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**Profaning GAMA: exploring the entanglement of demilitarisation, heritage and real estate in the ruins of Greenham Common's cruise missile complex**

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**Abstract**

This article investigates the post-Cold War fate of GAMA, the iconic hardened bunkers complex constructed at RAF Greenham Common, Berkshire, UK in the early 1980s to house newly deployed US nuclear tipped ground launched cruise missiles as part of the Euromissiles crisis. GAMA was then the focal point of international anti-nuclear protest, led by the women peace campaigners who camped just beyond its fences. The article investigates why, despite this prominence and the contemporary inclination towards heritagization, the site has not become a Cold War memorial or tourist attraction. The site's limbo state is found to be a product of the entanglement of the competing cultural drivers of demilitarization, ruination, heritagization and/or re-utilization. The study concludes (by applying Agamben's advocacy of profanation) that this limbo may be a fitting denial of the re-sacralization that this site might otherwise have faced, whether as a museum or a fully redeveloped commercial facility.

**Keywords**

Greenham Common; Cold War; Demilitarisation; Profanation; Agamben; Heritage.

## **Introduction: Two Views of GAMA**

Summer 2018: The former GAMA (**G**round launched cruise missile **A**lert and **M**aintenance Area) bunkers now sit squat and brutal in the Berkshire heathland. Like modern tumuli, the two offset rows of stout earth mounds shelter a concrete chamber within each hillock. From the vantage point of the grubbed-out Greenham Common airstrip, these dishevelled bunkers stare back through the triple fencing erected there in the early 1980s to guard this world-famous geopolitical hub. There are six of these humped-back shelters, most now with permanently open blast doors, their hydraulic rams having been sold for scrap many years ago. Once, these spaces would have securely garaged launcher vehicles and their nuclear warhead-tipped cruise missiles. Now, these voids are mostly empty, save for a few shipping containers and a motley collection of vehicles parked on the expansive, weed infiltrated, weathered hardstanding extending behind the arrayed bunkers. There are few signs of life and fewer still of the mass extermination once practiced for here. The overall impression is of an underused, marginal backstreet industrial estate yard, abandoned to the desolation of a perpetual Sunday morning, always perhaps awaiting the arrival of a motley car boot sale.

[insert Fig. 1 here]

**Figure 1 – the GAMA bunkers sit squat and brutal in the Berkshire heathland**

But the atmosphere was so different here in the early 1980s. Then, this site was a cacophony of construction site noise, military surveillance and protest songs. GAMA was the focal point of what Eric Hobsbawm called the “Second Cold War” (1995, p.244), a heightened level of geopolitical tension triggered by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and deepened by the Euromissiles crisis. This crisis saw the deployment of Soviet SS-20 mobile missile launchers within striking range of Western Europe, and the arrival in counterpoise of US ground launched cruise missiles in Europe from 1983. The women’s peace camp assembled in the

early 1980s in order to witness and oppose the construction of the GAMA compound; the intended main base for the UK's allocation of missiles.

### **Studying Demilitarisation and Afteruse at GAMA**

This article responds to recent calls (Stearns 2013, Bagaeen 2016) for research to increase understanding of the processes by which both demilitarisation (as *peace-making*) and the repurposing of military sites (as *place-making*) occur, and the pressures that affect their likely success. It does so by examining the fate of a particularly awkward type of military surplus – the bunker – and furthermore selects a particularly iconic instance of that class (i.e. GAMA), in order to show that neither an explicit commitment to a site's demilitarisation nor an unequivocal declaration of its heritage value will necessarily determine its future identity. Specifically, this article seeks to account for how, despite GAMA's ascribed heritage significance (it was scheduled for protection in 2003 due to its "international importance" as an "emblematic monument" (English Heritage 2003a) of the Second Cold War), and the bunker complex's unavoidably monumental physical form, the site had come to be such a banal backwater by 2018.

The study presented here is based primarily upon examination of West Berkshire Council's voluminous planning applications register for the site (West Berkshire Council 2019) and local histories of the site (Fairhall (2006), Sayers (2006) and Stokes (2017)). Supplemental documentation regarding the circumstances of the 2003 sale of the GAMA site was also obtained from Historic England and West Berkshire Council via Freedom of Information Act requests (Historic England 2019, West Berkshire Council 2003). The assembled account of the GAMA site's evolution has been corroborated through site visits (in the Summer of 2018 and 2019) and interviews with local residents, recreational users of the common and current or former officers of stakeholder organisations including West Berkshire Council, Greenham

Parish Council, Historic England, Greenham Common Trust, Greenham Control Tower Ltd and Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.

Drawing upon these sources, the case study analysis shows GAMA's fate as having been shaped by the interplay of four contemporary cultural drivers: demilitarisation, ruination, re-utilisation and heritagisation. The analysis considers the role of each driver in the evolution of the site since 1980. Despite being presented in a broadly chronological order, there is nothing neat about this temporal sub-division. The influence of these drivers overlaps and interacts at varying intensities across the study period. What is perhaps more telling is that there is an underlying temporal affinity between drivers which are essentially concerned with *disassembly* (i.e. demilitarisation and ruination) and those primarily concerned with *reassembly* (i.e. re-utilisation and heritagisation). Reassembly is more culturally comfortable in the UK, given the fit with deeply embedded notions of identity, progress, futurity and suchlike. Meanwhile, disassembly is expected to be only an initial (purgative) passing phase: a short step on the journey to either form of reassembly. GAMA is a worthy case for investigation, because its journey from disassembly to reassembly has been slow and faltering, and with the site presenting in the summer of 2018 as stuck in limbo.

