

THE PEOPLE WILL POSSESS THE WIND

From which direction is the wind coming? Can you feel the breeze on your face?

Do you ever look out at the wind farm in the Thames Estuary?

What does it do? How does it work?

Who does it belong to?

How much money does it make and who gets it?

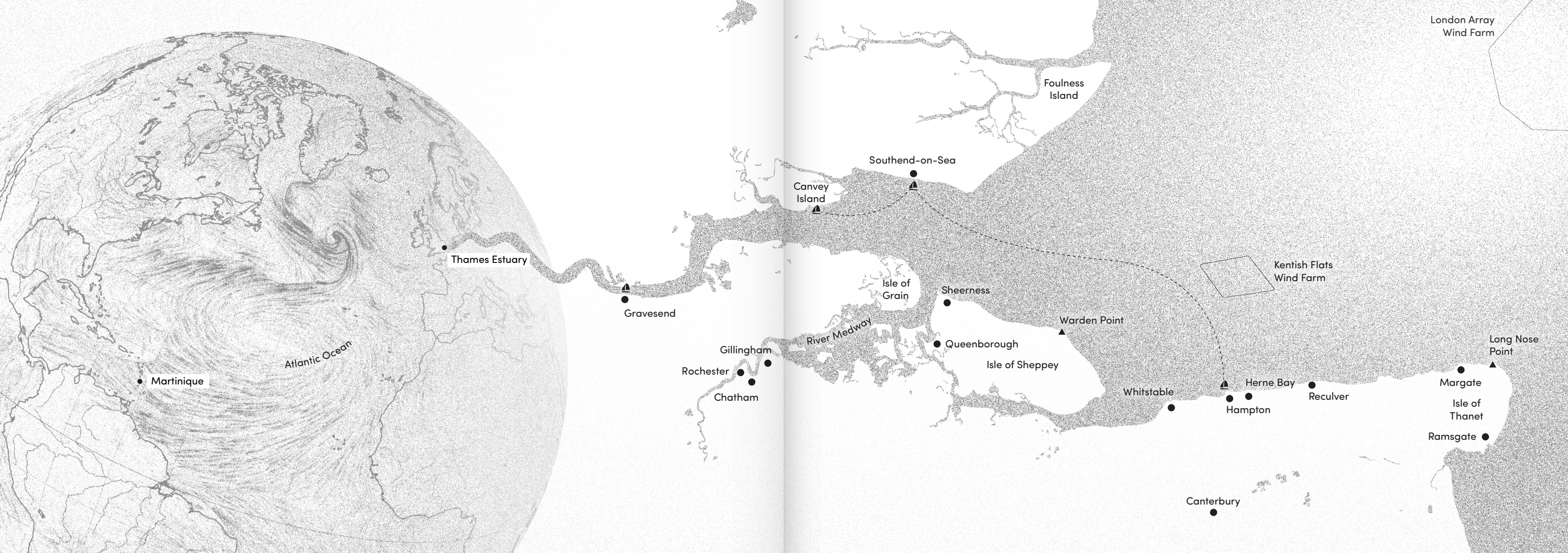
What if it were owned by the people?

What if the winds bound us together?



A celebration of
wind power in the
Thames Estuary
using a choir and
boats, through
singing and sailing.





London Array
Wind Farm

Foulness
Island

Southend-on-Sea

Canvey
Island

Thames Estuary

Gravesend

Isle of
Grain

Sheerness

Kentish Flats
Wind Farm

Warden Point

Queenborough

Isle of Sheppey

Gillingham

Rochester

Chatham

River Medway

Whitstable

Herne Bay

Hampton

Reculver

Margate

Isle of
Thanet

Ramsgate

Long Nose
Point

Canterbury

Atlantic Ocean

Martinique

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1

The wind. Tickling down the Medway valley, stroking the grasses and the rooftops. Through the gap between Blue Bell Hill and Coldrum, lifting the bunting in Rochester and the soaring gulls above Gillingham Reach. Rattling the shrouds of the craft in Queenborough Harbour and funnelling into the wide mouth of the Thames. Driving the waves against the islands of the Estuary – Grain, Sheppey, Canvey, Thanet, Foulness. Turning the blades of the wind turbines on Kentish Flats with a special rhythm.

