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## Great Streets: Repurposed Townscape

by Brian Goodey

The recent announcement of the Academy of Urbanism awards, including that for the book 'Great Streets', caught my eye. Working in Oxford, I bus or walk one of Allan Jacob's (\*) definitively analysed



'Great Streets', The High, every time I'm in town. Narrowed when shops fringe (a nice little College earner?), wider when the Listed College frontages are adjacent. It is an impressive and memorable (good for tourist marketing) street regardless of the steady stream of buses that fill the view. There are subtle twists and turns, two or three signal trees to punctuate, and some splendid college eye stoppers.

Such is the institutional and corporate involvement that there are few retail vacancies, but the High has changed massively since Turner's 19<sup>th</sup> century rendition, all town peasants in shadowed backdrop and gowned academics in central light. (The Turner image is readily available on line, but is © The Ashmolean). In my paltry forty years I've seen the gradual departure of community retail – even in the Covered Market – to be replaced by more tourist traps than student facilities, although the genteel bits and specialist outfitters survive. This Great Street is retained by tourist and student income and by conferencing. Affluent users are well served, umbrella led groups are instructed to admire.



But for the majority of British streets, the local urban community has voted with its wheels and keypad, with an average of 10%+ retail vacancy and an 'in-your-face' statement of the local High Street in decline.

An historic townscape may still work if there is the admiring market for admirable buildings as a painted scene to leisure shopping. For those seeking specific goods, rather than a retail experience, the mall or the web offer more choice with less investment in access, advice and instant results.



As Alan Lockey (\*\*\*) and many others have noted, the former retail High street must now offer something different, something that cannot be achieved on line, in the mall, or in the pay bounded visitor attraction. The successful - the Best - street of the immediate future must be much more than an approved townscape, but rather a context for human interaction and event not available on screen.

This is where the Academy's choices for 2020 are spot on – in the shortlist were Belgrave Road, Leicester, Rye Lane in south London and, initially surprising, the winner was St Mark's Lane in Bristol.

St Mark's is a narrow, two car, 19<sup>th</sup> century inner suburban street serving a dense terraced neighbourhood, punctuated by a foreboding neo-Norman St Marks (now converted to residential) and adjacent elevated railway. Beyond is a truly

hideous cage-like rail access and crossing in security galvanised metalwork, an extrusion of the engineer's art deserving of national condemnation.

This Street, though short and mean architecturally (perhaps Pevsner had a line on St Mark's), is the main river to which graffiti clad alleys (this is Banksy territory) and terraced streets flow. It is local, with basic supplies for a local market, it is social with cafes and more notices for come and join us events, and it therefore has colour, movement and the chance for encounters, even on the dullest day.

The mix of small commercial enterprises, community facilities, places of worship (Islamic and Baptist survive long after the established church gave up) all bring life here. From reports, this is all more active and colourful in the sun, and on Islamic festivals but, even in December, you have the feeling

that if you linger a while something will happen.

In the overblown Christmas wish lists of election manifestos, High Street regeneration got a mention. And, yes, business rates do inhibit innovative enterprise. But what is more important is re-connecting the local community with its retail street as the daily meeting place, the idea of 'going to town' for daily shopping or an evening drink where you meet your neighbours and, through the mix of people and time, sometimes see something truly noteworthy.

I'm not at all sure that we yet have the right training, funding or easily available exemplars to bring this particular interpretation of Great Streets into reality. In the 2020's please prove me wrong!

Notes

Allan B. Jacobs **Great Streets** The MIT Press, 1993

\*\* Alan Lockey. **A Nation of Shopkeepers'** Royal Society of Arts Journal Issue 3, 2019 pp 38-39.

*My thanks and copyright acknowledgement for the exquisite front page image of Oxford High, detailed here (right).*



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# Fugitives

By Simon Armitage

Then we woke and were hurtling headlong  
for wealds and wolds,  
blood coursing, the Dee and the Nidd in full spate  
through the spinning waterwheels in the wrists  
and over the heart's weir,  
the nightingale hip-hopping ten to the dozen  
under the morning's fringe.

