andrew Laphorn and Malcolm White. Additional support has been received from Jodie McGregor at Medway Swale Estuary Partnership and Stephanie Fuller at Arts Council England, South East. We are grateful to Iain Sinclair who has allowed us to quote from his novel *Downriver*, published by Paladin, 1991.

Frances Lord

Four Shores Project Manager

Simon Barker would like to thank Tim Baker at Holt & Wotton, Elaine Butlin and John Pomfrey at PMF Designs for help with the technical development of the wing; Surface Signs, Southend on Sea, for the installation of the text on the steps at Sheerness, especially Emma Lucas, Simon Lucas, Danny Bush, Gavin Conway and Jim Bush; and for general advice and support: Celia Davies, Jaimie Shorten and Kim Sweet.

Abbe Leigh Fletcher would like to thank Lotta Boman for additional camerawork, sound design and music composition; for transport, Shielagh Finlay; and for camerawork, sound recording, and all-round support and advice, Dan Leonard.

Under the skin

Sheppey gets under your skin, if only because of its many contrasts and contradictions and the edginess of a place that though only forty miles from London, can feel a remote and forgotten part of the busy south east.

At the mouth of the Thames Estuary and as part of the North Kent Marshes, it is a place where people and nature live in close proximity. Over 400,000 Citroens, Mazdas, Volkswagens, Peugeots, Hyundais and Chryslers are imported into Sheppey every year, in contrast to the equally plentiful flocks of gannet, lapwing, redshank, skua, grebe, wigeon, teal and oystercatcher that also arrive to either breed or over winter here. Our world exists uneasily alongside a semi-natural wilderness in a somewhat isolated island landscape (though admittedly only a narrow stretch of the Swale brings it into that geographical category).

Many people seem to subscribe to a forlorn vision of the place. They can justifiably moan at the lack of an Accident and Emergency department at the new community hospital, that the police station closes at 5pm, that there are no cinemas or good book shops and that, according to one satirical web site, there is no intelligent conversation since it was 'barred on Sheppey shortly after the Reformation'.

Town planning decisions have not always worked in ways that considered an awareness of the positive and distinctive features of the Island. The site of the unique circular castle built in 1361 at Queenborough for example, is now beneath a busy circular roundabout. The scant remains include a well in the centre of a drab paved rectangle, its position marked with a litterbin. This feature is faced from all four corners by blue painted benches. It is not much of a location to sit and reflect on the rich history of the Island or to ponder in any kind of positive way on its potential future.

Many changes however are under way for Sheppey. Over 700 new homes are to be built here in the next four years as the government plans an eastward expansion of the Thames Gateway. The new bridge onto the Island has been under construction throughout the Four Shores project and is now taking visible shape.

It is against this background that the creative team for Four Shores; architect Simon Barker, poet Ros Barber, filmmaker Abbe Leigh Fletcher and I, arrived on a cold March day in 2004. Our ambition was to familiarise ourselves with this singular landscape and its people and to examine the

potential of art work for four public rights of way from Sheerness around the coast to Harty.

We spent a week living in a 1970s caravan on a site at Muswell Manor, near Leysdown. On arrival, Terry and Sharon Munns, our hosts, made us a cup of tea. As we warmed up beside an enormous open fire in their lounge bar, they began to tell us about the early history of flight in their own backyard. I imagined the Short and Wright brothers and John Moore-Brabazon (who all flew here), sharing tales beside the same fireplace nearly one hundred years earlier.

Later, in the caravan, looking over to the hill at Eastchurch where CS Rolls learned to glide and which is now the site of a prison, we considered the wider implications of flight. Simon reminded us that at Colditz the prisoners secretly made a glider to effect their escape from incarceration. We pondered the thousands of wild fowl that, by instinct, fly here to make the Island their winter home; the holidaymakers who, through custom, flee here from London for an annual week of fun by the sea.

It was an evening of conversation, just one of many, as we walked and talked our way from Sheerness to Harty sharing many memorable moments.

Simon, Ros and Abbe will all have their own special memories, but I remember that we were all impressed one still and foggy morning as the tide crept higher, and gently lifted up scores of beached cockles and floated them southward on the long shore drift.

I recall the knowing looks we gave each other on hearing the recurrent thump of falling clay as we walked at low tide along the eroding shoreline between Warden and Barton Point. We had all read Abbe's *Sheppey Gazette* with its headline about the tourist trapped in a stream of cliff clay turned to liquid mud by winter rain.

I watched as we all collected a forest of fossilised twigs on the beach, and then later sat amazed in Fred Coulter's front room in Minster as this expert on the local Lower Eocene, opened box after box of sharks teeth and vertebrae, crabs, lobsters, reptiles, bivalves and insects; almost a complete fauna from 50 million years ago when this landscape was created.

The wildlife was varied and rich. Ros recorded the sound of skylarks overhead as we traversed a field en route to Harty

and a hare broke cover at the sound of our approach. The wildfowl was multitudinous and diverse in this 'Heathrow for birds' as the local RSPB officer put it. We were equally aware of the passion for shooting them, and began a collection of spent shotgun cartridges of brightly coloured plastic with names like High Pheasant, White Gold, Gamebore, impact and extreme.

Richard who lives most of the year in a beach hut near Muswell Manor, told us all about his passion for the squatting solitary wasp (genera *Passaloecus*) that inhabited the timbers of his home and other assorted fence posts and bits of the drift wood he gathered every day for his hearth.

Awash in local colour, real and metaphorical, the four of us conceived a unique Sheppey palette that might sum our experience; rose barite, vitriol, fiesta, mudslide, seal, bunker, halfway orange, twitcher, gypsy tart, verdigris, glister, anorak and tar were early additions to our chart.

I recalled reading about the journey made by William Hogarth and a group of friends to Sheppey in the spring of 1732. Their ribald, drunken, 'peregrination' to Sheerness heralded a discovery of the English landscape that was widely taken up by students of the Picturesque by the end of the century. Sheppey, however, was never much a part of these early tourist routes.

Today Sheppey still has ribald and drunken visitors; its wildness as well as its wilderness. Hidden bands of the bored and disaffected seem intent on random vandalism; on burning fields, taking cars, breaking windows and petty theft, its own microcosm of the state of the Nation as a whole and perhaps no worse than anywhere else.

It is still a sad sight though, to see the wonderful Pugin Church in Sheerness protected by barbed wire and it is easy to imagine the raised earth banks around the Hamlet of Shellness as fortifications against people as much as the sea.

Yet through the tough skin of this place, one can sense a pulse beat and we have tried to tune in to its rhythm. As a team of artists we all listened to each other, to local people and to the stories of the land itself. We tried to sneak up on the place gently, with respect, and to evolve our ideas with a little humility - to make art that would be enriching and that would complement the best of the existing cultural landscape.