From where does it come, this prevailing wind from the South West? Is it the echo of a hurricane in the Caribbean four thousand miles away? A cyclone that became a storm in the Mid-Atlantic and a gale buffeting up The Channel? Does it carry memories from Martinique, struck by Hurricane Dean in 2007.



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Another day, another wind. Iron cold, scraped out of the Baltic and flung across Denmark. Tumbling through Heligoland Bight. It is howling by the time it slams into the Thames. Out in the Estuary the turbine blades spin frantically. Was this North Easterly born in the Siberian taiga? A storm such as this recalls the floods of 1953 that devastated Canvey.

Where do the winds of our Estuary come from? And where are they heading after driving the fetch in Salt Pan Reach and Lower Hope? Whose winds are these? Whose energy is it that is captured by the Kentish Flats Wind Farm? Everyone's and no one's.

2

How strong the contrast this is to life in the past three centuries. A world of Yorkshire coal, South Wales coal, Lothian coal. A world of UK oil, American oil, Iranian oil and Nigerian oil, of wars fought to obtain the geology where energy resides. Coal mines in the Saarland between Germany and France. Oil wells of Iraq and Kuwait, catalysts of multiple conflicts. The world divided by its energy resources.

We are entering a world once more powered by solar, water and wind. An era of movement. Perhaps these streams of air will catalyse peace? A world connected by its energy resources.

Connection with the winds over the Thames is as ancient as human presence in the Estuary. The state of the wind would have determined the movement of the earliest vessels. Such as the Bronze Age boat unearthed from a riverbed in Dover.

Wind in the Estuary and across the Atlantic powered the ships of pilgrimage and migration, or trade and war, from the Thames around the globe. The *Godspeed* sailed colonists in 1606 to the land of the Powhattan ruler in what is now Virginia, USA. The *Hector*, belonging to the East India Company, sailed in 1608 to the port of Surat to trade with the Mughal Empire of India. *HMS Sandwich*, built at Chatham, fought under the command of Admiral Rodney at the Battle of Martinique in 1794.

Wind made possible the trade in kidnapped and enslaved peoples from West Africa and in sugar from the slave plantations in the Caribbean. Wind fuelling ships from ports including Chatham, Gravesend, Deptford and London. Ships returning with goods extracted from colonised lands and peoples.

It is this wind that bound together the islands of the Caribbean with the islands of the Estuary. And it is this wind that ties them together still, winds from the western Atlantic power the turbines on Kentish Flats.

The blades of Kentish Flats, perfectly static on still Estuary days, begin to move in the South Westerly breeze. These steel and fiberglass wings revolve, generating electricity, as they have done for twenty years. Each turbine produces over 3 Megawatts an hour at maximum capacity. Enough to power 130,000 homes. Equivalent to all the households of Thanet and Canterbury local authority areas. Or nearly all the homes in the city of Southend.

From each turbine tower electricity moves via cables along the seabed five and a half miles to the coast at Hampton in Kent. At Hampton the line runs underground up to the high land behind the town. There the charge passes into the National Grid and the pylons take the energy of the wind away south through Blean Woods towards Canterbury and west past Faversham towards London.

Once in the Grid, the power flows to anywhere in Britain from Land's End to John O'Groats. Indeed, even to over 100 islands from Orkney and Shetland, and to the Isle of Man and the Isles of Scilly. And away to other states, through the interconnectors from Pembrokeshire in Wales to County Wexford in Ireland, and from Folkestone in England to Sangatte in France. Further subsea cables are being busily constructed. In due course power from Kentish Flats might flow to Germany, or to the Netherlands, or even to Norway.

The power descends from the Grid at the edges of towns and cities, flows into sub-stations, from where it runs in cables under the roads to units that stand unnoticed on street corners. Then, through ducting beneath Tarmac pavements, to front doors and the mains supply boxes hidden in cupboards or under the stairs. The power of the South West Wind heats the element in a kettle and brings the water to boil.

Kentish Flats Wind Farm is not unique in this. There are seven wind farms in the Estuary. Twenty years ago when Kentish Flats was constructed it was the UK's largest offshore farm, now it is the smallest. There are 33 wind farms all along the East Coast of England and Scotland. The cluster of three at Dogger Bank covers a sea area half the size of the land area of the county of Kent. Britain is two decades into a wind revolution, but it has been barely noticed.

