

Colin Ward, 1992

Colin Ward

In this special issue we celebrate the centenary of the birth of Colin Ward. Colin was the conscience of the TCPA throughout the 1970s and, as an anarchist, uniquely shaped the way in which the TCPA engaged with its audiences.

It was, in particular, Colin's ability to appreciate and articulate the relationship between the marginalised - be they child, homeless person, allotmentee, hobbyist, plotlander, free miner, or indeed anarchist - and the city as a physical expression of State power and control that made his work as the TCPA's education officer so uniquely influential and successful.

Today we might add to the list of the marginalised the freerunner, the gig economy worker and the economic migrant.

A new generation is coming to appreciate Colin's work and his unique perspective on education, engagement with the State and the limits of personal freedom and choice within

the highly regulated social space in which town and country planning operates.

To what extent this renewed emphasis upon and appreciation of Colin's life, politics and work will influence this new generation and shape the future of the TCPA we must wait to see.

In the meantime, this special issue celebrates Colin's life and work and my personal thanks go out to those who have contributed articles and, in particular, to Colin's son, Ben, for supplying some very evocative images.

● *Philip Barton* is editor of *Town & Country Planning*

the house that colin built



Estate of Colin Ward

Colin Ward, 1954

In a letter Colin Ward sent to me in June 2005, as always paper-clipped to an article he had read that might interest me, Colin commented on an interview he had heard on BBC Radio 4 that morning. A woman dietician had spoken enthusiastically about the historic 'healthy diet' of Mediterranean peasants despite, in her words, living in 'an impoverished rural world living by hard labour on the land'. Colin's comment was customarily laconic - he could never be unpleasant or rude: 'In fact, of course, they left by the million, just to eat'.

Colin Ward was not a romantic about everyday life, nor self-deluding as to how an anarchist approach might be the answer to all life's difficulties. Sceptical about grand plans or revolutionary *démarches* – as Eileen Adams, Dennis Hardy, Gemma Hyde and Martin Stott testify in the following essays – he believed that new ways of living usually emerged from marginal locations and dispositions. In the former case these included: plotland communities on cheap agricultural land, bombsite playgrounds, amateur music-making societies (Martin Stott's reference to Jeff Bishop's

and Paul Hoggett's seminal study *Organising Around Enthusiasms: Patterns of Mutual Aid in Leisure* is a wonderful reminder), housing co-operatives, cycling clubs, primary and secondary school curriculum initiatives (where 'lower-status' teachers were given a degree of freedom), and refuges and refugee programmes. In short, wherever cracks appeared in the edifices. Rather like Richard Mabey's beloved 'weeds' – Mabey was one of Colin's protégés – it is often out of place migrants that have the tenacity to outwit the conventional order of things.

Ward's emphasis on the needs of children, highlighted by Gemma Hyde, is more urgent than ever; Hyde noting the scarcity of reference to children in the National Planning Policy Framework. Were he still alive, Colin would have soon noted the current pushback against low traffic neighbourhoods and the 20-minute city by the car lobby, anxious not to cede any further territory to the pedestrian, cyclist or advocates of street play and the child's 'right to the city'.

The work that Eileen Adams did with Colin at the TCPA which produced *Art and the Built Environment* was ahead of its time and astonishingly prescient. Who would have thought that artists would have ended up in the vanguard of urban studies and urban renewal, with walking now a principal *modus operandi* of urban enquiry, long before the psycho-geographers arrived on the scene. Finally, it is wonderful to read the warm tribute by Dennis Hardy to his old friend and colleague. The work of both Colin and Dennis have shaped my own thinking to an immeasurable extent, and it is impossible to better Dennis's tribute to Colin: 'He gave in life more than he took'.

● **Ken Worpole** is a writer and social historian, whose work includes many books on architecture, landscape and public policy. Ken has served on the UK government's Urban Green Spaces Task Force, on the Expert Panel of the Heritage Lottery Fund, and as an adviser to the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment. He was a founder member of the Demos think-tank and of Opendemocracy.

colin ward: the 'one off' changemaker

Dennis Hardy reflects on the life, achievements and legacy of his friend and mentor

Colin Ward was a 'one off'. As befits someone whose name is synonymous with anarchism, there is no fitting him into conventional categories. In the words of one of his many admirers, Carl Levy:

'Ward was the product of a Britain that no longer exists, where a lower-middle or working-class individual could progress into a professional and intellectual career, without having pursued a university degree'.¹

One can tinker with various permutations of nature and nurture to explain character formation but nothing in his early upbringing tells of what was to come. Colin was born in 1924 in Wanstead, an inauspicious suburb in north-east London. His father, Arnold, was a primary school teacher and his mother, Ruby, a shorthand typist. They were both Labour Party supporters and one can imagine that Colin's birth in the year of the party's first national government was a cause for special celebration.

In spite of (or perhaps because of) what proved to be his innate abilities, he was not at all inspired by his time at the prestigious Ilford County High School and left at the age of 15. One can imagine that his teachers had little hope that he would achieve much, and it is telling that his name is not presently included in an online list of notable alumni. His first job was as a builder's mate, but it was not long before he joined Sidney Caulfield's architectural firm as a draughtsman. This is where pointers to his future began to show. Caulfield was not only head of architecture at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, but he also designed several buildings in Hampstead garden suburb. The connections were starting to come together.

In 1942, at the age of 18, Colin was called up to serve in the army, and was soon sent to a posting in Scotland. Wars create their own ferment of ideas (and much else besides), and it seems that on visits into Glasgow he was attracted to meetings of anarchists where the ethics of violence and the rationale of a 'just war' were questioned. In due course he was called as a witness in a trial where a number of anarchists were accused of spreading pacifist ideas and disaffecting troops. Following that, he was swiftly despatched to the distant Orkneys (presumably where it was thought he could do no harm). By then, though, anarchism was already in his blood, and he remained a leading advocate for the cause for the rest of his life.



Colin Ward cementing in a chimney pot, 1954

Estate of Colin Ward

When the Second World War ended, Colin picked up his career as a draughtsman, gaining experience with firms specialising in the design of schools and municipal housing. His job put bread on the table, but he would return home in the evenings to deal with correspondence and paste-up pages as contributing editor (1947-1960) for *Freedom*² and then as editor of *Anarchy* (1961-1970). His only formal education after school came in the mid-1960s, when he qualified as a further education teacher. This led, in turn, to his appointment as education officer for the TCPA in 1971, where he edited the inspirational *Bulletin of Environmental Education*.