I felt that artists were needed who might proceed with empathy rather than through conflicting standpoints (for Sheppey has enough of those). A poet, a film-maker, an architect and a visual artist could be expected to bring different ways of seeing to the project, but whilst we represented different art forms, we were all unified by an affinity with the land and its people.

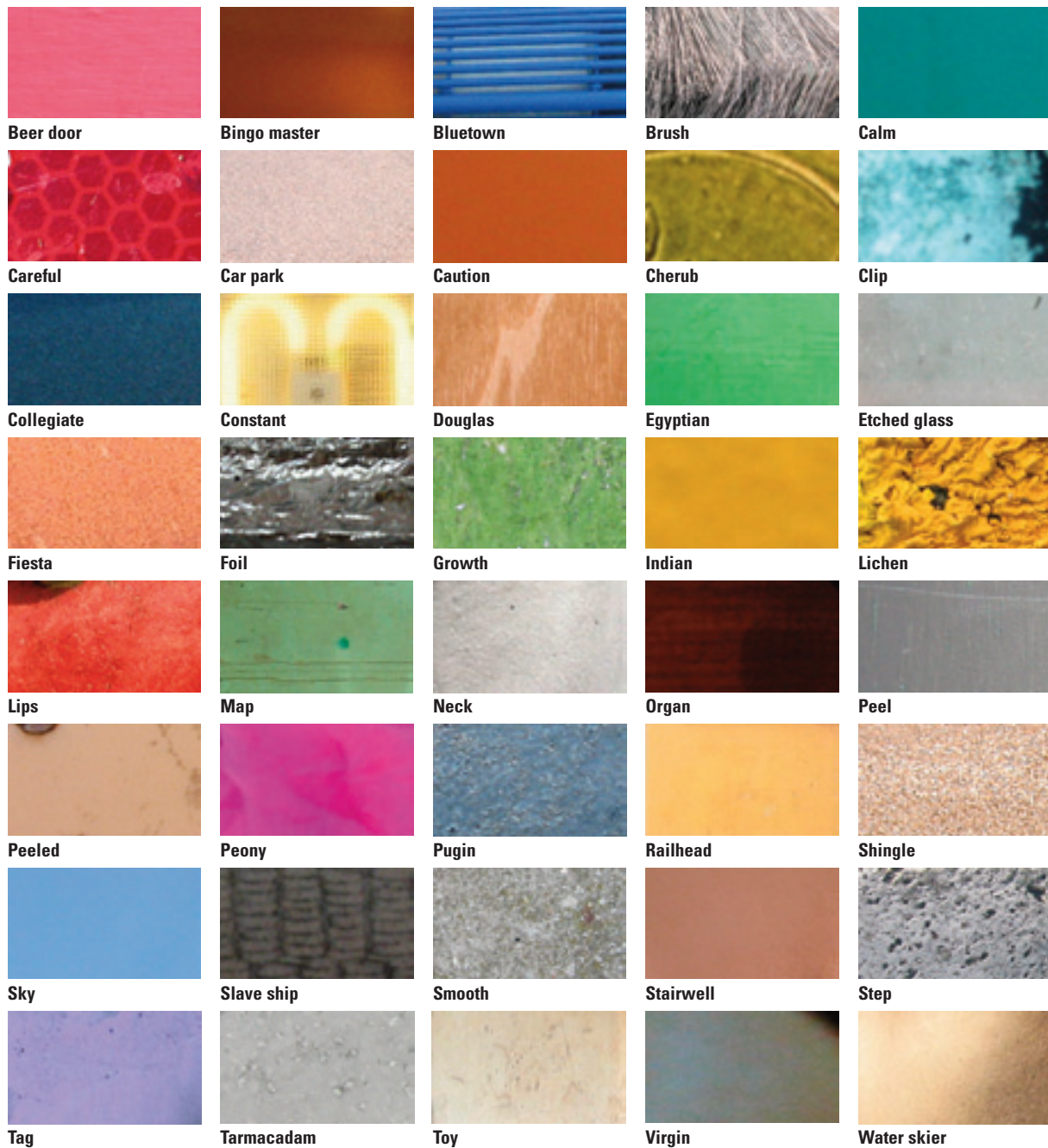
Our discovery of the place was an essential and key aspect of the project. In the end, as artists, we have our own voice and take responsibility for our own works, but here they are the product of working together. This book can be taken as a record of our journey through unique surroundings, tracing the evolution of our ideas and documenting our conclusions.

In a demanding environment we have endeavoured to do something well for Sheppey, to be the best we can be, in a place we have all grown to regard with great affection.

Stephen Turner



Walk One
**Sheerness
to Barton Point**



Colours of Sheppey: Sheerness to Barton Point, compiled by Simon Barker



Sheerness seafront, digital video stills from Four Shores film ©Abbe Leigh Fletcher



We visited Sheerness often; we became habitués of the Tesco café, it was easy to get to, and to park. Once inside Tesco you could almost forget that you were in Sheppey – apart from the local newspapers – but outside in the car park again, you were back on the Island; the massive concrete sea wall looming above, holding back the ferocity of the sea.



Concrete became a touchstone of the project. We found it everywhere, in all its interesting variations. We studied it, read up on its history, photographed it, collected fragments of it, went home and made our own. We were drawn to the concrete factory with its array of ornamental concrete windmills, echoing the full-sized ones at the wind farm in the estuary.



We were intrigued by the concrete barrels, which were serendipitously made by the sea, when it wrecked *The Lucky Escape*, which was carrying a cargo of cement in 1848. They had been collected from the beach and used to build a folly that now found itself in the car park of the *Ship-on-Shore* pub.



We gradually started to notice the differences between sections of the sea wall, to appreciate the subtle variety of forms that it could take. And then we began to catalogue the diversity of wartime concrete structures and the curious ways in which the intervening years had treated them.

Another important rediscovery alongside concrete was the great delicacy of North Kent: the Gipsy Tart – not to everybody's liking.

"The Sheppey sky is low, moulting, shifty. Container ships wait on the tide, hobbled and without enthusiasm. The water is glass-green, unusually clear. Sheerness responds to my mood. Its rain-washed roofs glisten and gleam."



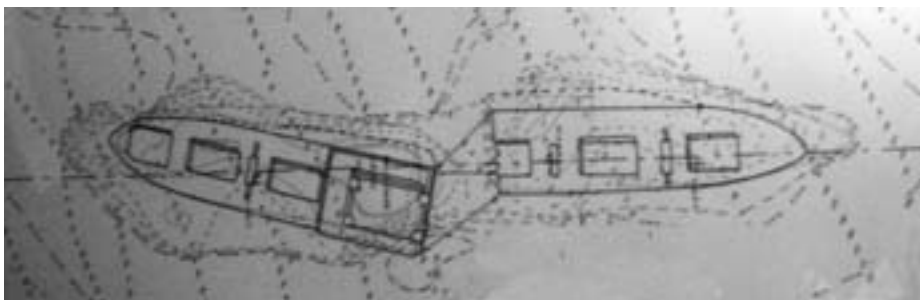
Despite myself, I am drawn to the place: solid marine architecture, gracefully proportioned Victorian pubs on the corners of the terraced streets."

