



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Change and Creation: historic landscape character 1950-2000



1. Change and creation



What does the material legacy of the second half of the 20th century – your century – mean to you?

Cars and motorways, airports and tower blocks, Wimpey estates and ‘prairie fields’. Nuclear weapons, power stations, windfarms and the moon landing. The Liverpool sound and Manchester, the 1966 World Cup, music festivals and the smell of fast food. TV and the web, easy travel and shrinking distance. Business parks and starter homes, the countryside as agri-business factory or city-dwellers’ playground. Shopping as leisure and homogenous high streets.

All of these defined the later 20th century world. Like it or not, the material remains of the last fifty years help us to recognise the major changes which we experienced in that time, brought about through innovation and rapidly developing technology. In the later 20th century we experienced the world in new ways, which changed our perception of our surroundings, and provided the inspiration for new physical landscapes, as well as new imagined and intangible landscapes.

Understanding how the 20th century landscape is perceived and how it connects to the past, is an urgent task. One reason is that the structures and buildings of that fifty year period are disappearing quickly, so that memories are already being revised and lost.

More importantly, it is difficult to understand the world we live in today without appreciating the legacy of the recent past. We must study the landscape and characterise the way it has changed and been created. This is not to say that we must protect all - or perhaps any - of the remains of the last fifty years. Indeed, if our conservation and management policies are to be sustainable, they must allow change to continue, rather than wipe the sheet clean every generation. Our decisions about what to lose, what to retain, and what to build anew, will be better, if they are informed by careful understanding.

In recent decades, conservation has become a driver of change in its own right, providing channels for public education, economic development and regeneration. By the end of the last century, through professional and popular interest, people had begun to engage very much more fully with the past, to care for it, and to make it part of the present. Time Team, the BBC’s ‘Restoration’ and The Heritage Lottery Fund are evidence of this. *Power of Place (Historic Environment Review, 2000)* and *A Force for our Future (DCMS, 2001)*, encapsulate this mood in public policy.

The physical structures of the later 20th century survive in massive quantities across the contemporary English landscape, most still in their original use. Do these remains ‘matter’? How are they perceived and remembered? For many people, they are unwelcome, representing the destruction of older landscapes. Yet the 20th century has shaped who we are, and is already part of our ‘heritage’. When should we start to value it? Do we leave the survival of the 20th century to ‘Nature’, so that our descendants can preserve whatever rarities survive? Or do we become active agents in deciding what is passed on and why?

A database compiled for English Heritage has demonstrated the extensive scale of current historical and archaeological research on the 20th century (Frearson, 2004). Now a new English Heritage programme – Change and Creation - aims to understand the later 20th century landscape: to assess the processes of change and creation in our urban and rural landscapes. It will be the first national landscape-scale appreciation of later 20th century heritage.

The European Landscape Convention defined landscape as an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.

This programme views landscape as both material and perceived. We are interested in people’s feelings about a place. The programme presents the opportunity to address what ‘landscape’ needs to mean to archaeologists, and how it can be used and valued.



Although the programme's initial perspective is that of archaeology, the aim is to integrate a diversity of approaches. The programme will use the methods of a range of disciplines, and will engage with many perceptions of England's 20th Century landscape, recognising the diverse, powerful and often contested nature of the very recent and contemporary past. Partnerships will be formed between professional, academic and community organisations. Various techniques for research and representation will be combined: film, photography, artistic interventions, oral histories, interviews, participant observation and public involvement, alongside archaeological fieldwork and more traditional studies of maps and aerial photographs.

The purpose of this document is to:

- Raise awareness and interest in the programme, by asking questions about the nature and value of the very recent heritage in the landscape. We think the photographs in this document raise some of these questions, questions that confront academics, cultural heritage resource managers and the public alike.
- Provide information on the background, aims and possibilities of the programme
- Promote the exchange of ideas and inspire the development of new projects which will contribute to the programme and drive it forward

At the core of the Change and Creation programme lie two key principles:

- that the material remains of the 20th century do matter; and
- that we can value, and sometimes perhaps celebrate, later 20th century changes to the landscape, as well as being concerned with losses.

It seems wrong to view the later 20th century merely as a pollutant, something that has devalued or destroyed what went before. The process of landscape change – its time-depth, or 'stratigraphy' – is recognised and celebrated for earlier periods. The 20th century should be no different.

Valuing the recent past:

View of a closed mine from the window of an abandoned miner's cottage in Camborne, Cornwall. It is not that long ago that this was thriving and busy site, where members of a community spent most of their lives. How should we value this heritage of the recent past? Who decides what we should conserve? What role should personal memories, nostalgia and even the media play in the destiny of such a site?



