WHAT MEMBERS FEEL ABOUT THE GROUP

Thirty-two members have so far returned questionnaires and voiced their opinions about what we do and publish and what they would like to see. I am hugely encouraged by what I read. I myself rarely respond to questionnaires. Given this encouragement even the work-stretched among you will wish to help me out with more responses.

Well done Hal Moggridge, Brian Goodey, Will Pilfold and David Harney for getting them back fastest — ‘fastest’ as in Beaujolais Nouveau. Speed isn’t everything!

If you have lost track of the questionnaire, it can be found as a printable pdf on our website. If you prefer to email just the numbered answers that would be a good alternative. I would not want to cramp your style.

PROPOSED FIELD EXCURSIONS AND EXPERT SEMINARS

We are at present ‘cooking up’ the following events and firm dates and invitations will be sent out in the next and subsequent issues:

# A day led by Professor Brian Goodey in the Lea Valley, East London, to walk in a contrasting pair of modern London Parks and take a radical look at the Olympic village site around Stratford.

# A day and overnight led by Bud Young in Somerset ridges and levels examining the web of landscape connections which link structure and habitat, vernacular building and history.

# A day and overnight led by John Gittins and Gareth Roberts in classic glaciated mountain, landscape of Snowdonia connecting physical landscapes with art and the policies of protection.

# An excursion with Dr Susanne Seymour through the Derbyshire Derwent Valley to investigate the Georgian landscape.

In addition we hope to put on an expert seminar and field meeting, about proposals for, and the start of, major peri-urban growth in greenfield countryside adjacent to the city of Exeter (Professor Peter Howard). All leaders are board members. Offers to assist?

Landscape survival: the quality still shows through

This note is predicated on the understanding that ‘research’ means new knowledge for the researcher, not necessarily endowed with the structures of RAE - the regular academic research exercise — but rather ‘new’ understandings, which enhance one’s life, and perhaps the lives of others. In this note I am concerned with a re-visit, a new contact with places remembered.

As a novice lecturer I visited the Montpellier region of France with Planning colleagues in the 1970’s. Perhaps because ‘field trips’ were more expansive, more exploratory, less hemmed in with health and safety, it stuck in the mind. I remember that we met a Nottingham geography field trip in the same Montpellier lodgings and marvelled at their land use mapping as we drank, put out a soccer team against Montpellier and lost. We did not map vineyards, but did range wide into the southern French coastal zone, viewing the earliest days of La Grande Motte, the first impressive re-developments of Montpellier, and the surprise of Sete and its Venetian canals. I retained a view of the wild Carmargue, historic cities and a sense that all was about to change.

In 2006 I returned, as spontaneously as possible, a quick flight from Birmingham, an e-mail hotel
Thirty years is a long time in landscape history. Roads, new developments, but most of all the packaging of heritage and landscape were evident. The bedraggled landscape of the coastal belt had been re-assembled for visitors, a tourism development as intended. Everywhere there were signs to ‘attractions’, which we had viewed as merely historic places in the staid Michelin guide.

Montpellier had turned itself round — yes, the historic quarter — but with a neat trick which wrapped townscape in an acceptable parcel. An interesting city, worth walking, and where damaged facades might have demolished the image, wall paintings which hinted at a past world. Only a few of these clever murals, but a townscape contrived for comfort. A concern here for wrapping up the visitor package: where the buildings don’t speak, the artist does.

Out of town and into the tourist/retirement hinterland. La Grande Motte, a brave pyramidal resort of the 1970’s, questioned at birth, is now a full blown resort town. Structures and planting mature, it is the growth pole for what was a swampy surround. Innovative structures heighten the effect. The image is secure, a new town with imagery and a sense of place far better than most 1970s developments in the UK.

I skirt the event, sketching quietly in bars and corners, simple ends of ships, facades, the static impedimenta of a living port. Then I move to view the event from a bridge, camera shots a plenty fail to capture its essence. The admired year-round townscape, the economically active boats are overwhelmed by crowds, shifting moods, unplannable events and being-there responses.