After that, he worked freelance as a much sought-after anarchist writer and speaker, with his reputation spreading not only in this country but internationally. Words were his thing – writing, editing, and reading, not to mention the art of penmanship (his lettering was a constant source of delight in itself). With his portable typewriter he was forever putting the finishing touches to an assignment, then hurrying to the nearest post-box to send it on its way. I never knew him to miss a deadline. There was always a book in his jacket pocket and, as a non-driver, time spent waiting for buses was never wasted. His was not a world of laptops, electronic mail, and mobile phones, which makes his prolific output based on more traditional methods all the more remarkable. But it is the freshness of his writing rather than sheer quantity which makes revisiting his work so rewarding.

A short article can hardly do justice to a lifetime of achievement but, fortunately, his work has already attracted numerous eulogies that more than adequately tell the story. In the rest of this piece, I am trying to do something a little different. It was my own great pleasure and privilege to work with Colin on several projects and to come to know him as a friend as well as mentor. On that basis, the following offers just a few insights into who he was as a person as well as a household name in the world of anarchism.

'Teachers around the country welcomed his writings and encouraged visits to their classrooms as a breath of fresh air'

Rethinking education

Colin was an original thinker and people-centred writer. While keeping a watchful eye on the politics of education, his focus was always upon the child in the classroom and at play. One only had to see him interact with his own son and friends, chuckling at their actions but never intervening. The anarchist



Estate of Colin Ward

Colin Ward with his son, 1973

approach to education, he once said, is grounded not in a contempt for learning but in a respect for the learner. He drew ideas from fellow anarchists like his old friend and collaborator, Paul Goodman, and the urban theorist, Lewis Mumford, as well as earlier exemplars such as William Godwin and Michael Bakunin. But always he looked for practical experience as well, forging links with Spanish dissenters of the fascist Franco government, and college protesters in the United States of America during the 1960s.

When he joined the TCPA as its education officer, his presence was felt in a positive way throughout the organisation. His ideas were always positive yet never imposed; simply by being there he enriched the lifeblood of a body which had its own origins in the proposals of another gentle reformer, Ebenezer Howard. Teachers around the country welcomed his writings and encouraged visits to their classrooms as a breath of fresh air.

Regaining control

His work was all about finding ways to give people of all ages a new sense of control over their lives. Sometimes - given that it was once commonplace to have a hand in building one's own home – it was a question of rediscovering lost skills. This is what attracted him to the interwar experience of 'plotlanders' – people who seized the chance to buy cheap land at a time of an agricultural depression and create their own communities. In a short but influential article, *A borrowed pound*, he told the story of a doughty East Ender, Elizabeth Granger, who in 1932 borrowed a pound as a down-payment on two plots of land (costing £5 each) on former farmland in Laindon, Essex.³ Her husband was the caretaker for a block of council flats and on his weekly day off the couple took a train from London to build their own bungalow. They made use of an army surplus bell tent while the work was underway and, with money earned by renting out the tent at other times to boys from their estate, they bought essential materials.

Brick by brick the bungalow took shape and, when Mr Granger was transferred to nearby Dagenham, the family moved into their self-built home. Over time, they made further moves, financed each time through the growing value of what they then owned. And all on the basis of the borrowed pound. As Mrs Granger later reflected:

'We never had a mortgage for any of them. I feel so sorry for young couples these days, who don't get the kind of chance we had.'

Mrs Granger's was a story writ large at the time but stifled after 1945 by an unsympathetic planning system. The plotlands, it must be said, were also a victim of their own success, with rising land and property values pricing newcomers out of the market.

Forever campaigning

Colin was certainly not the kind of person who would thrust a copy of a political magazine in front of you in a crowded shopping centre. Instead, he let his words do the talking, adding to his stock of writings probably every day of his life in response to requests and also because he was fired by personal enthusiasm to do so. I recall that while we were collecting information on the plotlands he said how much he wanted to tell the story of the squatting movement. He saw obvious parallels between self-build solutions and past attempts to secure a small piece of land or deserted property in the countryside. The outcome, in due course, was a book, *Cotters and Squatters: The hidden history of housing*,⁴ published by a sympathetic follower of Colin's work, Ross Bradshaw.

In marking a century since his birth, the problem for a contributor is not a paucity of source material but its very abundance. I doubt if writing comes easily to anyone, but it always seemed that Colin could sit in front of his typewriter and words would flow. It is so much easier to write with a computer, with its various tools like 'cut and paste', but Colin seemed to manage perfectly well with what he

had. Occasionally, one could see a literal 'cut and paste' on a page, or a careful use of correcting fluid, but usually he would get it just right first time.

Mingling with great minds

Returning to Carl Levy's observation at the start of this piece, the day has gone (or at least is more difficult to find) when someone could make their way in a professional world without a higher education qualification. One of the things that always impressed me with Colin was the ease with which he would exchange views with some of the leading intellectuals in his field and, in turn, how much they enjoyed his company and responded to his views. Colin would often speak, for instance, about the late Professor Ray Pahl, with whom he shared ideas on links between town and country, *urbs et rure*.⁵ Likewise, I know that Sir Peter Hall, geographer, and planning theorist, was a great friend and admirer of Colin's work. Peter and I made a journey to Suffolk to spend the day with Colin, then in declining health, and his always welcoming and supportive wife, Harriet. Our time was imbued with warmth and various anecdotes were cheerfully recalled. That was the last time we saw Colin.

Eulogies can too often be a pain to read, treacly and overdone. But I sense that everyone who has written about Colin has done so from the heart. He was genuinely a good person. He gave in life more than he took. His influence was immeasurable. As I say at the beginning, he was a 'one off', embodying the very best of a philosophy that puts people first. Politicians, please take note.

● **Emeritus Professor Dennis Hardy** is an urban planner who studied at University College London. He joined the Greater London Council and gained a PhD from the London School of Economics. He subsequently became a fellow of the Royal Town Planning Institute and was a lecturer in social science and urban planning at Middlesex University.

Notes

- 1 C Levy: 'Colin Ward (1924-2010)'. *Anarchist Studies*, 2011, Vol. 19(2), 7-15
- 2 'Colin Ward: Everyday Anarchy, the documentary'. Webpage. *Freedom*, 26 Jan. 2024. <https://freedomnews.org.uk/2024/01/26/colin-ward-everyday-anarchy-the-documentary/>
- 3 C Ward: 'Lost freedoms in housing'. *New Society*, 12 May 1977. Partly reprinted as 'A borrowed pound', *Bulletin of Environmental Education*, 1978
- 4 P Barker: 'Cotters and Squatters: housing's hidden history, by Colin Ward'. Webpage. *Independent*, 17 Jul. 2002. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/cotters-and-squatters-housing-s-hidden-history-by-colin-ward-184692.html>
- 5 RE Pahl: *Urbs in rure: the metropolitan fringe in Hertfordshire*. London School of Economics and Political Science – Geographical Papers No. 2, 1964. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/urbsinruremetrop0000pahl/page/n5/mode/2up>



Estate of Colin Ward

Colin Ward, 1992

working with ward

Eileen Adams recounts how working with Colin Ward in the 1970s on the curriculum development project, *Art and the Built Environment* had a seminal influence on her work. Experiential learning, sense of place, built environment education, intelligence of feeling, critical study, young people's participation in environmental change and inter-professional collaboration in education are all themes that have recurred in her subsequent research and development projects

Briefcase encounter

My first encounter with Colin Ward in 1974 was through the pages of the *Bulletin of Environmental Education* (BEE) (see box), which he edited as Director of the Education Unit at the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA). I was an art teacher at Pimlico School in London, engaged in *Front Door*, a research project designed to consider how architects might work with teachers to develop awareness of the built environment.