From *Downriver* by Iain Sinclair (p385)

The local museum seemed to embody something of the spirit of the old town. It was also the place where we first followed up Father Frank's story of the shipwreck of the *Richard Montgomery*.

We met Father Frank, walking his dog on the seawall near his church, which

opened in 1864 on the site of a former gun battery. The Church sticks its head above the sea wall to look out at the three cross shaped masts of the wrecked *Montgomery* in the estuary. These mark the spot where its dangerous cargo of high explosives has settled since it sank in 1944. The national press still carry regular scare stories about the likelihood of imminent explosion, bringing destruction to the island and a large part of the south east, but life in Sheerness carries on – 'if it was going to go up, it would have done it by now'.





The seafront is dense with signs, providing advice and orders. Individuals have applied their own additions. The idea gradually emerged to make an installation using text, painted onto the concrete sea wall.

We walked extensively on the promenade, and along the beach itself. I noticed that we rarely chose to walk on the stepped wall that connects the two. I wanted to place a text here, onto both the risers and the treads. The two would each be visible from a different viewpoint and would articulate movement along and across the sea wall.

I wanted the installation to be unimposing and so it was important that the text was executed in a standard font used by road marking contractors.

It was clear from the beginning that the story of the *Richard Montgomery* shipwreck would weave into the installation in some way.

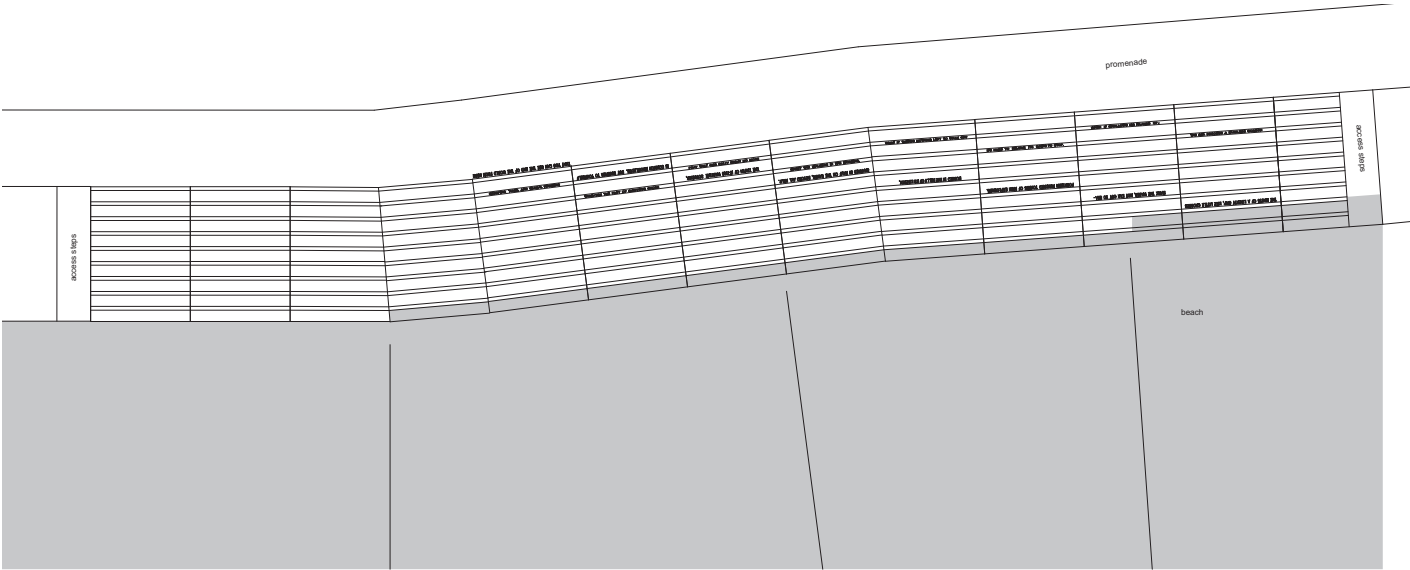
The first proposal was to list on the seawall the type and quantity of high explosive shells still on the wreck. In deference to the sensitivities of sunbathers on the beach the words





would be translated into a coded font such as Wingdings. The resulting hieroglyphics would have given the steps the feeling of a ziggurat. However, in order to make the most of the two

opposed viewpoints, two texts were needed; one appropriate to the view inland from the beach and one out to sea from the promenade.



Ros Barber wrote two poems entitled *End of the World* which responded to this: one about the Montgomery and one about flooding, which has been a constant threat to Sheppey (flooding and concrete are inextricably linked). They were also written in such a way that they can be read line by line, both from top to bottom and bottom to top, making effectively four poems and four possible ways of walking past the installation and reading.

THE MASTS OF A LIBERTY SHIP, LIKE
LITTLE CROSSES
MARK THE WATER, NOT FAR OUT TO SEA –
FOURTEEN HUNDRED TONNES OF HIGH
EXPLOSIVES.
BURIED IN THE BELLY OF ITS LIBERTY,
SNAPPED IN HALF ON THE SANDS,
BEYOND ALL HELP.
THE TRUTH OF IT – THIS WARTIME
SOUVENIR,
IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE. BUT WHISPER
TO YOURSELF
THAT YOU CAN SEE THE END OF THE
WORLD FROM HERE

CREEPING TIDES, AND GLOBAL WARMING
THREATEN THE FACT OF SHEPPEY'S
SHORE –
PRAY THAT OUR FOLLY MIGHT NO MORE
GREET THE WALKERS IN THE MORNING.
WHAT IF THERE'S NOTHING LEFT TO
WALK ON?
IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE IT'S GOING TO
STOP.
WHEN IT SWALLOWS ITS ISLANDS UP –
THE SEA BECOMES A FACELESS GORGON





Earlier versions of the proposed installation envisaged a dense 'carpet' of text covering a relatively contained area of the steps. In response to the writing of the poems it was stretched out over a larger part of the sea wall, to make the act of walking, which had played such a large part in the

development of the idea, an unavoidable element in its reading. It was also intended that together with the change from orange to white lettering, this stretching of the installation would reduce its overall impact in the broader landscape and make it closer in character to official sign writing.



Through experiments carried out on site, it was discovered that the thermoplastic would not adhere to the sloping risers and a heavy duty epoxy paint was substituted in these areas. However it could only be applied to the upper four steps of the sea wall as further trials on site revealed that it was less durable than the thermoplastic; with natural forces at work the painted text line on the lowest step was almost completely removed by the sea within a month.

The finished installation on the horizontal treads was carried out in pre-cut thermoplastic letters, a type usually used in bus garages, impregnated with small glass spheres to make them highly reflective. As the surface wears back to expose the glass spheres, they will become more reflective.

