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Lost Plotlands: Regulatory consequences of forgotten places

Abstract

The connection between specific aspects of mapping evidence prepared in advance of the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 and the history of the plotlands provides opportunities for critical reflection on the forgotten consequences of planning regulations. Firstly, new mapping evidence demonstrates that the scope and distribution of plotland places were historically of far greater significance than previously thought or documented in both conventional planning theory as well as existing plotland focused research. Secondly, the socio-political agenda which accompanied the production and representation of mapping evidence during the 1930 and 40s offers opportunity for critical reflection on the consequences and responsibilities of rethinking planning regulations.

Plain Language Summary

A forgotten connection between the plotlands (unplanned and informal housing) and the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 offer opportunity for critical reflection on the intertwined socio-political history of planning regulation and questions of democratic access to land and land ownership.

Keywords

plotlands; regulation; The Steers Report; planning; history; housing; landscape

Introduction

This paper offers a reflection on the interwoven responsibilities and consequences that are produced by changes to planning regulations. These observations are framed by the example of the plotlands: informally created ('holiday') homes and surrounding settlements that emerged in England and Wales from the late Nineteenth Century through to the advent of The Second World-War. The intention is to highlight how the arguably minor and mundane stories of the plotlands intersect with the history of planning regulations, and subsequently, to pose this shared history as an opportunity for critical reflection on the responsibilities that are entailed upon any rethinking or reimagining of regulation today.

Following a brief review of the existing literature on the history of plotlands, this paper highlights the limited availability of comprehensive or consolidated mapping evidence on the plotlands and the potential impact this has had on their place (or lack thereof) in the conventional history of planning and the impacts of regulation on everyday places. In response, this paper offers a critical analysis of a specific mapping study that was part of the evidence used to justify the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 and the fundamental transformation of authority and regulatory power over landscapes and lives that it prescribed. Specifically, this paper extracts evidence from J.A Steers' report on the 'quality of coastal scenery' and combines it with the existing mapping of plotland places in the research of Dennis Hardy and Colin Ward (and the other scattered observations of plotland places) in order to reveal a new map of the plotlands that dramatically increases the scope and scale of sites previously documented in existing planning literature.

The observations this paper draws from the Steers Report have intertwined functions. Firstly, to highlight the greater significance of the plotlands in number and distribution across England and Wales, thereby revaluing their importance in the history of landscape and planning regulations in Twentieth Century England and Wales. Secondly, a recognition that this renewed plotland mapping evidence both affords and necessitates critical reflection on socio-political context of the documents, reports, and maps used to justify the regulatory powers enshrined by the 1947 Town and Country Planning act. In response to these observations, the historical and continuing contemporary stories of the plotlands might hereafter be revalued as cogent and vital examples of the implications of changes to planning regulation on fundamental

issues of landscape democracy and land ownership, and the responsibility this entail upon anyone seeking to rethink regulation.

Plotlanding: The Forgotten Arcadia of Twentieth Century Britain

It is reasonable to say that without the work of Dennis Hardy and Colin Ward the history of the plotland movement might easily have been lost. Existing documentation and critical analysis of the plotland movement, its places, and communities can be found almost exclusively in their work. Individually, Colin Ward's work on anarchism, housing, and environmental themes provided him with invaluable (and unconventional) reflections on the political foundations upon which housing and architecture in the UK is built (1985, 2004). Separately, Dennis Hardy's observations on the history of the English landscape and planning highlighted the attempts of planners and policy makers to create new towns and communities (Hardy, 1979, 2000, 2011a, 2011b). However, their work together is notable for the collection, analysis, and publication of what remains the most comprehensive history of the plotland movement recorded in numerous academic papers across varied research fields, and most comprehensively in their book 'Arcadia For All' (1984). As the culmination of their research on the plotlands, this book offers critical observations on the origins of the plotlands, the politics of the planning regulations used to curtail and suppress plotland landscapes, and stories of the challenges faced by plotland communities in the wake of 1947 Town and Country Planning Act.

The plotlands can be broadly identified as homes and settlements that emerged in marginal and often isolated places across England and Wales from the late Nineteenth Century through to the advent the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947. Simple and often self-built homes, the plotlands emerged at a time when the distinction between formal and informal or planned and unplanned developments was far less clearly defined, primarily because they pre-date the birth of planning as we know it today. Whilst planning bylaws and regulations had been instigated in response to health and welfare concerns that emerged as a consequence of urban industrialisation, they were present as a patchwork of local responses that afforded the unregulated freedoms necessary for the plotlands to remain an emergent feature of the landscape.

Whilst the ordination of formalised planning in Britain has been discussed extensively in planning history (See variously: Ashworth, 1954; Cherry, 1996; Crow, 1996; Booth, 1999, 2002, 2007, 2015; Lubock, 2007; Ward, 2012), it is very rare that the plotlands feature in these discussions of the historical, legal, and political context that defined the progression of planning in the first half of the Twentieth Century. In contrast to more conventional discussions of the formalisation of planning, the plotlands are often defined by their being juxtapositions to conventional planning narratives. This contradiction is framed by the alternative political ideas and spatial narratives from which the plotlands were born: artistic bohemian yearnings for freedom, the anarchistic politics of self-management, or the democratic principles of land and freedom (Hardy and Ward, 1985b). These themes are often intertwined with a continuation of the broader, more radical critical questioning of landscape democracy and land ownership that has remained ever-present throughout the history of the British landscape (Linklater, 2015).

Political (and economic) responses to the societal, health, and environmental problems of urban industrialisation in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century led to the founding of many core principles of modern urban development and planning. The birth of modern planning coincided with the development of Ebeneezer Howard's planned utopias of the 'garden city movement' at Welwyn and Letchworth (Howard, 1946; Hall and Ward, 2014), and the comparable philanthropic visions of utopian model cities developed at Bourneville and Port Sunlight, etc, (Dellheim and Fraser, 1990; Capet, 2006). Both of these differing visions contribute significantly to the emerging ascendency of urban and utopian visions as the foundations of modern planning (Mullin, 2000; Jameson, 2004; Pinder, 2013, 2016). In the early Twentieth Century it became clear that if cities were to aspire towards a utopian future then they needed to become organised and rational and planned (Sutcliffe, 1980), be it via the strategic vision of grounded social intervention proposed by Patrick Geddes (Geddes, 1949), or the more infamous modernist visions of Le Corbusier and the 'Plan Voisin' and the 'Ville Radieuse'. Yet in contrast to these overlapping revolutions in planning as a tool for efficiency and regulation, plotlanding represented a yearning for something different: according to Hardy and Ward, the Plotlanders weren't seeking utopia, they yearned for arcadia.

