England is a landscape of housing estates peppered with tower blocks and mock vernacular gables, of Victorian sprawl alongside private closes, and of new towns budding out of the old. These places of habitation are joined by motorways and driveways, and overlooked by angular-steepled churches with abstract stained glass, domed mosques and Thai-style temples. Aeroplanes stack above, waiting to descend. The post-war social landscape of England represents at every turn a distinct departure from historical form, and yet at the same time, as many continuities in old forms, old concerns and old habits. The level of change impressed on England’s landscape in the post-war period is evident in the generations of residential building or expansion and the increasing physical mobility of its citizens. Cities and towns have morphed into shapes inconceivable in pre-war years and the separation of rural and urban has become blurred and muddled as commuters flit between them. Few spaces in the country are unaffected by the sound of the internal combustion engine, and automobile touring has given way to the steady acceptance of the car as personal space, an extension of home and one of life’s necessities.

Post-war suburbs and the new urbanism: Lincoln’s Ermine estates

David Walsh
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Lincoln’s post-war suburbs are often overlooked. However, these areas are important for residents and worthy of attention as part of people’s heritage and as illustrative of life lived towards the end of the 20th century. Given Lincoln’s limited size, there should be scope for residents and visitors alike to appreciate all 2,000 years of the city’s history, including its more recent developments.

Lincoln Townscape Assessment

The Lincoln Townscape Assessment (LTA) is a three-year characterisation project funded by English Heritage and the City of Lincoln Council. The LTA will assess the ‘inherited’ townscape of the whole city (not just the earlier, ‘historic’ areas). It will look at the development of its current character, its urban form (including aspects considered in current urban design) and local people’s views. The council will use the resulting characterisation to provide a context for new developments and to help foster a sense of place, identity and community.

Current urban-design thinking is concerned with creating lively places with distinctive character which are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. The principles for achieving this include (after CABE 2000): character (including local identity); continuity and enclosure (defining the enclosure of spaces, and public/private spaces); quality of the public realm (attractive, safe, effective public spaces and routes); ease of movement (good permeability and connectivity); legibility (recognisable routes and landmarks); and adaptability and diversity (mix of uses and developments, including building types).

Lincoln has recently undergone an Enquiry by Design exercise facilitated by the Prince’s Foundation for the Built Environment to produce a city-centre masterplan. To understand the context of the city centre the surrounding urban and suburban areas were also addressed. The LTA will now characterise each of these areas in more detail, providing an opportunity for specific and accessible information to help understand the current townscape, and inform any future interventions. It also provides an opportunity to analyse what existing townscapes have to offer as sustainable neighbourhoods. It should be noted that in Lincoln the post-war suburbs are not covered by any heritage designations.
The Ermine estates

The Ermine East and Ermine West estates are situated between radial roads heading north from the city centre. They were built by the council, mainly in the 1950s, as part of the city’s post-war development, by an engineer-led team. The estates constitute 9 per cent of the built-up area of Lincoln and span wards that are identified as containing areas of multiple deprivation.

The Ermine estates display many of the characteristics of immediate post-war design and development. The majority of housing is of traditional height and has a broad uniformity of form and style, mostly plain two-storey semi-detached houses and rows of houses in red/brown brick with shallow pitched roofs of concrete tiles. The houses have limited decorative detailing and shallow curved, or flat, hoods over doorways. This housing, with private front and back gardens, is on a more domestic scale than the post-war high-rise housing that often attracts more attention. It continues the tradition of inter-war semi-detached houses, although in a much plainer style.

However, there is a surprising variety of building types. There are bungalows, three-storey apartment blocks with concrete balconies, sometimes in long rows marking the edges of the estates, pre-fabricated ‘Cornish’ houses and ‘Hawksley’ bungalows; and one high-rise apartment block, Trent View. At the time of building this variety of housing types provided an appropriate balance between cost and housing density, as well as meeting wider ‘market’ demands. Nearly all the residential streets are overlooked by doors and windows, which provides an aspect of safety that is welcomed by residents.

The streets are sinuous, with a loose geometric pattern. There are many cul-de-sacs in Ermine West, and more curved and looping streets in Ermine East. Both estates have some large awkwardly shaped urban blocks, especially around their edges, which together with the sinuous street pattern inhibit permeability and movement across the area. The townscape can be quite disorientating for visitors. Through-traffic has also been segregated from the housing, as was the intention at the time, and access to the estates is very limited from nearby main roads.