2. The late 20th century landscape



Political, economic, social and cultural change in the second half of the 20th century altered England's landscape in a fundamental and powerful way.

Take the expansion of the road system, and its associated infrastructure. Our car culture led to the development of the motorway network and its service areas, multi-storey car parks in all our towns, as well as controversial schemes such as the Newbury Bypass. Housing estates developed far from urban services, as did out-of-town shopping centres, and the massive sheds of regional distribution centres. A single invention - the internal combustion engine - has changed our lifestyles and our landscape.

The development of global communications also created new landscapes of television aerials, telephone masts, satellite dishes and networks of cables across cities and countryside. Perceptions of space and time changed, aided by the car and by fast travel, and an associated shrinking of distance. Airports multiplied and long-distance travel became commonplace.

Population increase saw the infilling of space in our cities, and the development of new towns. Post-war state-led housing renewal generated new estates and high rise blocks for urban populations. The architecture was often optimistic and modernist. By the 1980s, new housing was largely provided by the private sector for the new 'middle class majority', for instance in cul-de-sac estates. Gated communities developed in response to the fear of crime. There was a return to historic architectural styles, perhaps reflecting disenchantment with 'progress' and a conservatism which found 1960s architecture 'un-English'.



The city pushed into the country, with new housing, out-of-town shopping and leisure centres, university campuses, hospitals, and new schools. Urban waste became rural landfill. Town and country lifestyles were blurred, to provide for a commuting workforce, with cafes, restaurants and convenience supermarkets filling the high streets of our market towns. Country roads were modernised to take a higher volume of traffic. The countryside was suddenly urban, but we also began to reinvent 'the village' in our inner cities.

The countryside changed. It seemed that the rural and the pastoral gave way to commodity and big business. Areas of beauty, or even any green area, became 'honey-pot' destinations, or the sites of festivals and car-boot sales. Political, technological and commercial change created agri-business, with consolidated farms, prairie fields and forest plantations. New settlement patterns appeared. Farm buildings and farm houses became redundant and were converted to commuter homes, with no link to their surroundings other than proximity.



Military landscapes grew, probably as never before, both in the real world and in perception. The strangely shaped structures and facilities associated with Britain's and the USA's Cold War nuclear capability generated social and ideological conflict in their own right. Sites such as Greenham Common came and went. Our military relationship with NATO and the USA mirrored a TV-led cultural relationship. The increasing influence of American popular culture shaped our shopping malls and theme parks.



The stories in our landscape also tell of transformations in our economy. There are silent and evocative remains all around us, from which we can piece together the decline of many industries and their communities. They have been replaced by the modern service sector, housed in isolated business parks and call-centres. Collieries, steel and shipyards, textile mills, factories and nuclear power stations became obsolete, some of them now enjoying new lives as museums and visitor centres.

The social and demographic changes of the late 20th century can be seen in the landscape. The ageing population, the changing nature of family, fragmented households, the tendency to individualism and a mobile workforce have given rise to starter homes, loft living and continuing migration from north to south.



In some places the later 20th century saw an absence of landscape change. Sometimes economic stagnation curbed development and preserved much historic fabric, particularly in the inner cities. Elsewhere, land use policies and planning restrictions prevented change – in National Parks, for example, or Green Belt. The training and operational needs of the Ministry of Defence, meant that the half century left little new material impact in areas such as Salisbury Plain. However, just like the areas of major transformation, this absence of landscape change is also the result of human decision, and it is similarly distinct and evocative.

The later decades of the 20th century also saw the maturing of the ideas and practice of 'conservation', and 'heritage management' and the notion of the 'historic environment' emerged. Just as nature conservation was developing an agenda for (re)creating (lost) habitats, the processes of archaeology and heritage management came increasingly to be seen as agents for change in the environment in their own right. In World Heritage Sites, Conservation Areas and Sites of Special Scientific Interest, the processes of change and creation have been given a particular direction by designation and by public policy.

Boundaries

Big Brother. CCTV is a feature of the later 20th Century. It highlights how boundaries have shifted and blurred. Has country has become city? Green become brown? Have social as well as physical boundaries broken down and new ones arisen in their place? Has what was once public become private? Are we clear anymore about what is sacred and what is profane?