One of the vicissitudes of British urban and rural landscape history was to give birth to the plotlands. The severe agricultural decline of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the value of farmland decreased to such a degree that un-productive and marginal land began to be cheaply purchased

(Thompson, 2007). Coinciding with the detrimental conditions experienced by the working class in cities during the late industrial revolution, the opportunity of undervalued and marginal land was quickly recognised by citizens seeking escape from the city and new lives in rural arcadia (Hardy and Ward, 1980).

From its origin in Greek antiquity, the word arcadia describes a poetic vision of a simple life in harmony with nature. Originally referencing the landscape, pastoral lifestyle, and sparse population of a mountainous ancient province of Greece, arcadia became a byword for an idealised rural lifestyle. A yearning for arcadia can be seen in relation to a broader social change in the late Nineteenth-Century during which time the idea of rural pastoralism had become part of an important socio-cultural movement with artists including Shelley, Coleridge, Southey and Wordsworth, and political philosophers like Morris, Kropotkin, Marx, and Tolstoy each responding to the impact of industrialisation on societies, cities, and working-class citizens.

Proponents of pastoralism came to valorise the English rural life and landscape as an idealised alternative to industrial urban life. However, such arcadian escapes were themselves as much a romanticised fiction as the unreachable idea of all utopias and were often marked by fictional idealised narratives of rural freedom or the idealistic aesthetics of bohemian culture. These modern arcadian fictions were so often only able to flourish when accompanied by a degree of economic privilege that was implicitly apart from the reality of subsistent rural peasant class that had persisted for centuries before or the continued inequalities faced by the Twentieth Century urban working class. Thus, throughout the Nineteenth Century, the fictional arcadian ideal was rarely achieved by anyone outside of the historic landed gentry and the burgeoning class of wealthy industrialists. It is therefore unsurprising that the plotlander way of life was seldom a realisation of an idealised arcadian pastoralism.

Despite these origins in an imagined pastoralism, the idea of plotlanding persisted and grew as the lure of different and simpler lives led to an unorthodox working-class reimagining of the freedom of an arcadian landscape. Early plotland sites were built on land that, whilst having been predominantly purchased legally, were beyond many aspects of regulatory control. Once established they often developed organically without any formalised plans, producing both humble and yet often creative and unique constructions that stood in stark contrast to the formal architectural and planning conventions of late Victorian Britain. Later during the interwar years, the idea of plotlanding was to become increasingly driven by entrepreneurial and speculative developers who purchased unused land cheaply before subdividing plots and advertising the

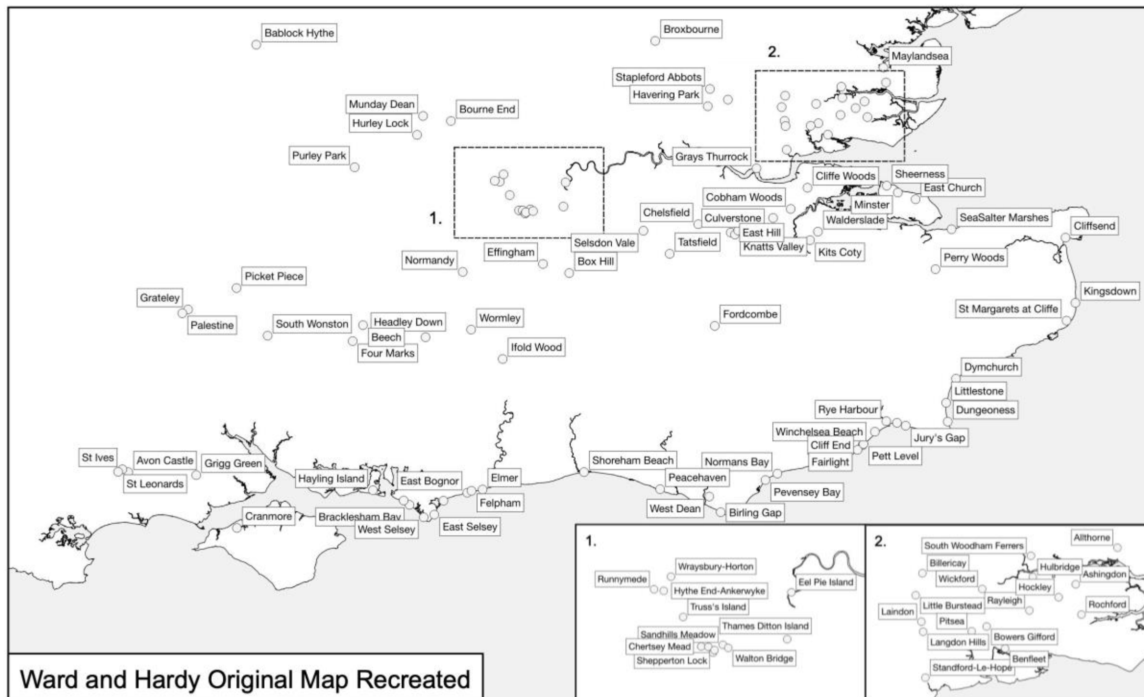
sale of packaged holiday escape homes in city newspapers. Thereby, the somewhat bohemian, anarchistic, and organic origins of early plotland sites gave way to a more distinctive and broadly identifiable working-class identity and spirit: ordinary people seeking escape from the city and the possibility of an alternative way of life.

Yet early and later plotlanders alike sought similar goals: to live a simple life. This pursuit of simple lives beyond and other to the assumptions of urban landscapes led plotlanders to approach and occupy land and landscape differently and thereby to the production of what Hardy and Ward described as a form of (unconscious) anarchistic arcadia (1985a). Simply seeking escape from the conditions faced by the working-class in cities, plotlanders journeyed on railways, rivers, canals, and coastlines in search of unused or unwanted land. This method of unplanned exploration and distribution across the landscape produced a disconnected (or perhaps rhizomatic connected? (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 13)) network of sites who were only linked by the contemporarily unorthodox nature of their inhabitation and relationship to land; a relationship that, whilst perhaps not always being conventionally arcadian, was almost always involved the inhabitation of marginal, undervalued, and unwanted spaces. Consequently, families seeking escapes from the city and the unusual freedom offered by the act of plotlanding often became part of landscapes that were spatially marginal from their origins through to today where many have often become entrenched in a myriad of socio-political forms of marginalisation. And it is this connection of different and unorthodox lives to unusual and marginal places that best encapsulates the plotland vision/version of arcadia and the tensions it highlighted and exacerbated between the history of landscape and land ownership, democracy and regulation in England and Wales.