A design feature of the post-war period, and today, is that civic buildings/amenities are at road junctions and so mainly on the periphery of estates. However, the civic buildings of the Ermine estates almost invariably sit in the middle of large individual plots, mostly behind car parking. This results, in part, in the absence of a ‘town square’ in either estate. Although there are some shops there is little commercial activity.

The public spaces include many ‘greens’ with houses facing on to them, a characteristic of some post-war estate designs. Today the greens have often been reduced by parking spaces and very few incorporate a shop or civic building. In some
areas long stretches of security fencing divide the houses from areas of open ground (now in poor condition). The main private spaces within the estates are front and back gardens.

There are many wide verges, often in odd curved shapes to accommodate the street pattern. These may have been designed by the engineers to produce good sight-lines for traffic. There are areas of garaging, now often unkempt and in awkward locations, which also reflect the response of the period to increased car use.

The Ermine estates are of their time, though with earlier landscape elements that have survived and contribute to their current character. For example, the estates are named after the Roman Ermine Street. Their northern boundary is defined by the city boundary, in some places marked by traces of a medieval ditch and bank. The street pattern is not influenced by post-enclosure field boundaries, probably because the area was developed as one unit by the council. However, former field boundaries mark some of the edges of the housing developments.

**Character and community**

The characterisation of the Ermine estates shows the importance of fully understanding local character and providing detailed information in the context of current urban design approaches. It shows, for example, that the lack of a ‘town square’ detracts from neighbourhood centres, even where civic buildings are near junctions. It is not possible to dismiss existing post-war suburbs as offering little for sustainable towns, and in some areas the similarity in design approaches from the two periods is illuminating. As current design guidelines suggest, there is no blueprint: each area requires its own solution.

The LTA has completed a draft characterisation of the Ermine estates. The next, and most important, step is to see what local residents think. This may be done as part of the Local Strategic Partnership’s Neighbourhood Management Approach. Consultation already carried out for the LTA in other areas has shown that local people are enthused by focusing on the character of their area, however modern, and understand its contribution to defining future changes and taking locally held views into account.

**Reference**


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**New townscapes of South Yorkshire: housing from the 1960s to the 21st century**

Dan Ratcliffe
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The ongoing South Yorkshire Historic Environment Characterisation (HEC) Project was initiated to provide decision-makers with a comprehensive account of a complex and highly urbanised environment. The urban area of this former metropolitan county has expanded hugely since the early 19th century with many earlier villages and market centres, as well as much former countryside, engulfed by the rapidly growing centres of Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield. Perhaps as a consequence of this rapid expansion, the area has not generally been treated as one with historic interest, being understood rather as a self-consciously modern environment. The emerging findings of this project are helping to challenge this simplification.

**South Yorkshire HEC**

The HEC project records areas of common historic form and date within the present landscape, as well as the legibility of earlier landscape characteristics. The resulting database is being used to define and describe particular landscape trends, such as the development of suburban areas or the late 20th-century regeneration of post-industrial land. The following case studies describe two characteristic types of high-density housing built in Sheffield since the mid-20th century. They show how the project can assess time depth in the modern landscape and highlight the historical processes operating on landscapes of late 20th-century origin, as well as legitimising these recent buildings as objects of study and with evidential significance in their own right. This will provide closer understanding of the way changes in the physical environment reflect underlying social trends – such as the increased enclosure and surveillance of modern developments which may in part reflect the shift towards privatised rather than public housing provision.

**Municipal housing 1955–70**

Analysis of HEC data for areas developed or redeveloped between 1955 and 1970 shows a clear trend towards municipal rather than private building. This period is characterised by very large areas (50–200 hectares) of system-built housing, mostly blocks of flats (both high and low rise) around which large communal spaces were
provided (rather than the private enclosed gardens provided at earlier municipal estates of the 1930s).