The same revolution is sweeping the globe. Nation after nation is turning to the wind. The island of Martinique in the Caribbean, colonized by the French in 1635, is now a 'French Overseas Territory' and included within the EU. It has a population of 350,000. This is greater than all the residents of Southend, Canvey, Sheppey, Whitstable, Herne Bay and Margate combined. Martinique is set to

be powered entirely by wind and solar within the next five years. However the amount of energy consumed by an average household on the island is far smaller than that in a British household. The power produced by Kentish Flats is double what is used by the total population of Martinique.

The island's energy system is entirely owned by one state corporation, Electricité de France. The same company that plays a dominant role in our Estuary's electricity system and is the UK's largest generator of zero-carbon power – via renewable and nuclear energy. It operates 31 wind farms in the UK and has 17 solar farms under development in this country.

These two places, the Estuary and Martinique, seemingly far apart, are bound together by the wind, by a long history of extraction and by the same corporation that extracts profit from the weather.

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In each house in the Estuary and Martinique, by the mains supply box sits the electricity meter, counting up the kilowatts, and sending data to the energy utility. From our homes this digital data flows to the computer systems of companies such as EDF Energy, a wholly owned subsidiary of Electricité de France. This multinational corporation is headquartered in Paris. And from our personal accounts is transferred payment, direct debit for the quarterly bills. Digital cash passed from one data system to another. A passage powered by electricity itself.

The cash accumulated from the quarterly payments of 5.2 million UK customers is gathered in by EDF Energy, who use it to purchase, among other things, kilowatt hours of electricity generated from wind farms in Britain.

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Vattenfall, a corporation owned by the Swedish state, has ten wind farms in the UK. Kentish Flats is their oldest project, and their fifth largest in the country. Vattenfall sells electricity to a customer such as EDF Energy, who will then sell it on to their own customers – householders, businesses and others. EDF also purchases electricity from generators such as Orsted, part owned by the Danish state, as well as buying power on the open market.

After the purchase from Vattenfall is made by EDF, funds are transferred to Vattenfall's account in Stockholm.

Vattenfall is a national institution in Sweden. It was established in 1909 to generate hydro-power. Hence its name, Vattenfall – 'Waterfall'. It was established by the Swedish state as a public

company. Over a century later, the state is still the sole shareholder. At least some of the money from EDF flows to the Swedish state.

So, the wind that passes across the Estuary turns the blades on Kentish Flats and is transformed into electricity which flows via the Grid to myriad homes in the UK and is transformed into digital money in the accounts of EDF of France and Vattenfall of Sweden. From there it goes to the French state treasury and the Swedish state treasury, to pay revenue costs or to be utilised for investment in the public sector.

Wind is transformed into money which flows into the international financial system.

This is the alchemy of wind in this age of movement.

5

The workboat *Tornado* slips her moorings at Ramsgate Outer Harbour and motors sedately down the buoyed channel. At the sea mark she turns and heads into a Force 3, blowing ten miles an hour from the North East. The ebb is running. The cold wind pushing against the rising tide makes for a grey sea foaming with white horses. It is a slow and wet passage until the boat passes Long Nose Point and the skipper turns west into the mouth of the Thames. Now the wind is behind and the tide is slackening. The three-person team relaxes with a coffee ahead of work on Kentish Flats Wind Farm.

The engineers have risen early at homes in Dover, Sheerness or Ramsgate. They drove to arrive at the office by 7am, ready for the Toolbox Talk that set out the plans for the day ahead. They've gathered parts specific for the job, as well as food and water, and their personal safety equipment - harness, life jacket, hard hat.

In due course *Tornado* uses her bow thruster tubes to nudge the front fender up to the ladder on a turbine at the southern edge of the wind farm. Away to the north, east and west are lined up the platoon of forty-five 377-foot-high towers - each equivalent to a thirty-storey building. Their blades turn with solemn dignity in the Force 3. The work team steps off the deck and onto the ladder to the transfer platform. In bright orange life jackets and orange safety helmets they climb the rungs to the steel doorway, unlock it, step inside and disappear.