There is one bus back, set apart from the town centre, and I retreat cowered by my inability to capture the excitement of Sete on the day. Back in Montpellier I am challenged. I failed to communicate the rush of joy, which I experienced in seeing the event on the day, in the place. From memory I painted. (see front cover).

Landscape comes with trappings of time, place and events. Early on geographers (and here I do blame my profession), removed in situ human response and dotted quantitative presence in order to get at some sort of essence, landscape designers chose to insert their own stick figures which responded to proposal rather than situational experience, but really most landscapes are animated rather than dormant.

This was one of the several lessons from a spontaneous visit to Montpellier, one that I will harvest further, with less surprise but with more concern for a lifelong training as to how to observe … and its inadequacy.

Brian Goodey
Professor of urban and rural landscape
Oxford Brookes University

Philip Pacey
University of Central Lancashire
GUERILLA GARDENING
No doubt there have been many instances of unauthorised ‘guerilla gardening’ dating from before the term was coined, apparently in the 1970s. It has been suggested that gypsies planted vegetables here and there, returning to harvest their crops; what evidence there is for this I do not know. Certainly modern day guerrilla gardeners can claim ancestry with the Diggers who began communal cultivation of waste land at St George’s Hill near London in 1649, and whose leader, Gerard Winstanley, argued that ‘true freedom lies where a man receives his nourishment and preservation, and that is in the use of the earth’. Today’s guerrilla gardening movement was begun by Liz Christy, who dropped ‘seed bombs’ on vacant lots in the Bowery neighbourhood of New York City. Since 1973, ‘Green Guerrillas’, based in New York, have helped thousands of people turn vacant lots into community gardens. Their achievement and continuing activities are recorded on their Web site, www.greenguerillas.org

In England, Richard Reynolds began undertaking ‘solo missions of horticultural regeneration’, usually under cover of darkness, towards the end of summer 2004. Subsequently he has sought to involve others in enlarging the scope and extending the geographical reach of guerrilla gardening: his website www.guerrillagardening.org encourages would-be guerrilla gardeners to ‘enlist’, to receive newsletters, and if so minded, to join a ‘troop’. A map shows where acts of guerrilla gardening have taken place around the country, and many examples are recorded. A typical example begins:

‘My mother and her friend, The Brigadier, spotted a sorry bed where old evergreen bushes had been felled to help crime prevention. Nothing had been put in their place, so we struck. Mother gathered a team of fifteen locals aged 9 to 67, many bearing plants for their garden…’

Reynolds says ‘I cannot deny that the mischief of being an unofficial gardener, a vandal with plants, is part of the fun for many of us’. An obvious comparison can be made with graffiti, in that a place is modified (perhaps enhanced, perhaps not) unofficially if not illegally. Graffiti may be a response to a blank surface, or to a dull environment, or to the ugliness of commercial advertising. Guerrilla gardening is a response, not so much to uninspiring official planting as to the absence of any planting, to urban deserts, and to the potential which is wasted by wasteland; for some, guerrilla-grown vegetables, along with those from back gardens and allotments, are a protest against the control which capitalism exerts over the food we eat.

Guerilla gardening excites me not least because it represents a way of living without belief but with a kind of faith. (I have tended to think of belief and faith as the same thing; a recent television tribute by Gryth Rees Jones to John Betjeman recently brought home to me that they are not, that faith is in spite of doubt, that it does not vanish uncertainty.) Guerrilla gardening accepts risk. The guerrilla gardener willingly engages in planting, knowing that the plants may be ripped out, the soil removed; he or she tries to do good, with no guarantee of lasting success; invests in the future knowing that there may not be a future. Guerrilla gardening defies despair, subverts nihilism, and creates value out of demands to be recognised as worthwhile. Furthermore, guerrilla gardening is often a gift to a community, and may be the nucleus of a community. But not least, it’s tremendous fun.