Before turning to examine the post-war story of the site as framed through each of the four drivers, we must first outline the lens through which we will consider the benefits of the site's failure to have fully reached the final state envisaged by any of the drivers. Our argument will be that GAMA's limbo state denies the usual, neat victory of any one of these drivers, and thus represents a provocative profanation, unsettling neat, linear notions of reassembly. We will suggest that the site's outturn is an awkward, unresolved landscape, perhaps forming a "countermonument" of sorts. Countermonuments (Young 1993), are sites formed by public artworks or material remains which operate to remind or provoke those who encounter them – to force a confrontation with difficult pasts, like the Holocaust. Whilst usually curated, and

thereby *intended* as provocations, Moshenska (2010) has suggested that countermonuments can arise inadvertently (such as in the sudden unearthing of a Second World War bomb on a building site). The GAMA site is not curated as an intentional countermonument, and its physical remains do not force a violent confrontation with the past, but at some level, through its failure to fall into a neatly resolved ‘future’ use, the GAMA site forms an inadvertent countermonument. It certainly embodies the contemporary ambivalence identified by Beck (2011) in relation to bunker sites, and to the Cold War more generally. Furthermore, we will use Agamben’s (2006) advocacy of profanation to consider how the site’s present inability to settle for any one of the four fates set for it by the drivers could be seen as a success of sorts.

In his 2006 essay “In praise of profanation”, Agamben argues that cultural apparatuses, like religion, law, heritage (and, by extension – we argue – the military) confer upon places and other things that fall into their special sphere, a “special unavailability” (73) which separates them from the possibility of other, unscripted (non-ritualised) uses. For Agamben, profanation is best seen as a call for perpetual vigilance against (and permanent resistance to) likely domination of any one cultural framing, because that dominance can bring with it re-sacralisation whereby the full possibilities of use once again become narrowed. Agamben valorises multiplicity and calls for such profanation via physical and or symbolic acts of disruptive use which challenge their otherwise ascribed sacred aura or mythification. Above all (for Agamben) profanation seeks to celebrate evolving, open-ended use. He accuses heritagisation (particularly in the form of a reverential “museification” (Agamben 2006, p.83)) of sacralising places and things, privileging their “exhibition value” (90) and in doing so freezing-out their use-value. He is concerned that museification’s ‘look don’t touch’ logics render people into passive tourists, denying the possibility of use to them.

However, Agamben is not an advocate of a simple ‘re-develop and move on’ form of commercial re-utilisation. He warns that capitalism re-sacrilises through the commodity

fetish: that is, turning things into ‘assets’ (in particular by declaring them to be private, and physically off-limits). Agamben warns that capitalist logics will happily colonise and exhaust any place through totalising, destructive consumption if given the chance.

So, now sensitised via Agamben’s warnings against the dangers of any single sacralising cultural formation winning out, we turn to examine the history of the site through the overlapping drivers of demilitarisation, ruination, heritagisation and re-utilisation. In doing so we will see how, in the wake of its de-sacrilisation as a military facility, GAMA’s awkward circumstances have so far thwarted the site’s re-sacrilisation by either museification, intense commercial exploitation, or an aesthetically valorised ruination.

### **Demilitarisation**

Definitions of demilitarisation range from arms reduction to societal reconfiguration. This article follows Bickford (2016) in taking a broad, cultural, view of demilitarisation – that it is as much about creating attitudinal change as about destroying weapons. Examining demilitarisation as a *cultural* process is particularly important given the way in which the Cold War’s nuclear militarisation (and the GAMA site as an iconic embodiment of that) insinuated itself into all corners of culture and society (Masco 2008). Accordingly, the demilitarisation of GAMA is assumed to have necessitated both the physical deactivation of the site’s launch enabling structures, and an attempted semantic recoding of what the place is now *for*. The biblical analogy of turning swords into ploughshares describes demilitarisation as a process of literal change: by being reforged into a ploughshare, the iron comprising the implement is thereafter categorically regarded as a ploughshare, not a sword-in-waiting. To guard against this risk of slipping back into military use, demilitarisation thus entails a degree of intentional material *and* symbolic ruination (Bevan 2016). Because demilitarisation looks to the future and life beyond war (recovery and reconstruction) – it also has a close

relationship to re-utilisation. Furthermore, increasing awareness of the importance of the role of memory, memorialisation and confrontation with militaristic pasts as part of post-conflict recovery (e.g. Young 1993, Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996, MacDonald 2009), links demilitarisation with heritagisation processes – but with some tensions. Focussing back upon the sword's prior existence and role is potentially dangerous (as contrary to the transcending-conflict goals of demilitarisation) and it risks perpetuating war's cultural presence: whether as glorification or fetishisation (as seen in war museum and monuments of the imperial era).