Like all applied road lettering, the installation will gradually wear and fade. In this erosive environment it is hard to predict how long this will take. It will certainly vary from the top to the more exposed lower steps, but it will also change in other ways as time passes. The lowest lines of text fall at the edge of the shingle beach, which covers them periodically, advancing

and receding, altering the length and the meaning of the poems with the changing tides. The inevitable graffiti has also appeared since being installed, using stolen municipal blue paint – a Sheppey tradition stretching back to ‘Bluetown’ in the eighteenth-century, painted with stolen admiralty paint.

Simon Barker





"I've always wanted to do some sort of public graffiti – sanctioned graffiti."

From an interview with Ros Barber in Abbe Leigh Fletcher's *Four Shores* documentary.

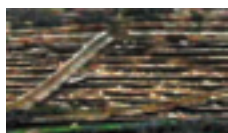


Walk Two
**Minster Beach
to Warden Bay**





Algae



Barge



Beached house



Bin



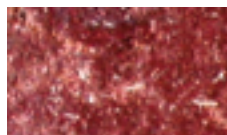
Bottle



Brick



Brushed



Cape



Cardboard box



Chinese leather



Clay



Cover



Crazy



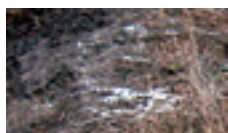
Crumb



Fleeced



Fletton



Frosted mud



Frosted



Georgian



Groundsheet



Maelstrom



Marble



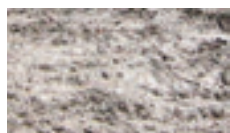
Medusa



Mineral deposit



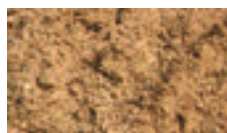
Mirror



Mudflow



Mudpan



Mudslide



Nodule



Old iron



Rubbed green



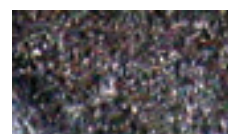
Sandlime



Sett



Slab



Slate



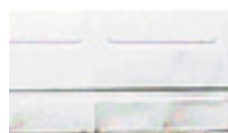
Stop cock



Sunk bunker



Tin roof



Van



Warnham red

Colours of Sheppey: Minster Beach to Warden Bay, compiled by Simon Barker



Warden, digital video stills from Four Shores film ©Abbe Leigh Fletcher



Left, top to bottom
Abrupt drop to sea from end of
Warden High Street
Lighters for sale at car boot sale
Part of a wood fallen into the sea at
Warden
Flow of wet mud at Warden Point



Right, top to bottom
Eroding cliffs at Warden
Beach at Warden Point



Above
Remains of Sound Mirror

Left top and bottom
Remains of Pill-box





"...shells and stones have been scrubbed by a fierce tide, polished, individually nominated. The beach is numbered like a geological chart. An illustration. The dominant colour is a fugitive pink: pubic coral. Fragments, sea-brick, corners of Dutch tile..."



"My pockets are bulging with pebbles. I feel like Monty Druitt; an over-obliging Masonic sacrifice, a voluntary redundancy from a Suicide Partnership. I can't resist the unique quality of these tones: the colours they have drained from sky and sea. Alchemical essences. I fondle them. I weigh them in my hand: eggs. I sniff. I lick. I listen for the pulse of life. I have also to carry away a lump of rusted iron in the shape of a pike's head: a flaking battle helmet, shamanistic blood-tool out of John Bellany."



From *Downriver* by Iain Sinclair (p386)



A selection of objects found by the artists while walking at Warden Bay:



Left, top to bottom
Metal
Glass
Petrified wood (used to make vitriol)
Yellow nodules found all over the beach and imbedded into the cliffs along Warden



Right
Collection of different types of bricks found between Minster at Warden Bay



Top

Lino found on beach at Warden
representing geological fragments

Bottom

Polished shell and concrete sample,
made by Stephen Turner





"The entire foreshore from Minster to Warden Point is strewn with materials from former structures fallen into the sea as part of the process of erosion (the clay cliffs here erode at six feet per year in places). Entire pill boxes have made the journey from cliff top to cliff base intact and in just 60 years. Other buildings made the journey but were broken into fragments en route. These remainders remind us of what once was, and are, a neglected but beautiful legacy of the attrition between sea and land; a reminder of the passing of time.

To draw attention to this in a poetic way, I decided to mark selected hunks of concrete along the ten kilometre route by polishing them and cutting words into their surfaces – words that explore the theme of erosion and resonate with the form and location of a particular fragment.

This walk can only be made at low water, and depending upon the state of tide a work will sometimes be underwater, or emerging from the sea as the walker passes by...

The works will themselves be subject to erosion by the sea. Sharpened edges will be rounded again. Shells and sand will fill the incised letters, and green algae will regrow there to make the words visible. With time they will be reclaimed by nature.

I like the idea that these works will not add to the world of things, but rather reuse, reclaim and help us to reconsider what is already there.

All four artists came up with suggested words and a very long list grew, to be reduced to six: CRACKED, EXPOSED, LEFT, WEAR, FALLEN, SETTLE."

Stephen Turner





Steven Mace polishing concrete slab (top) prior to lettering being inscribed by James Honeywood (below)



Stephen Turner

Fallen, polished and incised concrete,
letter cutting by James Honeywood



Stephen Turner

Exposed, polished and incised concrete,
letter cutting by James Honeywood



Leysdown-on-Sea

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Walk Three
**Leysdown
to Shellness**



Amused



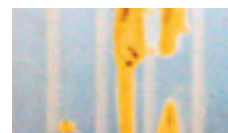
Bank



Blue mud



Bright lights



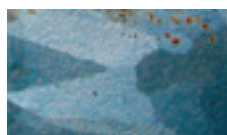
Burnt



Caravan



Duck



Galvanised



Game



Gate



Glass pineapple



Greenie love



Hangar



Hut



Interesting



Leysdown pea



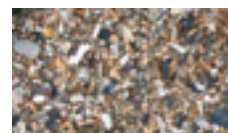
Log



Menu orange



Mudflat



Mussel



Nudist



Painted



Park



Peel



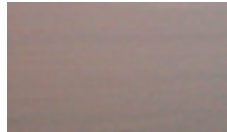
Pelvis



Picket



Pile



Pink drink



Pipe



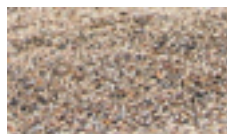
Rail



Red light



Shed



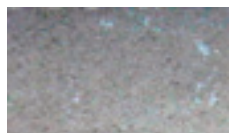
Shell



Shellcrete



Sheradised



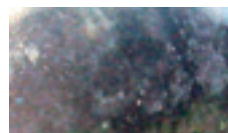
Shorts



Siding



Sublime



Tether



Trailer

Colours of Sheppey: Leysdown to Shellness, compiled by Simon Barker

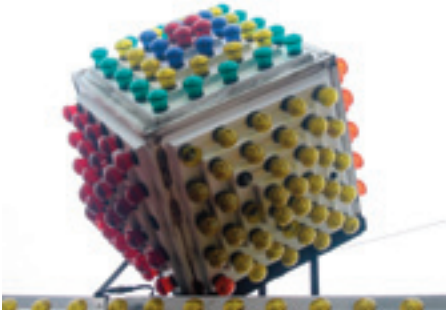


Leysdown, digital video stills from Four Shores film ©Abbe Leigh Fletcher



“An heroically direct track leads to the island’s south-east tip. A puddle red dirt road, out of some grander tale, is caught between retreating telegraph poles and the deserted beach. We can share the fantastic Icarus flights of the pioneer aviators, high above luminous green fields and out over a blanket of grey sea.”