Note Image from UK website cited with acknowledgements.

ANTHOLOGY from Charlotte Bronte’s book “Jane Eyre”

A production of Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte appeared on UK television last month. Though purists will say that half the magic was lost, this viewer who found the book riveting when he read it some years ago, found the programme unbearably romantic. Unbearable is the last word, though intricate holds together very well indeed. In these extracts, Jane’s moods of delight, exultation and black despair are expressed by a series of letters and how she as the narrator voice expresses them.

From Chapter 12 of the third edition 1848 of Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte.
It was a fine calm day though very cold; I was tired of sitting still in the library through a whole long morning. Mrs Fairfax had just written a letter which was waiting to be posted so I put on my bonnet and cloak and volunteered to carry it to Hay; the distance, two miles would be a pleasant winter afternoon walk.

The ground was hard, the air was still, I walked fast till I got warm, and then I walked slowly to enjoy and analyse the species of pleasure brooding for me in the hour and situation. It was three o’clock; the church bell tolled as I passed under the belfry: the charm of the hour lay in its approaching dimness, in the low-gliding and pale-beaming sun. I was a mile from Thornfield, in a lane noted for wild roses in summer, for nuts and blackberries in autumn, and even now possessing a few coral treasures in humps and haws, but whose best winter delight lay in its utter solitude and leafless repose. If a breath of air stirred, it made no sound here; for there was not a blot, not an evergreen to rustle, and the stripped Hawthorn and hazel bushes were as still as the white, worn stones which causewayed the middle of the path. Far and wide, on each side, there were only fields, where no cattle now browsed; and the little brown birds, which stirred occasionally in the hedge, looked like single russet leaves that had forgotten to drop.

Jane here has settled in to her post as governess — ‘the promise of a smooth career’ but as yet has not found the love she desires; this is the scene which she imagines will occur when she meets him once more, and on her return to Thornfield:

‘True expectation and black despair are expressed by a series of letters and how she as the narrator voice expresses them.

From Chapter 23 of the third edition 1848 of Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte.

A splendid Midsummer shone over England: skies so pure, suns so radiant as were then seen in long succession, seldom frown or slyly, our wave-girt land. It was as if a band of Italian days had come from the South, like a flock of glorious passenger birds, and lighted to rest them on the cliffs of Albion. The hay was all in, the fields round Thornfield were green and shorn; the roads wide and baked, the trees were in their dark prime; hedge and wood, full-leaved and deep-tinted, contrasted well with the sunny hue of the cleared meadows between.

The previous chapter ends with the words “Never had he (Mr Rochester) called me more frequently to his presence; never been kinder to me when there — and alas! Never had I loved him so well.”

*****

From Chapter 28 of the third edition 1848 of Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte. A distraught Jane Eyre flees from the house of Mr Rochester for whom she had conceived an affection. Whitcross is no town, nor even a hamlet; it is but a stone pillar set up where four roads meet: whitewashed, I suppose, to be more obvious at a distance and in darkness. Four arms spring from its summit: the nearest town to which these point is, according to the inscription, distant ten miles; the farthest, above twenty. From the well-known names of these towns I learn in what county I have lighted, a north-midland shire, dust, with moorland, ridged with mountain: this I see. There are great moors behind and on each hand of me, there are waves of mountains far beyond that deep valley at my feet. The poplars here must be thin, and I see no passengers on these roads: they stretch out east, west, north, and south — white, broad, lonely; they are all cut in the moor, and heather grows deep and wild to their very verge. Yet a chance traveller might pass by; and I wish no eye to see me now: strangers would wonder what I am doing, lingering here at the most, evidently objectless and lost. I might be questioned; I could give no answer but what would sound incredible, and excite suspicion. Not a tie or bond to human society at this moment — not a charm or hope calls me where my fellow-creatures are — none that saw me would have a kind thought or a good wish for me. I have no relative but the universal mother, Nature: I will seek her breast and repose … I struck straight into the heath; I held on to a hollow I saw, deeply furrowing the brown moorside; I waded knee-deep in its dark growth; it turned with its turnings, and finding a moss-blackened granite crag in a hidden angle, I sat down under it. High banks of moor were about me; the crag protected my head: the sky was over that.