The skipper remains on the vessel together with another crew member. Despite being over five miles offshore the Estuary here is remarkably shallow. The skipper gazes out across the sea on this Tuesday morning. There's a Cobelfret roll-on-roll-off ferry away in Sea Reach bound for Rotterdam, and a cockle boat circling over the beds in Whitstable Bay. Otherwise, there's no sign of shipping. No cruisers with sails filled on a weekday out of the Summer season. To the north,

beyond the rusting remains of Red Sands Forts, is the grey outline of the tower blocks of Southend. To the west the headland of Warden Point, the muddy cliff face of the Isle of Sheppey. To the south the seafront of Herne Bay. And in front of him, to the east, the North Sea stretching to the horizon.

Inside the nacelle, the machinery at the top of the turbine, the team takes a break having ascended over three hundred feet by lift, from sea level to the tower's peak. They have stopped the blades from rotating so that work can begin on checking the gearing. The turbine was built twenty years ago in a factory owned by the Danish company Vestas in Jutland. And now it is coming to the end of its working life.

The towers themselves were manufactured near Antwerp in Belgium, shipped to their current site and erected into place over 58 working days in 2004 and 2005. The floating cranes and slowly gathering array of towers were clearly visible from the beaches of Whitstable. Visitors to the ancient Roman fort at Reculver watched in puzzlement as the towers were driven into the seabed and the blades affixed. For this was the first offshore wind farm in the Estuary.

It was finally opened in September 2005. Ten months later the project was paid a visit by the then Prime Minister Tony Blair, the Chancellor Alistair Darling and the Environment Secretary David Milliband.

The team in the turbine tower takes breaks on the job. They down tools, have their packed sandwiches and tea, share stories and phone the skipper of *Tornado* moored far below. All is well. The sea state is calm. The forecast looks good. The tide has turned. Eventually after a maximum of eight hours in the nacelle the men begin to descend in the lift. They will return tomorrow to continue the job.

The anchor is weighed. The skipper steers the vessel to the base of the turbine, the tide is running fast, sweeping past the steel tower. The engines of *Tornado* have to thrust to keep her steady in the flow. The maintenance crew step aboard from the ladder and the workboat bears away and heads out to sea, bound for Ramsgate.

6

From 2004 to 2015 the boats that took workers to and from the Kentish Flats turbines were based in Whitstable. Vattenfall paid fees to the owner of the harbour, Canterbury District Council, and several of the crew lived in the neighbourhood of Whitstable. What if the boats returned to work out of this nearest port, just as the boats servicing Vattenfall's Thanet Wind Farm work out of Ramsgate? As at ports such as Grimsby and Montrose, the wind industry is part of the lifeblood of the economy. In the East of England around 25,000 full-time jobs are in the renewable energy sector.

There were well advanced plans for the Danish company Vestas to build a turbine construction factory at Sheerness, but they were shelved in 2012. What if the replacement parts for the Kentish Flats wind farm were manufactured in Sheerness, fifteen miles to the west? Would this not create more jobs in the area, provide business for local suppliers, and give the residents of Sheppey a sense that this is 'our wind farm'?

The owner of Kentish Flats Wind Farm is, ultimately, the Swedish state. How would things be different if it was owned by the British state? Or owned at a more local level by Kent County Council? Or by a consortium of the district councils that ring the Estuary?

What if the wind that passes across the Estuary turning the blades on Kentish Flats and transformed into electricity which flows via the Grid to myriad homes in the UK and was changed into digital money for the accounts of Canterbury District Council, Swale District Council, Castle Point District Council, and Southend-on-Sea City Council. Money utilised for the public good in villages and towns across the Estuary?

Wind transformed into better school buildings or improved street lights. Wind transformed into electric buses or better elderly care.

What if the wind farms and solar plants being constructed on Martinique by EDF were owned by the people of the island rather than by a French state corporation?

This could be the new alchemy of wind in this age of movement.

7

This is not as far-fetched as it may seem. Vattenfall used to own the company that ran all the electricity and services of the City of Hamburg in Germany, but in 2014 the corporation was pressured by the city authority to sell it back. A similar people's referendum in Berlin in 2014 began the process where the city took back control of its electricity supply company from Vattenfall in 2021. It was 'municipalised'. What if the same process took place with the Kentish Flats Wind Farm?

