

More about Walt Patterson

In 1970 I joined the poet Ted Hughes and two of his poet colleagues on their new magazine, the UK's first environment magazine, called *Your Environment*. I soon became its editor. In June 1972 I attended the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, helping the recently-established international organization Friends of the Earth (FOE) to produce an independent conference newspaper, the Stockholm Conference Eco, the first of what was to become a regular feature of major UN conferences.

On our return I was invited to join the full-time staff of FOE in London. With my wife Cleone's backing I became FOE's first 'energy campaigner', in the tiny office in Poland St, Soho. With my American friend Amory Lovins I helped to launch the first public opposition to nuclear power in the UK, in a campaign that eventually thwarted plans by the Central Electricity Generating Board to order 32 new nuclear power stations in the following decade. We then challenged plans by British Nuclear Fuels Ltd to build a new 'reprocessing plant' at what was then called Windscale. A two-year campaign culminated in the 'Windscale inquiry' in 1977. Unfortunately the inquiry inspector ignored the FOE case and gave the go-ahead to what eventually became 'THORP', the vast radioactive white elephant at the site in northwest England that BNFL renamed Sellafield. THORP's track record has since comprehensively vindicated FOE.

After Windscale I stood down from FOE to become an independent analyst and writer on energy and environment, contributing to the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, *New Scientist*, the US magazine *Environment*, and many other periodicals, as well as two reports for the US Library of Congress and evidence to official hearings in the UK and elsewhere. I wrote not only about nuclear affairs but about coal technology and other energy and environmental issues. My book *Nuclear Power* (Penguin 1976-86) became my calling card, eventually selling some 130 000 copies in English, and also appearing in five foreign languages. Other books included *The Fissile Society: Energy, Electricity and the Nuclear Option* (Earth Resources Research 1977); *The Plutonium Business and the Spread of the Bomb* (Paladin 1984); and *Going Critical: An Unofficial History of British Nuclear Power* (Paladin 1985).

Through the years I appeared at and testified at a number of official inquiries into nuclear proposals, including the McCarthy commission in New Zealand and the Cluff Lake inquiry in Canada, at the publication of the report of the the Fox commission in Australia, and less formally in Norway, Denmark, Germany, France, Japan, the US, Canada and Hong Kong, among others. In 1978, with Amory Lovins and our Norwegian friend Paul Hofseth, I helped to set up what became the Gorleben International Review, an expert critique of plans for what would have been the world's largest civil nuclear installation in what was then Federal Germany. In the shadow of the Three Mile Island accident in the US on 28 March 1979, the premier of Lower Saxony rejected the Gorleben plan. In 1983 I testified at the inquiry into the proposed Sizewell B nuclear station.

As a nuclear specialist I gave many briefings and made numerous appearances on radio and television in the UK and abroad. In 1984-5 I acted as series advisor to the award-winning BBC drama series *Edge of Darkness*, still remembered as a television landmark.

In 1985-86 I acted as specialist advisor to the House of Commons Select Committee on Environment for their study on *Radioactive Waste* (HMSO 1986), published in February 1986. The months later, on 26 April, the operators blew up Chernobyl 4. For many months thereafter I was caught up in a headlong succession of international media and conference appearances, commentary and writing.

In 1987 Financial Times Business Information published my report on *Advanced Coal-use Technology*, the first of three, each selling over 400 copies at a price of some £400. Into the mid-1990s I was a regular speaker and participant in coal conferences around the world, until I realized that most coal producers had no interest in promoting improved use of coal.

In 1988-89 I joined a team preparing a television documentary series called 'The Energy Alternative', commissioned by Channel 4. My book *The Energy Alternative* (Boxtree 1990) became the basis of the series. In 1991 the paperback edition was chosen one of the 'Green Books of the Year'.

In 1989, as the Thatcher government set about selling off the electricity system, the City of London left no doubt that it would not buy the nuclear power stations. Unless they were removed from the sale it would fail. On 9 November 1989 the government withdrew the remaining nuclear stations from the sale. That evening I was in the BBC Newsnight studio, preparing to talk about the collapse of the nuclear dream, when word came through that they had opened the Berlin wall. Six weeks later, at the climax of a remarkable year, Romania overthrew and executed its brutal dictator Ceausescu. In the turbulent months that followed, my wife Cleone began corresponding with Romanians who became, and remain, good friends. We exchanged visits, and Cleone and I fell in love with Romania and its kind, courageous and funny people. I talked so much about the country that in 1991 my friend Jonathan Stern, head of the Energy and Environmental Programme at Chatham House, invited me to become an associate fellow of Chatham House and undertake a project on Romania. I accepted, and have been at Chatham House ever since.

In 1993 I became senior research fellow. I made some twenty trips to Romania, learning Romanian and working with senior Romanian colleagues and friends to produce a report that became a book entitled *Rebuilding Romania: Energy, Efficiency and the Economic Transition*. It was launched at Chatham House in 1994, with a lecture by the President of Romania, Ion Iliescu. The Romanian version was published in 1995 and sold out immediately. Since that time I have visited Romania many times, advising and speaking at several national energy conferences and other gatherings.

My work on coal technology prompted a growing interest in biomass as a fuel, especially for electricity generation, culminating in a Chatham House book entitled *Power From Plants*, published in 1994.

By this time my various specialist interests, in nuclear power, coal, biomass and other renewable energy technologies, were converging on electricity as a research topic in its own right. I began work on a book to be called *Transforming Electricity*. By the time it was published, in 1999, much of what had been speculative in early drafts was already happening. *Transforming Electricity* has since been published also in Polish, Romanian and Chinese.

Transforming Electricity prompted the Swedish-Swiss engineering giant ABB to enlist me as an external participant in the company's year-long strategic appraisal in 1999-2000. ABB sold off both

its nuclear division and its large-scale turbines, refocusing its activities on smaller-scale generation, and innovative network and control technologies.

During 1999 I wrote for Chatham House a 'millennium essay' entitled *Running The Planet*, published in November 1999 as a supplement to the Chatham House monthly *The World Today*. I also began working on a follow-up to *Transforming Electricity*, that I called *Keeping The Lights On*. A lengthening succession of papers were published on the Chatham House website and are now also available here in my own archive under *Energy Futures*. The project culminated in my thirteenth book, *Keeping The Lights On: Towards Sustainable Electricity*, published in 2007.

At the turn of the millennium I retired from the full-time staff of Chatham House, but have stayed on as an associate fellow of what we now call the Energy, Environment and Development Programme. I am now studying the practical policy implications of the analysis developed in *Keeping The Lights On*.

In 2000 the Institute of Energy, now the Energy Institute, awarded me their annual Melchett Medal. I gave my medal lecture, entitled *Energy 21: Making The World Work*, at the London Planetarium. You can now find it here, under *Towards A Worldview*. I also became a fellow of the Energy Institute. In November 2004 *Scientific American* magazine, in their annual *Scientific American 50*, named me 'energy policy leader' for my advocacy of decentralized electricity. In 2006 the Science Policy Research Unit at the University of Sussex made me a visiting fellow. I am also on the board of advisors of Climate Change Capital in London, and on the editorial board of *European Energy Review*, published in The Netherlands.

In February 2007 Cleone, my beloved wife of forty years, died, leaving me, our daughters Perdy and Tabby and Cleone's many friends bereft. But the work Cleone inspired, fostered and shared, including this website, goes on.

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