The Plotlands: Mapping traces

The alternative ways of life and place that encompassed the plotland idea remained (perhaps understandably, and also perhaps for the best) a stubbornly difficult to define and therefore also to locate and map. To date, the location and documentation of plotlander sites has been almost completely reliant upon the work of Hardy and Ward, who themselves note their reliance upon the help of individual county planning officers for the examples they document in their mapping (1984, p. 29 note 3). Their collective research only offers one map of the plotland sites, which identifies just over 100 plotland sites across the

South-East of England, with enlarged mapping sections for two areas where plotlander sites exist in tight clusters: near Thames Ditton in Surrey and around Pitsea and Laindon in South Essex. The digital recreation of this map in GIS was the first step of the research for this paper.



<u>**Figure 1: GIS mapping recreation of original plotland location map from 'Arcadia For All' (Hardy and Ward 1984)**</u>

However, this map does not reflect the full extent of the plotlands that Hardy and Ward identified and discussed in their research. Whilst their focus was undoubtedly on the South-East of England (seemingly for reasons of practicality related to their research base at Middlesex Polytechnic), Hardy and Ward also identify a limited number of plotlander sites across the wider UK in both 'Arcadia For All' (1984) and 'Makeshift Landscapes' (1981), including sites in Greater Manchester, Cheshire, North Staffordshire, County Durham, Lancashire, Gloucestershire, Devon, and Cornwall. Thus, whilst the wider extent of plotlanders across the UK was clearly known (or at least suspected) by Hardy and Ward, it was seemingly not possible to research and document sites on a national scale. It is plausible to speculate that the full extent of plotlanders across the wider UK was unknown to Hardy and Ward because it was in the South-East that the weight of public and political attention on the plotlands caused local councils to accurately identify and locate sites that may have escaped attention elsewhere in the country. If this is indeed a plausible supposition it raises the

question as to why the same local scrutiny (and later academic interest) was not afforded to plotlands lives, places, and landscapes beyond the South-east of England.

Today, (re)mapping all of the examples of plotlander sites noted but not actually mapped by Hardy and Ward is relatively quick and simple. A desktop methodology allows the named locations in Hardy and Ward's work to be identified using online digital mapping services and aerial photographic evidence (google maps, etc.). Relatively exact GPS coordinates are able to be located when specific local information was available to pin-point precise plotlander sites, and the remaining named sites could be located approximately based on evidence of the typology and morphological language of known plotland developments (unfinished roads, caravan/static home sites, small scale units, etc). Using this methodology allows all of the plotlander sites named by Hardy and Ward to be digitally located and offers a more complete picture of the plotlands as a phenomenon that occurred, at least sporadically, across most of England.

Figure 2: GIS mapping of all named plotland locations in in both 'Arcadia For All' (1984) and 'Makeshift Landscapes'

Beyond the work of Hardy and Ward there has been no concerted attempt by academics or planners to identify and document the wider story of plotlander sites beyond South-East England. However, there are numerous papers, articles, weblog posts, etc. that have highlighted various individual plotland sites beyond those previously identified by Hardy and Ward. They include: the vitriol aimed at certain plotlanders sites by Cyril Joad (1931), the photographic evidence presented in the work of Stefan Szczelkun (1972), the observations of architectural historian Jonathon Meades in the TV documentary episode 'Severn Heaven' (1990), the general observations of self-building accompanied by the identification of sites near Swansea Wales by noted architectural theorist Stewart Brand in the TV documentary episode 'The Low Road' (1997), weblog posts by a user named 'Worm' on the website 'The Dabbler' (2011), documentation of the use of railway carriages for informal homes by Fiona Newton (2012), the sightings of Bobby Seal in his research weblog 'The Psychogeographic Review' (2013), a newspaper article by Godfrey Holmes in the Independent (2017), an early Twenty-first Century art project by Lesley Martin, all in addition to observations of previously unknown coastal sites by myself (the plotlands seem to haunt my every seaside holiday trip!) and my brother (once people know what to look for they seem to pop up everywhere you go!).

Each of these locations have previously been known but never mapped in relation with one-another. Yet together, these isolated reports and scattered observations contribute to an emerging picture of plotlander locations distributed far more widely across all of England and Wales. When added to the 101 mapped and 18 un-mapped locations found within the texts of Hardy and Ward, these 31 additional sites raise the number of observed plotland sites to 150. This new map is in itself is a notable step forward in documenting the plotland story. However, as we shall see, new evidence of previously un-documented plotland locations will dramatically expand and extend the plotland history.