Pressure for demilitarisation was present from the birth of the GAMA compound. In 1980 Greenham Common airbase was announced as the intended base for a flight of Tomahawk cruise missiles, each to be armed with an (up to) 150 kiloton nuclear warhead (approximately ten times the yield of the A-bomb dropped on Hiroshima). Through blockading, fence-cutting and occasional incursions, peace camp protestors resisted the site's presence from the outset. Notably, in 1983 a cadre of women protestors had made it into the part-built GAMA compound, joined hands and danced on top of one of the part-built bunkers. Raissa Page's iconic photograph of this trespass announced to the world both the militarisation, and the wished-for demilitarisation, of this site (Hopkinson 2011). Despite this campaigning, by 1984 the full complement of 96 cruise missiles were stationed at GAMA. However, they were not there for long: in December 1987 the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty was signed by Reagan and Gorbachev. This provided for a phased removal and destruction of 2,000 weapons, including GAMA's. The Treaty took effect in June 1988 and provided for a three-year implementation period for the decommissioning of the both weapons and their launch support systems (i.e. GAMA), with associated access-for-verification rights. As Fairhall's (2006) site history shows, once the weapons had been removed the USAF announced that it was handing the airbase back to the RAF. In 1993 the Ministry of Defence (MoD) declared that, as a consequence of the end of the Cold War, RAF Greenham Common



was now surplus to the UK's defence requirements and that it would be decommissioned and disposed of. Decommissioning saw the airfield's runway grubbed-up, and its rubble re-used as ballast for the Newbury by-pass road scheme. The airfield's extensive buried fuelling lines were also removed and decontaminated. Its perimeter fencing was taken down in 1997 when the airbase passed to a public-private consortium for £7Million, from whom the local council bought 750 acres of the common for £1, leaving the built-up area by the base's main gate to be commercially managed as a business park. However, because the verification rights remained extant under the Treaty until 2001, the GAMA compound remained fenced-off and separated from the airfield's wider decommissioning and disposal programme.

### **Ruination**

Unless subjected to ongoing care and maintenance things fall apart, regardless of any human destructive agencies like warfare, vandalism or demolition (Cairns and Jacobs 2014, DeSilvey 2017). This is the entropy that underlies all things, and this applies both to material structures and intangible cultural formations (like abandoned practices and forgotten ideas). Whilst entropy is a non-human drive, the human reaction to ruination (and specifically whether, and how, to resist, enable or curate it) is a cultural formation. How contemporary ruins arise and how they are given meaning has been the subject of considerable recent academic attention (DeSilvey and Edensor 2013). But much of that work has focussed on either the practice-formations of 21<sup>st</sup> century ruin gazing (for which, in relation to bunker ruins see the contributors to Bennett 2017b) or in acknowledging ruination's more-than-human aspects (DeSilvey 2017). Only limited attention has been given to the cultural production or management of ruins and ruination by those responsible for them (whether as owners or state agents). The reasons for a place falling into ruination may be circumstantial – and speak to 'simple' bad fortune or neglect, or it may indicate a more deliberate attempt to physically destroy or semantically eradicate an existing place (see for example here Bennett

2019) and thus link back to demilitarisation. The uncontrolled surrender of GAMA's less well-known sister facility at RAF Molesworth in Cambridge to ruination's entropic forces appears to be the former (Eccles 2014). Meanwhile the National Trust's decision to curate the ongoing decay of the iconic Atomic Weapons Research Establishment (AWRE) 'pagoda' bunkers at the former military test site at Orfordness in Suffolk, as an aesthetic landscape feature within its natural reserve, is an example of the latter (Wilson 2017). GAMA seems to have taken a middle path between these two extremes.

[Insert Fig 2 here]

**Figure 2: GAMA: semi-ruination; semi-monumentality**

In separating the GAMA site from the routine decommissioning and disposal of the rest of the airbase, the Treaty appears to have triggered ruination and dereliction there. As noted by Coggan (2005a) during the 1990s the compound was managed on a minimal care and maintenance basis by the MoD. The nuclear blast-proof hydraulic doors of the bunkers were lowered permanently into open position in order to enable Soviet satellite surveillance to confirm the facilities remained deactivated, and at some point during its stewardship the MoD took steps to permanently deactivate these doors – by removing and selling for scrap most of their hydraulic rams. The site's electrical system and other utilities were also removed or otherwise made inoperable (e.g. concrete poured into drains) and shafts and chambers were welded shut. This action appears to have been motivated by two standard features of the disassembly phase for military sites: vengeance and vandalism, with reports that peace campaigners, scrappers and/or souvenir hunters were known to be accessing the site in the 1990s. But beyond these specific steps there was no imperative to demolish the GAMA bunkers. Demilitarisation rarely requires a total erasure of military structures. Denial of use to an enemy (and/or trespassers) may simply require limited works of functional disablement or access-blocking.

In 2001 it became feasible to transfer GAMA into the main airfield restoration scheme. However, the local council seemingly balked at exercising their option to acquire GAMA for a nominal sum (£1) due to concerns about upkeep and safety liabilities for the site (West Berkshire Council 2003). As a result of this, in 2003 the MoD decided instead to sell GAMA. It appears to have been assumed at this point that GAMA's future lay (at least in part) in a heritage outcome, with the bunker's monumental landforms utilised for commemoration of the Cold War (English Heritage 2003b). Notably, the hydraulic rams for the Quick Reaction Area (Building 701) had been held back from scrapping, with this as the most likely of the bunkers to be suited to becoming a museum, and in March 2003, in preparation for GAMA's sale, English Heritage had secured the designation of the site as a Scheduled Monument under the 1979 Act (English Heritage 2003c). But this protective designation could not, of itself, compel the creation of a museum or other Cold War-related memorial use of the site, and the MoD (despite acknowledging the heritage importance for the site through involving English Heritage as an adviser in the sale) appears to have chosen not to impose any contractual obligation upon the purchaser to ensure an active heritage use of the site (Historic England 2019).

