

## **Peter Mitchell: Nothing Lasts Forever**

### **Francis Gavan, Ghost Train Ride, Woodhouse Moor, Leeds, Spring 1986**

In this colour photograph, a middle-aged white man stands in front of a packed-up fairground ride.

Filling the centre of the image is a mysterious structure about four metres tall and twelve metres long. The long side of the structure faces us, with a huge white skull mounted on the short side, to the right – the 'head' end. We gradually realise that underneath it all is an HGV, out of which the fairground ride is unpacked, while the truck itself is concealed with a patchwork of wooden boards, mainly painted red.

In front of the truck, a low platform of wooden decking stands on rough ground. Curving metal rails for the ghost train are attached to the platform and steel cables run from it up to the main structure. In the distance, there is a row of neat grey houses and a church tower. The sky is cloudy.

Francis stands near the 'head' end of the looming structure, beside a large black tire with red trim. He's middle-aged, heavily built, with a bristly moustache. He's wearing black work clothes and boots, with a red rain jacket on top, the hood pulled up. His hands are by his sides, his expression sceptical, a half-smile on his lips.

Sheets of blue plywood wrap around the upper level of the structure. On the long side, the word GHOST is spelled out in hand-painted red capital letters, with a string of red lightbulbs fixed above. Beneath this sign is another hand-painted board about a metre and a half square that shows a skeleton ghost emerging from a grave beside

a church, and a bat flying across the moon. It's entitled HAUNTED GRAVEYARD.

Alongside the painting, what appears to be a warning to customers is painted in smaller yellow capital letters, but only half of it is in position. The way the words have been cut off adds a sinister touch of drama: NOTICE ... Please ...Your ... Before Ent...You Ha... Been Wa...

To the left of this notice, there is a gap filled with black tarpaulins and metal bars – folded away parts of the ghost ride. More red wooden boards hide the truck, with a tyre and a driver's cab just visible.

Mounted at the head end of the truck, there is a flat metal cut out of a skull, two metres tall, with light fittings set in the eye sockets. Beneath the skull, there's a transparent red plastic hood for an unknown purpose. Perhaps it swings open to become the skull's gaping maw and punters walk inside to board the ghost train? But at the moment, sky and clouds are visible through the skull's eye and nose sockets, and a light drizzle seems to be falling on Francis, the proprietor of the ghost train.