



Controlled  
Ruination

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Poem written at Orford Ness with Mendham Writers  
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October 2012





Nesting birds and unexploded bombs: Beware  
Take care, to keep to the tracks. Do not  
Deviate. We are the National Trust in us  
To keep, preserve this heritage of ours  
Which in this case is all to do with LAND

This Ness or Nose, this vegetative spit of land  
A piece of peeling skin from island body  
That once was joined to that which, sea divided,  
Threatens, so chosen as a vantage facing east.  
The threat that never came. This flat land









Became the place where bombs were tested,  
Trajectories into single sand, all photographed  
At shutter speeds in high up bunkers. A Chinese wall,  
Built by prisoners of another war. And later still  
A research station for atomic weapons.  
And Cobra Mist - a distant stark rectangular block  
Without a window to look out or in. Where Roger,  
With us now, came then in '68,  
And was paid 160 quid a day  
For January labouring. No union or questions asked.



A boat away, we landed on the shore, where  
In a surprising Scandinavian voice we hear:  
'And if you like the lighthouse, like I do  
You'll make your way there first, and don't forget  
To hug it. It won't be long before the mercury  
Is taken out. It will be left to fall. The sea is close'.









An egret white on murky mud flat, took flight.  
Shutting back its neck, it flew to where  
I could not go, landing on a porcelain toilet,  
Disjointed and incongruous, in a marsh  
Of ripe reddening samphire fingers.

The stuff of boffins who worked here  
then, are left  
Littered in the land, together with  
their tools of war:  
Blown out shells, and twisted wire,  
arching  
Like the blackberry bowers, with fruit  
so sweet  
Not spat on by the devil, on this  
benign October day,  
(Although we wondered about  
radioactivity).











All juxtapose and jar our tourist eyes.  
A warden on a bicycle shouts out to lovers  
Walking on a ridge of swales 'They're centuries old!  
Keep off', A sign: 'Eleven Thousand Volts,  
Danger! MOD' is necklaced with a  
Briar that homes a caterpillar's winter comb.



Beyond, still on the distant flat land, a string  
Of stick thin dancers, antenna masts soar  
High to mist. As recent as last year used  
To transmit waves of voices from the BBC  
To the World. Now cut back, stand silent still.







Sea poppy with interwoven loops of stems  
A criss crossed veil, protecting hub.  
No brazen hard rectangular wall of front, but  
An effective mesh to greet the sea sharp wind and rain,  
That deviates the blow, and breaks the energy.  
These plants know how to survive what man  
Or nature give. Unlike the cracking concrete path  
On which we must tread.







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October 2012, Orford Ness with Tamar and Rochelle and Mendham Writers



Made on a Mac