It was no easy leap, to exit the engine house of the head  
and vault the electric fence  
of commonplace things,  
to open the door of the century's driverless hearse,  
roll from the long cortège  
then dust down and follow  
the twisting ribbon of polecats wriggling free from ex-  
tinction  
or slipstream the red kite's triumphant flypast out of  
oblivion  
or trail the catnip of spraint and scat tingeing the morn-  
ing breeze.

On we journeyed at full tilt  
through traffic-light orchards,  
the brain's compass dialling for fell, moor,  
escarpment and shore, the skull's sextant  
plotting for free states coloured green on the map,  
using hedgerows as handrails,  
barrows and crags as trig points and cats' eyes.

We stuck to the switchbacks and scenic routes,  
steered by the earth's contours and natural lines of de-  
sire,

feet firm on solid footings of bedrock and soil  
fracked only by moles.

We skimmed across mudflat and saltmarsh,  
clambered to stony pulpits on high hills  
inhaling gallons of pure sky  
into the moors of our lungs,  
bartered bitcoins of glittering shingle and shale.

Then arrived in safe havens, entered the zones,  
stood in the grandstands of bluffs and ghylls, spectators  
to flying ponies grazing wild grass to carpeted lawns,  
oaks flaunting turtle doves on their ring-fingers,  
ospreys fishing the lakes from invisible pulleys and  
hoists,  
the falcon back on its see-through pivot, lured from its  
gyre.

Here was nature as future,  
the satellite dishes of blue convolvulus  
tuned to the cosmos, tracking the chatter of stars,  
the micro-gadgets of complex insects  
working the fields, heaths tractored by beetles,  
rainbowed hay meadows tipsy with mist and light,  
golden gravel hoarded in eskers and streams.

And we vowed not to slumber again  
but claimed sanctuary  
under the kittiwake's siren  
and corncrake's alarm,  
in realms patrolled by sleepwalking becks and creeks  
where beauty employs its own border police.  
And witnessed ancient trees  
affirming their citizenship of the land,  
and hunkered and swore oaths, made laws  
in hidden parliaments of bays and coves,  
then gathered on commons and capes  
waving passports of open palms, medalled by dog rose  
and teasel  
and raising the flag of air.

*"I was delighted to be asked to work with the NAAONB on this auspicious occasion. They are an institution that safeguards and celebrates all that is good about the world we live in, and an organisation whose values I share and trust. The relationship between poetry and the land in this country goes back to the very origins of poetic utterance and I'm proud to be making a contribution to that ongoing dialogue. There is no greater challenge for a contemporary laureate and geography graduate than to contribute artistically to a conversation about the natural world and the state of our planet, and to praise those things that are wonderful and of wonder."*

**Simon Armitage, Poet Laureate**

The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty commissioned this poem to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, which paved the way for the creation of the UK's 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The Act sat alongside the complementary National Health Service Act in a visionary recognition of the vital links between health and access to nature for all.

## HERE IS WHAT MAKES A GREAT 'COUNTRY PARK'

By Bud Young

Some time ago I was involved in grant aiding a series of country parks in the South East — a fairly new funding venture by the Countryside Commis-

ulist gesture years back, but they are still there and looking good. Right now they are the new focus of a double auditorium-style bank. Think theatre. It is very much under construction. They are digging into the mounds closeby which reveals (as one might have expected) that these are spoil heaps of discarded stone and soil, the stone not suitable for



sion at that time (1980) . It was for the provision of greenspace in 'nice places for urbanites' which also protected the farming interest. Some were not that nice, a bit ordinary but local authorities got on with it. Some were dull but had trees, woodland and grass with the quintessential information board and toilet block. I was therefore delighted at the weekend to visit a country park which carried both these vital components as well as the deepest elements of landscape. All of them? Let me explain.