3. Modern approaches to heritage

'An important development has been the widening of what people regard as their Heritage, and the way in which national organisations have responded to this. The National Trust's purchase of Paul McCartney's childhood home in Liverpool was perhaps the most high profile signal of this responsiveness.....' (Force for our Future, DCMS 2001)

'Our appreciation of the historic environment is broader than it used to be. 73% of the population disagrees with the statement that 'only great architecture and buildings count as heritage and 69% disagree that 'nothing after 1950 counts as heritage' (Power of Place, Historic Environment Review 2000)

The 'heritage' of the later 20th century, as with any other period, invites us to engage with the past. However, the abundance of material and the memories and perspectives of those who lived through the last half century mean that the recent past presents a more complex series of questions than earlier periods. What can be done with it? How can it be understood, and its resources be explored? How does it serve the needs of individuals and communities?

What new perspectives could its richness and sheer quantity provide for studies of other periods? Does it need to be managed in any way so that future generations can recognise their history in it? Or should time and nature be allowed to decide what our legacy is? Are we actors or witnesses? - a particularly acute question for archaeologists, historians and conservationists brought up in a climate of conservation and rescue.

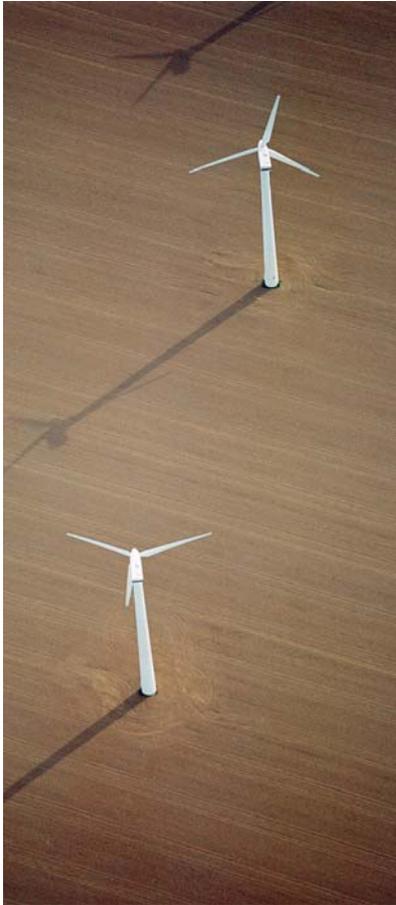
These questions are not new. In the past decade, British archaeology, for example, has seen a new interest in the recent and contemporary past, pushing at the traditional boundaries of academic and professional archaeological interest. This has been reflected particularly in the fields of heritage management, in material culture studies and in the increasing interest in the archaeological study of historical periods. The study of the very recent past also provides the opportunity for dialogue with a particularly broad range of disciplines, such as archaeology, modern history, geography, anthropology, planning, sociology, the visual arts, design and literature. An aim of the Change and Creation programme is to enlist their perspectives and innovative techniques.

The growing appreciation of recent heritage is also reflected in public interest. Almost every day, we hear of debates over whether to keep or demolish a piece of 1960s or 70s architecture that is loved and loathed in equal measure. It is only a few decades since Victorian architecture was the subject of such conflict. Not even Victorian industrial buildings now carry the same degree of difficulty as late 20th century buildings. English Heritage's Post-War Listing programme was a pioneer in this field, a good example of public perceptions changing as greater knowledge and understanding was collected, leading to new ways of valuing and to an appreciation of the wider context of individual buildings.

A number of recent developments in the approach to the management of England's cultural heritage inform this programme. Reviews of the historic environment and agenda for the future - such as *Power of Place* (Historic Environment Review 2000) and *Force for our Future* (DCMS 2001) - reflect the increasing concern that heritage should play an active part in enriching everyone's lives and in the development of sustainable communities. Recent opinion polls have demonstrated the affection in which historic buildings and places are held. It is recognised that the past is all around us and the importance of the historic environment for economic and social regeneration, education and tourism has now been established. Thematic surveys of new monument types as diverse as Cold War airfields, shops, post-war architecture and coal mines have already been undertaken. Work can now be extended into other aspects of later 20th century landscapes.

A new technique, Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) was developed and promoted by English Heritage through the 1990s in order to provide high-level understanding of the time-depth of the landscape, by studying the past within the present landscape. It aims to understand the broad manifestations of human activity and history that give context to individual sites, adopting the view of





landscape reflected in the European Landscape Convention. It focuses on the semi-natural and the non-site dimensions of landscape as well as on traditional archaeological concerns, and on some of its intangible aspects as well. HLC takes present day landscape as a main object of study, documenting the historic and archaeological dimension and presenting this in GIS based plans and databases.