From this low point she is rescued and lives for a period with two sisters (not her own) while teaching at a small charity school. As things fall out and most ingeniously too, she returns in love to Mr Rochester rich and part of a rediscovered family.

FINIS
Since I wrote (see LRE 40) about the ‘early imprinting’ (our dear editor’s apt term) of my ‘anchorage’ on the far-out city boundary of Sheffield, and about my recent second-hand virtual experience of it, I have been there again – again virtually. And this was at least as odd an experience, and a little unsettling, too.

Actually, it wasn’t the same place. Let me explain. Remembering that it was a while since I tried to catch up with any news about this area, I googled (delicious word!) the relevant place-name. Inevitably, there was much more on the web than previously. Inevitably, too, parts of the electronic record had gone, though the source of the troublesome jolt was still there. My screen was dominated by ‘results’ from the rock-climbing fraternity. There is a world I know only the frontier of. I happened on several galleries of photos of climbers on a freestanding rock pillar called the Needle. This stands just off a sometime-quarried millstone grit edge (locally called a rocher) on the other side of the valley from My Place, and slightly upstream of it. Some of the photos showed the route across to My Place. I was surprised. I learned several things.

First, I had not appreciated how much denser the woodland now is in this part of the valley (which is just short of the moorland edge and of the Peak Park) than a few decades ago. What had stuck in the gallery of my memory was a pastoral valley floor, flanked by thin, scrubby woodland, with rather bleak rectilinear-walled cattle-pasture on the plateau on one side and rather brave Suburba looming on the other. Downstream was a modest water treatment works and upstream two charmingly matured Victorian reservoirs with their backdrop of planted woodland that fringed the heather and bilberry moors. What I saw on my monitor’s screen was a reservoir, and water-works, patches of fields, advancing Suburba and retreating moor, but most of the view was a tree’d landscape.

Truly a ‘landscape’ – indeed, a prospect. This was the valley – and My Place in it – as seen from the top of a needle of rock standing above the tree canopy — my landscape as I have never seen it. When I knew the place, that part of the valley was (so far as I know) out of bounds. A few years ago I found and enjoyed a recently-made path through it, skirting the Rocher, and rising to the Enclosure landscape, but the Needle I still knew nothing about. How could this be?... Of course, the Needle wouldn’t have shown to someone nosing around for bugs or bilberries on lower ground.

As I ponder these pictures of valley, trees, rock, climbers, and an ironing-board, I imagine My Place – my anchorage. But of course it isn’t there. GPS might find the location for me – and my feet might remember some of the shapes of the ground – but the habitat has changed. The sense has changed – and it seems to be in a different play. My place is no more.

In fact, having just checked in W.A. Poucher’s 1966 Peak and Pennine walkers’ guide, which I’ve had for years, I have to admit to seeing a photo of the Rivelin Needle several times – but I hadn’t “taken it in”. It stood 20m bold and tree-free when I was innocently mooching in the area. But it wasn’t on ‘my’ side of the valley. Now it’s quite famous. My loss!

So much for being knowledgeable about the landscape. I didn’t think, however, that it was so much more a selection of bits of the land rather than the whole ‘scape that was important to me. It may be so, for while I occasionally watched some of the trees, the wood itself was easing back into position. I seem to have failed to appreciate how much, but how subtly, an imprinted landscape changes, and how narrowly focused our interest can be in what we might think of as ‘The Whole Damned Thing’.