From *Downriver* by Iain Sinclair (p399)





Leysdown was our base in the eastern end of the Island. We met at the Coffee Pot, very different from the café at Tesco; here there was no doubt that you were anywhere but at the heart of Sheppey. I have dim memories of holidays in a caravan at Leysdown as a child, and the way the place is woven into family memories made me feel curiously at home.

Leysdown is a place of extremes: bursting at the seams with people in the holiday season, empty and desolate the rest of the year. Gaudy amusements, acres of caravans and slightly ramshackle huts sit alongside sublime seascapes and wild landscapes.

It is not the typical established Victorian seaside resort with a prom and grand buildings; it feels home-made and unmade. There is a sense of self-reliance, that people have made their own affordable resort. It came as no surprise when I learned that nearby Muswell Manor had been the centre of pioneering aviation in the early part of the last century. It made sense that the resourceful and the purposeful might have been drawn to this place.





On our first epic walk around the eastern end of the Island, I was struck by how difficult it was to judge the form, size and nature of distant structures, seen across this expansive and flat landscape. In particular the bird watching hides stood out. They seemed to change shape as my position changed relative to them. Sometimes they appeared to have complex and irregular forms, sometimes very simple. Sometimes they appeared solid, at other times it seemed as though the light was passing through them. They were slightly disappointing when we finally reached them.

These thoughts lead to ideas for a structure which would do all these things in a more deliberate way, providing a punctuation point on this walk. An elevated viewing point for the flying lands of the open, eastern end of the island. The ideas gave birth to a structure, designed to be made from Sweet Chestnut staves, which would lie against the counter wall, giving access through its hollow, open structure up to

a high platform and down to a platform on the marsh.

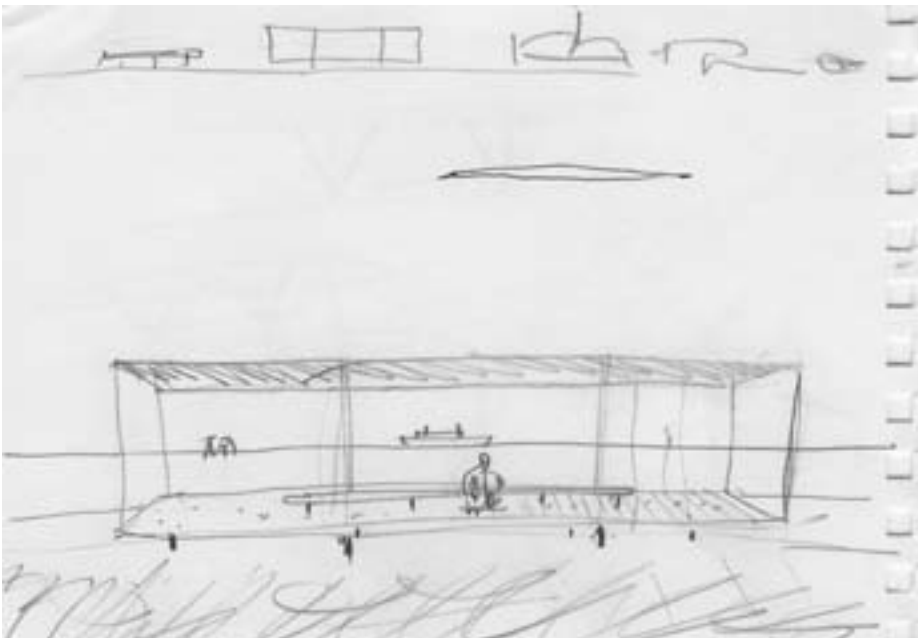
Due to concerns about land ownership and vandalism – it was thought that it might be an easy target for bored arsonists – this idea was not taken forward. Another, less remote site for such a structure was proposed on the sea wall near Muswell Manor.





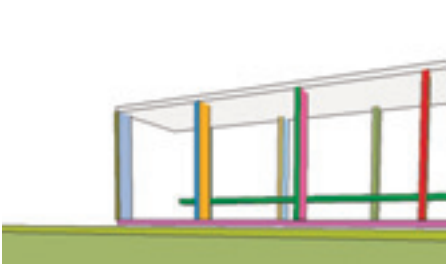
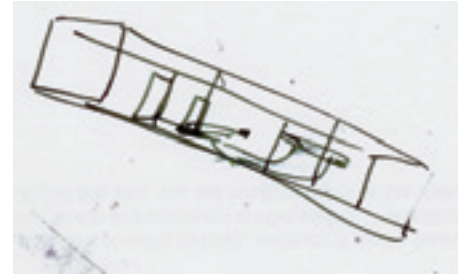
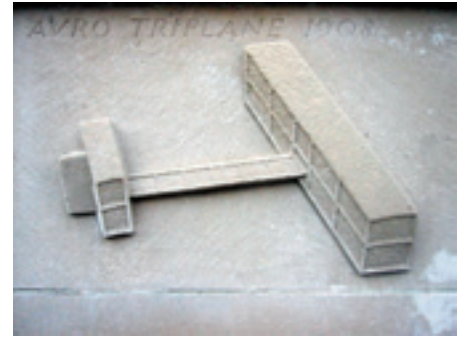
This site called for something very different. A new proposal was made for a simple and useful covered bench, which would be a place to rest on the walk along the edge of the sea from

Leysdown to Shellness: somewhere for looking out to sea or back inland over the fields around Muswell Manor, or to sit and watch the moon.





This version of the shelter took a simple long rectangular form, a similar scale and proportion to all those objects which seemed to typify the coming of the modern age to Sheppey: the Wright Flyer, the shipping containers, the caravans and various utilitarian structures around the island, often appropriated ingeniously from other uses.



This structure was to be in steel to reduce the likelihood of vandalism; this raised issues about finish and maintenance of the surfaces. After a short interlude experimenting with painted colours which reflected the surroundings, the structure was transformed into a quite different finned structure clad entirely in mirror polished, stainless steel, literally reflecting back the colours of the sky, sea and fields. Its shape was refined to make it visually ambiguous, almost disappearing when seen from certain angles, dependent on the vagaries of the light. The visual effects were tested with countless models and the design was further honed to respond to Environment Agency access requirements on the sea wall, and the need to make it stand up to the extreme conditions in such an exposed location.