The place is called Ham Hill. In itself it is a notable landscape feature. As its first attribute it commands extensive views across Somerset. It is secondary woodland or volunteer scrub not wooded; its outward views embrace some big hillside woodlands. From it looking east you can see historic lynchets; it has wildly interesting minor topography internally — a commotion of haphazard mounds; externally it has a steep northern rim. This makes it as good as an Iron Age rampart on which it also scores.

At its centre encircled by its rim ridge and hemmed in by the confusion of mounds sits a circle of standing stones a commemoration for the Millennium, the year 2000. This might have been a flash pop-

sale and discarded over the last several hundred years. And yet there are many big but unusable chunks of rock and large blocks and a vast mixture of small rocks. The best stone quarrymen needed, what could be sold, would have been well bedded rectangular blocks. I read that it was quarried over



the years by many local families at a cottage level, and is now run by two companies but the property of The Duchy of Cornwall.

This then is a quarry site, that it has been going for



let us say 300 years, that it provided building stone for many villages, Montacute close by, Stoke and Norton Sub Hamdon and down to Crewkerne. It has that golden colour that people gush over in Cotswold villages.

So this country park has a back story. Excellent. And the day I was there the wind gusted to 50 mph and I feared for my life as I walked the steep slippery rim. Is that drama?



And as a country park it boasts people walking and at play. Just the job. Children on tiny bikes whizzing down the mounds, a dog or two (or five or six), a scatter of individual standing stones as in Carnac or Avebury -- stones big enough to look 'ancient civilisation' in a thousand year's time. Think future. So — landscape attributes: shape, offsite views, internal views, mazelike paths, extraordinary three di-

mensionality of the interior, revealed origins, local history, memorial stone circle, families and children, trees, scrub grass and plans for future theatre. And if you want more there is a tall obelisk, a needle commemorating the war dead. And of course toilets.

**BY**

**Note** from Wikipedia.

Hamstone is the name given to a honey-coloured building stone from Ham Hill, Somerset, England. It is a well-cemented medium to coarse grained limestone characterised by marked bedding planes of clay inclusions and less well-cemented material which

weather differentially to give exposed blocks a characteristic furrowed appearance. In origin, Hamstone is a Jurassic limestone from the Toarcian, or Upper Lias, stage.

LRG now has a new Registered Office address (to replace 1027A Garrett Lane, London).