This was a collaboration between the Royal College of Art, the Greater London Council's Architects Department and the school. One of the architects gave me copies of BEE, and I was delighted and shocked to find that many of the ideas concerning the relationship between art and the built environment with which I had struggled were explored within its pages. Imagine my surprise when Tom Unwin, a pupil at the school, asked if he could interview me to write an article.

Colin arranged to meet me to find out more about the project. In preparation for this, I borrowed from Pimlico library all of the books I could find that he had written. He arrived at my flat carrying a heavy briefcase, which he promptly emptied onto the floor, so that copies of the same books tumbled out as presents for me. When he spotted my pile of books, he immediately put his back in the briefcase. I was too shy to explain that mine were only on loan, and I would have to return them to the library.

Over the next few years, I experienced more of Colin's kind and generous nature.

Art and the Built Environment project

Colin's interest in the contribution that art and design could make to environmental education was further developed in 1976, when the Schools Council invited him to direct *Art and the Built Environment* (ABE), a curriculum development

project which sought:

'to develop in pupils a feel for the built environment, to enhance their capacity for discrimination and their competence in the visual appraisal of the built environment; and to evolve and disseminate generally applicable techniques and methods for achieving these objectives.'

Colin encouraged me to apply for the job of project officer. I attended the interview after travelling on the overnight train from Dartington, where I had mounted an exhibition of the *Front Door* work from Pimlico School. Colin directed the questioning accordingly, and I talked excitedly and animatedly about the project, the value of the work, the importance of disseminating the results of experimental work and the necessity of engaging teachers in research and development. I got the job. In the ABE project, we were primarily concerned with extending the role of the art teacher within environmental education. Our aims – namely encouraging a subjective response and the development of pupils' critical skills – were also central to the aims of art education, where the importance of sensory experience was stressed; emotional response and discriminatory skills were developed, and students were offered alternative means of perception. An affective¹ approach to study was valued, and the relationships between the world of the self and the world of objects was continually explored.

We shared an office with Tony Fyson, Colin's deputy, on the mezzanine balcony above the TCPA editorial office. Some days the space fairly hummed with activity – a busy, noisy and stimulating atmosphere with different conversations going on across the room; calls up to and down from the balcony; visitors coming and going; loud phone conversations; the clickety click of Colin's

typewriter, and the chink of coffee mugs. Working with Colin was a partnership. He was concerned with why and what we were doing and created strong arguments for environmental education to develop a concern for aesthetic and design quality. I was preoccupied with how we might achieve our aims and contributed my experience of art and design education from my perspective as a teacher. Colin placed our ideas in a theoretical context: I focused on the practicalities of approaches to study. Colin introduced the ideas of geographers, planners, architects, and illustrators – one issue implied that Kate Greenaway² had inspired the *Essex Design Guide!* I encouraged teachers to create their own study methods to nurture pupils' aesthetic and design awareness and develop critical skills in relation to environmental appraisal: art teachers needed to have a creative input and were more likely to be influenced by other teachers.



Estate of Colin Ward

Colin Ward and Tony Fyson at the TCPA, c.1975

Our work involved visits to schools, in-service courses for teachers, speaking at conferences and writing articles for journals and magazines. We produced newsletters and bulletins and created special issues of BEE to disseminate the project's ideas. As Colin's approach to producing a monthly magazine was literally the cut and paste method, I learnt a lot about desk-top publishing using scissors and cow gum before the advent of computers. At meetings in the trial schools, teachers were keen to explain how they treated the environment as a subject for artmaking whilst Colin patiently introduced notions of looking at the environment not only as an artist, but also as a critic or designer.

At courses and conferences, Colin would often introduce the topic with a reference to being in Barlinnie Gaol (see image on page 224) to shock the audience into attention; then adopt his usual lecturing style, producing strong arguments for art education to embrace environmental study, and challenging art teachers to try new approaches. Through involvement in various committees, we attempted to influence education policy and examinations. A key aspect of the work that we took forward from Front Door was the idea of architects and planners collaborating with teachers to devise suitable study methods. To support this, we invited environmental professionals to work on in-service courses with teachers. This led to a nationwide network of inter-professional working parties that was very successful in establishing this area of study in schools.

At that time, art teachers did not use textbooks or follow a prescribed curriculum but had the professional freedom to develop their own approaches. They based work upon their particular interests and adopted or adapted ideas from artists' work. Our final publication, *Art and the Built Environment: A Teacher's Approach* provided arguments and study methods that teachers could cheerfully select or reject until they were able to subsume them into their own practice.³

The book was written, not in the TCPA office, but at Colin's home in Suffolk. He had only recently moved into the old cottage, but the first room to be organised was his study in the back garden, previously the coal shed, but now a cosy retreat with bits of pre-loved furniture and examples of do-it-yourself construction. His desk was a door laid on top of piles of his books, my desk a card table and my chair was one that had seen better days in the garden. Colin's typewriter was broken, so we had to use the small, portable typewriter that I had been given for my 14th birthday. At my side were boxes of rotting apples. I understand that their smell improves one's mood, prevents panic attacks and inspires creativity – they certainly worked in my case! The smell of the apples, the buzz of the bees and the heat of the summer days lulled us into a gentle doze in the early evening, and Harriet, Colin's wife, * had to shout loudly to call us in for supper. In his previous house, Colin's study was also in the garden, in a shed with an electricity supply. When Colin failed to turn up for a meal, Harriet would turn off the electricity supply to warn him that it was time to stop work.

Generosity of spirit

Colin was something of a magpie, collecting information, references, quotes, songs and doggerel from many different sources, which he cheerfully shared with colleagues, audiences and readers. One source was a letter my father had

sent to me about his childhood home. I knew that Colin would be interested in the account of living in a tenement in Greenock, so I read it aloud. It was promptly purloined by Colin, together with a photo from my album for an issue of BEE on family history. I had not sought permission for the letter to be published, and my father was shocked to see it in print. However, he was also delighted that he was now a published author, and promptly ordered 15 more copies of the magazine to send to brothers, sisters, and cousins.