HEC data record the relationship between these housing landscapes and the earlier landscapes they replaced. A clear typological difference can be shown between those built on the sites of earlier terraced and back-to-back housing and those built over rural land, providing a glimpse of values ascribed to those landscapes at the time of their development. The inner-city estates tended to remove all physical traces of the earlier streets, leaving very little within the developments to give historic legibility, while in areas of countryside more use was made of existing landscape features. For example, within the Gleadless Estate, on the south side of Sheffield, trees, hedgerows, ancient woodlands and even a cruck-built vernacular farm building were incorporated into the new design, giving the estate a general grade of ‘fragmentary to partial’ legibility of earlier landscape character.

In the long term, the characterisation project provides a baseline for more detailed study of these estates and for deeper analysis of the radical new ways of living that these new physical environments provided for their residents. In the short term, the project provides an accessible evidence base for forward-planning exercises concerning their future. One unit of this type is already designated as a heritage asset (the Grade II*-listed Park Hill Flats); current and recent drives to demolish or renovate and re-launch many of these estates may require us to look in further detail at their preservation or recording.

City-living apartments since 1990

The most recent residential type identifiable from HEC data within Sheffield comprises high-density ‘gated communities’. This type represents the vast majority of both high- and low-rise apartment buildings developed in the city since the 1990s. The type initially appears diverse in character, including both new-build apartments and the reuse of existing buildings, giving a range of legibility of former environments. This variety derives from the fact that these developments are often sited on land formerly occupied by obsolete industrial or institutional buildings. However, the developments share characteristics in the ways in which private, public and communal space are laid out. Access to most of these developments is generally separated from the public street-network by a communal area to which access is secured (normally by a physical boundary such as a gate), with activity within the area kept under surveillance by private security firms via CCTV.

Analysis of the small but growing number of these developments shows that a significant proportion retain architectural features from earlier environments (for example, fragments of historic breweries and cutlery workshops, and the frontage of an early 20th-century cinema). In addition, some developments reuse large parts of earlier historic environments. In Sheffield, examples include a listed former workhouse and later hospital complex where the boundary wall forms the basis of the gated complex and the former cell blocks have been redeveloped as luxury apartment buildings!

Gleadless Rollestone: Gleadless Estate (built from 1955) retains medieval woodlands and fragments of earlier strip-field boundaries. Building types were designed according to their locations on the steep valley sides. © Aerofilms A153538 (1965)
These are privately funded developments and it is interesting to speculate how much of the retention and reuse seen within them is the result of a perceived heritage dividend and how much is the result of dialogue with the local council and national heritage agencies. Some of the retained elements are listed or lie within Conservation Areas; others are simply local landmark buildings.

By looking holistically at the historic environment as a phenomenon that exists throughout the landscape rather than in pockets of special interest or ‘heritage ghettos’, and by including the contemporary, we hope to deliver a more inclusive and responsive account of its character – one which takes account of the heritage of all periods.

For more information on the project please visit: http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/?pgid=32282&fs=s

The car: an agent of transformation
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The car is responsible for some of the greatest transformations in the modern landscape. This article looks at the changes in the West Midlands brought about by the contraction in car-making capacity and the visual impact of the conflicting demands of speeding up and slowing down traffic flow.

Car-making
The decline of the British motor industry is well documented. Although the numbers of cars manufactured or assembled in England today are not much lower than those produced by the industry in what is perceived to be its heyday, the number of plants in the traditional home of car-making, the West Midlands, has declined. Instead, the greenfield sites established by Honda in Swindon, Nissan in Sunderland and Toyota in Derby account for much current production.

The collapse of MG Rover in 2005 and the subsequent closure of the vast Longbridge plant attracted much publicity. Although Nanjing Automotive have announced the resumption of car production on part of the site, the physical impact of the closure is enormous. The proposals for the Area Action Plan prepared by Birmingham City Council and Bromsgrove District Council envisage the replacement of 30 hectares of factory buildings by housing, mixed-use development and a technology park. Nanjing will retain only 42 hectares in the centre of the former Austin site; the North, New West, East and Lower South Works are all in the process of demolition. The Lower South Works includes the site of the original factory established by Herbert Austin in 1906 although no fabric from that period remains. The loss of so much of the plant has great significance for many Birmingham residents, for whom ‘the Austin’ has been a familiar landmark.