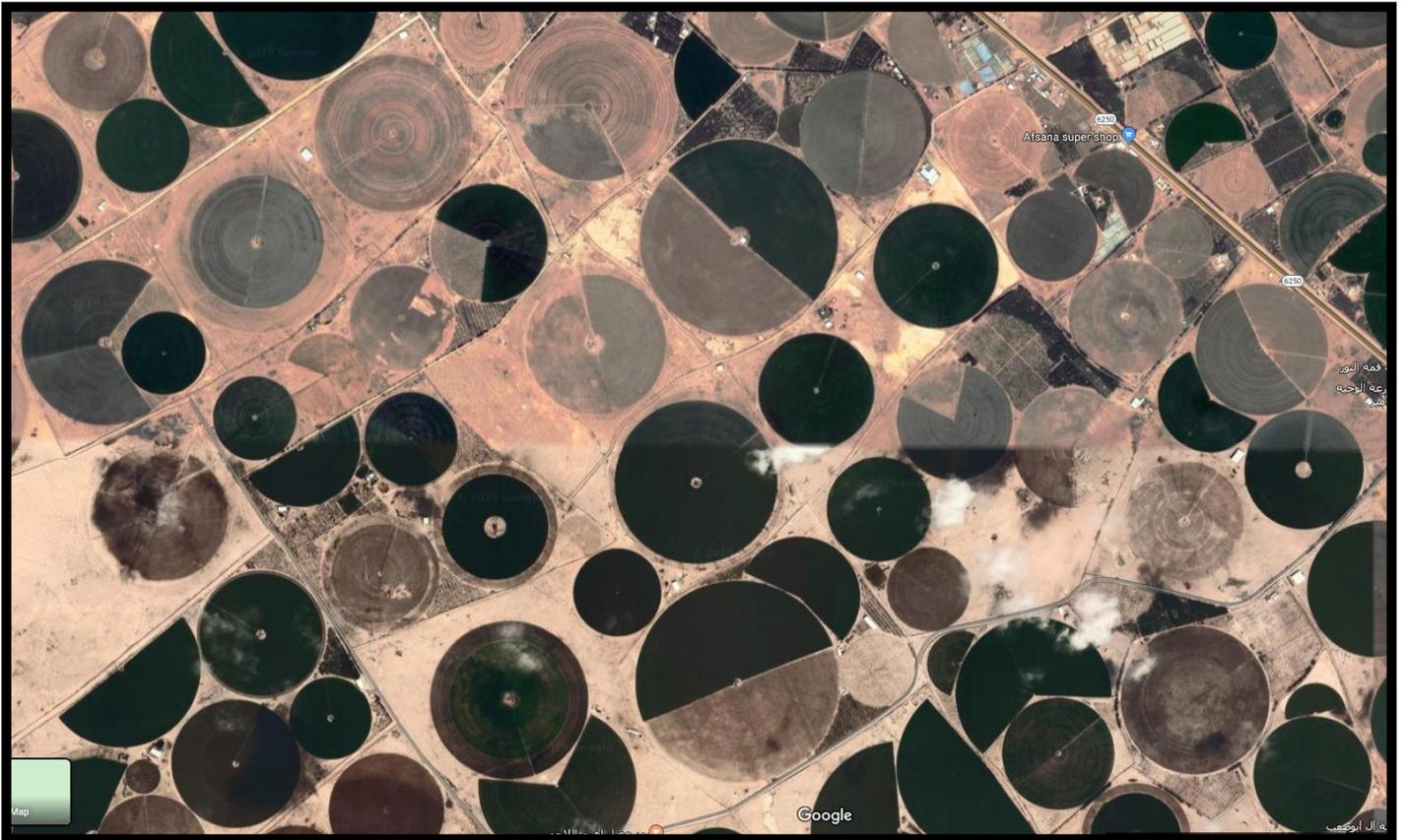
It is:

**99 Western Road, Lewes, East Sussex,**

*What have these two landscapes got in common?*

*Both are sited in countries rich in oil.*

Locations: West of Riyadh, capital of Saudi Arabia and Lagos, Nigeria. Google Maps acknowledged.



## ANOTHER TIM O'HARE SOIL CONFERENCE

### Sustainable soil practices in Development. October 1st 2019

130 plus delegates at last week's SoilsCon 2019 heard key industry speakers promote sustainable soil practices in landscaping and construction. House builders, landscape architects, garden designers, contractors, and topsoil suppliers attended the fourth annual soils conference organised by soil scientist and landscape consultant Tim O'Hare.

In 2018, after three successful conferences, SoilsCon took a break. The current focus on climate change, however, and a realisation by the wider industry

achieved if soil is recognised through the broadest possible coalition of interests, with all stakeholders, disciplines, and sectors playing their part to ensure this fundamental natural resource is sustainably managed by developing training, knowledge transfer and good practice.

**Tim O'Hare** then gave a masterclass (it says here) in sustainable soil use in landscape projects. His key objective at each SoilsCon is to provide delegates with the knowledge and tools to effectively manage their project soils. Tim took delegates through the soil planning process and stressed the importance of understanding the site soils they are working with from a very early stage. From initial planning, outline and detailed design, through to construction and soil aftercare, it is crucial that soils are correctly

surveyed, specified, tested, sourced, manufactured and managed. Tim stressed the fact that soil compaction is a major problem on site and delegates were shown images of sites where compacted soil had led to a total failure in soil functions, including poor infiltration, soil fauna decline, anaerobic conditions, and ultimately plant failure and increased flood risk.