Ours is not a story opposing the construction of wind farms and solar farms – though there are sound reasons to oppose them when built insensitively – but rather to ask: who owns these new systems so vital to the national economy and domestic daily life?

This is no different from the struggle over the ownership of other energy sources during the past two centuries. Or the current calls to nationalise the railways and Government's moves to take state control of British Steel.

This struggle continues in the desire for the people to own the means of generating and distributing renewable energy. A new publicly owned power company, GB Energy, has been set up by the Government to fulfil this desire. What could it do to help people living in the Thames Estuary to feel a shared ownership over the wealth generated by the wind farms?

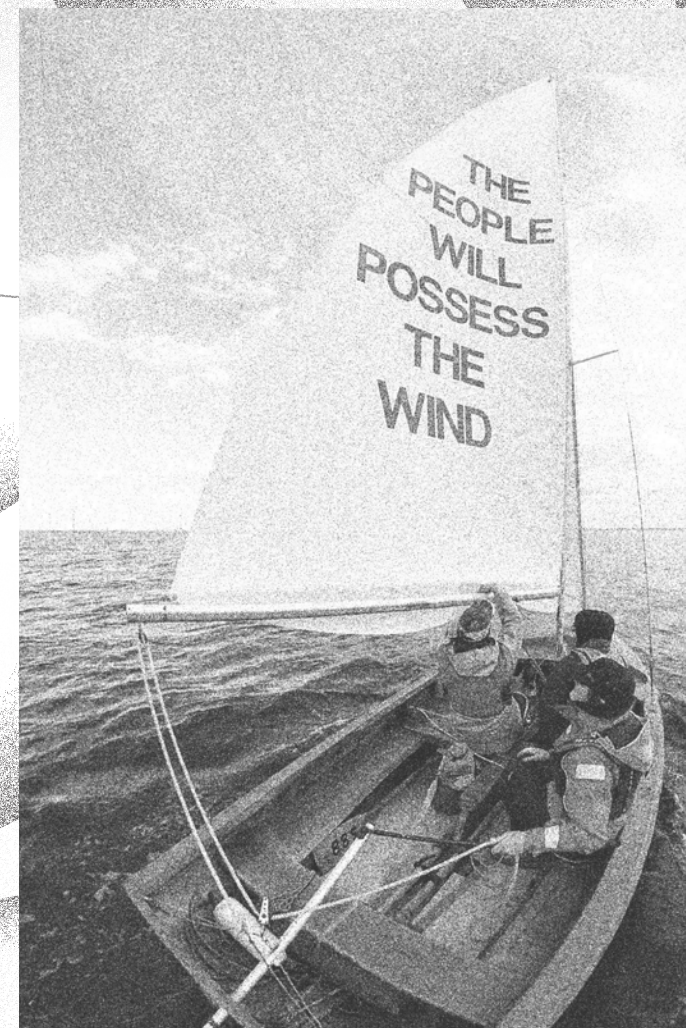
There is no word in Martiniquan creole for 'possession'. The traditions of the island emphasise the sharing of goods in common. What if the people of the Estuary recognise that we share the same wind as the people of Martinique? What if we could belong to the wind, with the wind itself?

This is not just about renewable power and slowing climate chaos, but also about democracy, reparations and global connection. In a world where we are constantly assaulted by what divides us, what if the wind became a force that united us? The wind blowing through our voices allows a choir to sing in harmony.

“

The idea is to bring the world into contact with itself, to bring some of the world's places into contact with others.

– Édouard Glissant, Martinican philosopher



The People Will Possess The Wind project

Land

James Marriott
Gaby Jeliazkov

Sailing

Jane Trowell

'Portals of Return' Choir

Jabez Walsh
Sense Turner

Chloé Bertini
Tobi Obisanya

Composition & coordination
by Lauriem aka Laurie Mompelat

Film

Nell Houguez

Illustration and layout

Jaś Lewicki

Booklet essay

James Marriott
Terry Macalister
Laurie Mompelat

Social Media

Suzanne Dhaliwal

The People Will Possess the Wind was co-created out of dialogue between James Marriott, Nell Houguez, Jane Trowell, Terry Macalister & Gaby Jeliazkov.