'His good nature and good humour ensured that he was a delightful colleague to work with'

Colin's reputation as a pundit meant that he was often consulted by researchers, writers, reporters, organisations and institutions for information and advice. I benefited from the fall-out from many of these contacts. For example, in 1978 the International Society for Education through Art (INSEA) invited Colin to a week-long seminar in Sèvres. He passed the letter to me: 'France', he said, 'that's abroad: that's your department'. This was my first foreign assignment. This and other contacts with INSEA resulted in recommendations being made to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on the relationship between art education and environmental education.

Another invitation came from a television producer to contribute to research for a programme on the Pompidou Centre. Again, Colin explained that he did not travel abroad, but volunteered my services as a consultant to accompany the producer to Paris. In my view, I contributed little to planning the programme, but I did learn that toilets produced by a French manufacturer were chosen because those produced by the British and Germans failed the tests. I wonder: what were those tests?

Freedom and responsibility

Colin was a wonderful friend and mentor, kind-hearted, funny, compassionate, and wise. Working with him was an intense experience. His antipathy to coercive authority was evident in his management style, which could be described as inspirational, charismatic, collaborative, consultative, participative and laissez-faire. He did not direct the project so much as encourage and inspire and was more liable to give hints and suggestions than to issue directives. He was happy to listen to all my bright ideas while he smoked and typed about something completely different, ready to agree to suggestions, and content to pass on any

responsibility that he could, while being prepared to dig me out of any hole that I might have fallen into. His good nature and good humour ensured that he was a delightful colleague to work with – ready with an anecdote, a quote, or a burst of song. He was very funny and made me laugh! His humanity shone through in his dealings with everyone.

I always had great admiration, respect, and love for Colin. It is not often one can say that about the boss (I use that word advisedly). Working with him influenced my perception of the world; how I think, and how I work. There was a lot of sideways learning involved: he would casually push a book under my nose; or mention an author; or make an off-hand remark; or place me in an unfamiliar situation, or set me a challenge. I knew that he would defend or rescue me if I were in trouble. As a friend, he was always positive, encouraging, and supportive, though he did say that as he grew older, he would get up in the morning as an optimist but go to bed as a pessimist.

Legacy

Working with Colin impacted profoundly on my subsequent work, which was based on the action research model established in the Front Door and ABE projects:

*"Teachers are being asked to develop a critical stance to their own work, and colleagues are asked to share their experience so that others might learn from it."*³

This included:

- developing a national network of inter-professional working parties of teachers, architects and planners;
- researching the use, management and design of school grounds in the Learning through Landscapes project, and
- promoting drawing as a means of study through The Campaign for Drawing.

I am not on my own: Colin has influenced a generation of educators around the world.

● *Eileen Adams* is an international freelance researcher, educator, author and filmmaker. She continues to be influenced by Colin Ward, who described their work as 'a lever for educational change and a vehicle for the empowerment of the child'.

Notes

- 1 Relating to moods, feelings, and attitudes.
- 2 'Kate Greenaway'. Webpage. *Wikipedia*®, 8 Apr. 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kate_Greenaway
- 3 E Adams, C Ward: *Art and the Built Environment: A Teacher's Approach*. Longman for the Schools Council, 1982

***Editor's Note:** Sadly, Harriet Ward died on 14 June 2024.



**BULLETIN OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION
1976-1979**

During the three years when the *Art and the Built Environment* project was based at the TCPA, a number of issues of the *Bulletin of Environmental Education* (BEE) explained ideas underpinning the project and reported on work in progress.

BEE 68 Experiencing Townscape (December 1976)

This was devised by Keith Wheeler, chairman of the project's consultative committee. Methods were set out as a series of experiences such as steeplechasing, townscape notation and building assessment profiles. The project was aimed at art teachers, but these approaches did not prove popular, as they seemed too prescriptive and rooted in geography teaching.

BEE 72 Sensing the Environment (April 1977)

Brian Goodey was invited to share approaches designed to enlarge aesthetic awareness. The sensory walk proved popular, but the 'streetometer' left art teachers cold.

BEE 73 An Approach to the Appraisal of Buildings (May 1977)

Although disappointed at the use of the stereotype image of the teacher on the cover of BEE, I was pleased to see the question of building appraisal tackled by Jeff Bishop, who focused on the criteria for judgement in his CRIG analysis: context, routes, interface and grouping.

BEE 78 Art and the Built Environment (October 1976)

More popular with art teachers were case studies of work in schools, set in the context of current issues in art education. This issue compared the use of the environment as a stimulus for artwork with treating the environment as a subject for critical study.

BEE 83-89 The House that Jack Built (August/September 1978)

Colin Ward prepared the material for *The House That Jack Built*, which took the work of a number of artists and examined their assumptions about the urban scene. He drew parallels between the work of Kate Greenaway and the *Essex Design Guide*.

BEE 94 A Townscape Appraisal by Hampshire Teachers (February 1979)

This issue, reporting on an in-service course with teachers, architects and planners in Hampshire, proved to be very popular with art teachers, as study techniques could be easily adapted for pupils in schools.

BEE 96 Front Door (April 1979)

This issue was a reprint of *Front Door News* first published as a broadsheet by the Greater London Council Architects Department in 1976. It was very popular with teachers, who appreciated the many examples of pupils' work.

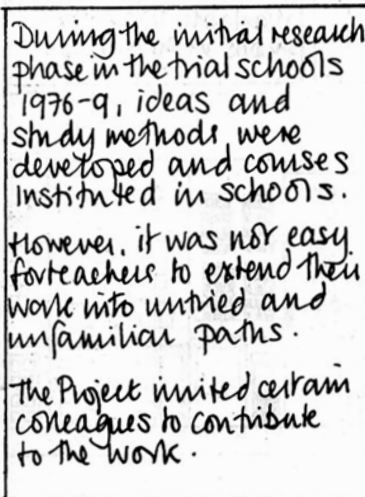
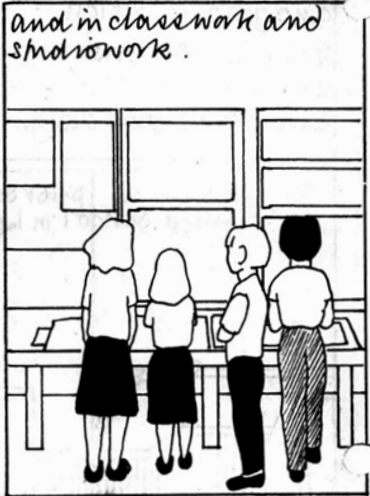
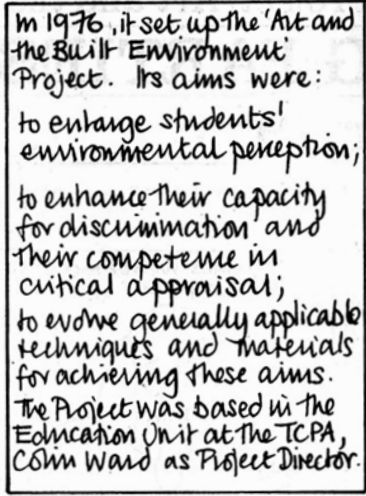
BEE 98 A Rainy Day in Derbyshire (June 1979)

This issue was based on an in-service course for teachers in Derbyshire. Approaches to study and strategies for critical appraisal could be adapted for use in schools.