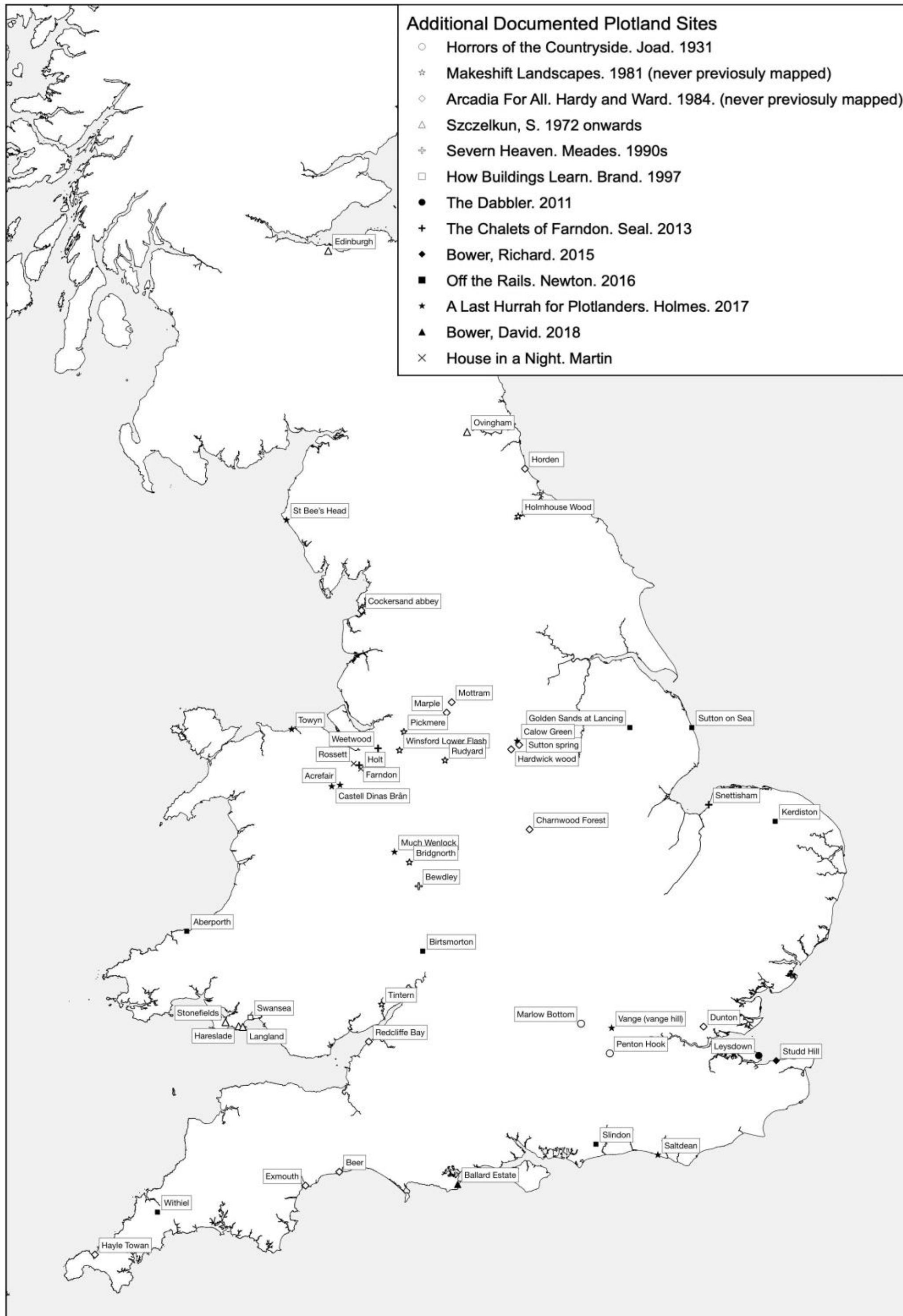


Figure 3: GIS mapping of isolated and scattered plotland sightings

The Steers Report: Mapping, regulation, and politics

> *For some, a stake in the countryside was the fulfilment of an Arcadian dream; for others of this time, it was clearly nothing less than a hideous nightmare. (Hardy and Ward, 1984, p. 40)*

During the 1920s and 1930s the plotlands became a subject of political and social vilification. As both the number of plotland sites and idea of plotlanding began to grow, the idea of rural landscapes being invaded by working-class outsiders attracted frustration and anger from those with an pre-existing sense of the social value of the countryside and to how that value should be used and experienced (Hardy and Ward, 1985b). This outcry was relatively small, yet it was driven on by the persistence of powerful social voices advocating for the protection of the rural landscape. And these socio-political advocacies against unorthodox developments like the plotlands are notable for their intersection with the extensive research mapping and reporting that was undertaken in preparation for the new authority and regulations entailed within the Town and Country Planning act of 1947.

The unauthorised and unplanned use of land exemplified by the plotlands became a small but important focus of the unprecedent mapping studies undertaken to determine the delineation and disposition of the British landscape. During the late 1930s and throughout the 1940s a number of government backed reports were produced that would become the knowledge basis for the planning regulations and authorities enshrined in 1947. These reports include The Stamp Report in which Sir (Laurence) Dudley Stamp accomplished (through the novel method of research evidence being produced by local children at a Parish level of granular detail) the first systematic survey of land utilisation of Britain, The Barlow Report on the urban concentration of population and industry published in 1940 (that led to the formation of the Ministry of Works and Planning in 1942), The Scott Report which was perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of evidence found in support and justification of the need for fundamentally new national planning powers and policy (notably having far reaching impacts on the question of how 'outsider' and 'inappropriate' uses of the countryside would be regulated from 1947 onwards), and The Uthwatt Report on the relationship between compensation and betterment in the context of an aggressively expanding nationalisation of land and the widescale nationalised developments that would begin in the wake of The Second World-War. These reports represented a new combination of political, geographical, and crucially sociological research

on the question of land-use in Britain noted by C.M Haar (1951) and later by Hebbert who suggested that '… a somewhat unholy alliance between scientists enthusiastic for social engineering, and designers enthusiastic for the legitimation which science could bestow…' led to a system where 'Too much rested upon persuasive varieties of environmental determinism—on the notion that a wide range of social issues were in some sense caused by the physical attributes of urbanisation, with its corollary that territorial and architectural arrangement could provide a key medium for positive social intervention.' (Hebbert, 1983, p. 14)

The importance of the relationships between political, sociological, and geographical science in these mapping reports undertaken throughout the 1930s and 1940s cannot be over-stated. The Barlow, Scott, and Stamp reports formed, in the words of J.A. Steers, 'a triad covering of physical planning and reconstruction in this country.' (1943). The combination of mapping evidence and reporting undertaken to support regulatory change is astonishing and represents an enormous achievement and step forward in the use of data and evidence to justify a fundamental shift in the authority and ownership of land and landscape. Yet, whilst issues of democratic access to land and the inequity of land ownership that are intrinsic to the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 are still as fundamental and controversial today as they were nearly a century ago, an unbiased scrutiny of the political justifications that support the fundamental shift in regularity power is still perhaps as difficult to achieve and maintain. The power entailed in the 1947 enshrining of government authority and regulation concerning what constitutes acceptable use and inhabitation of land is easily overlooked as the alternative is so unimaginable, and yet it is perhaps this reason that planning history and theory is rarely critiqued from such a foundational perspective. The right to own, access, and make use of the landscape is a defining characteristic of the continuing pursuit and contestation of democracy and equality in the UK. And when framed within this wider context of landscape history and politics pertaining to the democracy of landscape and land ownership, the observation that the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 was in some small but demonstrable part a response to unplanned developments exemplified by the plotlands must thereby ensure their significance in any continuing discussion of the contestation of land, freedom, and citizenship that has continued throughout the history of England and Wales (Linklater, 2015).