The closures of the Peugeot plant at Ryton and the Jaguar plant at Browns Lane represent the end of large-scale car production in Coventry, the centre of the industry since its inception in the 1890s. Less publicised is the closure of many smaller plants producing components, which has also impacted on the landscape. For example, the Peugeot plant at Stoke on the south-east side of Coventry, home to the former Humber and Hillman factories, parts of which dated back to the 1900s, has been greatly reduced in size and much of the site freed up for redevelopment as an office park and for housing.

Another factor dramatically changing Coventry’s landscape is the new fashion for apartment blocks close to city centres. This, combined
with a seemingly insatiable demand for offices, has led to the demolition in the last 10 years of many of the earlier factories located in an inner belt of less than a mile’s radius of Coventry city centre, where site values are greater than rent yields from industrial usage. In a number of cases, front office blocks of some architectural distinction, such as the former Swift works (now an Ibis hotel) or the Singer works (now Coventry University housing), have been retained and integrated into the new development, but the distinctive factory buildings with their north-light roofs have almost invariably been demolished. A definitive study of Britain’s car factories was published in 1993 (Collins and Stratton 1993): since then nearly half of the significant plants in Coventry have been demolished, including some of the largest such as Daimler at Radford and most of the Standard/Triumph Canley works.

Roads
New roads form a substantial component of the West Midlands landscape. The days are now gone when a tightly drawn and visually intrusive ring road such as Coventry’s, constructed in the 1960s and 1970s, with its disregard for historic street patterns and archaeology, could be built. Opposition to road building remains intense and the M6 toll road, intended to relieve congestion on the crowded stretch of the M6 through Birmingham and the Black Country, was attacked for the amount of land it would take up. The junctions between the new road and the M42 south of Birmingham certainly bear this out with substantial areas of land rendered unusable, locked within the swirling curvature of the intersections. But these sinuous curves have an appeal, making an impact on the countryside even greater than that of 19th-century railway builders.

While many Victorians, following the example of Ruskin, deplored the impact of the railways, others were transfixed by their sublimity; it is hard today, outside the ranks of highway engineers, to detect such reactions to roads – we confine our adulation to the cars in which we travel not the infrastructure that enables us to do so. Things may change. ‘Spaghetti Junction’, the complex interchange on the M6 at Gravelly Hill, already provokes an enthusiastic reaction from some Birmingham residents – it is seen as one of the things that makes the city distinctive; will it one day inspire the affection that led to the inclusion of the Rotunda as an integral part of the new Birmingham city centre?

Speed
The M6 toll road is intended to speed up traffic flow but more effort today goes into ways of slowing drivers down. The whole litany of traffic-calming measures – the speed hump and the chicane with its attendant clutter of signage being the most common – has become familiar to all motorists. So too has the separation of drivers and pedestrians – one of the central tenets of town planning since the Second World War. But changes are on the way. The government is actively promoting Home Zones, where road users and pedestrians share space. An innovative housing scheme at Newhall, Harlow (Essex) has turned many traditional traffic-planning measures on their heads.

Conventional wisdom dictated wide sight-lines on corners, something that in the past led to the destruction of many historic buildings in the name of safety. At Newhall, trees are introduced at junctions as view-blockers so that motorists have to slow down. Roads traditionally had to be covered with prominent white markings to indicate who had priority at junctions: a message reinforced by yet more signage. There are no road markings at Newhall so drivers again have to slow down because they are not sure who has priority. As there are no pavements on the narrow roads, there is no demarcation between pedestrian and driver, with the result that drivers proceed...
extremely slowly without the need for speed humps. Safer streets without clutter may be a significant step in reducing the visual dominance of the car as we move into the second century of mass motoring.

REFERENCE

People we knew – blue plaques and the later 20th century
Susan Skedd
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In 1867 the (Royal) Society of Arts erected the first blue plaques in London and today there are just over 800 in the capital. Right from the start, the purpose of a blue plaque was to celebrate the connection between an illustrious individual and a building in which he or she lived or worked. English Heritage – which took charge of the scheme in 1986 – adheres strictly to the long-established principle that plaques can only be placed on the actual house inhabited by the nominated figure, and not on the site where it once stood. At present, the vast majority of the plaques in London commemorate 18th- or 19th-century dwellings rather than post-war structures. One notable exception is 19 North End, Hampstead, London NW3, where Michael Ventris (1922–56), the architect and decipherer of Linear B script, lived from 1953 to 1956. Designed by Ventris and his wife Lois, this simple brick-built house was built in 1952–3 and fitted out with furniture by Marcel Breuer.