The final design is far removed from the original timber proposal. It has been kept as simple as possible, utilising simple, available technologies to stay within the modest budget of the current project, but the structural complications of building on the exposed sea wall and fluctuating materials costs have made it too expensive to be completed at the present time. However, with planning permission granted to build the Wing, Medway Swale Estuary Partnership hope that it will be sited on Sheppey at a future date.

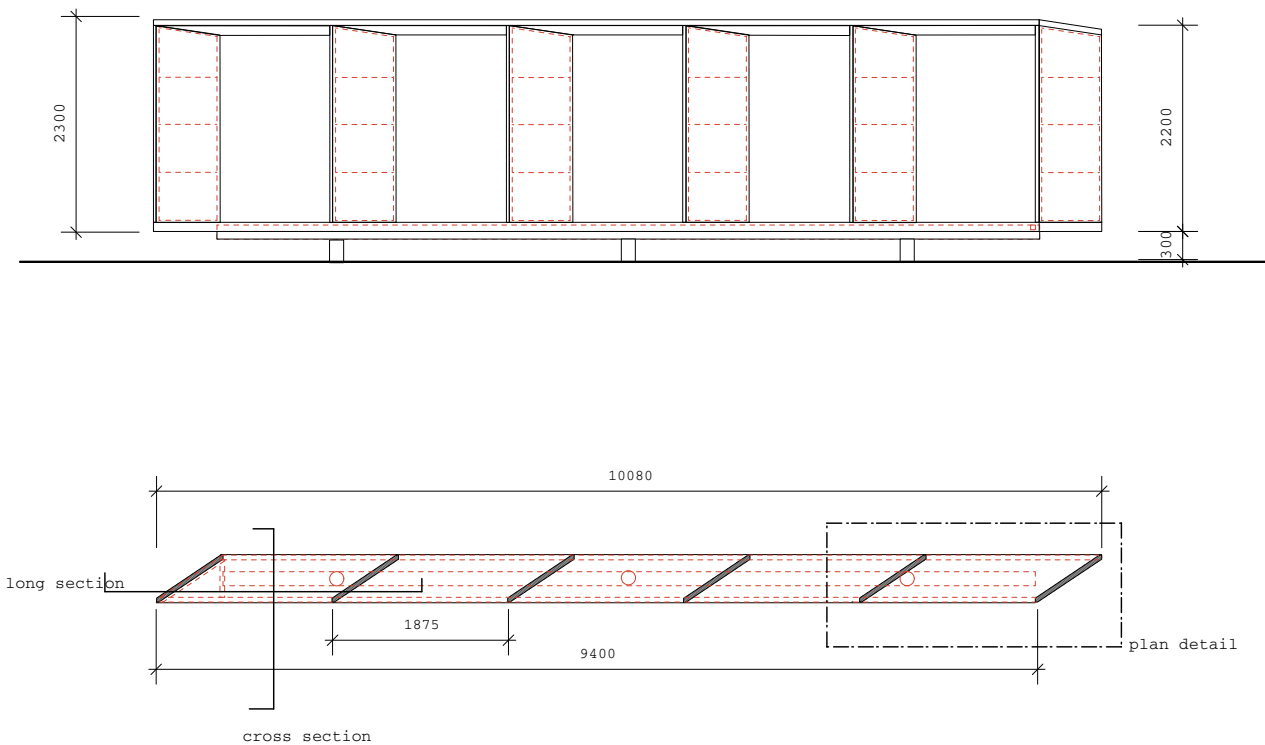
Simon Barker



Left

Trolleys in one of the original Muswell Manor aircraft hangars of 1909, now at Stanford Hill Prison.