Whilst the Steers Report was undoubtedly less prominent in the political processes that led up to 1947, it is none-the-less an important document in its own right, and as we shall see, an undeniably significant factor in the story of the plotlands. In 1942, the Minister for Town and Country Planning tasked the revered geographer J.A. Steers to undertake a survey of the entire coast of England and Wales.[1] Thus, from April 1943 to April 1945 Steers undertook the astonishing task of personally walking the entire coastline of England and Wales in order to map the 'scenic quality' of the coastal landscape. In each section of the survey he was accompanied by the regional planning officer or his deputy.

The Steers Report offered an academic perspective on the impacts of urban growth, industrial practices and plotlands alike on the quality of coastal scenery. His observations provided a singular perspective on the scenic quality of the entire coastline. The process of assigning a qualitive scenic quality – ranging in this survey on a scale of excellent to good (perhaps interestingly with almost no areas deemed less than good unless they were urbanised or industrialised) – was recognised and noted by Steers himself as benefitting in terms of its singular efficiency at the expense of his findings likely to be met with criticism for their subjectivity (Steers, 1944, p. 8). Yet this small moment of self-criticism by Steers is heavily counter balanced by the overwhelming support his work received. Attendants at the review and discussion of his report include many of the pre-eminent important political characters and policy makers of the time, including: The Rt. Hon. Sir George Clerk (The President of The Geographical Journal), Mr. W. S. Morrison (The Minister of Town and Country Planning), Professor W. G. Holford (noted for role in creating the education of town and country planning at UCL), and Dudley Stamp (of the earlier 1930s land utilisation survey). Those in attendance discussed and applauded Steers' findings (1944). The warmth of its reception was perhaps a fair reflection on the challenge of his endeavour, but was also a sign of how valuable its findings could be to politically minded individuals and policy makers seeking evidence to justify the need for planning regulations to protect the scenic quality of the landscape for the broader democratic good.

The political, socio-economic, and philosophical justifications for Steers' attempts to define, value, and in his mind 'protect the social value of the coastline' are too layered and complicated to be discussed in detail

[1] Steers would also be invited to survey the Scottish coastline from 1946 to 1953, though the findings of this survey and its potential link to the plotlander story is yet to be reviewed.

here. However, it is worth noting that Hardy and Ward are themselves clear in their critical reflections on the political foundations of the planning policies and actions that led to the various, often sad, outcomes to plotland stories (1985b). The negativity of the politically charged writings pertaining to the plotlands that Hardy and Ward documented clearly suggest the degree of impartiality at play in these debates, including Dean Inge's description of a cancerous 'bungaloid growth' and Howard Marshall's 'gimcrack civilisation like a giant slug leaving a trail of slime behind it'. Yet Steers is notable for revealing a seemingly balanced and relatively apolitical approach to these issues, noting: 'a hut, caravan, converted bus, probably represents in the first place a desire for an open-air holiday away from towns and smoke' (Steers, 1944, p. 12). This attitude was also somewhat echoed in Sir Patrick Abercrombie's 'Greater London Plan' of 1944 where he noted the narrow mindedness of critiques against the genuine and reasonable desires reflected by the plotlander movement, whilst also reinforcing the link between the failures of urban planning and the desperation of working-class citizens seeking escape to a better life. Abercrombie, like Dudley Stamp, and Steers, and many others voices in these reports and debates that led to the 1947 Act, framed their work through a desire to democratise planning and did not see (or accepted) the authoritarian nature of the regulatory approach they deemed necessary. However, Abercrombie is also clear that the Plotlands were an expression of the failures of cities through lack of planning, and not in and of themselves simply an expression of the unfulfilled desire of citizens for democratic access to land and the rights and freedoms that land entails. Instead:

> *The prostitution of urban planning to material ends was a by-product of Victorian commercialism; the spoilation of the countryside by a 'pepper pot' sprinkling of bungalows and incongruous town villas came later as the result of the final replacement of feudalism by individualism. Democracy in England has yet to learn how and what to plan. (Stamp, 1943, p. 17)*

The conflict between the supposed democratic intentions and the language of morality and aesthetic authority used to justify the forthcoming planning approaches is seemingly self-evident today. Abercrombie both recognised the necessity of seaside holiday escapes for the working class urban population, but framed this democratic need for escape as a potential 'urban invasion of the countryside' (1943, p. 200), reinforcing the emerging British planning engagement with the urban-rural dichotomy. And this broader socio-cultural

contextualisation and political utilisation of the plotlanders was summarised in Hardy and Ward's reference to a planning commentator who decried hut-dwellers for both getting the view and spoiling it (1984, p. 6).

Despite the questionable subjectivity of Steers' observations of 'scenic quality' the outcome of his study was a remarkable mapping exercise with implications for the development and protection of the coastline of England and Wales. Crucially it also provided the most detailed and comprehensive insight into the story and location of plotlander sites beyond the work of Hardy and Ward. As part of the documentation of scenic quality, the report and map document the built landscape of the coastline including observations of industrial areas, derelict mining areas, residential and other built up areas, and densely populate inland areas. Most importantly for our purposes it also clearly denotes 'areas of bad scattered developed'. This choice of words on the mapping key coupled with the written description of these areas in the report strongly suggests that Steers was identifying plotland sites.

Mapping Coalescence: Replotting lost plotlands

The process of GIS mapping the Steers Report follows much the same methodology as the work on the original Hardy and Ward map. The act of locating general locations by name and looking for possible morphological indications on satellite images provided enough information to approximate the location of all sites noted by Steers. 104 locations have been identified from the map produced by Steers with a further 10 being identified in his writings accompanying the report.

Figure 4: GIS mapping recreation of The Steers Report locating 'Areas of bad and scattered development' as denoted by Steers

A serendipitous aspect of the Steers map is its concordance with the Hardy and Ward map. Whereas Hardy and Ward's work focused (for various reasons discussed earlier in this paper) on the South-East of England, Steers map covers everything other than the South-East (which was excluded due to the implications of military secrecy during the Second World-War) and somewhat perfectly completes the coastal picture of (possible) plotland sites in England and Wales. In the few areas of overlap (mainly along the South Essex coastline where Hardy and Ward had tentatively noted sites beyond South-East England) there is clear evidence of the independent identification of the same locations in both Steers' and Hardy and Ward's maps. Despite apparently not using his maps or reports in their work, Hardy and Ward were also aware of The Steers Report, noting the specific detail he offered in describing the plotlands as 'Shacks, Huts, and Camps' that could be classified as simply as either unplanned holiday camps, shack towns, and isolated huts. This purposeful choice of language used by Steers strongly suggests a comparable definition of plotlander housing was being used by both parties. This concordance in descriptive language and identifiable sites in relation to Hardy and Ward is sufficient evidence to support this paper's supposition that the Steers map can be considered as a previously unrecognised picture of the full coastal extent of plotland sites across the whole of England and Wales.