### **Heritagisation**

Bunkers are capable of sustaining very intense meanings for those who feel fascinated by them. Internet forums feature numerous photographic and video accounts of visits successfully made – despite the persistence of the multiple security fences - into the heart of the GAMA site (e.g. Stray of the Path, 2015). But this fascination is not shared by all. An early bunker hunter, the French architectural and cultural theorist Paul Virilio (Bennett 2017a), wrote in his seminal *Bunker Archeology* (1994) about how one summer day in 1958, whilst on a seaside holiday, he found himself suddenly aware of the discarded monumental forms of the Nazi Atlantic Wall defences and committed himself to exploring the history of

their production and their future architectural possibilities. But he also noted how these bunkers were shunned by locals, who considered them to be taboo, and too recent to be archaeological.

The last 50 years has seen the rise of an ever-stronger preservationist mindset, plus an ever-more pluralist notion of what is worthy of valorisation as heritage. Thus heritage – via a process of “heritagisation” (Harrison 2013 p581) – is accumulating at an accelerating rate, with perhaps some shrinking of Virilio’s ‘not yet archaeological’ interregnum: by the mid-1990s the attention of heritage professionals in the UK was already turning to the question of how the Cold War (which ended in 1989 with the ‘fall’ of the Berlin Wall) should be protected as heritage. As regards bunkers, heritagisation has been expressed through protective designation (as a Scheduled Monument under the 1979 Act or as a Listed Building) and has reached its apogee with state ownership (thus ‘York Nuclear Bunker’ is owned by English Heritage). Traditionally (in the UK) heritagisation has been motivated by positive stories of national identity (hence the proliferation of Blitz, Battle of Britain and D-Day themed Second World War bunker ‘attractions’ such as the wartime tunnel complex beneath Dover Castle, or the Cabinet War Rooms / Churchill Museum beneath Whitehall). These sites are presented as places of resilience or victory – they are not staged as sites of war crimes. Sites like GAMA were places from which nuclear genocide was threatened and rehearsed (Klinke 2018; Klinke & Garrett 2018). But curation of a UK heritage site as an aggressively anti-militaristic ‘attraction’ would be an unusual framing, for the notion of countermonuments has not really featured in UK heritage practice (although some attempt is made at this within discrete displays and occasional events at the UK’s national war museums and York Nuclear Bunker (Bowers and Booth 2017)).

Due to GAMA’s Cold War offensive role, the persistence of nuclear weapons (notably the US have recently announced their withdrawal from the 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces

Treaty) and the mix of views about whether or not the Cold War is something to celebrate, GAMA is a particularly strong exemplar of “concrete ambivalence” (Beck 2011), a cultural difficulty in being able to decide what to think or do about the remains of military bunkers. In support of this, there are perhaps some signs of a gap between the optimistic assumptions of heritage professionals and actual public appetite for GAMA’s museification. Writing at the end of the 1990s, Schofield (who in the 1990s helped lead English Heritage’s campaign to protect and promote 20<sup>th</sup> century military sites as the new heritage frontier), asserted that “recent military sites often evoke a depth of feeling rarely seen on other types of sites” (1999, p.171). But the feelings evoked were not at that time all positive and supportive of heritage valorisation, and it is notable in contrast that Hinchliffe (1997) lamented (in relation to the failure to secure sufficient political and financial support for a proposal to turn the former USAF Upper Heyford air base into a Cold War museum) that many regarded such sites as suited better to new uses, and that the Cold War was too ambiguous to ‘celebrate’. Meanwhile, writing a decade later, Walley & Strange (2007) claimed that their investigation of the remains of Cold War sites in Yorkshire had still found evidence of ambivalence (and occasional hostility) to the idea that such sites were yet valid subjects of heritage attention.

The last decade has seen the Cold War become embedded more centrally as historic and identity-forming, with some Cold War ‘attractions’ (many of which are based in former bunkers) managing to arise and survive (albeit with some anachronistic flexing to the whim of popular tastes – such as on-site ghost tours, film shows and gigs; see Hermann 2017 for an overview), but these attractions still tend to be military enthusiast-type and collection-led private museums. They often present as a fetishistic celebrations of collected weaponry and materiel. If they aspire to more serious museification bunker sites need both public funding and a political resonance (Farbøl 2015).

The prospects for successful museification at GAMA would seem to be fairly low and receding. A longstanding plan to create an interpretation centre within the airbase's former Control Tower finally came to fruition in 2018, but achieving this took over 10 years. The saga was bedevilled by funding difficulties and ambivalence from local authority stakeholders, even though the Control Tower's cultural ambit had the benefit of being wider than any museification of GAMA could ever be – as the Control Tower offers a community hub, scenic views, authentic fittings that have been less exposed to scrappage and deactivation, and a wider topic focus: ranging across the Common's local and natural history and the romance of aviation heritage, in addition to the base's brief (but high profile and contested) role in the 1980s Euromissiles crisis.