Project background

The People Will Possess the Wind in the Estuary 2025 is the latest version of a project that began in Liverpool Bay in September 2018 as a collaboration between Platform and Artists4Corbyn. Commissioned by Lena Šimić and Gary Anderson of The Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home, a crew journeyed by boat to Burbo Bank Wind Farm to celebrate the possible future of this resource.

The event and first *The People Will Possess the Wind* sail were presented at The World Transformed 2018. An accompanying booklet was published and a motion passed by the Walton Constituency Labour Party.

A second version took place as part of Platform's *Crude Britannia* project within the Estuary 2021 festival. The project included video conversations between former workers at the Coryton Oil Refinery and Isle of Grain gas plant with participants from Algeria and Nigeria.

The project features in the book *Crude Britannia – how oil shaped a nation*, by James Marriott & Terry Macalister (Pluto 2021). Available online and in all bookstores.

Special thanks to

Lauriem aka Laurie Mompelat for bringing a decolonial perspective and anchor to this work; *Four Bells*, skipper Richard Twyman and crew; *Widgeon*, skipper Penny Davies and crew; Debbie Twyman for collaboration on sail lettering; Estuary festival: Thea Behrman and Michaela Freeman; Nick Robins; Annie Brooker; Zainabb Hull, and the Polden Puckham Charitable Foundation for additional funding.

Estuary Festival

The People will Possess the Wind was commissioned by Estuary Festival for Estuary 2025.

Estuary Festival is an independent arts organisation that shines a spotlight on the Thames Estuary through high-quality contemporary arts programmes.

Estuary 2025 (21-29 June 2025) is the 3rd edition of the contemporary arts festival celebrating the stories, places and people of the Estuary. Through the theme of 'Vessels', Estuary 2025 looks beyond the boats and ships of the Thames Estuary, to explore how communities, people, flora, fauna and even art events might be thought of as vessels too, carrying stories, memories and ideas.

Estuary 2025 is supported by 54 partners including Arts Council England's Place Partnership investment and National Highways Designated Funds.

www.estuaryfestival.com
@estuaryfestival

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Platform

For over forty years Platform has created work, in a myriad of media from live art to writing, music to film, campaigns to reports, that is focused on tackling injustice and climate breakdown.

Platform is internationally recognised as a catalyst for creative change whilst at the same time remaining deeply engaged with London and the Thames Estuary stretching over several decades.

www.platformlondon.org

Get in touch

If you are interested in the ideas and stories in this booklet we are keen to hear from you.

Email us at: info@platformlondon.org
Or: info@estuaryfestival.com

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LIVE EVENTS

Scan the QR code below to see all the latest details.



FILM AND DISCUSSION

The People will Possess the Wind - a celebration of wind power in the Thames Estuary using a choir and boats, through singing and sailing.

Join us for a free film screening and discussion, exploring the ideas behind the project: ownership, renewable energy, and how wind can be a force to unite us.

SUNDAY 22ND JUNE

- 📍 **Gravesend Town Pier**
West Street, Gravesend, Kent DA11 0BJ
- 12.30pm - 13.15pm
-

CHOIR PERFORMANCES

Join us for three free events on on Canvey Island, at Southend-on-Sea, and at Hampton as part of the Estuary 2025 festival.

Watch and join the choir singing on the seafronts. If the wind allows, see the sail-past of our boat, 'The People Will Possess The Wind'.

SATURDAY 21ST JUNE

- 📍 **Seafront by the Labworth Café**
Furtherwick Road, Canvey Island, Essex SS8 7DW
- | | |
|---------|-------------------|
| 9.30pm | Arrival |
| 10.00am | Choir performance |
- 📍 **Southend Pier**
Western Esplanade, Southend-on-Sea, Essex SS1 1EE
- | | |
|---------|-------------------|
| 12.30pm | Arrival |
| 13.00pm | Choir performance |

SUNDAY 22ND JUNE

- 📍 **Hampton Pier**
Western Esplanade, Herne Bay, Kent CT6 8DL
- | | |
|--------|-------------------|
| 7.30pm | Arrival |
| 8.00pm | Choir performance |
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