



The stories that built an industry and the ones still waiting to be told

As offshore wind reshapes the global energy landscape, the people building it remain largely unseen. Drawing on first-hand experience offshore and a six-decade visual archive of the North Sea energy sector, Ashley Linford of CHPV Offshore Film and Photography explores why authentic storytelling matters, not only to document the energy transition but to inspire the next generation who will carry it forward.



In 25 years, people will want to know how the energy transition was actually built. We're making that record now.

A moment that doesn't come around twice

When I zoom out and step back to look at what's being built, the scale of infrastructure, the pace of the transition and the number of lives being impacted by this industry, I feel a real passion to document it properly. Moments like this don't come around twice.

Consider what's currently under construction or in planning across UK waters alone: dozens of offshore wind farms, installation vessels mobilised around its coast and thousands of workers employed directly and across the supply chain.

Offshore wind farms around the UK will generate enough electricity to power millions of homes. And yet the day to day reality of building these, from the early morning mobilisations, the precision lifts, to the competence of the people working within it, still rarely gets explored through meaningful storytelling.

In 25 years, when someone wants to understand how Britain decarbonised its grid, the archive we build now is what they'll have to work with.

Relatable stories are sitting inside this industry right now that the world hasn't heard. The crane operator who spent 30 years at sea. The welder who retrained from a completely different sector. And probably the most important story right now is the young technician who grew up in a coastal town and never imagined they'd have a career like this on their doorstep.

These aren't peripheral stories. They are the story of the energy transition.

I think about a crane operator I worked alongside on the Kraken. I called him my offshore dad at the time. He took me under his wing from day one and shaped my understanding of what it means to work offshore.

His story, and the stories of thousands like him, represent something irreplaceable. And in the next ten to fifteen years, as that generation moves on, those stories go with them.

The people on the other side of the horizon

New wind farms around the UK will power homes.

And I sometimes wonder how many of those people, in those homes, have ever really thought about where that electricity comes from, or who spent their career making it happen.

The question is whether, as the scale of what's being built continues to grow, we find ways to bring more people with us. From communities onshore to the next generation of workforce.

The North Sea doesn't have a monopoly on these stories, but it does have something distinct: depth.

What's happening in offshore energy right now is genuinely revolutionary. And most of it is invisible or unrelatable to the people it will affect most.

I've been on both sides of it: installing turbines as a young man and now telling its stories through film and photography. The gap between what this industry is achieving and what the world understands about it is one of the most significant opportunities I can see at the moment.

I spent the better part of a decade as part of crews building it. As one of the first four trainees of Seajacks, now Cadeler, I worked my way up aboard the Kraken, installing offshore wind turbines around the UK in the North Sea. What I noticed is that there's a way these sites operate. There's a culture and a rhythm, and I realise now that much of that story is still waiting to be told.

That's what eventually pulled me away and towards the camera. And it's what now drives me as the person taking CHPV Offshore Film and Photography into the next chapter of its more than 60 years of history.

Sixty years of history

CHPV has been documenting the North Sea energy industry since the early gas platforms of the 1960s.

The archive we hold, approximately 2.5 million images and thousands of hours of footage, is a visual record of an industry that has shaped Britain's energy landscape across six decades.

The platforms. The first offshore wind installations. The people, the vessels and the milestones that most of the world never saw.

That archive is a responsibility I take seriously.

But more than that, it's a reminder of what consistent, long-term documentation actually produces.

Every project we shoot today is adding to a record that will matter in 25 years, to researchers, to families and to anyone who wants to understand how the energy transition was actually built.

Every day, on every project, we are creating a little bit of history.

The North Sea has over 60 years of offshore experience behind it, from oil and gas through to offshore wind. The engineering culture, safety evolution and workforce transition here are genuinely unique.

Many of the North Sea's most powerful stories aren't just of local interest. They're the origin story of a global industry.

And right now, with that industry expanding at pace worldwide, there's an opportunity to export not just technology and expertise, but the human narrative that gives it meaning.

The lesson oil and gas left behind

The oil and gas industry has a complicated visual legacy. Some of it is genuinely powerful. There's a body of documentary and photographic work from the North Sea platforms in the 1970s and 1980s that captures something real.

But much of it defaulted to the industrial and the functional: the asset, the process, the output. The human story was often secondary.

Offshore wind has a chance to do something different moving forward.

It's an industry with a purpose narrative already built in. The energy transition, climate and legacy all create an opportunity to lead with people.

Human storytelling can help inspire the future workforce through the amazing projects happening around the UK and the real difference they are making.

The workforce that hasn't arrived yet

The untold stories aren't only about the past. They're also about the future, specifically the generation of workers who will build and operate the next phase of offshore wind capacity and who haven't yet decided this industry is for them.



You can't aspire to something you've never seen.

For many people, offshore energy is still something seen in the distance, rather than understood through the people and stories behind it.

I've spoken to young people in coastal communities near Lowestoft and elsewhere who simply don't know this industry exists as a career pathway for them.

Not because the jobs aren't there, but because no one has shown them they belong in it and what it looks like to live it.

A carefully made documentary series or even a single honest portrait of someone who grew up nearby and now works offshore can move people in a way that a LinkedIn post never quite manages.

Documentation isn't just a record. It's a tool, a community bridge and an act of pride on behalf of an industry that has earned it.

I genuinely believe that when young people see what a career in this industry actually looks like, the sense of purpose it gives and the scale of what they'd be part of, many of them will want in.

The job is extraordinary. But many simply don't see themselves in it. Yet.

What next?

The next few years of visual communication in energy won't be defined by better cameras. It will be defined by a better understanding of audiences, of projects and above all, of people.

Long and short form storytelling. Cinematic documentary series. Immersive formats that let future workers or the wider public step inside an offshore installation and feel it.

These won't replace technical communication. They sit alongside it to build connection and trust.

And as content generated by AI becomes more accessible and generic, the importance of genuinely human storytelling will become more valuable, not less.

Authenticity will become the premium.

And this industry has an almost limitless supply of it, in its people, its environments and the sheer scale of what's quietly happening every day.

I always say statements inform, but stories connect.

And being able to take important statements or messages and turn them into something relatable is key.

A net zero commitment is important. The engineer working to deliver it is relatable. A safety record matters. The technician returning home safely to their family makes it human.

This industry is making history.

Let's not miss the opportunity to tell it in the best possible way, to impact our future colleagues, our future neighbours and the future of this planet.

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