When combined with the 150 plotlander sites already noted and mapped by Hardy and Ward et al, Steers' evidence increases the total number of known plotland sites to over 260 sites (allowing for a number of duplicates), whilst also providing the first evidence of the far more extensive and complicated distribution of sites across the full coastlines of England and Wales. However, a further consequence of this increase in identified plotland locations is the disparity it highlights in the distribution of sites in coastal and non-coastal locations relative to the two key points of mapping evidence. Whereas Steers' work was entirely focused on the coastlines, Hardy and Ward mapped both the coastal and inland plotlands, and even sought to delineate between different locations under the categories of coastal, river, and woodland, as well as their relative relationships to the railways and canals that the plotlanders were known to use in their escapes from cities. Further analysis of Hardy and Ward's original mapping evidence affords an invaluable picture of the

categorical (here defined as either coastal, river/lake, woodland, railway) proportions of plotlander sites in the South-East that have not previously been mapped or analysed.

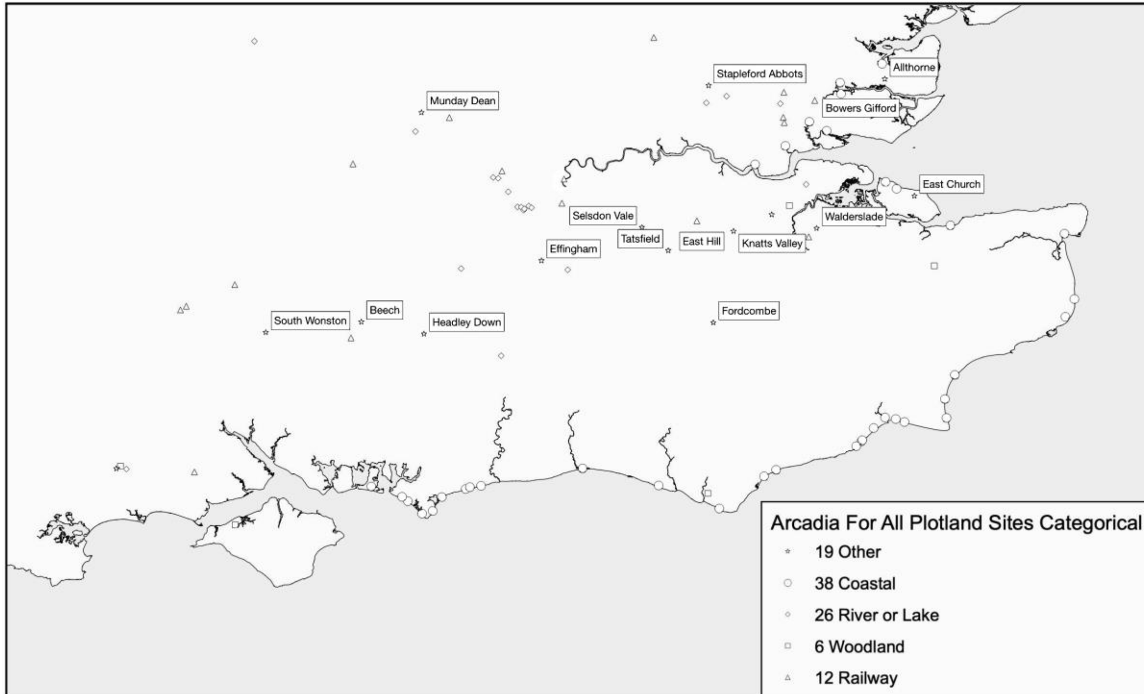


Figure 5: GIS mapping of combined categories of plotland locations previously mapped in 'Arcadia For All' (Hardy and Ward 1984)

The relative categorical proportions of sites identified by Hardy and Ward noted becomes compelling when compared to the findings if the same approach of categorisation is applied to the expanded mapping of sites across England and Wales revealed in this paper. Whilst the evidence available (mapping or otherwise) is too limited to support any comprehensive or conclusive statistical projection, the disparity in the proportional distribution between the 'Hardy and Ward' and 'All Known Plotland Locations' evidence indicates a likelihood of significantly more (possibly over a hundred more) inland / non-coastal plotland sites across England and Wales that remain unknown and possibly lost forever.

	Coastal	River or Lake	Woodland	Railway	Other
Arcadia For All locations	37.6%	25.7%	5.9%	11.9%	18.8%
All known plotland locations	63.4%	19.2%	2.3%	6.0%	10.1%
Difference	+25.8%	-6.5%	-3.6%	-5.8%	-8.7%

Figure 6: Categorical analysis of plotlands locations

The mapping approach utilised in this paper has sought to highlight the gap in knowledge that persists in the intertwined stories of the plotlands and planning regulations. Irrespective of how many more plotland sites remain unknown and lost, the concrete evidence of the Steers report and other sporadic sightings highlights a clear critical observation that the history and continued stories of the plotlands is of far greater significance and scale than previously documented. More broadly, the plotlands can also begin to be recognised as a critical example of how planning regulations are intertwined with the everyday experiences of landscape and the democracy of land ownership – themes that whilst remaining core tenets of planning theory and policy can, on the evidence of the newly unearthed evidence of this paper, quite easily become overlooked and forgotten as the impacts of planning regulations changes ripple out into the landscape and the future.

It is demonstrably clear that the political processes that preceded and drove The Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 were heavily indebted to mapping evidence like that found in The Steers Report. The unquestionable connection between the history of the plotlands to the history of planning regulation reinforces an important point of critical reflection: whilst the plotlands may only be a small facet of British socio-political, landscape, and planning history, they were undoubtedly part of the debate, discussion, and evidence used to justify a fundamental shift in the democratic relationship of citizens to land. Whilst planning regulations had been introduced via a bylaw system for where it was deemed necessarily (primarily on new developments and urban slum renewal for public health reasons), 1947 was a pivotal moment in the regulatory story of the British landscape. In what could be interpreted as (at least partially) a direct response to the informal freedom represented by the story of plotlanding, from the 1st of July 1948 ownership of land alone no longer conferred the right to develop that land. Discretionary planning was institutionalised. Formal permission was required for land development, effectively banning any further

developments akin to the plotland movement. This raises an unanswered question: do the plotlands represent something that cannot be reconciled with planning's self-narrative? Are the principles of self-organisation and the alternative arcadian imagining of a democratic landscape exemplified by the plotland movement axiomatically and incompatible with the premise of planning regulation?