After the morning break, during which a Soil Surgery was held, the next speaker was **Sarah Morgan, garden designer, horticulturist, lecturer and Chair of the Society of Garden**

**Designers (SGD)**. Sarah's presentation demonstrated why knowledge of geology and soil should influence the design of landscape projects if they are to be successful in the long-term. Her own 'hands on' approach to project soils has convinced her that careful site analysis, minimal disturbance, responsible handling and creative solutions can all reduce project costs and increase the longevity of the planting. Drawing on her many years of experience as a horticultural advisor and garden designer, and referencing projects she had undertaken, she described her own working practices.

Closing the morning's presentations was **Tim White, Senior Associate at Tim O'Hare Associates**, who talked about the management and preparation of back garden soils. With particular emphasis on the gardens presented to homeowners on new build



that we must manage our soils more sustainably, meant that the time was right for another conference. The speakers for 2019 provided delegates with knowledge across a range of soil-related subjects that will enable them to take a balanced approach to working with soils sustainably.

Following a brief introduction by Tim O'Hare, **Neville Fay, a chartered arboriculturist and Founder/Director of the Sustainable Soils Alliance** explained the vital mutually supportive relationship between trees and soils and the threats posed by the loss of c. 2.9 million tonnes of topsoil a year. While air and water have national standards, soils do not and, until recently, their rightful place in government policy and core government practice has been ignored. The Sustainable Soils Alliance is dedicated to restoring the nation's soils to health within a generation. As Neville explained, however, this will only be

developments, Tim discussed the difficulties presented by construction sites, where the presence of many different trades, their plant, machinery and vehicles, and the limited space for storing topsoil presented the ‘perfect storm’ in terms of soil management. Groundworkers, Tim said, rarely understood the requirement for topsoil to remain friable, uncontaminated by glass, aggregate and mortar, and, most importantly, to be worked with only when it is relatively dry and definitely not in a ‘plasticised’ state. Using some disturbing images of poor soil handling and storage, and examples of compaction, Tim stressed the need for housebuilders to do more to make sure the soils that end up in the gardens of new homes are really ‘fit for purpose’.

After lunch, soils scientist **Simon Leake, Managing Director of SESL Australia**, discussed the design of low fertility soils, referencing the Barangaroo project in Sydney for which he designed the project soils. A sandstone headland beneath the southern end of the famous Sydney Harbour Bridge, Barangaroo has been redeveloped as part of Sydney’s central business district. The six hectare Barangaroo Reserve now boasts c. 75,000 native trees, plants

Following on with the theme of manufactured soils, the next speaker was **Andy Spetch, National TOP-SOIL Manager at British Sugar plc**. He briefly explained the sustainable credentials of the company’s topsoil – it is brought in on the sugar beet delivered by farmers across East Anglia to British Sugar factories – and then took delegates step by step through the recycling and conditioning processes that have been developed over the years, which result in the production of various topsoil products. Andy explained how many of these processes can be adapted to conditioning soils on construction projects.

Choosing and using mulches was the day’s penultimate presentation, delivered by **Catherine Dawson, Technical Director of Melcourt Industries**. Opening her presentation with an explanation of the physical properties of different types of mulch, Catherine then looked at the various claims for what mulch could achieve, giving delegates clear guidance on the correct selection of mulch, how to apply it, and the expected outcomes for planting schemes when best practice is applied.

The day’s final presentation, and possibly the most photogenic, was on Wildflowers – superheroes of