BEE 102 Art and the Built Environment Travelling Exhibition (October 1979)

The final issue, BEE 102, was a catalogue of a travelling exhibition prepared to disseminate the project's ideas. It comprised 30 A2 size laminated panels and was lent to teachers and lecturers through the network of Schools Council regional collection centres and information centres in England and Wales.

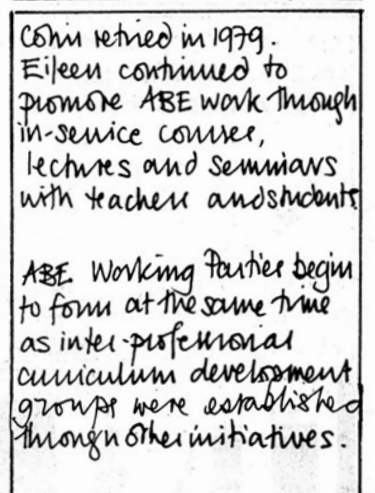
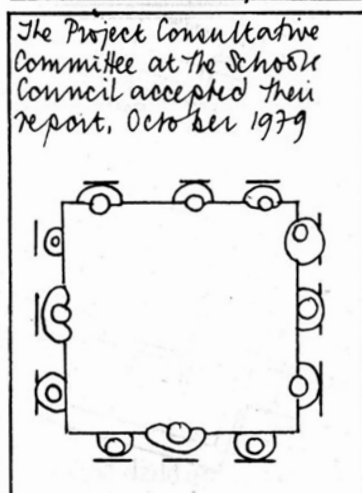
Art and the Built Environment newsletter no. 19, pp. 2



Art and the Built Environment newsletter no. 19, pp. 3

At first, most of the studies concentrated on outwork derived from environmental reference. However, through an intensive in-service programme 78-80, a range of analytical and critical study methods was developed and incorporated in work in schools.

A number of associate schools joined in the work.



Colin and Eileen wrote their report on the three years' work.

Three filmstrips and notes were also prepared.

The Project Consultative Committee at the School Council accepted their report, October 1979

Colin retired in 1979. Eileen continued to promote ABE work through in-service courses, lectures and seminars with teachers and students.

ABE Working Parties begin to form at the same time as inter-professional curriculum development groups were established through other initiatives.

missing presence – reflecting on the child in the city

Gemma Hyde explains why, rather than being nothing more than a harmless nostalgic indulgence, Ward's writings about 'the child' are of crucial relevance today

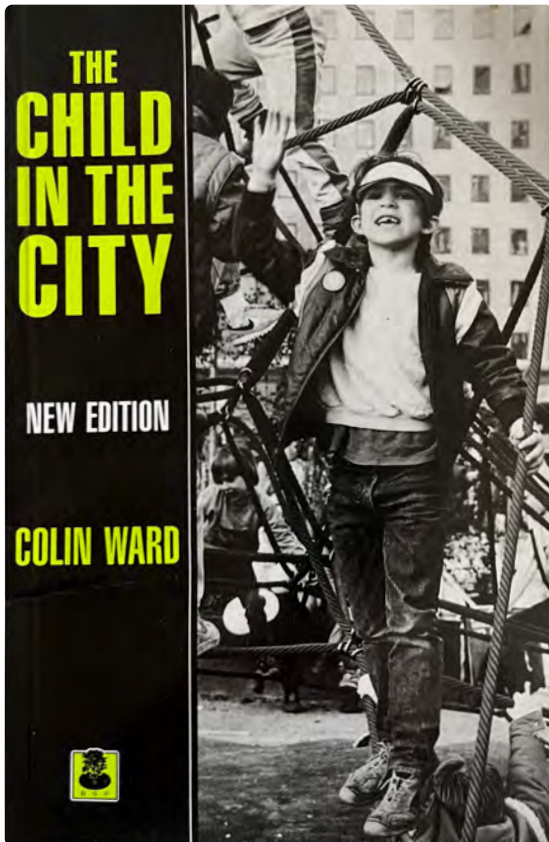
I admit that prior to this year I was unaware of Colin Ward, especially his time as an education officer with the TCPA, and his work exploring how people

engage with and influence their environments. Nor had I read *The Child in the City*, despite my interest in the relationship between children, young people* and the built environment. Furthermore, little did I expect Ward's insights from 1978 to resonate with me so much.

The Child in the City carefully explores and exposes the world of childhood, the ability of children to counter adult-based intentions and interpretations of the built environment and proposes that the right way to judge a city, or any planning scheme, should be through what it delivers for children.¹ Writing in the late 1970s Ward's work covers so many contemporary issues around children, young people and where they live, including the differing needs and rights of girls and young women in public space; the exclusion of children and young people from decision making about the places in which they live; the impacts of poverty and deprivation on life outcomes, and the continued failure of planners and designers to consider children at all in the planning and designing of places.

What Ward delivers through the book is powerful, challenging and sadly depressing because the conditions and barriers he outlines have not really shifted since the book was written 46 years ago. We are not planning, designing, building and delivering spaces and places where children and young people have equal opportunities to thrive.

The Child in the City opens with a question: 'Is it true, as very many people believe it to be true, that something has been lost in the relationship between children and their environments?'



Colin Ward's far-sighted work

And despite the intervening years since publication, the answer from myself and many others is, I think, the same. Yes. Something has been lost, and something needs to change.

My 'yes' is partly based upon the avalanche of statistics telling me how unhappy and unhealthy our children are:

- One in five young people aged 8 to 25 has a probable mental disorder, this is up to four pupils in an average secondary classroom. This is a substantial increase from 2017, when prevalence stood at about one in eight.²
- Girls are twice as likely as boys to have a probable mental health disorder in adolescence compared with boys. Although rates are similar in childhood, prevalence begins to diverge in adolescence and the gap widens with age.²
- In England, one in three children leaving primary school is overweight, with one in five living with obesity. Children resident in the most deprived parts of the country are more than twice as likely to be living with obesity than those in the least deprived areas.³
- 53% of children and young people (3.9 million) do not meet the chief medical officer's guidelines of taking part in sport and physical activity for an average of 60 minutes or more every day.⁴
- Only 22% of children and young people in England believe their views are important to the adults who run the country, whilst under one half of teenagers believe they have the power to influence the issues they care about.⁵

'Something has been lost, and something needs to change'

We have all been children. Childhood, unlike so many other types of life experience is universal, and it is difficult not to compare our experiences to those we observe children now having. It is of course extremely easy to look back with rose-tinted glasses, with 'memory and myth' about what it was like to inhabit the streets and neighbourhoods of our times, but equally it is a powerful catalyst for action.