If the prospects for a successful museification are low, then what of the prospects for monumentalisation? The GAMA bunkers are certainly eye-catching, as awe-inspiring as the Orfordness pagodas. But the fact that something looks monumental in scale does not automatically make it a monument in the sense of communicating enduring symbolic meanings. That the site has been designated as a Scheduled Monument since 2003 has only limited effect in communicating to passersby any sense of what the GAMA bunkers were actually for (scheduling only generates this messaging within the scheduling particulars (English Heritage 2003a) – thus targeting it at a professional audience). Scheduling requires that the site owner does not damage the site's key structures, but it does not impose an active obligation to interpret the site for the benefit of those who might encounter it. And if this messaging were somehow imposed upon the owners (which it is not) what would the framing be? As mentioned earlier, the UK does not have the continental tradition of countermonuments. The UK's heritage culture would not readily embrace a scheme to actively curate the GAMA site as a warning monument to the evils of nuclear war, because it is not used to instructional admonishment. Likewise, overtly proclaiming the brooding

GAMA bunkers as a celebration of the ingenuity of military technology or a monument to the winning of the Cold War, would likely enrage peace campaigners as a “masculinist” (Mott & Roberts 2013) celebration of warfare, destruction and brinkmanship. It is likely that, at best, the monumentality of GAMA will remain incidental – as a strange landscape form left open in the landscape inviting viewers to project their own interpretations onto its blank, grassy and concrete grey mounds.

Some monumental coding was trialled at GAMA around the turn of the millennium, but it is unclear whether these framings would work now. Installation and video artists Jane and Louise Wilson (1999) and, separately, photographers Kippen (2001) and Watson (2004), moved away from a concern with the site’s historicity, instead presenting it as a *fin de sec* emblem of a haunted “deactivated landscape” (Watson 2004) . In doing so they came close to temporarily activating the ruination aesthetic of Orfordness’ bunkers at GAMA. The Wilsons accessed GAMA when it was still MoD property and in their resulting work, the 1999 Turner Prize nominated *Gamma*, the sisters explored the atmosphere of the interior of the abandoned bunkers, in doing so inevitably projecting their own meaning making endeavour upon the site. Collings (1999), reviewing *Gamma*, noted how the Wilsons chose to film the bunkers in an alienated, disconnected style – as though with roving security cameras – making it seem like a science fiction film, confounding our expectations because this place was real. He also remarked on the absence of any celebratory ‘the war is over’ air and detected instead the intention to create an unsettling atmosphere, a feeling that something malevolent remained even though the cruise missiles had gone. Thus, whilst enacted within a Cold War bunker, the resulting work spoke more generically to a sci-fi movie-inflected world in which surveillance CCTV and modern ruins were proliferating. The work then, was (inevitably) of its time: as much expressing millennial angst as it is Cold War trauma. But, perhaps here the Wilsons were also accessing that transcultural sense of the bunker’s monumental essence – returning

us to Virilio's first impressions as he entered his first Nazi bunker and felt assailed by trans-cultural memories of "the Egyptian mastabas, the Etruscan tombs, the Aztec structures" (1994, p.11). Certainly, GAMA's bunkers *are* monumental in shape, scale and (for some) feel. They are not normal-looking structures. They do activate archetypes of a fallen civilisation, or nuclear waste repositories. But this effect is best attained from a distance, and in the context of their unattainability behind layers of security fencing. Up close they are empty, these blank functional spaces presenting little to see or interact with.

[Insert Fig. 3]

**Figure 3: GAMA's unattainability behind layers of security fencing**

### **Re-Utilisation**

We live in a society that regards active use as healthy and disuse as dangerous, for the inverse of re-utilisation is an ongoing, unbidden ruination (Bennett 2017c). Since 2003 GAMA has been privately owned. Given that private sector ownership privileges the maximal – profit-generating – re-use of vacant 'brownfield' sites, what requires explaining is why, despite over a decade of actively marketing the site for interior and exterior storage use, re-utilisation of the site has played out so slowly. GAMA's current owner and its professional advisers declined to participate in this research, and they have made little effort to publicise their intentions for the site beyond statements submitted as part of the planning application battles and their marketing particulars. Therefore, this interpretation is based upon those publicly available documents.

As Geesink (2017) shows, bunkers are difficult to repurpose, due to their reinforced walls, buried aspect and their design for exceptional activities. The choice of re-use options is usually framed by what is physically possible, and financially viable. Because of their awkward, monumental-form and novelty, bunker spaces often appear to become museums or



art galleries. But these are ‘front stage’, attraction-type uses which want to be known about and thus have a high profile. Meanwhile, quieter – and more numerous – ‘backstage’ re-uses tend to play upon the ‘security’ features of bunkers as data centres, environmentally-controllable archival stores or hydroponic farms (and in the early 1990s the MoD had assumed mushroom farming to be the most likely after-use for the GAMA bunkers). But not all bunkers are readily suited to ‘backstage’ uses, if the actual space afforded by them is insufficient or unsecure. This has seemingly been the case with GAMA: the site does not present a particularly attractive proposition as storage real estate because the bunkers follow the strange inverted proportions of pyramids (more structural mass than useable inside space), and few of GAMA’s bunkers or igloos now have doors. Nonetheless, marketing brochures produced for the site owner by its property agents (Quintons 2010, 2012, 2015 and 2018) have repeatedly promoted storage (upon its exterior hardstanding and within its interior spaces) as the most viable re-utilisation of the site. In these brochures, consistent with real estate practice, the figures are intended to speak compellingly to the site’s potentiality: “the GAMA site is 76 acres, 20 acres of which are hardstanding. The various buildings present 75,000 sq ft of storage potential”, with storage permutations “from 1,761 – 57,596 Sq Ft” and at an indicative rental “from £5 per sq ft” (all from Quintons 2015, n.p.).