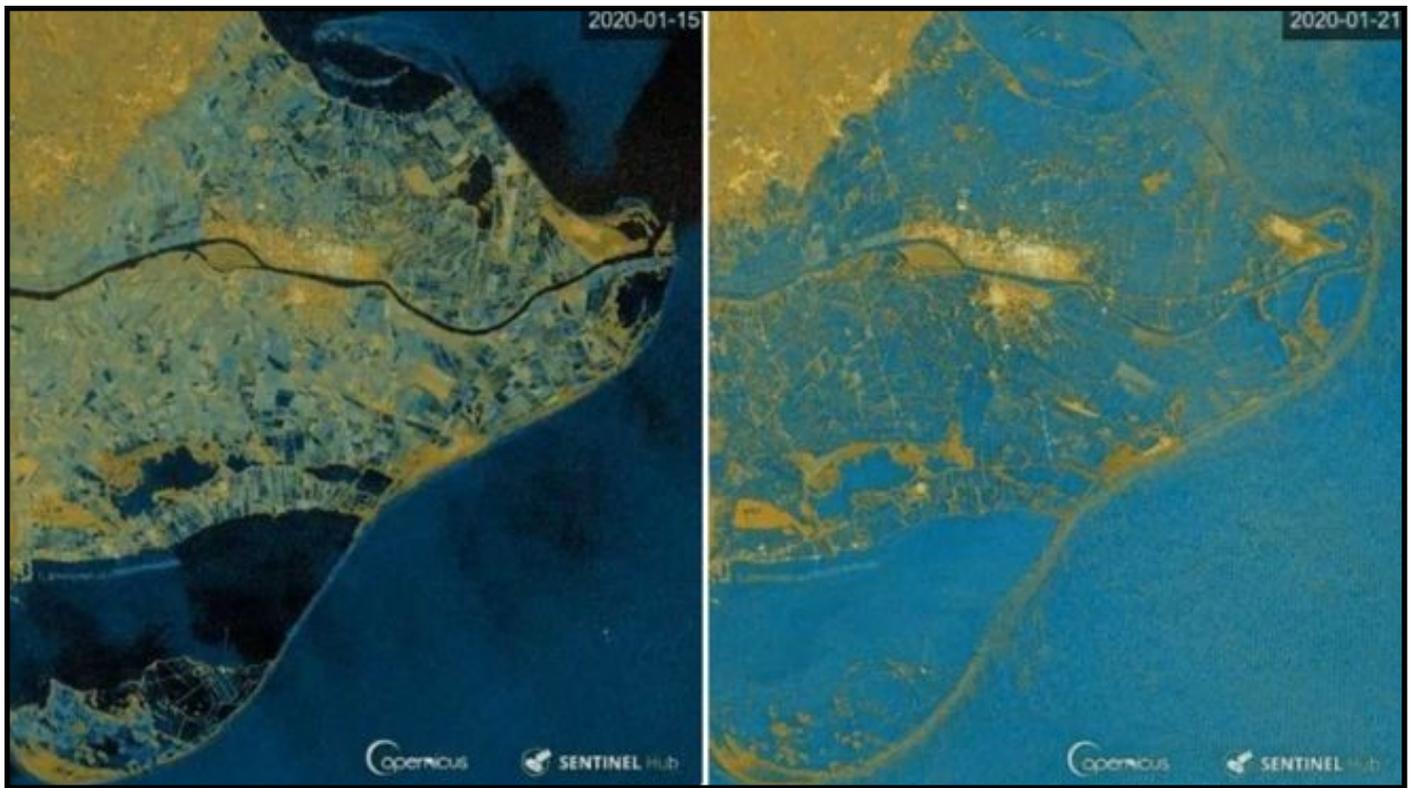
green infrastructure and urban greening, delivered by **Helen Gillespie-Brown, Business Development Manager at Wildflower Turf**. In her presentation, Helen explained the development of wildflower turf and how it is grown, including the selection of seed mixes for different landscape applications. She highlighted the benefits wildflowers bring to any landscape and discussed how they can enhance biodiversity for the advantage of wildlife and people whilst meeting regulatory requirements such as

Biodiversity Net Gain and BREEAM. Wildflowers make significant contributions to Green Infrastructure and urban greening for many reasons, from pollution mitigation to effective SuDS schemes, offering multifunctional solutions throughout.