Oh, the ironing-board! While googling, I also learned that there’s something called Extreme Ironing. I’m sure there wasn’t in my day.... (Find ‘Extreme ironing’ and ‘Rivelin Rocks’ in Wikipedia).

Since this was Cumbria, a sort of Holy Land for those of the Romantic sensibility, more than one speaker made a passing nod to Coleridge and Wordsworth, though the presiding spirit at this seminar should probably have been that even more local boy, William Gilpin, who was born at Scaleby Castle, not far from Carlisle. It was Gilpin’s published tours of the more mountainous areas of Britain, complete with advice on suitable subjects for brush and pencil, which did so much to generate the Picturesque enthusiasm of the late eighteenth century. Gilpin’s central interest was the visual representation of landscape and that was the also a main thread through, though paint had to give way to pixels, and the Claude glass (1) to the Virtual Reality headset.

Gilpin infamously suggested taking a malted to the ruins of Tintern Abbey to make them yet more Picturesque. He was satirized in his own day and nowadays gets a bad press because the Picturesque has become the whipping boy of landscape theory. The degenerate Picturesque has become the chocolate-box twee, but the whole idea of evaluating landscapes on the basis of their suitability for painting is now derided. Doesn’t the Picturesque deny other sensory inputs: sound, touch, small and the kinaesthetic sense? Isn’t it inevitably distancing, setting up a picture frame between the world and the viewer? Isn’t it politically and socially deploitable to gaze with purely aesthetic intent at the poor or their dilapidated hovels?

At the seminar these criticisms never seemed too far away. One of the benefits of Virtual Reality (VR), it seems, is its immateriality. In other words, once you have got yourself wired up into the gloves and the headset, there is no longer any picture frame. You are there, surrounded, enveloped in the imagined digital environment. Of course, there are only any poor people to worry about if you put them there, and none of these artists did.

For the Canadian artist Char Davies, this experience of VR immersion has profound implications. Eschewing the kind of photographic realism which many VR designers (and computer game developers) often strive to achieve, in Osmose (1995) and Ephémère (1998) she created translucent environments where the boundaries of objects became blurred. In Osmose, the traveller in this virtual world imagine My Place – (digi-naut?) could follow the traces of minerals as they were absorbed by the roots of a tree, soar among the branches or even enter the structure of a leaf. But of course it isn’t there. My anchorage. But of course it isn’t there. It isn’t there.

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The virtual worlds of Anouk de Clerq, a Belgian artist raised by ‘Buddhist psychotherapists’, were much more sparsely furnished, even minimal. The first we were shown was little more than a horizon in front of which little inky creatures whizzed about. The next, which was introduced as a sort of secret garden, was undulating and dum-dum-like, with odd little structures and, at one point, stands of vertical lines that looked like the worst sort of Forestry Commission plantation. All of this was accompanied by a soundtrack of harsh mechanical noises. De Clerk described these virtual places as Wonderlands (drawn in some way—like the landscape designs of Geoffrey Jellicoe—from the Jungian collective subconscious) and she was clearly able to share them with us, although I was relieved when each clip came to an end. The artist saw herself within the Romantic tradition, but using virtual worlds rather than nature to express something of her inner self.

The day’s presentations seemed to split along gender lines. The two just described were essentially meditative and inward-looking. The second session began with the work of Jorn Ebner, a German artist presently based in Newcastle, who is concerned, amongst other things, with the idea of territory and settlement. While on residence at Grizedale he developed a portable kit for the creation of a mobile settlement, and he does similar things on game-like webpages, where hunter-gathering visitors can move virtual objects around to make places. There were resonances here with the sorts of drawings architects and landscape architects make in AutoCAD before they start to change real places, but it was difficult to know whether Ebner was being critical or ironic.