In marketing the site as “probably the most secure above ground storage available” (Quintons 2012 & 2015), the agent has sought to key-into bunkers’ ‘ultra-secure’ storage connotations. But, whilst recently granted planning permission allowing the retrofitting of shutters to the bunkers will somewhat improve their security going forwards, the assuredness of such claims remain questionable given the history of incursions into the site during the Cold War, by scrappers and vandals during the 1990s and currently by urban explorers as detailed in numerous online videos and photo-essays, for example Stray off the Path (2015).

GAMA is owned by Puffin Properties Ltd but managed by Flying A Services Ltd (FAS). In an early planning application, the then operations manager for FAS argued that the site needed planning permission to enable temporary “storage of vehicles, fertiliser, other horticultural materials” on the GAMA site’s exterior hardstanding (Coggan 2005b, p.1). He indicated that FAS was exploring other uses for the site too: such as outdoor markets and rallies, but also revealed that FAS had found no interest in the marketplace for turning the bunkers into a data bunker. In an accompanying “interim” [Heritage] Management Plan (Coggan 2005a) commercial exploitation of the site via these temporary uses was asserted to be essential to fund maintenance, security (in the face of a high level of break-ins) and development of the museum project: “the first phase of a planned restoration of the site that we hope will eventually result in a Cold War museum centred on the Command Bunker” (Coggan 2005a, p.2). At this early point at least, FAS appeared keen to acknowledge the heritage significance of the GAMA site, echoing the sentiment of its Scheduled Monuments designation and assuring the local authority that the physical plan form of GAMA was an internationally important “cultural heritage asset that the operators have no desire to compromise” (Coggan 2005a: 7).

The agents pointed to the site’s heritage significance in their 2012 marketing particulars, by offering an “opportunity to own a site deemed of national importance” (Quintons 2012: n.p.) and the hyperbolic suggestion that the site could be developed as an internationally important tourist attraction, potentially as the: “Number 1 Cold War Attraction in Europe – Stonehenge, a monument with similar status attracts over 1m visitors annually” (Quintons 2012: n.p.). Thus the history of the site and its distinctiveness was seen to add value to it as real estate. It is notable that heritage-related statements have not featured in the marketing particulars issued since that date. Instead, recent years have seen a steady stream of storage-focussed planning applications and appeals (see West Berkshire Council 2019), the present outcome of

which (as at April 2019) can be summarised as follows: the owners currently have *temporary* permission allowing storage of up to 6,900 cars upon GAMA's exterior hardstanding. Additionally, since 2017 they have had *permanent* permission for storage-related use of the interior of the GAMA bunkers and associated outbuildings.

It is clear from the submissions made by English Heritage (and since 2015, Historic England) as heritage consultee, that the granting of permission for temporary exterior (and permanent interior) storage was somewhat reluctantly supported by them in the hope that this would facilitate gainful use of the site, pending a (hoped for) elevation of the site to some higher, more heritage-related use. Furthermore, in explaining their decision to allow shuttering and doors to be retro-fitted to the bunkers, Historic England's Inspector of Ancient Monuments (Lambert 2017) noted that whilst this would be inflicting some harm upon the Scheduled Monument (by making it more difficult to appreciate its original form and function) through a "carefully balanced judgement" they had concluded that the harm would "be balanced by giving the [bunker] structures an active function" (2017, p.2). It was rationalised that permitting "low key storage, which in turn allows for more regular maintenance of the structures, and a more secure future for the structures and the wider site", thereby keeping at bay other commercial functions which might cause "a greater level of harm to the significance of the monument" (2017, p.2). But seemingly there are still limits to how far the heritage authorities are prepared to tolerate harm to GAMA's heritage significance, as shown by the refusal to make the exterior storage permission permanent, or to widen permitted storage to include shipping containers in addition to cars.

But the planning and heritage authorities cannot compel any particular use of the site, all they can do is refuse applications for re-utilisation put to them by the owner, by arguing that they conflict with the site's heritage protection or other valid considerations. Thus, the GAMA site has become the subject of intermittent applications by the owner for permission to use

portions of the site for storage-related purposes, challenging refusals where necessary through the planning appeal process; sometimes successfully, sometimes not. Accordingly, the site has never been fully exploitable by the owner and each attempted partial reutilisation has had to be won through protracted legal proceedings. The Council's planning register (West Berkshire Council 2019) evidences the frustration felt on all sides, but that this state of affairs has played out over such a prolonged period also highlights the absence of a constraint which might otherwise have driven matters to a decisive head more swiftly: as a Scheduled Monument the GAMA site is exempt from business rates (a tax payable based upon the assessed worth of a site, even if it is disused). Normally the cost pressure of liability to pay business rates on an empty site compels a swift reutilisation. But due to this quirk of the system this pressure has been absent at GAMA, with the owners' seeming 'hold and wait' approach being viable here, in a way that might have been unsustainable elsewhere.