Most importantly, HLC draws a clear distinction between landscape and environment - between ideas and things. Landscape can be taken with you, while environment has to be left behind. Landscape is cultural in two senses: physically created by past human action and intangibly created by present human perception. Change is a critical component of both of these cultural dimensions and HLC therefore focuses on managing change rather than only on protection. This has particular resonance when the most recent parts of landscapes are being studied, and when there is still broad disagreement about meaning and value, such as whether new landscapes are necessarily less important than old ones. Studies of later 20th century landscape character can tell us about peoples' reaction to earlier layers of the landscape, and illuminate all manner of perception and myths about both the past and the present. *A Force for our Future* endorsed the characterisation approach as a leading method for managing change in the historic environment.

HLC is an enabling approach, that recognises many ways and levels of valuing, and which relies heavily on interpretation, and on human perception. It differentiates between elements of the landscape, but it does not prescribe whether something should be kept or allowed to disappear, be adapted or conserved unchanged. In this sense landscape characterisation is open ended. HLC provides information that can be used for decisions or policies to be made, but it leaves others to make choices about the future of landscape, just as they make choices about their perception of landscape.

Interstitial landscapes

City waste. People have always been surrounded by their rubbish and all of our cities, towns and villages contain undeveloped wastelands, disused areas, embankments, awkward and leftover spaces. What do these landscapes on the margins tell us? Are they really empty? Should these apparently neglected areas be addressed by landscape archaeology?



4. A 21st century view



Archaeologists and architectural historians working on the later 20th century have access, in contrast to earlier periods, to an almost complete resource: one which has not been subject to the same processes of loss and change as the remains of more distant periods. Here is an opportunity to understand and record the variety of late 20th century monuments while they still survive in largely complete form. It is surprising how quickly things from the recent past can disappear: over 70% of the 1000 or so World War II Heavy anti-aircraft sites for instance (all substantial and extensive structures and settlement sites) have been removed since 1946, mainly as a result of post-war urban expansion.



The very proximity of the past five decades brings special problems and opportunities when considering preserving its heritage. There are issues of appreciation, detachment and clear vision. However, the study of the very recent past in the landscape offers the rewards of personal involvement with our surroundings. People live day to day in the landscape, and the legacy of the 20th century has already been assimilated into their lives and experiences. As well as dialogue with those who currently live and work in the later 20th century landscape, central to the programme's methods will be engagement with those who remember this legacy when it was first created. This possibility is not open to any other period.

The programme will borrow from the ideas of 'contemporary archaeology'. It will challenge and review established conservation and cultural resource management theories and principles that are perhaps often taken too much for granted. The programme will therefore contribute to philosophies of heritage management, as well as to our understanding of and treatment of the landscapes of the later 20th century. The choices we face are not whether to have a cut-off date for what should be regarded as heritage, nor how to incorporate recent change into perceptions of



Landscapes of movement

Bluewater Shopping Centre, Kent. These monuments to consumption also reflect our ambivalence about movement: of people, things and ideas. Do migration and asylum centres welcome new communities or do they stem influx and threat? Are motorways a scar on our landscape or a means of getting what we want, when we want it? Do we enjoy multinational brands or do we see cultural imperialism in our bill boards and shopping malls?





landscape. We already do this. What we need to do now is to find ways of doing so consciously and transparently, and to debate the process.

So, through a range of public engagements, Change and Creation will initially explore the diversity of popular understandings of late 20th century landscapes, in order to frame the questions and strategy for the programme. A principal aim of this wider consultation will be to consider matters of significance and value: which aspects of landscape from the recent past do different people value, given different ages and walks of life?

The Change and Creation programme will:

- Characterise the contribution to England's landscape made between 1950 and 2000
- Explore this landscape layer through a series of themes, to be developed through consultation and debate with the public, academics and professionals
- Pioneer trans-disciplinary study methods for understanding this landscape.
- Determine concepts and methods for managing the landscape as a whole and for monitoring directions of change



The programme will provide an initial characterisation of the landscape-scale material remains from the later 20th century across the whole of England, focussing strongly on landscape character, not the study of individual buildings or sites. The date range for the Programme is broadly 1950-2000, but there will be some recognition of earlier origins of major processes and landscape creation.



Transient landscapes

Watching the eclipse at Goonhilly Down. Crowds, communities, even small towns, can appear and then disappear as people gather for festivals and protests. Commuters, new age travellers and the homeless are always on the move. Is it true that these transient populations leave no mark on the landscape? Should their campsites and shelters be preserved for posterity? Should their monuments now include photographs, video and satellite imagery?



5. The way forward



The Change and Creation programme will provide an overall structure of *dialogue*, *characterisation* and *resource management* within which individual projects will be carried out. Some projects are already underway. Others will be initiated by English Heritage or its partners. The programme will provide a forum for planning and discussion, and a means of sharing results and developing collaborations.