Simon Barker
Wing, Muswell Manor, photomontage

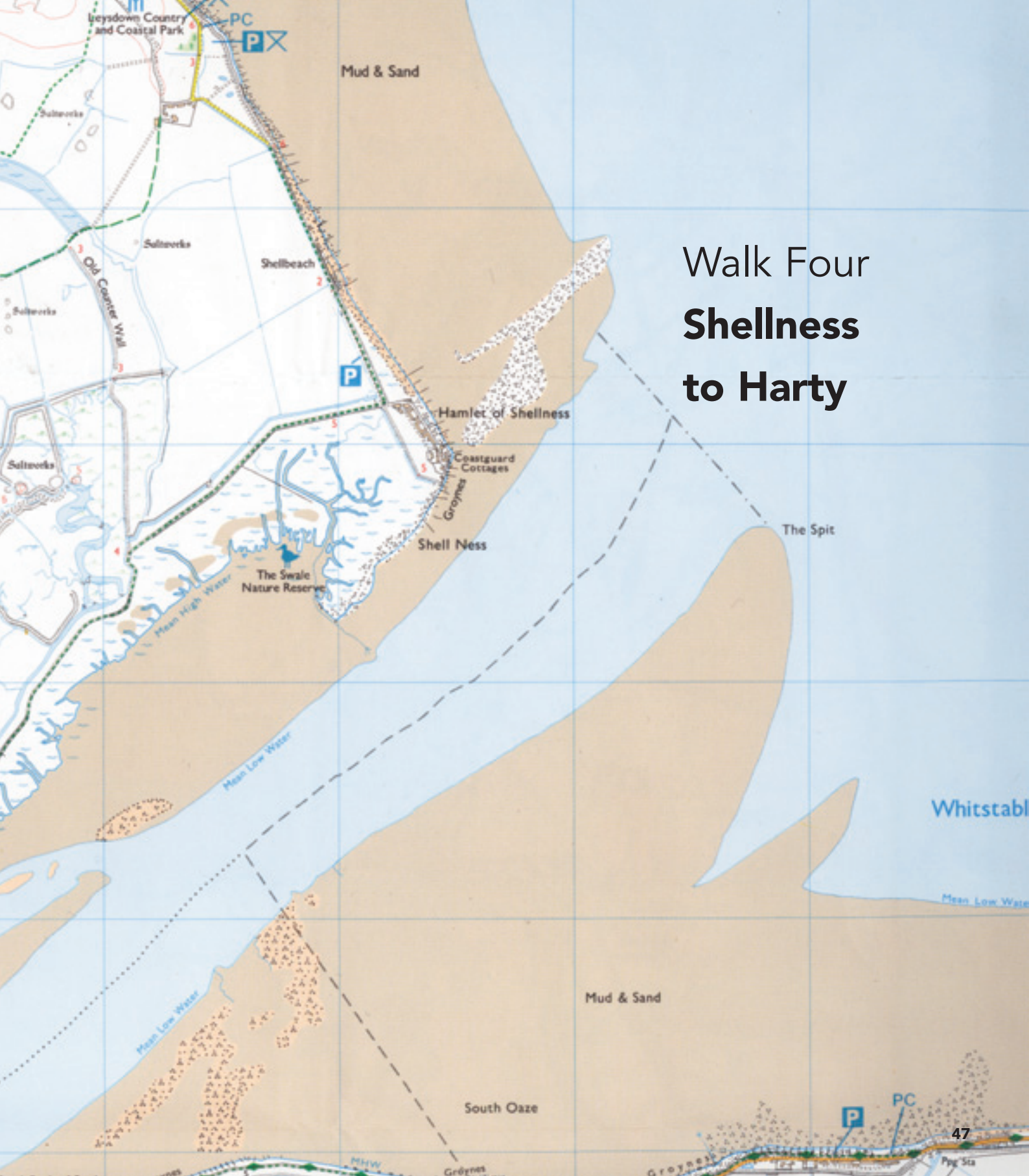




Simon Barker

Wing, Muswell Manor, photomontage

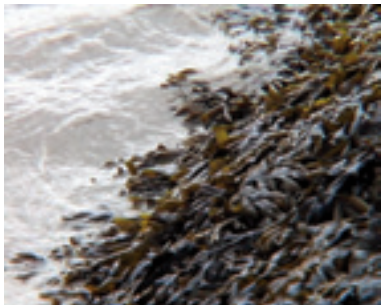




Walk Four Shellness to Harty



Colours of Sheppey: Shellness to Harty, compiled by Simon Barker



Shellness to Harty, digital video stills from Four Shores film ©Abbe Leigh Fletcher



"Our own messenger floats down towards the rush-fringed fleet, disappears. This is an island that is the world. It is removed, discrete; one of those transitory border zones, caught in uncertain weather, nudged, dislocated by a lurch in the intensity of the light. Special place where, I'd like to believe, 'good persists in time'."

From *Downriver* by Iain Sinclair
(pp400-401)



Images reflecting the landscape of extremes found at Shellness:



Left, top to bottom

The sky

The sea

A dead porpoise washed up on the beach

Shells on the beach

Right, top to bottom

Buds

Worm marks etched into bark

Hay bales

The flooded interior near Harty





Top

Counter walls that divide the salt and the fresh water along the route to Harty

Bottom

Shell beach melding with the mud of the estuary

“Saltmarshes, tidal flats, water meadows: a remote agitation of fat white sheep. A new vocabulary is required, creating a new mind. Small craft buck over the Swale in unaccustomed sunlight, dipping and chopping against a running tide. And yet the older boats at anchor barely stir. All movement seems unreal, made in defiance of this pastoral landscape, this panorama of recall. ... The path (a green serpent) doubles back on itself, hesitates between the slate modesty of the river and the promise of small fenced hills. Teal, shoveler, wigeon, pintail. We can expect them all. They are listed on a notice board. The short-eared owl breaks from cover and glides, wings spread, in confirmation of our track.”

From *Downriver* by Iain Sinclair (p400)





Left, top to bottom

Discarded corrugated material

Shot gun cartridges

Inflatable toy

Footpath sign to Harty Church

Right, top to bottom

Clay pigeon

Iron ring on the beach at Shellness

Child's gravestone

Hamlet of Shellness sign



Above
Blockhouse at Shellness

Top left
Shellness beach

Bottom left
Shell concrete found on the island



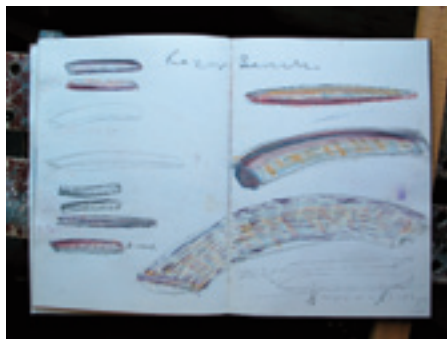
Razorform

“This work is made from concrete using white cement and an aggregate of different shells sourced from Shellness beach. It is based on an abstraction of the razor shell; a variety that is common to this place. The top surface has been highly polished, revealing beautiful, intricate patterns of the different shells that include an enriched percentage of razor shells.

The slightly curved shape nestles on the beach just above the high water mark, and echoes the curved ridges of the beach itself. On particularly high spring tides it will be covered and polished by the sea.

People might sit down on it, to rest and to enjoy the peacefulness of the site and its spectacular views.”

Stephen Turner



Shellcretes

"I wanted these works to refer to the shapes, colour and textures of the place they are made for. It became apparent that concrete has been the material of choice over many generations for the building of sea defences, and of war time defences of a (pill boxes), and some structures even used the abundance of local shells as an aggregate in their construction. This was the idea for shellcrete, devised by Simon Barker and myself as we peregrinated around

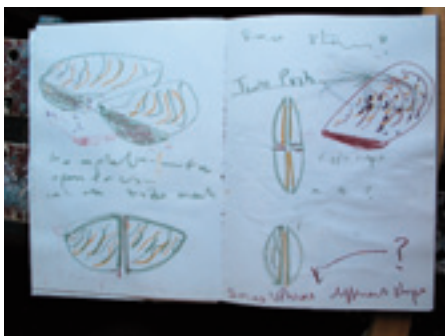
the island considering its many meanings. I got the idea for polishing the surfaces in the studio one day, while making one of many samples that explore different shell mixtures.

They are made from concrete using white cement and an aggregate of oyster shells from Shellness Beach. Five pairs of shapes have been cast. Each has the same volume, but the forms modulate from circle to ever flatter and wider forms that start to evoke the shape of the shells

themselves. They allude to the movements of shells along the foreshore as part of the process of erosion and deposition – matter is never lost, simply displaced.

From some angles they look a bit like eggs nestling amid the shell and grass of the path between marsh and beach and add to the strangeness and mystery of this landscape... or moons solidified and fallen to earth."

Stephen Turner





Stephen Turner

Shellcrete (one of five)

white cement and shells

Swale Nature Reserve, Shellness



Stephen Turner
Shellcrete (one of five)
white cement and shells
Swale Nature Reserve, Shellness

Another World

I've never seen myself as a gentle invader. As an artist – a writer – I'm a Saxon, by nature. I come, I look, and if I like what I see, I inhabit. Sometimes I feel a moment's guilt (I mean, what about the people who were here already?) but then I quickly get over it. I have to. I'm a pragmatist. Art isn't – by and large – a sympathetic neighbour. It doesn't bake scones and lend cups of sugar. Art finds its place and it encamps there. It raises its flag, gathers pebbles for its catapult, sets its traps and sits in wait. Art marks (and sometimes stinks), like a territorial cat.

But my demands – like that cat's – are very particular. There are certain characteristics in a location – a setting – which I need in order to thrive as a writer. The most vital of these is that the place should have little gaps, little tears and fissures which my imagination can creep inside of. It should be holey. It should be filled with tiny nooks and crannies.

The first time I came to Sheppey, I didn't find just gaps and fissures, I felt as if I'd fallen, head first, into another world, entirely. And from that moment on, instead of possessing it, inhabiting it – as was my intention – my *desire* – it inhabited me. I arrived, all arrogant, all proud and buttoned-up, in my scruffy mini van, with my walking boots and my map, and then I left – when I finally left – quite undone.