Urbanists like Bagaeen and Clark (2016) have been keen to show the redevelopment potential of the post-Cold War 'peace dividend', pointing out the suitability of surplus airfields and that many large military sites have, or could be, readily converted to business parks, airports and housing estates. Such schemes work best for larger sites. GAMA is a small site by comparison and, as already argued, its bunkers are of limited utility. Correspondence disclosed by Historic England to us regarding the circumstances of the MoD's sale of the site in 2003 (Historic England 2019) shows that the MoD involved English Heritage in the evaluation of the bids received, and that the successful bidders were regarded as likely to promote museification as at least part of their plans for the reutilisation of the site. But it also appears that MoD did not impose any obligations for that in the terms of their sale. Instead, future assurance of heritage matters was left for English Heritage (via the protective designation of GAMA as a Scheduled Monument) and the planning system. Hindsight now shows that this alone was insufficient to compel any particular future use of the site by its

private owner. Dobson (2016) argues that at the heart of the debate over the way in which military sites are sold-off, and the extent to which their futures are provided for in those sales, lie competing notions of public good: conflict between a short-term financial return mentality characteristic of the MoD's disposal protocols and a more holistic, longer-term view of the community value of sites and their use-potentialities. Urbanists now argue that community engagement is key to the successful re-use of military sites, and Adam (2016) makes a direct link to heritagisation, by arguing that the heritage-based salvation of military sites will only be sustainable if the site contributes to their identity and sense of place. He argues that wider 'national' ascriptions of heritage value to a site are an abstraction, which cannot alone bring about sustainable preservation (unless a state agency takes on ownership and preservation itself). Having regard to the aftermath of the 2003 sale of the GAMA site, it seems clear that *ensuring* an active heritage-related use at GAMA would have required a greater attention to the longer-term community value of the site and a greater consideration of its link to local identity and sense of place. It would also have needed some degree of public sector financial commitment, something that neither the MoD, English Heritage nor West Berkshire Council seemed able or willing to commit to in 2003.

### **Is GAMA Profaned?**

Revisiting the site in the summer of 2019 it was evident that the intensity of use of the site had changed noticeably from the previous summer, through the arrival of regimented rows of stored cars parked on hardstanding areas inside GAMA compound. But as noted earlier, this storage activity is allowed by a temporary permission. No doubt it represents a lucrative turn of events for the site owner, and clearly marks an intensification of the commercial re-utilisation for the site. But it is a passive use, still emanating an air of deserted stillness and inactivity.

[Insert Fig. 4 here]

**Figure 4: regimented rows of stored cars parked on hardstanding areas inside the GAMA compound**

GAMA appears still trapped in a limbo of sorts – it can neither move unfettered towards new uses, nor achieve its realisation as a heritage attraction. The site’s aspirational future is presently framed as both heritage *and* prosaic re-utilisation (i.e. storage), but neither drivers seem able to fully take control of the site’s destiny, each being held back somewhat by the other.

Viewed through a professional heritage lens, it would be easy to conclude that the site has failed, in that it has not become a heritage attraction. We live in an era of ever-greater heritagisation, but Harrison (2013) has questioned whether this accumulation (and preservation) of heritage is sustainable. And in a reflective moment, even Schofield (1999) whilst remaining a strong advocate for the heritagisation of Cold War sites has acknowledged that heritagisation may perhaps *prevent* a site from moving on, and a trauma being overcome. If we view GAMA in its wider spatial and temporal context, the site is merely a concreted and fenced corner of a former airfield. The runway, fuel lines, bombers and nuclear weapons that previously gave the site its military significance have already gone, and the history of the airfield is the history of a succession of adaptive reuses. Why should that not be GAMA’s fate too? We certainly live in a time where there is an incessant drive to move sites onward into redevelopment, and to quickly turn their past-born functional redundancy into profitable future possibilities. But if we argue it *that way*, then has not the site also failed in terms of it not having yet achieved a full, swords-into-ploughshares, re-utilisation?

We have argued that conventionally the success or failure of demilitarised sites is measured by how swiftly and effectively they reassemble via adaptive reuse, museification or aestheticized ruination. Agamben’s analysis of sacrilisation suggests that any one of these

outturns could be limiting, and not see the full realisation of a place's use-value (or of full acknowledgement of its diverse meanings). Agamben has called for profanation as a counter to sacralisation. Furthermore, Macdonald (2009) has written of how profanation may be an effective strategy in dealing with difficult post-conflict sites (*difficult* because of the history that they embody and/or because of their "dissonance" (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996) – irreconcilable multiple meanings attached to them). She shows strategies of profanation at work in turning former Nazi sites and structures to prosaic uses – such as parts of the expansive Nuremberg rally ground being used as a lorry park and an occasional concert venue. However, the profanation which Macdonald identifies in Nuremberg can be traced to an intentional semantic ruination, GAMA's profanation (most recently through the juxtaposition of the GAMA bunkers and car storage) is the inadvertent by-product of a stalemate between heritagisation and re-utilisation in their battle for control of the site's reassembly phase. The winning out of either at GAMA would see separation (via re-sacralisation) return: active heritagisation freezing GAMA in the past or full re-utilisation extinguishing the significance of the past.

Instead, GAMA's current limbo state seems to embody the virtuous unsettledness that Agamben ascribes to profanation. Disassembly has occurred (i.e. demilitarisation and some degree of ruination) but reassembly is presently uncertain and incomplete. And in the liminal space created by this hiatus GAMA presents as an anomalous, deactivated post-military ruin, sufficiently profaned by weeds, abandonment and prosaic storage uses to have signalled an escape from military sacralisation, but insufficiently converted to the recuperated, monolithic certainty of either a heritage attraction or as commercial real estate.