Giving evidence to a parliamentary select committee inquiry on children, young people and the built environment⁶ in January of this year, I was struck by how many of the interactions between the inquiry participants were framed through reflections by the MPs on their own childhood experiences. For example, Ian Byrne, MP:

'When you are talking, I am just thinking back. In the summer, we used to have a car park that would be a tennis court, a cricket field or a football pitch. Everybody would play out in the street on it. That was where you would go.'



Henry Ren, Unsplash

Designing in opportunities for free play

Or this from Clive Betts MP (Committee Chair):
'I am also starting to regress back and think about my own experience – it was a long time ago – of playing football and cricket in the street. At that time, the only time we had to stop for a few minutes was when the ice cream van arrived because it was the only vehicle we saw all day.'

There is a danger of course of giving in to nostalgia, but these memories and the sense that something has changed, and not for the better, can act as a catalyst, not to return us to the 'good old days' but to stop, to think again and ask afresh to children, young people and their care-givers: what do you want? What do you need? What would bring you back to the city, the streets? Because we no longer see children, no longer hold space for them, no longer invite them to explore the spaces and streets that make up their neighbourhoods. They are a missing presence, and we are all suffering for it.

How the child sees the city

Ward states that 'the child's world is full of miracles'. Anyone who has ever had the pleasure/pain of walking anywhere with a toddler can relate

to the levels of fascination that sticks, puddles, cracks in the pavement, bollards, kerbs and ditches can evoke. Textures, changes in ground levels, paths and boundaries are all physically close to a young child, and present opportunities for interaction, risk, learning and development. The Bernard Van Leer Foundation's Urban95 initiative⁷ communicates this through the core question: 'If you could experience the city from 95cm- the height of a healthy 3-year-old- what would you change?'. They have developed three lessons for toddler-friendly cities including that 'think babies' should be a universal design principle which is likely to create spaces and environments that ultimately work for everyone. This is similar to the 8 80 Cities⁸ approach where place shaping is 'guided by the simple but powerful idea that if everything we do in our cities is great for an 8 year old and an 80 year old, then it will be better for all people'.

Both approaches speculate, like Ward, that there are ways to create places and spaces where the relationships between people and their environments can be more fruitful and enjoyable to all when the needs of children and young people are embraced. And yet, in English planning policy, and too often in practice, children and young people are not mentioned and not considered. In the main

body of the National Planning Policy Framework⁹ for England, children are mentioned only once – in relation to providing housing for families. The words 'youth' and 'young' are entirely absent.

There is a void in national policy and direction, and so it is not surprising that local planning policy so often fails to address the needs of children and young people. The government is failing to take a lead, despite the wealth of evidence to suggest that the built environment is a key determinant of health. For children and young people, who are developing rapidly both physically, emotionally and socially, this means that their environments can have a profound impact upon their educational performance, social and emotional development, work outcomes, income and lifelong physical and mental health, including life expectancy.¹⁰

Happy habitats

All lives are inherently spatial, they happen some **where**. For children, the spatial geographies they inhabit are generally smaller than for adults – home, doorstep, street, school. Since 1980, opportunities for independent play and mobility have been restricted by the entrenched spatial injustice of streets being given over to cars. Ward recognised this loss of freedom and the increased fear of the streets in parents, caregivers and children alike. Groups like Playing Out,¹¹ a resident-led organisation that supports temporary 'play takeovers' of streets across the UK, state that the car is the number one immediate barrier to children playing outside. Residential streets used to be multi-purpose but have become monocultural places for driving through and car storage, pushing children out of what was once communal space. Many studies have shown that increased traffic danger is the main reason children play out less than they used to. And there is a vicious cycle: the less children are seen outside, the more roads become just for cars. Children are losing out and this needs to be addressed in planning and design, in addition to providing access to formal and informal play and public spaces that exist for and welcome children and young people.

Ward writes that a city that is really concerned with the needs of its young will make the whole environment accessible to them, because, whether invited or not, they are going to use the whole environment and find ways to play everywhere and with everything. Quoting Iona and Peter Opie, Ward states 'that the most precious gift we can give to the young is social space: the necessary space – or privacy – in which to become human beings'. Planning and building for children is a spatial justice issue, as well as a social justice one.



Marina Abrosimova, pexels

Imagine experiencing the city from 95 cm

The TCPA: 'a vehicle for the empowerment of the child'

The TCPA's vision is for homes, places and communities in which everyone can thrive. The mission is to challenge, inspire and support people to create healthy, sustainable and resilient places that are fair for everyone – including children and young people.

Children fundamentally seek the same characteristics from their urban environment as everyone else: a healthy, safe and secure place to call home, safe and clean streets, access to public and green spaces, clean air, things to do, the ability to confidently get around and the freedom to see friends and feel like they belong.¹² Many of these things are represented in the Garden City principles¹³ and place-making frameworks like the 20-minute neighbourhood.¹⁴ Planning and designing cities from a child's perspective has the potential to be a unifying aid to tackling place-based challenges across many contexts. It focuses not only on what the physical environment looks like but also the way in which it works and the relationships it supports or hinders for some of the most vulnerable members of society.

For the last decade the TCPA has worked in collaboration on healthy place-making, pursued and supported the principles of 20-minute neighbourhoods and partnered with Sport England and others on the youth engagement toolkit *Voice Opportunity Power*.¹⁵ This year, we are re-engaging with the legacy of Colin Ward to develop the TCPA's work using the lens of planning places where children and young people develop well.

A general election was called in May and the parliamentary select committee inquiry on children, young people and the built environment closed before publishing its final report. However, it is a special coincidence. It is a special coincidence that this year's parliamentary select committee inquiry on children, young people and the built environment coincided with the centenary of Colin Ward's birth. There is a groundswell of interest and passion to re-visit and see positive change in the relationship between children, young people and built environment professionals and I am excited to circle back to the legacy of Colin Ward's insight and stand in the footprints of the contemporary child in 2024 to see how we might take an inclusive approach to place-making that re-centres, engages, supports and promotes the rights of the child to not only live in the city but shape it at all scales.

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*It is important to note that children and young people are not a homogenous group, and their needs and experiences of the built environment will

vary depending upon their age, physical abilities, emotional, social and educational experiences, and cultural backgrounds. Ward also covers this in the preface of the first edition of *The Child in the City* quoting Margaret Mead: 'Every time we lump them together, we lose something'. The author recognises the imperfect nature of talking about children and young people in such broad terms.