Do I understand Sheppey after writing a book about it? No. Will I ever understand it? I hope not.

After I wrote *Wide Open* (my Sheppey book) I was doing a local radio interview, in Sussex (or thereabouts). The DJ, a genial, uncomplicated, avuncular man in his late fifties, hadn't read the book, but he had – at least – been to the place where it was set. He'd been only once and he'd never returned, but it had left an indelible mark upon him. 'You've written an entire book set there,' he said, quite casually, just in passing, 'so did you mention the sound?'

The *sound*?

I'd mentioned the skies, the light, the marshes, the flatness, the smells, the black rabbits, the beaches, the nudists. I thought I'd mentioned *everything*, dammit. But the sound?

'Didn't you mention the *sound*?' he persisted, 'that whine, that strange whine, which gets inside of your head and won't leave it? That crazy sound, that high, whining *sound*? Didn't you mention *that*?'

Oh my Lord! It suddenly crashed in upon me: The sound! He was right! I'd written a book, and I hadn't mentioned it! Four hundred-odd pages and I hadn't mentioned it. The whine. The ghostly whistling. The *sound*.

A short while ago I turned on the TV, and I saw a news item about a man who had been found wandering a beach, speechless, dressed in a wet, black suit. No-one knew who he was. And they took him to a hospital and they tried to speak to him, but all he would do was draw pictures of a piano. So they brought him a piano, and he played it, quite beautifully.

'That's like the start of a novel,' I thought, idly. 'That's like the start of one of *my* novels.'

And then the newsreader said, just in passing, quite incidentally, almost as if it wasn't that important – 'He was found wandering and confused on the Isle of Sheppey...'

And I smiled.

But of course he was.

Nicola Barker

Project Team Biographies



Ros Barber is a prize-winning poet and prose-writer, and creative writing tutor for the University of Sussex. She has won prizes in both the Asham and *Independent on Sunday* short story competitions. Her poetry, which has been commended three times in the National Poetry Competition, is widely published in anthologies and magazines, and has been broadcast on both Radio 1 and Radio 3. In 1999, she was nominated for Poetry Review's "Geoffrey Dearmer" Poet of the Year, and won Writers Inc Poet of the Year in 2000.

Her commissions have included a series of poems for the Dover to Folkestone cycle path, and a sonnet sequence about Embassy Court for Architecture Week. She has been poet in residence at a barber shop in Herne Bay, and at the offices of Arts Council England, South East. Her first full collection, *How Things Are on Thursday* was published by Anvil Poetry Press in 2004.



Simon Barker is an architect and partner in Barker Shorten Architects, based in London and Sussex. Barker Shorten Architects are a registered practice of the RIBA and have won several architectural competitions including first place in the European Housing competition. Current projects include a new community centre at Leysdown on the Isle of Sheppey, a community training centre in East London, public art projects, and several education and arts buildings.

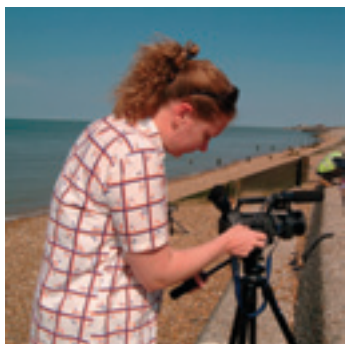
Simon has recently been appointed to be a Design Advisor for Design Excellence in North Kent (DENK), and is also a visiting lecturer at Kent Institute of Art and Design.

He studied architecture at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London.

Sarah Draper, a reformed marine archaeologist who used to run her own seabed and shipwreck exploration company in Hong Kong, manages the The Medway and Swale Estuary Partnership.

MSEP is a voluntary forum addressing estuary issues. It consists of 16 organisations from the private, statutory and voluntary sectors. All have expressed a common interest in promoting a sustainable future for the Estuary. The Partnership brings together the many organisations having an interest in safeguarding and promoting the area's economic, social and environmental assets.

Since 2002 the Partnership has received significant European funding through the SAIL II project. Its name is derived from the acronym 'Schéma d'Aménagement Intégré du Littoral' and translates to 'Integrated Coastal Zone Management' (ICZM). The funding has supported a broad portfolio of 23 projects including landscape enhancements, environmental education, academic research, awareness raising events, circular trail creation, walk guides and the Four Shores Project.



Abbe Leigh Fletcher artist and filmmaker, uses digital video to reconstruct the subjective experience of location, identifying and evoking a sense of place.

Her work breaches the gap between observational documentary and subjective, expressive interpretation of events depicted and her role within them. By expanding and emphasising the impact the camera has on a situation, through expressive and structuralist editing strategies, (rather than trying to pass off the camera as invisible witness to the events unfolding before it), the camera becomes an active participant.

Lecturing in practical filmmaking, screenwriting and documentary production at Kingston University, London and at the Arts Institute, Bournemouth, she is a graduate of the RCA and LCP, (now LCC), London. Short-listed for the Observer Student Art prize in 2002, she has exhibited in Kyoto and Toyota, Japan, Copenhagen, London and Newcastle-upon-Tyne.



Stephen Turner is an artist who has employed natural processes and materials to examine ideas about the cultural landscape. He has worked extensively with the chance effects of tidal flow on different river estuaries, resulting in *Tide & Change* (Darnet Fort 1998), *Time & Tide* (a Millennium project with the Historic Dockyard, Chatham 2001) and *Tide Marks* (Trinity Buoy Wharf, London). Other projects include *Cella*, an installation for Turner Contemporary in Margate, *Tree Rings* for Stour Valley Arts and *Seafort*, a reclamation of the derelict Red Sands Fort (a concrete platform eight miles off the north Kent coast), where he will live alone for 42 days in the Summer of 2005, exploring the concept of creative solitude.

Stephen studied fine art at Leeds University (BA Hons 1976) and, with a Commonwealth Scholarship, at the University of Regina in Canada (MFA 1979). He was Fellow in Painting at Exeter College of Art from 1980-82.

Frances Lord is a freelance consultant, curator and writer specialising in public art. She works with a range of individuals and organisations including local authorities, healthcare trusts and environmental organisations initiating, developing and managing projects. Recent projects include *Heart of Reeds* (a reed-bed designed by land artist Chris Drury for Lewes, East Sussex, 2005), *Chalk Stones* and *Moonlit Path in Petworth Park* (by sculptor Andy Goldsworthy in West Sussex, 2002) and *Jewellery is Life: an exhibition of new jewellery by Mah Rana* for Fabrica in Brighton, 2002. Frances regularly organises seminars, conferences and events to coincide with Architecture Week and was an Executive member of Public Art Forum (now Ixia) 1999-2002.

She was Director of the Hampshire Sculpture Trust, 2000-1; Crafts then Commissioning Officer at South East Arts, 1994-2000; and she worked at the Crafts Council, London from 1983-94.