Candidates for blue plaques cannot be considered until 20 years after their death or until the centenary of their birth, so most of the people commemorated are figures who predate the post-war era. However, an increasing number of candidates are individuals who were active in the second half of the 20th century. While this trend is to be welcomed, it raises some interesting dilem-

The M1
Although not the first UK motorway, the M1 is arguably the defining icon of the motorway age, and is already nearing its 50th birthday. The M1 and its structures have become historic monuments in their own right. Artist Matthew Walter’s photographic study of the changing M1 landscape during current widening between junctions 6a and 10 (commissioned from the Highways Agency through Balfour Beatty – Skanska – Atkins) throws the familiar road into unfamiliar relief (see photo on p 7). His photographs illustrate the interaction between road and landscape – two halves of a landscape, in fact, divided since construction. In his work, which documents the process of change, the landscape appears fluid, altering continuously. Temporary landscapes and spaces spring up – lunar craters and peaks evolve from miniature mountain ranges of gravel and displaced earth; irregular organic mounds and scars contrast with the nuts and bolts of road construction, the disciplined rows of concrete tubing, traffic cones and steel girders. And in his night shots, the road provides the definitive illustration of the 24-hour culture of motorways. There is never true darkness, and highway illumination colludes with moonlight for the road to take on an entirely new character. Striking images in multi-colours, light and dark, still and active, show what distinguishes the road, makes it unique, and reveals its true character: dramatic, sometimes foreboding, the embodiment of tensions between historic optimism and present-day frustration.

Andrea Bradley and Matthew Walter
Atkins Heritage
MODERN TIMES

mas as it is often difficult to evaluate the lasting contribution of historical figures from the recent past. This is especially true in fields such as television and radio, film, and popular music, which are teeming with familiar household names. These issues are thoroughly debated by the Blue Plaques Panel, which advises English Heritage on which people – nearly all of whom are proposed by the public – should be honoured with a blue plaque.

What kind of snapshot of ‘modern times’ does the blue plaques scheme offer us? Among those honoured for achievements that typify the modern world are the sculptor Henry Moore (1898–1986), the composer Benjamin Britten (1913–76), the first President of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah (1909–72), and the pioneer of DNA, Rosalind Franklin (1920–58). A lighter note is provided by the film producer Sir Michael Balcon (1896–1977), who masterminded the Ealing comedies in the 1940s and 1950s, and Alfred Bestall (1892–1986), illustrator of the Rupert Bear cartoon strip in the Daily Express. Proof of the eclecticism that lies at the heart of the scheme is provided by two plaques that were unveiled within days of each other in 2006: the founder of the Royal Ballet, Dame Ninette de Valois (1898–2001) and the physicist and inventor of holography, Dennis Gabor (1900–79). Over the next few years, we can look forward to adding to the list of post-war luminaries, with the enticing prospect of commemorating figures such as the architect Basil Spence (1907–76) and the creator of the Welfare State, Lord Beveridge (1879–1963).

OPINION

When is the right time to do the archaeology of something? At the beginning of the 21st century our circumstances are different from other periods, in terms of the sheer over-abundance of information and things in which we are immersed. Many aspects of human experience are literally buried – silent and invisible. Material changes happen so quickly that it is rather difficult to make sense of them. These conditions are not unlike the more traditional settings of archaeological work, where lack of information has similarly rendered whole realms of human activity mute and invisible. Archaeology as a consequence has developed sophisticated tools with which to make sense of such circumstances. But archaeological interventions are overtly political, often engaging directly with life’s raw and painful nerves, such as homelessness, social exclusion, war crimes, and reconciliation. We have the technologies to access almost everything if we want to – and the freedom to be deliberate and strategic. But more importantly we have responsibilities towards the communities, individuals, and institutions directly implicated by archaeological work into the recent past in helping them come to terms with the obscured and often painful circumstances of contemporary life. Under these circumstances, archaeology should be socially relevant. It must earn its keep.

Victor Buchli

Archaeological interventions in the modern world can engage directly with life’s raw and painful nerves, such as various forms of social exclusion.

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