Dialogue

- The programme will promote public and professional dialogue around the contribution of the later 20th century to our landscape. This will be achieved through discussion, workshops, and focus groups with the public and local communities; the involvement of professional partners, such as universities, local authorities and others; and through a number of conferences.
- The programme will explore peoples' own perceptions and memories, and focus discussion on issues of management and conservation at public and professional levels.



Characterisation

- A nested classification system will be developed, identifying and characterising distinctive and influential late 20th century landscape types in broad terms, and the exploring major themes through which these types of landscape can be understood.
- Data will be collected around these themes, and in relation to particular landscapes and landscape types. This will be largely desk-based, using historic maps, GIS, archive film, published and grey archaeological literature and aerial photographs. Data collection will aim to build upon previous English Heritage and partners' work, and upon earlier HLC projects. The programme themes will also be explored at a number of sample sites, allowing focussed area characterisation.

Resource management

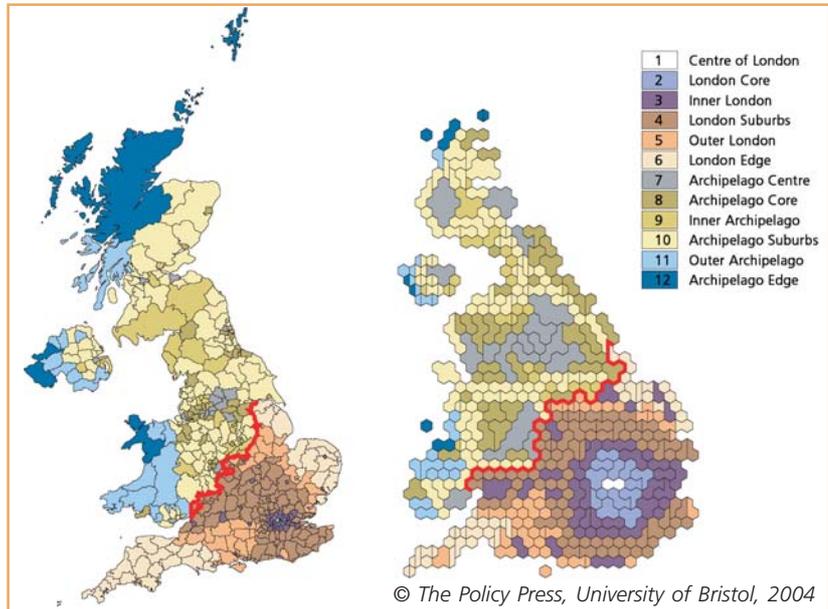
- The programme aims to define methods for the understanding, appreciation and management of twentieth century landscapes.
- It will produce tools to enable us to monitor the landscape based on a better understanding of recent directions of change.
- It will influence other methods of landscape assessment (eg countryside character assessment).
- It will aim to inform spatial planning, landscape and agri-environmental management schemes, and designation policies.

There is an invitation on the back of this leaflet to contribute to the debate about the scope and direction of the Change and Creation programme



Landscapes of exclusion

The north south divide of England. The massive migration to southern England is 20th century landscape change at its broadest. It has been shaped by rivers of complex social processes: increases in both wealth and deprivation, the changing nature of the family, migration and immigration. Are we left with landscapes of exclusion? How do patterns and differences in class, ethnicity, wealth, gender, age and sexuality leave their mark on the shapes of cities and countryside?



further reading

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www.changeandcreation.org

www.english-heritage.org.uk/characterisation

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ATKINS



What do you think?

This leaflet sets out a first appreciation of the nature and value of the later 20th century landscape, and proposes a programme – the Change and Creation programme – to suggest what might be done to understand it better and to devise ways to manage it in the future. The elements of the landscape that the programme will focus on, and how they will be explored, will be the subject of debate over the coming months and years, as the programme develops. Ultimately the answers to these questions will come from those who live and work in the wide variety of landscapes of England, of all generations, backgrounds and interests, not only from academics, government organisations or heritage managers. We would greatly value your opinions, even at this early stage in the process.

- What do you remember most clearly about the 20th century? How are those events or activities still represented in the landscape?
- What do you appreciate, dislike or miss about the later 20th century landscape?
- What do you think about change and creation? Would you prefer our landscape to be more like it was in the early 20th century?
- What can, and what should we do with modern landscape character? What should we be recording now for the future?
- Do you have any comments on the images we have chosen for this document?
- Do you have ideas for engaging your community, school or local society with aspects of the 20th century landscape?

To suggest a way in which you or your organisation might contribute to Change and Creation, please send your thoughts and details by email to web@changeandcreation.org