**Report by the Company PR office (edited)**



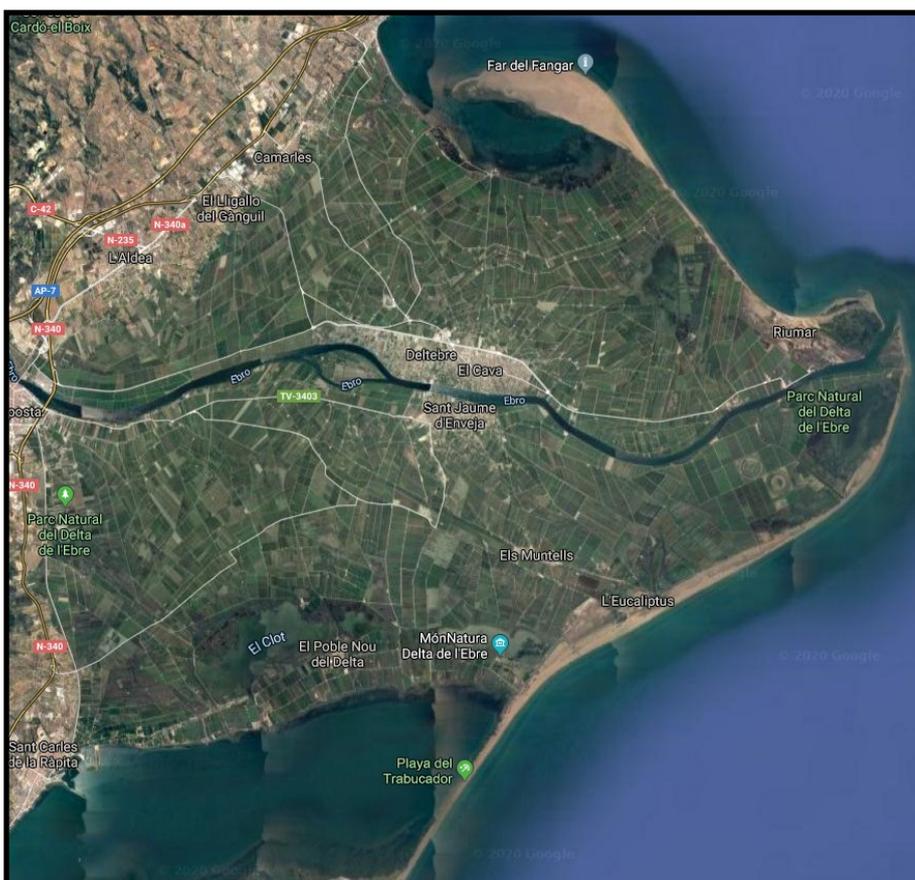
and shrubs, all growing in low fertility soils where the levels of phosphorus in the soil were fundamental to the success of the scheme. Using excavated sandstone from the site, Simon explained how his trials with varying percentages of green compost resulted in a soil design that has seen the reserve flourish.



## THE EBRO DELTA: LANDSCAPE OR GEOGRAPHY

### A note by the editor

These two satellite images show the flooding of the Ebro delta Spain's longest river lying between Barcelona and Valencia. A storm surge on the east coast of Spain has swept 3km (two miles) inland, devastating 30 Kms<sup>2</sup> of rice paddies (see the rectangular patchworks) in the Ebro river delta south of Barcelona. Storm Gloria (January 2020) has wrecked beach facilities, blocked roads and caused power cuts.



The distinctive urban area within the delta is Deltebre, which sits on the north bank of the Ebro while to the west are the coalesced urban spreads of L'Aldea and Amposta.

## TREES TO SAVE THE WORLD

by the Nigel Young

All the talk these days is about Climate Change. I unconsciously used capitals for these two words. Associated topics considered to relate and to form part of a joined up whole are the Australian forest fires, the flooding in Derbyshire and the wasting of Alaskan glaciers not to mention those in Greenland and elsewhere. News fatigue? Yeah! So here is another commentator.

