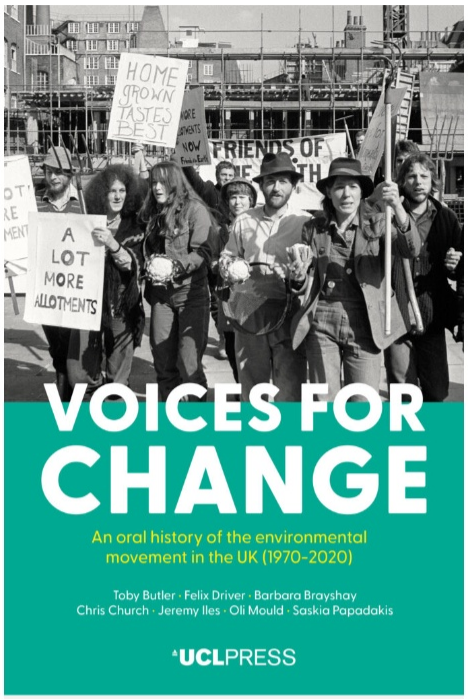
Voices for Change

An oral history of the environmental movement in the UK, 1970-2020



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Voices for Change is a groundbreaking history of environmental activism across the four nations of the UK since the early 1970s, revealed in first-hand testimony by some of those who were most closely involved. It highlights the lived experiences of generations of environmental campaigners engaged in a wide variety of protest, projects and policy during this period, from grassroots actions in local communities to the leadership of major national organisations. The book draws on a unique archive of 100 in-depth life-history interviews with environmental campaigners involved in action on a wide range of concerns, from conservation and transport to energy and climate change. It situates the experience of activism biographically and historically, exploring the role of family, region, class, ethnicity, gender and generation in the lives of participants in the key campaigns of the period. The voices of campaigners whose contributions have never been widely recognised appear here, alongside some of the most high-profile, including Jonathon Porritt, Caroline Lucas, George Monbiot, Jane Goodall and Swampy. There are also links to hundreds of freely available audio clips and associated transcripts from the interview archives. Together, these voices highlight the achievements and the challenges of activism across more than 50 years, revealing diverse and unsung stories from the movement. Through this focus on life stories, the book provides a vital resource for today's environmental activists, throwing new light on the varied origins, forms and impacts of their campaigns.

'This groundbreaking book weaves together the life stories of environmental activists in the UK to narrate a unique modern history of a hugely successful movement for change. Their voices are woven into thought-provoking themes like mobilisation, diversity and how activists sustain themselves, demonstrating the overlapping legacies of the last 50 years of environmentalism. Understanding this history is crucial in generating hope for our contemporary environmental battles. I urge everyone to read and listen to the voices and lessons shared in this fabulous and inspiring book.'

Jenny Pickerill, University of Sheffield

'Astonishing in its range and scope, this all-embracing and long-overdue history of UK environmental activism in all its modes draws on an impressively diverse array of life stories. The vibrant voices we hear help us make sense of a complex, multi-layered movement over five decades which has brought us to our vital awareness of the climate emergency.'

Rob Perks, former Lead Curator of Oral History, British Library

Toby Butler (Author)

Toby Butler is a public historian and Head of the Immersive Learning Centre at Birkbeck, University of London. Over the last 25 years he has devised numerous collaborative and community oral history projects in the UK, India and the USA. Books include The 1943 Bethnal Green Disaster: an Oral History and Stories from Small Museums. He joined Royal Holloway in 2022 to co-ordinate the project that led to this book.

Felix Driver (Author)

Felix Driver is Professor of Human Geography at Royal Holloway, University of London. His books include Geography Militant, Imperial Cities, Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire, Hidden Histories of Exploration and Mobile Museums. He is an Honorary Research Associate at Kew Gardens.

Barbara Brayshay (Author)

Barbara Brayshay is a geographer with an academic background in environmental science and bioarchaeology, with posts at Royal Holloway, the University of Manchester, the University of Sheffield and the University of Wales (Lampeter). She is a Director of Livingmaps Network and a member of the Climate Choir Movement.

Chris Church (Author)

Chris Church is Director of Community Environment Associates, specialising in climate change and related issues. He has worked in the environmental sector for over 30 years with NGOs including Friends of the Earth, the National Trust, Surfers Against Sewage and Community Energy England, and has advised National Lottery programmes on Local Food and Access to nature.

Jeremy Iles (Author)

Jeremy Iles has had a long career in environmental campaigning from 1983, including instigating the Urban Agriculture Consortium, 15 years as CEO at the Federation of City Farms, and earlier spells with Sustrans, the London Wildlife Trust, and Friends of the Earth. He is a folk musician, and Yacht Master.

Oli Mould (Author)

Oli Mould is Professor of Human Geography at Royal Holloway, University of London. His research explores urban activism, creativity and social justice. He has written four books, Urban Subversion and the Creative City, Against Creativity, Seven Ethics Against Capitalism and Postcapitalist Cities.

Saskia Papadakis (Author)

Saskia Papadakis is a researcher and activist with interests in race, place and identity. Currently Honorary Research Associate at Royal Holloway, University of London, Saskia's first book, Resisting the North-South divide: Race, migration and identity in postcolonial England, is forthcoming with Manchester University Press.

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