Notes

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- 15 See: <https://www.voiceopportunitypower.com/>

colin ward and everyday anarchist solutions: allotments and other makeshift landscapes

Martin Stott explores the historical and social context of self-directed development as a response to social, political and economic upheaval

Colin Ward was always drawn to the kinds of spaces where people could participate in what he referred to as the 'anarchy of everyday life'. Not strictly ungovernable spaces, but contexts in which self-organising was at least tolerated and where activities that were messy or seen as odd could be enjoyed without being disturbed. These were often spaces colonised by children, outside the formality of playgrounds and the prying eyes of adults. But also those 'makeshift landscapes' to be found on the edges of towns and cities where railway lines and canals meet abandoned quarries and gravel pits, landfill sites, scrap metal dealers' breakers yards, and allotments.

Why was Ward so taken with these unplanned and largely unloved spaces? His intellectual journey was influenced by a number of anarchist and utopian writers.

Firstly, and most notably, Pyotr Kropotkin, especially his books *Mutual Aid: a factor of evolution* (1902) and *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow* (1899), which Ward re-edited and introduced to a contemporary audience in 1974.¹

Secondly, the philosopher Martin Buber, who set out in *Paths in Utopia* (1949) the difference in the



Pyotr Kropotkin c.1917

Anarchy Archives

space between what the political power of the state needed to be and what it often was; in the process squeezing out what he referred to as 'social spontaneity'.

Thirdly, the writings of planners and educationalists Paul and Percival Goodman, whose books *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life* (1947) and *Growing Up Absurd* (1960) articulated a view of childhood and the spaces that children inhabited that advocated for a more informal learning environment for children, which was at odds with the rigidity and conformism of the educational system as they knew it.

Ward's biographer, Sophie Scott-Brown² sets out the social vision underpinning his anarchism in her introduction:

'For Colin Ward, anarchy was ordinary, everywhere and always in action. It happened on our city streets, allotments, around kitchen tables, in village halls, town squares and pub snugs.'

'Spaces colonised by children, outside the formality of playgrounds and the prying eyes of adults'

The decentralist and localist impulses, the advocacy of mutual aid, and the focus upon human need are what she refers to as 'an ethics of

practice', the anarchy of everyday life. This approach led to a world view that did not always sit easily with the anarchist and other countercultural trends that exploded around him from the 1960s onwards. As Scott-Brown puts it:

'There were significant differences between his invocations of 'everyday life' as a sphere of meaningful political action and the 'personal politics' of for example feminist activists. Where he laid much stock in invoking 'common sense', the latter sought to challenge and disrupt the very notion of it [...] His favourite characters, allotmenters, art teachers or housing co-operativists, may have been on the fringes of society but they were not social outsiders; if anything they were quite the reverse.'

To Ward these were people who practiced the anarchy of everyday life and did so in spaces that they carved out themselves from a more conformist mainstream society.

As a young man, writing in *Freedom* (incorporating *War Commentary*) in 1946, he celebrated the occupation of disused military camps by homeless families after the Second World War as a form of instinctive mutual aid, which he characterised as 'the practicability of anarchism' in the face of a serious housing shortage. Over time, this morphed into a fascination with the area between country and city where a wide range of spaces and settlements and newer forms of habitation and livelihood transformed the landscape; what the Welsh socialist writer, academic, novelist and critic, Raymond Williams, referred to as 'border country', and what has more recently come to be known as 'edgelands' – a term coined by the British writer and campaigner for countryside access, Marion Shoard.

Ward explored these spaces where he and fellow writers, including Dennis Hardy and David Crouch, found caravan sites, plotlands, camping grounds, smallholdings, allotments and children's dens and hiding places. The attraction was not just to these intermediate physical spaces in themselves, but also to the activities, or 'social space' that Buber identified, and that they frequently engendered. It is this which Jeff Bishop and Paul Hoggett³ analysed and celebrated – that of the unexplored world of the hobby or enthusiasm, of how people organise their joint activities in their spare time, and the myriad of everyday cultural and leisure activities and the clubs, groups, associations and federations created to sustain them. These activities are about communication, neighbourliness, sharing and mutual support, rather than competition, whether that be cricket clubs, model railway enthusiasts or ballroom dancing.

Whilst many like upholstery, snooker or drama are physically quite bounded, many others such as



Ward's article in *Freedom*, 7 September 1946

canal or railway preservation, metal detecting or orienteering take advantage of the same intermediate physical spaces as well as enhancing that social space in their locality too. The further the authors delved into the subject the more they felt that they had stumbled 'into an area of social life which was massive in its proportions, rich in detail and of fascinating complexity, but almost completely overlooked'. For Ward this was an infectious delight in the ordinary; anarchy in action.

'Ward's interest in the land and its opportunities, whether that was for squatting, self-build, or small-scale agriculture, has lengthy antecedents'

Ward's interest in the land and its opportunities, whether that was for squatting, self-build, or small-scale agriculture, has lengthy antecedents. One of the many themed issues of *Anarchy* under his editorship from 1961-1970 was one on 'The Land' (Number 41, July 1964). The issue focuses mainly upon agriculture, and he wrote (under the pen name of John Ellerby) on the importance of small-scale agriculture and industrial production, reprising Kropotkin's ideas in *Fields, Factories and*

Workshops (which indeed doubles as the title of his article). Kropotkin, way ahead of his time in many ways, emphasises that humans are an intrinsic part of nature – ecological sensibility – and that soils could be improved in terms of productivity by human activity, as small-scale agriculturalists and allotmenters well know. In this context he also emphasised the importance of intensive agriculture, horticulture, market gardening, intensive field cultivation, greenhouses and kitchen gardens. He prefigures the more recent concerns around organic growing, 'human scale technology', permaculture and community gardens, all of which Ward champions. One of Ward's most insightful analysts is Stuart White,⁴ who connects his town-country 'social vision' through Garden Cities, housing cooperatives, community gardens and allotments to small scale industrial production in community workshops, and the mutuality of local exchange trading schemes (LETS). While this can, with a little imagination, be seen as a vision of a possible future society, Ward is generally more concerned with what people can and do experience right now.

