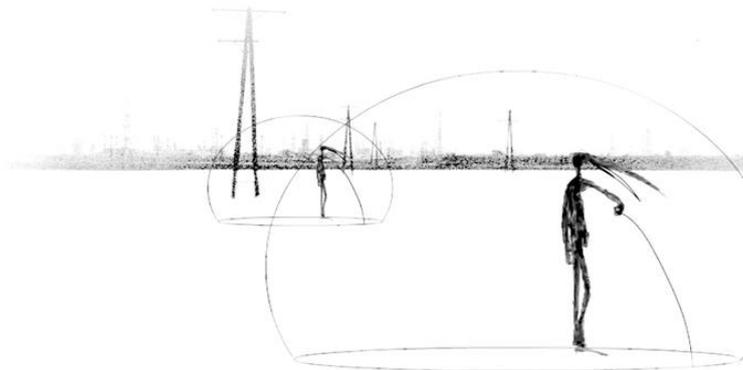


# The Black Path

Music and Sound from the  
exhibition at House of Blah Blah

THE HOUSE OF BLAH BLAH  
PRESENTS  
THE BLACK PATH



PRIVATE VIEW  
WITH LIVE EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC BY  
AMMONITES & WARPED FREQS

JANUARY 28TH - 7PM

EXCHANGE HOUSE  
EXCHANGE SQUARE  
MIDDLESBROUGH, TS11DB



Supported using public funding by  
ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND

[WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/BLAHBLAHHOUSE](http://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/BLAHBLAHHOUSE)

BLAH BLAH

1. Chris Stewart - Transporter Isometrics  
(Music - Soiled)
2. Soiled - Dust Impressions
3. Soiled - Knitting Scoria Bricks
4. Soiled - Navigation to Connals Bed
5. Ammonites - Transporter Isometrics
6. Warped Frequencies - Trace Track Trail Tread

**The Black Path** is an ancient route. It has been many things: the northern boundary of an Anglian Kingdom, a medieval sailor's trod, and a convenient path to work for the steelworkers of Middlesbrough.

The Black Path Project commenced in early 2015 as collaboration between Chris Whitehead and Gavin Parry, they soon realised that a number of other artists in the area had also created work based around the path. They then set about contacting artists and asking them if they would be willing to join the project with a goal of producing an exhibition. Once assembled, the group approached the House of Blah Blah, who were very enthusiastic about the project and agreed to work with the group.

The goal of the project was to present a contemporary response to the Black Path, at the time no one could have predicted what events unfold over the following months in terms of the collapse of the steel industry. This project now has an added poignancy; it has accidentally captured the end of an era.

The exhibition and show features, field recordings, paintings, photographs, sculptures and music, all created as a response to the Black Path. The exhibition commences with a performance by two groups of musicians, Ammonites and Warped Freqs. both of who have written music especially for this occasion.

## The Artists

**Carl Mole** is a photographer from the North East of England. He makes photographs of the things that interest him, focusing on the local environment and the people who inhabit it.

**Bob Mitchell** "Through the use of photography, film and painting, Bob Mitchell dissects the borders and continuity.es of urban, natural, industrial and post-industrial landscape."

**Chris Stewart** is turning his life into a playable, text based, adventure. Hit him up on Twitter @SideBurnedPoet to learn more. He's anthologised in Break-Out (Ek Zuban, 2013). Find his award-winning videopoems here: [www.youtube.com/zorki28](http://www.youtube.com/zorki28)

**Warped Frequencies** Beauty of sound & chaos in not so equal measure

**Kirsty O'Brien** My practice explores abstract painting techniques that follow the processes that happen within Teesside's steel industry. The gloss and acrylic react; pushing, stabilizing and re-solidifying, which corresponds with the processes that happen within the coke ovens at South Bank.

**Gavin Parry** Oafishly wanders about with a camera.

**Eugene Schlumberger** works in the space where the shadow of popular culture falls on concrete surfaces

**Chris Corner** Artist and Musician

**Chris Whitehead** Artist, Musician, Sonotaphonomist, Poet

**David Watson** Born in South bank and having painted industrial Middlesbrough for over 50 years, David includes a painting that brutally blends his memories of the path against the decline of industry on Teesside today

**Aphra O'Connor's** work for 'The Black Path' displays a creation of Print and Sculpture pieces taken from fragmented imagery of industrial Northern buildings.