In spite of significant shifts in recent decades to reinforce engagement with planning regulations at the community level, these attempts to confront and contest the disconnection between top-down planning ideals and the everyday reality of regulation still reflect a persistent intolerance for the kinds of fundamental challenge to our understanding of land ownership, democracy, and landscape. If we recognise that the history of these plotland places and in many instances the places themselves have been become lost and forgotten within our collective landscape we must confront a profoundly worrying premise: if it is possible in less than a century to disregard and neglect these small but politically significant examples of the evolution of our landscape and land ownership then what other stories of regulatory imbalance and inequity may also have been forgotten? And faced with these unanswered questions, then any engagement with the theoretical and practical implications of rethinking regulation must surely be framed by a critical self-reflection on the impact of our political context today on the unknown landscapes and democratic futures of tomorrow.

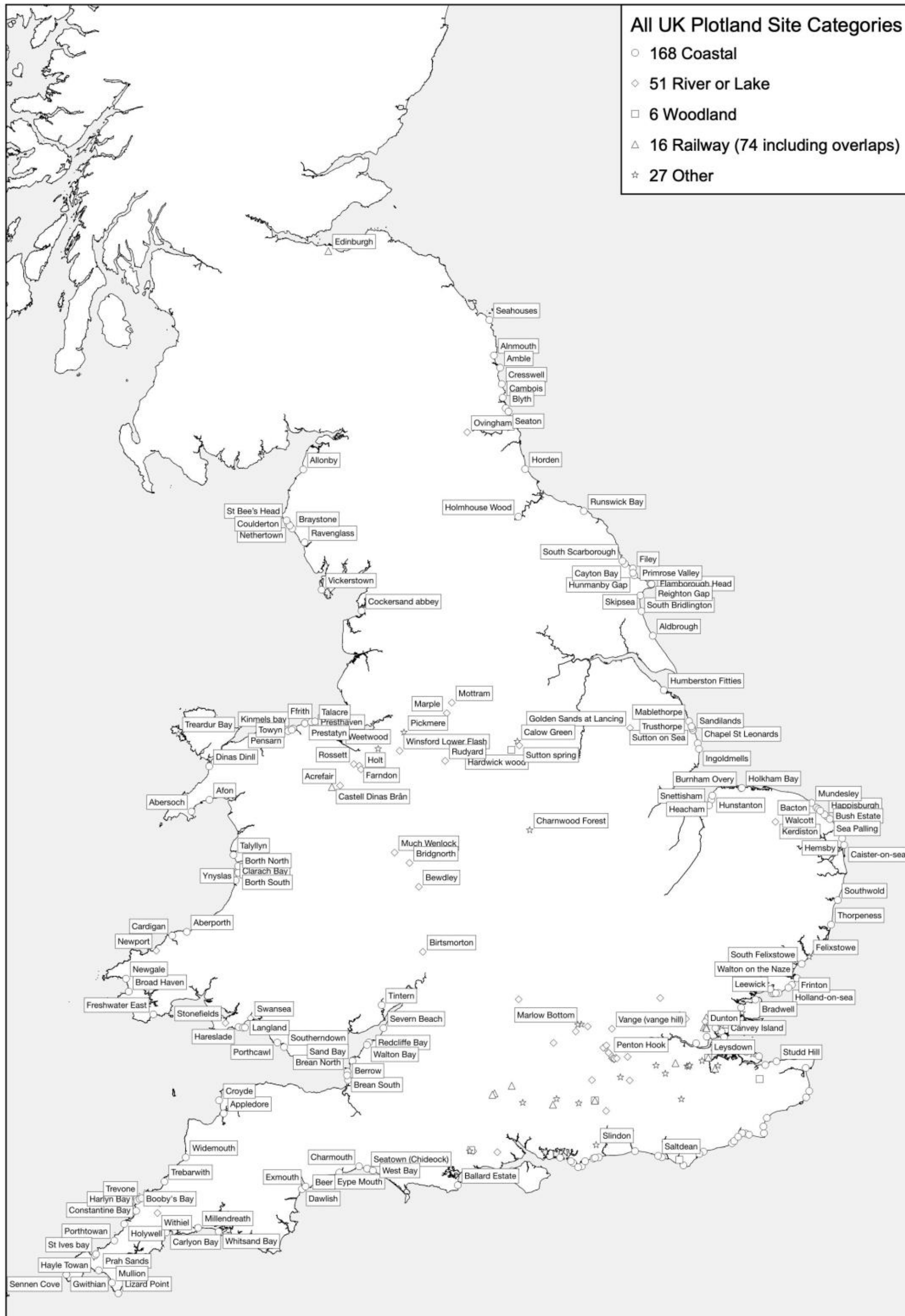


Figure 7: GIS mapping and categorisation of all known plotland locations

Plotlands Today: Responsibilities and consequences of regulation

> *Embracing the spirit of optimism, comprehensive planning legislation was passed in the form of the 1947 Town & Country Planning Act. Yet, effective as it was in a variety of ways, the main impact of the 1947 Act proved to be more in controlling new development rather than removing what was already there. Certainly, the day of the new 'shack towns' and scattered huts was over. But for many years more, local authorities continue to grapple with a not inconsiderable and remarkably stubborn legacy of makeshift landscapes. This type of development had been quick to take root, but its distinctive features were to remain in evidence until well into the Twentieth century. (Hardy and Ward, 1984, p. 51)*

During the Second World-War, many coastal plotland sites along the English Channel were seized and demolished by the British government, with perhaps the most notable example being the 'bungalow town' of Shoreham-by-Sea in West Sussex, which, like many other plotlands on the South and East coasts of England, was entirely cleared by home forces responding to perceived dangers of invasion by sea (Hardy and Ward, 1984, p. 50). The plotlands (and plotlanders) that survived the enforced military coastal clearances of the early 1940s faced an uncertain future. The regulatory ambiguity that existed before WWII was replaced by a legislative vacuum until, after decades of vilification, the implementation of the new planning laws in 1948 saw the beginning of the long and slow processes in which many plotland sites became the quiet targets of clearances and compulsory purchase orders. Others became isolated and forgotten outliers that would persist in a no-mans-land outside of planning, with some still existing in planning isolation to this day.