The same difficulty attended the presentation by Italian ‘games-artist’ Damiano Colacito. His work does highlight the tension between VR and the real world. We may become fantastically good at creating virtual environments, but it seems unlikely that they will ever be mistaken for reality. And even if this were possible, we might wonder what the point would be—just as people began to question those Picturesque gardens where landscape as far as we could envision the notion (and recognising it only as outdoor play space) may perhaps provide a fundamental imprint.

Reflecting on my past memories of place, I have recently been able to take a new, but contemporary to the time, look at these landscapes. From a photographer’s viewpoint the landscape research it was proposed must serve communities at all levels not forgetting ordinary people as well as development and policy. The group was in favour of grass roots work, perhaps in liaison with other grass roots groups. Particular interest was expressed in post industrial landscapes. We should explore links to achieve this. See also page 12 ‘proposed excursions’. We would value your feedback—please send to me.

There emerged a well supported interest in urban fringe landscape and its post modern theory/practice. Wolverhampton and the Midlands conurbation was in the thick of this, and so were hundreds of communities with a potential interest in their changing landscapes. Landscape research it was proposed must serve communities at all levels not forgetting ordinary people as well as development and policy. The group was in favour of grass roots work, perhaps in liaison with other grass roots groups. Particular interest was expressed in post industrial landscapes. We should explore links to achieve this. See also page 12 ‘proposed excursions’. We would value your feedback—please send to me.

Our Wolverhampton Meeting and Urban Industrial Landscape Thoughts

There were some works that seemed particularly well suited to the space, where two walls were covered with images of woodland, it only gradually dawned that one of these was a film of real woodland while the other had been created using the games-engine from Unreal Tournament. I might have seen nothing more, if one of the artists concerned, Ruth Gibson, hadn’t told me that she was hidden somewhere in the real image, wearing a sniper’s camouflage suit. Similarly there were camouflaged creatures—well, graceful furtive women actually—hidden away in the virtual image and with the help of the joystick provided, you could track them down. I enjoyed this interaction, though I’m not sure what any of it meant or proved. After a couple of minutes the initial confusion between real and unreal worlds is over.

Landscape architects have been using virtual reality for at least as long as artists and perhaps to more purpose. We have a student, for example, who is using similar software to that used in Summerbranch to model a landscape of growing trees. This will be used by the Great North Forest as a tool for public participation, as it will allow people to see views with change in a devil’s hunting woodland. But all of the day’s presentations held some interest and I was sorry that I had teaching commitments that would not let me stay for the second day.

I recall going on an adventure (one of several to this place) across the fields which faced the house. I had a ‘stout pole’ and it was a great delight firmly imprinted on my mind that I used this to leap over a number of wet channels in the pasture. I know that they were channels because they were filled with clear water. Examination of the contemporary airphotos shows that we lived opposite a field of medieval ridge and furrow and the channels were not channels at all but rain-filled furrows. There was a little mere (a small tree girt pond) where we walked out, with duckweed spots. I was alarmed. At my most intrepid I went with two others (such is my recollection) into a very small field covered in black mire with green duckweed spots. I was alarmed. At my most intrepid I went with two others (such is my recollection) into a very small field and caught two sticklebacks from a pond with

Notes
Ian Thompson is Editor of Landscape Research and teaches at the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, University of Newcastle. The Claude Glass Manufactured in England in the 17th Century, was standard equipment for Picturesque tourists, producing instant tonal images that supposedly resembled works by Claude. It was a tinted convex mirror. You turned your back on the subject. (Bit like a wing mirror, John!)
Blair Witch. A hugely successful, low budget American horror movie of the late 1990s which aimed to blur the difference between reality and fiction at students investigate a witch within a forest and themselves fall victim to magical disappearance.

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There emerged a well supported interest in urban fringe landscape and its post modern theory/practice. Wolverhampton and the Midlands conurbation was in the thick of this, and so were hundreds of communities with a potential interest in their changing landscapes. Landscape research it was proposed must serve communities at all levels not forgetting ordinary people as well as development and policy. The group was in favour of grass roots work, perhaps in liaison with other grass roots groups. Particular interest was expressed in post industrial landscapes. We should explore links to achieve this. See also page 12 ‘proposed excursions’. We would value your feedback—please send to me.