**Ammonites** Pyjamas for extinct sea creatures.

## Links

<http://www.aphraoconnor.co.uk/>

<http://www.bobmitchell.co.uk/>

<http://www.carlmole.co.uk/>

<https://elmlodgerecordsuk.bandcamp.com/>

<https://eugeneschlumberger.wordpress.com/>

<http://thehouseofblahblah.co.uk/>

<http://kirstyobrien.weebly.com/>

<https://linearobsessional.bandcamp.com/album/south-gare>

<http://sonotaphonomy.blogspot.co.uk/>

<https://teessidepsychogeography.wordpress.com/>

<http://www.thenorthernartist.co.uk/>

<https://warpedfreqs.bandcamp.com/>

<https://www.youtube.com/user/zorki28>













## THE BLACK PATH

The Black Path, stretching between Middlesbrough and Redcar, is part of the Teesdale Way, a public right of way running the banks of the river Tees. Many traverse the Black Path every day, sometimes multiple times, by train or road. If the railway lines and the A66 are the twin arterial routes connecting the South Tees region, then the Black Path forms a capillary threaded through them.

The industry through which the path treads is, if not the whole story, a significant part of the story of this region, over which industry casts a large shadow, both literal and figurative. A shadow figurative in that it was the iron and steel industry, alongside the chemical industry, which led to this region being populated, populous and affluent; a shadow literal in the plumes of smoke and steam bellowed into the atmosphere: the detritus of the process that enabled this growth.

If we needed a symbol of this, who hasn't looked up to those sky on those nights, those (all too rare nights), when fires flame through the night, and we are all - each of us - held, womb-like, under the gentle undulations of an iron-orange sky.

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I walked the path on an unusually spring-like day one February past.

Despite the rather grand and foreboding name - 'THE BLACK PATH' - the path itself was flickering and fragile, at times half-hidden, at times barely perceptible at all. This was in contrast to the structures that surrounded it: the coke ovens, the BOS plant, the blast furnace: structures that continue to dominate the area. They are monuments to the future and walking amidst them was to walk amidst places peculiar and special.

What was striking about the walk, however, is how much the industry and environment intersected. Concrete and metal grew naturally out of green moss and long grass, while rust decayed back into the ground. The many pipes which span the area - printed onto the side of one, the word OXYGEN, a fuel for the fires that enabled the industry to flourish - rise and fall into the ground like weeds and vines. The entire scene was drawn from the same pallet: brown, green, grey, except for deep within the coke ovens, behind soot black shutters, glimpses of glowing, incandescent orange.

There were two particular examples of this interaction between nature and industry that stick in my head. Both, in their own ways, are poignant.

The first was the sight of the river on reaching the path. A tributary of the Tees, it was covered in what I think was described best as a tarpaulin of sludge, plastic bottles and discarded footballs. It reminded me of that prominent sign next to the Dorman Long building, since lost

to time once, proclaiming, without irony, that here, industry and wildlife were 'working together' for a greener Tees Corridor.

The second example was on reaching the South Bank coke ovens. By way of explanation, I reached them at about midday. The coke ovens were in use and it was an active site. Here coal, transformed within the ovens into coke, was deposited into a rail carriage to be cooled at the end of a track.

I remember three things.

I remember the noise: it was the noise of activity, a repetitive clanking as regular as the chiming of a clock, and sirens, and inaudible messages transmitted over loud speakers.

I remember those colours: the orange and whites of intense heat amidst the soot black of the ovens.

And I remember that, at the end of the track, when coolant hit the coal freshly from the oven, an explosive cloud of gas was violently emitted. I remember standing beneath a shower of rain, as it fell, on a beautiful day in February, under cloudless, electric-blue skies.

That noise, that glow, that rain will not be found if you walked the path today.

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The black path proper started at three red bollards, just on from the Riverside Stadium. But the walk had a prelude of sorts, commencing in central Middlesbrough and onwards through the recently regenerated Middlehaven, the site surrounding the Riverside between the Transporter Bridge and Anish Kapoor's Temenos.

The three red bollards present a break; a break between a projected future of bright and vivid colours: cladding in gold and silver, lime and pink; pristine concrete, steel and glass; as against a past of soot black, and browns, and greys, and muddy greens and rusting ambers.

Walking the Black Path was to walk spatially, but it was also to walk temporally; it treaded a narrative through history. It is a place where elements converge to tell a story of divergence: of a past, and present, and possible, and lost, futures. It embodies a question with which we must grapple, now more than ever. To where does our past lead us and from where does our future take its shape?

**Alistair Nixon**

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