Stories of plotland places facing the incoming planning regulations are often depicted through infamous and extreme case studies. Numerous plotlands were re-appropriated under formal planned redevelopment projects, exemplified by the story of Peacehaven in West Sussex which had been the subject of perhaps the most consistent public attention due to the publicity (and later notoriety) garnered by its entrepreneurial founder Charles Neville (Hardy and Ward, 1984, pp. 71–90). The sustained local government and planning engagement in the Peacehaven story is the most complete example of the consolidation of plotland places into the formal landscape promised by formal planning regulations. Yet the amount of detailed information

and evidence regarding the redevelopment of plotland Peacehaven discovered and documented by Hardy and Ward is almost unprecedented and is not reflected in extensive documentation of how regulation was administered at other plotland sites. And given the remarkable period of time required for the changes driven wrought by the new authority of formal planning to be effective in the development Peacehaven, the question of how regulation was experienced by and imposed upon other plotland places remains a subject deeply deserving of much further research.

Today, the plotlands origins of Peacehaven is practically unrecognisable in its fabric and sense of place, and it is now demonstrably a part of the conventional seaside landscape of East Sussex. Yet as an example of the extraordinarily different experiences of the impacts of regulation, Jaywick Sands on the Essex coast is recognisable and indeed notorious because of its plotland origins. The site was created by a similarly notorious entrepreneurial developer of plotland sites Frank Stedman (Hardy and Ward, 1984, pp. 138–152), who purchased several hundred acres of marshland near Clacton on Sea and began the development of a plotlands seaside holiday destination. Jaywick quickly drew the attention of the local Clacton council who were (rightly?) concerned by the lack of infrastructure that accompanied the substantial number of homes that were planned and eventually built. Tensions at Jaywick continued to grow and were soon reflected by the frustrations of the association of freehold owners that formed in response to the lack of development on site. And whilst Stedman steadfastly claimed that it was local council bureaucracy that delayed the successful development of the site, the significant dangers from winter flooding quickly highlighted the lack of any meaningful defensive sea wall or wider provision for infrastructure to protect the community and support any sustainable growth. This flooding risk was to remain the Achilles heel of Jaywick to this day, with major weather events causing catastrophic flooding on numerous occasions (Hardy and Ward, 1984, pp. 138–63). These various characteristics coupled with a growing isolation from the investment and development of nearly Clacton would eventually lead to the social decline that sadly Jaywick is still famous for today (*Essex village used in 'appalling' Trump candidate advert*, 2018; See for example: 'Episode 5 | Benefits Britain: Life On The Dole', no date).

The level of moderately detailed and longitudinal evidence pertaining to the experiences of Peacehaven and Jaywick is rare. The new evidence of the expanded scale and extent of plotlands evidenced by the mapping in this paper only highlights the fact that there is almost no knowledge of the differing everyday experiences

of plotland communities, places, and landscape over the course of decades. This special issue of TPR seeks to highlight the impact of the discretionary planning system that we inherit today, and the contrasting stories of Jaywick and Peacehaven highlight the need for critical reflection. The ripples of seemingly mundane regulatory practices that emerge in the wake of planning changes are felt in the everyday lives, landscape, and communities for decades. And the lack of research and monitoring of these effects in longitudinal or comparative studies on the plotlands highlights the need to rethink not only our approach to regulations but also the impacts of regulation.

Given the invaluable earlier work of Hardy and Ward it is woeful that planning history, theory, and practice has been unable or unwilling to continue to engage with the plotlands and the political themes of landscape democracy and unorthodox land ownership in any demonstrably consistent, rigorous, or critical manner. Perhaps the most recent research on these wider challenging issues is recognisable in the critique of the language used to describe the plotlands landscape found in David Matless' work on the moral geography of English landscapes in which particular references to Steers work is explored in connection to a broader moral history of mapping and planning (1996, 1997). More recently, the exciting new collaborative community art project being undertaken at the Humberston Fitties (a plotland site of over 300 chalets built in the 1920s on former salt marshes on the Lincolnshire coast near Cleethorpes) highlights the need for continued and multiplicitous engagements with the human scale landscapes of the plotlands (Tarlo and Tucker, 2019). This unique and sadly still largely isolated project highlights the exciting potential for innovative models of research engagement with the plotlands, and the potential to recognise and value the unique people and places that make them.

Today, the contradiction between the extraordinary effort undertaken to map plotlands as problematisations that supported the empowerment of formal planning authority stands in stark contrast to the lack of any sustained professional or academic engagement with the consequences of those regulations on the principles of democratic access to landscape and land ownership. What is clear from the new evidence extracted from The Steers Report is that the full extent of plotlands still remains unknown. Yet when combined with the Hardy and Ward map, and additional sporadic plotland identifications from other sources, this paper has been able to offer the most representative picture of the extent of the plotlands ever documented, including clear evidence to increase the number of known plotlands from the

101 previously located in Hardy and Ward's original map to over 260 mapped in this paper (and the postulation of significantly more still remain lost and unknown).

When perceived in relation to the studies, surveys, and mapping reports upon which UK planning policy is founded, this newly expanded picture of the plotlands provides opportunities to reflect on the wider socio-political consequences and responsibilities of planning regulations on the democratic values and meaning we ascribe to the British landscape. The lack of research engagement with plotlands in contemporary planning history and theory is suggestive of a disconnection between the foundations of planning regulations and the fundamental consequences they created for both the plotlanders in this specific case, and the broader questions of democracy, land, and freedom that they represent. The landscapes and communities produced by plotlanders still survive as rare realisations of the desire to revalue and reimagine the idea of land occupancy, ownership, and identity. And the continuing contemporary critical analysis of land ownership (Linklater, 2015), contemporary questions of housing inequalities (Ryan-Collins *et al.*, 2017), and privatisation (Christophers, 2018; Shrubsole, 2020), further reinforce that the plotlands should still be a subject of continuing research and debate. They represent a rare example of the impact of regulations on the individual and their relationship to the land. Any continued lack of contemporary research engagement with the history of plotlands would seem to reflect either a belief that the inherent questions that plotlands represent – of democracy, landscape, and land ownership in relation to regulation and planning – have been resolved (which is manifestly a nonsensical suggestion), or that there is an unwillingness to confront the consequences of regulatory authority and planning legislation on the everyday lives of people in the lost places and forgotten landscapes.

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