

# Robinson in Ruins

35mm to DCP, 101 mins, 1.78:1, colour,

is a journey by a wandering, erratic scholar, through landscapes in the south of England, mostly in Oxfordshire and Berkshire.

It begins with a series of captions: 'A few years ago, while dismantling a derelict caravan in the corner of a field, a recycling worker found a box containing 19 film cans and a notebook / Researchers have arranged some of this material as a film, narrated by their institution's co-founder, with the title / *Robinson in Ruins* / The wandering it describes began on 22 January 2008.'



The narration, written to accompany the edited picture, begins: 'When a man called Robinson was released from Edgcott open prison, he made his way to the nearest city, and looked for somewhere to haunt'. This Robinson 'was equipped with an ancient ciné camera, with which he made images of his everyday surroundings'; 'he believed ... he could communicate with a network of non-human intelligences ... determined to preserve the possibility of life's survival on the planet'. 'From a nearby car park, he surveyed the centre of the island on which he was shipwrecked: "The location," he wrote, "of a *Great Malady*, that I shall dispel, in the manner of Turner, by making *picturesque views*, on journeys to sites of scientific and historic interest."



The narrator's 'late beloved' had been Robinson's co-researcher in the projects described in the films *London* (1994) and *Robinson in Space* (1997), narrated by the late Paul Scofield in the character of the co-researcher. The latter project was curtailed when Robinson disappeared, towards the end of 1995, in the vicinity of a military installation near the England–Scotland border. His former companion later met Vanessa Redgrave's character 'at a conference about documentary film, in China'; they co-founded the research organisation that has assembled *Robinson in Ruins* from the found footage, assisted by the information in the notebook.

The cinematography began on 22 January 2008, the day after the first of many global stock market crashes during that year, and continued until the middle of November; its period includes most of the principal events of the 2008 banking crisis and ends just after the US elections.



The 'wandering' encountered several locations that demonstrate the past and continuing presence of the United States military in the UK and the hiving off of strategic public-sector assets to private-sector, often US/UK-owned, consortia, until it reached what seemed an appropriate destination: a deserted village, the site of an agrarian rebellion against land enclosure in the 16th century and, nearby, a present-day commercial satellite communications station, the scene of the gruesome execution of some of the 16th-century rebels.



Vanessa Redgrave's narration includes references to the deepening economic crisis, food and energy security, climate change and mass-extinction. Despite all these, the film manages to reach an optimistic conclusion.

Patrick Keiller August 2010

First exhibited in the 67th Venice Film Festival; released in the UK 19 November 2010

The Narrator: Vanessa Redgrave

Photographed, edited and written by Patrick Keiller

Script editor: Julie Norris

Sound editors: Larry Sider, Chu-Li Shewring

Executive producer: Keith Griffiths

Co-researchers: Patrick Wright, Professor of Modern Cultural Studies, Nottingham Trent University; Doreen Massey, Emeritus Professor of Geography, the Open University; Matthew Flintham, doctoral researcher, Royal College of Art.

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World sales: HanWay Films Ltd  
contact: Fabien Westerhoff

+44 [0]20 7290 0750

[fw@hanwayfilms.com](mailto:fw@hanwayfilms.com)

UK distribution: British Film Institute

+44 [0]20 7957 8935

[bookings.films@bfi.org.uk](mailto:bookings.films@bfi.org.uk)



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