While carbon neutral by 2050 is the declared aim (not soon enough they say), tree planting is seen as an element of the solution. Tree planting is landscape. We will plant a trillion says President Trump. Elsewhere, but in my small town an enthused group is aiming to plant one tree for every member of its population (1700 estimated). That is quite an expensive venture. Trees cost money, stakes and guards (are these still plastic? Recycled plastic?) cost money. 40 years ago it was called the ATP or Amenity Tree Planting programme and I oversaw government funding of the efforts across four counties in England.

At that same time the Countryside Commission established guidelines for the landscape improvement of ten distinct farm types. It was called the NAL — the New Agricultural Landscapes programme. I refer to this not because I have evidence that it succeed-



ed but because it emphasised the management of hedges. And trees in field corners. Tiddly additions. Hampshire at that time (under the guidance of Landscape Institute's recent director, Merrick Denton Thompson) were also concerned with hedges and field margins. I assisted them mapping extensive areas. Time passes, initiatives fade new ideas make the headlines. Wilding (see LRE 85) of lowland agricultural land is the new buzz. Good.

But as I travelled by train from Reading to Exeter the other day I am struck by hedges yet again. This links them to climate change. Nod your head or say "yes ....??"

Some of the farmlands I passed through had hedges which, though broad and 'well managed' — an agricultural notion — contained no emergent trees. One such was an immaculately barbered pattern of



rectangular fields such as I show below. Not a tree in sight. Others, praise be, were dotted with old standard oaks. Still others perhaps in less intensively farmed land amounted to coppice with tree lines running into woodland.

So we do the sums: or crunch the numbers as we now say: allow trees to emerge from hedge growth — they do, and we will have a million trees and to many of us a more beautiful landscape. We will admit to the farming community that trees in hedges shade crops, create wind disturbance fringes, and have to be avoided by the hedge barber — time is money. But this sounds like ‘profit before planetary rescue’. And profit is one of the principal identified causes for our planetary anxiety.

How else to achieve massive gains? Well suppose that there are 5 million gardens in England of sufficient size to accommodate a tree — ok reduce that to 2 million. A tree in the garden? — that’s nice! Two trees and you can sling a hammock.

**BY**

#### Note

To attest my credentials to speak on hedges, I add the following reference:

**“Hedges in Hampshire: an airphoto study of hedge quality, structure and loss in ten representative Hampshire parishes”**. Report with maps, tables, and atlas of illustrative photographs, R.N.Young and R.A.Young 1986 for the Landscape Department, Hampshire County Council.

#### NATURE NOTE

Local thatcher Adam Hyne tells me that where thatched roofs curve around (as at the corner of my house), jackdaws pull out the thatch reed to eat flies that live and lay eggs in the hollow stems. Flies on a stick! Yummee. Look at any nature publication or TV programme and **bee hotels (how to construct your ...)** are very popular. My thatcher has netted the affected area and we may lose a whole (raucous) family of birds. The conservation dilemma.

There are hundreds of jackdaws in this town. Every so often they whirl around in a noisy celebration fly by.

Your articles and comments, images reports and poetry are urgently required if I am to keep this publication afloat in a world increasingly dominated by 140 word comment or papers in multiple authorship of a serious academic intent. **The Editor**

The Editor, has a library of 82 official published and unpublished reports some thick meaning substantial, and mostly thin cardboard covering a variety of topics, these include:

National parks, green belt/urban fringe, country parks, planning, heritage coast plans, small woodlands and forestry, landscape management plans, rights of way, green lanes, regional studies, the interpretation for visitors of sites and places, archaeology, agriculture/farming, housing and urban nature. Most of these date from more than 30 years ago and some may be classics from that time. For example **A Plan for the Chilterns 1973**. Many were connected with or authored for the then Countryside Commission.

If you would like to receive this 20" thick stack gratis — though with a £30+ postage I would be pleased to hear from you. Email me at: [young@airphotointerpretation.com](mailto:young@airphotointerpretation.com)

The views and opinions in this publication are those of the contributing authors and the senior editor individually and do not necessarily agree with those of the Group.

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