Ward's interest in self-build movements in housing – he was a great admirer of Walter Segal's methods and successes in south east London – was most fully articulated in his work with Dennis Hardy on tracing the history of 'plotlands',⁵ starting at the end of the 19th century, when working class people began to purchase land within a reasonable



Plotlander Arthur Vance resting from his labours. Dunton, Bedfordshire, c.1932

© Don Liddard

distance of cities such as London at depressed prices. The term 'plotlands' came about because when land was 'dirt cheap' in the agricultural depression from the 1870s until 1939, it was parcelled up into 'plots' by speculators and sold off, often for £5 or less per plot. The purchasers built on the plots and in doing so new communities, most famously Peacehaven in Sussex and Jaywick Sands in Essex, became established. They weren't exactly loved by local planners or their neighbours, but rather seen as 'bungaloid growth' in a pristine landscape. As White puts it:

'Many middle class observers viewed the developments at the time with alarm and disdain, and post war planning legislation was motivated in part by a desire to prevent them happening again. Ward however is deeply impressed by the episode. Where others see an unpleasant untidiness, even a 'vast pastoral slum', Ward sees a prime example of creative direct action by which working class people crawled out of the very real urban slums in which they lived and found for themselves a modest place in the sun.'

A 'peopled landscape' was what Ward called these places, somewhere low income families 'gained the freedom to move into a more spacious life that was taken for granted by their betters'. Ward describes the process:⁶

'Mr Fred Nichols of Bowers Green in Essex was in his seventies. He had a poverty-stricken childhood in East London and a hard and uncertain life as a casual dock worker. His plot 40ft wide and 100ft long cost him £10 in 1934. First he put up a tent which his family and friends used at weekends, and he gradually accumulated tools timber and glass which he brought to the site strapped to his back as he cycled the 25 miles from London. For water he sank a well in the garden. His house was called 'Perseverance.'

It reminds me of the 'horticultural strips' I came across outside Bidford-on-Avon when I was working for Warwickshire County Council and was responsible for, amongst other things, their farms and smallholdings. These, eight in all, are an extraordinary remnant from the medieval strip farming systems – long, narrow and typically about half of one hectare each. A cross between an allotment and a smallholding they support a thriving community of part-time farmers who have developed an extensive system of sheds and barns where they engage in everything from motorcycle and farm machinery repair to large scale home brewing, as well as the small-scale commercial cultivation of their plots. Marion Shoard poetically refers to these kind of encampments as 'self-seeded dreamscapes'. 'Wildlife diversity here is often far greater than in the surrounding

countryside and many of the structures are more fascinating than those of nearby towns and cities.'⁷ Heaven on earth for Ward.

Dreamscapes, self-seeded or not, are what attracts many an allotment plot holder to their plot and are what Ward and his fellow author, David Crouch, home in on in their book *The Allotment: Its Landscape and Culture* (1988). For them the allotment is a marginal but vital place where people of modest means can reclaim something of their own lives and where old patterns of mutual aid still flourish, where the 'gift relationship' is simply part of the fabric of life. What plot holder has never given away to neighbours lovingly tended veg' in a time of glut, or gratefully accepted seedlings after their own were ravaged by slugs? The allotment is not just about food production but a cultural freedom that has thrived on official disregard and neglect.



Martin Stolf

The allotment: an anarchist utopia

The image of the allotment as tatty old eyesore is correct, if that is what the viewer wants to see, but Ward and Crouch insist that it be granted the dignity of its own unique if accidental aesthetic. Many a photographer over the past thirty years has come to the same conclusion, with moving and insightful results. This is a peopled landscape - undesigned, diverse and rooted in a history which seems to run back over five hundred years - as the Bidford plot holders attest to. Ward and Crouch celebrate the immigrant in the tapestry of allotment history, men such as Sebastien Espada the anarchist refugee from the Spanish Civil War who, in the 1940s, used his training in horticulture to grow peppers, aubergines, and even Kentucky tobacco on his plot in Ealing, until the excise man came calling.

That tradition of immigration driving innovation, learning, and reform on allotment sites continues to this day. The chair of my own site is a young Palestinian woman, while other plot holders are Kurdish, Algerian, Chinese, American, Serbian and Polish. An Iranian refugee currently housed on the Bibby Stockholm barge visits a British family and is to be found helping with the pruning, mowing, and

weeding on their plot. Trained as a carpenter in a previous life, he has constructed a series of raised beds on their plot that are the glory of the site. The nature and composition of the working class that Ward and Crouch refer to has changed in the nearly 40 years since they wrote *The Allotment*, but the allotment still represents, for them and us, a particularly vital landscape. As they put it:

'... a working class landscape, a productive landscape, conforming to no style... found in conditions of need and poverty... it is an intensive and inventive landscape, free from everyday outside controls and forced by necessity towards initiative and invention.'

In a sense this is what Ward recorded in *Cotters and Squatters: Housing's Hidden History* (2002) – marginalised groups setting about creating their own futures under the nose of authority. He describes the 'free miners' in the Forest of Dean who in the 19th century existed as 'a community of small proprietors [with] a considerable degree of independence and freedom from authority'. Then there is the history of popular squatting in royal forests, something refugees were reported to be doing in the New Forest in 2023 and, more extensively, in the Calais 'jungle' at Sangatte, France as they attempted to reach the UK; 'people's history' being played out in real time.

In my experience, rather than being the preserve of the stereotypical male, the old man cycling home with a bunch of carrots over the handlebars, allotments these days are as much or more for children, especially as families – perhaps reinterpreting the aspiration of Harry Thorpe's advocacy of allotments as 'leisure gardens' in the 1960s – are to be found ensconced on their plot appreciating the sunshine and birdsong, while their children are making mud pies, chasing pigeons, finding little spaces of their own between the hedge and their parents' shed, gleaning harvest leftovers, or helping with the barbeque on a weekend evening as friends join them for music, beer and song at the end of a long day. For children, allotments are a safe space. A recurring theme in Ward's *The Child in the City* (1978) is children's creative appropriation of city spaces. Ward contrasts American playgrounds 'designed for insurance companies' with what he argues all urban children should have access to:

'... gardens where they can keep their pets, and enjoy their hobbies, and perhaps watch their fathers working with real tools; secret places where they can create their own worlds; the shadow and mystery that lend enchantment to play.'

In a way, allotments can be described as quintessential Ward. Scott-Brown quotes Ward as

saying: 'I am not a utopian anarchist – I look for day to day anarchist solutions', and she goes on to say: *'If the utopian pursued anarchism as an entire social design the latter [Ward] took it as a multipurpose gadget for loosening the restraints of everyday life. As a propagandist, he championed the designs, but by personal and intellectual convictions he was a gadget man, presenting ideas as resources to be picked over for the bits that could be used in the present.'*

'In a way, allotments can be described as quintessential Ward'

Ward himself, in his book *Influences* (1991), in summing up why Martin Buber was so important to him, said:

'Buber's exploration of the paths to utopia, far from confirming an acceptance of the way things are, confirms, [...] that the fact that there is no route map to utopia does not mean that there are no routes to more accessible destinations.'

What Ward found on allotments and similar places of escape or play were those 'accessible destinations' for an anarchist, right in our midst.

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Notes

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