

Documenting the Deindustrial Revolution

The decline of British heavy industry in the 1970s led to labor disputes and high unemployment in the early 1980s. As the country prioritized modern technologies and greater efficiency, photographers recorded the communities, structures, and ways of life that were under threat or disappearing. Graham Smith and Vanley Burke portrayed people they had known for decades, while Chris Killip, Sirikka-Liisa Kontinen, and Gilles Peress undertook long-term projects to create intimate yet often bleak photographs of life on the margins of society. Paul Graham and John Davies explored England's uneasy embrace of the future by showing the people and places being left behind. While these photographers held no real hope of inspiring change, they shared an earnest concern for who and what was being lost as the nation modernized.