Instead, partly through its difficult-to-ignore monumental structural form, partly through the persistence and projection upon it of public knowledge and memory, and partly through the continued incursions and online testimonies of urban explorers, GAMA lives on as a

“multivalent” place (Bennett 2013), a space of *uncurated*-heritage: an open, fluid playspace (Edensor 2005, Garrett 2011, Arboleda 2016). Here GAMA presents as an *optional* countermonument, richly signified by some as a totem of the Cold War but ignored by others. Here memorialist engagements rub shoulders with other – more ambivalent– co-option of the GAMA’s iconic bunkers and fencing as multiple backdrops to other uses: dog walking, children’s play, drone flying, bird watching and the temporary storage of cars.

Some might argue that allowing bunkers to withdraw into the background assists the working of the war machine (active bunkers prefer to operate out of sight). It was certainly the case that the peace women sought to foreground the GAMA complex in the 1980s, but they did so in order to achieve its elimination – and they employed profanation tactics in their campaigning. As Cresswell (1996) has shown the essence of the women’s protest was to emphasise their difference to the masculine-military complex they faced, a strategy aimed at inflicting “cognitive confusion” (Snitow 1985, p.47) upon those running the base: or as Schofield and Anderton (2009, p.107) have put it “to subvert the fence; to make it less male, less military, less functional [...] and more ridiculous”.

When the final peace camp at Greenham Common was vacated in 2000, one condition of departure was that a memorial garden (featuring a stone circle) would be created at the former site of Yellow Gate camp (now the entrance to the business park), but there was no call from the peace women for GAMA itself to be preserved as a countermonument to the nuclear arms race. Admittedly the proliferation of Holocaust memorialisation sites since 2000 has potentially increased the viability of museification of other forms of extermination camp – but this study has identified no calls to formally memorialise GAMA in these terms (as a site from which nuclear extermination could have been orchestrated). Conversely, given the site’s association with anti-nuclear protest it seems unlikely that a celebratory attraction (akin to the US museums based in Titan missile launch bunkers) would seem tenable at GAMA.



Demilitarisation is a process whereby swords are turned into ploughshares, but also a condition aspiring to a future in which “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (The Bible (1998), Isaiah 2:4). Given the pervasive cultural saturation by war imagery, and its insinuation into popular entertainment culture (Der Derian 2009), the currently profaned state of GAMA, stuck in limbo between memorialisation and profitable moving-on, and where these militaristic structures are increasingly fading into the cultural background of the common land should perhaps best be seen as a fitting final act of demilitarisation in which the site has indeed become “less military, less functional [...] and more ridiculous” (Schofield and Anderton 2009, p.107).

## **Conclusion**

This article has been an exploration of why, despite its Cold War significance, the GAMA site has not become a heritage attraction. An interpretation of this ‘failure’ has been offered and the suggestion offered (via Agamben) that this outcome may be a success of sorts. But, does it matter that GAMA is not a museum? The question is ultimately a temporal and situational one. What was promised, and to whom was this promise meaningful? It appears that the stakeholders involved in the 2003 sale of the site all thought that a Cold War museumification would arise for at least part of the site. But the case study shows that protective designations and assumptions (and whether about the site’s heritage protection or its commercial opportunities) cannot be guaranteed to bring about those futures simply through the force of their words or aspirations. Attentiveness to the local specifics across a 30 year period shows the fate of at least this transitional site to have been more complex and unpredictable than that. Instead, as we have suggested, the site is an inadvertent countermonument through its embodiment of contemporary ambivalence towards the Cold War and its military remains. It also, in its awkwardness of travel from disassembly to

reassembly, offers up a countermonument that points out the complications inherent in heritagised sites' journeys towards re-utilisation within the UK's planning control system.

But the site's story may not yet be over. As Verschuure-Stuip (2016) argues, the post-military fate of sites plays out across many decades, and GAMA's journey from disassembly to reassembly may simply still be underway. Thus, we must be cautious about viewing the current limbo state as the site's final destination. For example, if planning permission for *permanent* car storage was to be granted then that would see the site tilt substantively towards capitalist re-sacrilisation. Were this to occur the site would become much more valuable, perhaps leading to commercial exploitation winning out against current heritage constraints upon the site. Or conversely, that turn of events might finally leverage a Cold War museum for a portion of the site.

This study has shown the four drivers to be approximate and overlapping – but structuring the account of this iconic bunker site's post-military fate this way has enabled us to show how a site's journey is framed by various competing logics: with all the scope for conflict or reinforcement that that implies. Agamben's profanation call is idealistic – for no site can ever accommodate all potential use calls upon it. But his is an incisive warning against the limiting effects of desiring neat, total solutions (and the limitations in use and meaning that they impose). Leaving open some room for mess, plurality and change (and perhaps even ambiguity) offers something more dynamic and collaborative, in contrast to forcing a single identity onto a site: be this as either a museum, a commercial facility, an aesthetic ruin or a deactivated military installation. GAMA shows that in circumstances where no one driver is able to win-out, a multivalence is enabled within the indeterminacy. Thus – potentially – the sword can simultaneously be a ploughshare, a mirror and an art object all at the same time. But whether multivalent profanation best arrests the risk of a slide back towards the sword of militarism remains to be seen.

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