There were some works that seemed particularly well suited to the space, where two walls were covered with images of woodland, it only gradually dawned that one of these was a film of real woodland while the other had been created using the games-engine from Unreal Tournament. I might have seen nothing more, if one of the artists concerned, Ruth Gibson, hadn’t told me that she was hidden somewhere in the real image, wearing a sniper’s camouflage suit. Similarly there were camouflaged creatures—well, graceful furtive women actually—hidden away in the virtual image and with the help of the joystick provided, you could track them down. I enjoyed this interaction, though I’m not sure what any of it meant or proved. After a couple of minutes the initial confusion between real and unreal worlds is over.

Landscape architects have been using virtual reality for at least as long as artists and perhaps to more purpose. We have a student, for example, who is using similar software to that used in Summerbranch to model a landscape of growing trees. This will be used by the Great North Forest as a tool for public participation, as it will allow people to see views with change in a devil’s hunting woodland. But all of the day’s presentations held some interest and I was sorry that I had teaching commitments that would not let me stay for the second day.

I recall going on an adventure (one of several to this place) across the fields which faced the house. I had a ‘stout pole’ and it was a great delight firmly imprinted on my mind that I used this to leap over a number of wet channels in the pasture. I know that they were channels because they were filled with clear water. Examination of the contemporary airphotos shows that we lived opposite a field of medieval ridge and furrow and the channels were not channels at all but rain-filled furrows. There was a little mere (a small tree girt pond) where we walked out, with duckweed spots. I was alarmed. At my most intrepid I went with two others (such is my recollection) into a very small field covered in black mire with green duckweed spots. I was alarmed. At my most intrepid I went with two others (such is my recollection) into a very small field and caught two sticklebacks from a pond with
I am trying to see why this design approach came into being and is practiced. In addition to studying the theory behind all this, I am also looking at the impact that public policy, guidance and funding issues have had on this as a design phenomenon. And does the re-introduction, albeit in an often much modified form, of a former landscape feature, stimulate the elusive sense of place. Does the resurrection of formerly buried landscape features have any bearing on the experiential interest that a user perceives? In short, does a line of blue bricks in the paving mean anything to the average user who has no idea that there used to be a river there?

To explain my background I graduated in geography at Aberystwyth where I specialised in history as a land surveyor then at the Land Registry I then re-trained as a landscape architect at UCE. Within contemporary landscape architecture, there is a design approach which sees some designers re-creating the outlines and traces of buried landscape features. It is as if these landscape architects are looking at old maps, and putting back onto the site what used to be there, or in McDermid’s words: forcing these skeletons up to the surface.

One striking example of this design approach can be found in the recently completed Phoenix Initiative in Coventry. Partly built on the site of a long since-destroyed Benedictine monastery, the designers, Robert Rummey Design Associates (RDA) have taken the outline of the Priory Cloister and re-interpreted it as a courtyard fronting onto the visitor’s centre. This ‘new’ cloister is defined on three sides by a high sandstone wall (the fourth side being the glass front of the visitor’s centre) into which a line of blue bricks set into the paving is traced using a change in the paving material.

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To explain my background I graduated in geography at Aberystwyth where I specialised in historical landscape studies and surveying. Working first as a land surveyor then at the Land Registry I then re-trained as a landscape architect at UCE.

Alex Albans

RESURRECTING THE SKELETON

“All landscapes hold their own secrets. Layer on layer, the past is buried beneath the surface. Seldom irretrievable, it lurks waiting for human agency or meteorological accident to force the skeleton up through flesh and skin back into the present.” McDermid, 2006

This quotation neatly describes the topic of research I am currently undertaking at the Birmingham Institute for Art and Design – part of the University of Central England (UCE).

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