

for the very large ‘New Market Buildings’ in the mid-nineteenth century, and a fourth for an impressive new bank building. Both also removed all evidence of the historical plot pattern on these two corners. That leaves only the north side of the junction of St Mary’s Street with High Street displaying the pattern of interlocking plot boundaries which is the basis for Haslam’s hypothesis. His own ‘confirmation bias’ is thereby exposed.

I do not dispute that medieval urban plot patterns on street corners that meet roughly at right angles often display the interlocking pattern noted by Haslam; indeed, I have published a number of examples myself. What I do dispute is that this reflects the original layout of the town, rather than the subsequent evolution of the pattern as land was divided and exchanged to make best commercial use of the properties originally created – a process that Scrase demonstrated in his study of Wells was at its peak in the period between 1250 and 1325 (Scrase, 1989). Nor do I anywhere assert that all ‘burgages were originally of equal size’. My own published examples demonstrate that this was not the case, including in Ludlow (Slater, 1990). However, planned burgages laid out by one land holder, at one time, were usually of equal size.

I am glad to read that we can now agree that the first reference to the building of the town walls of Ludlow was in 1233. Haslam’s reference to the Shropshire Historic Environment Record (SHER, 2018) as evidence for an

earlier rampart and palisade is a travesty of the evidence in the SHER. This is many pages long and the overwhelming tenor of the evidence is that the walls were built over a long period between 1233 and the 1290s; that they were poorly built and seem to be more for controlling access to the town than for defence; that they ‘were not completed on the south side of the town until at least the 1290s’, and that ‘it is not clear either historically or archaeologically whether it replaced an earlier timber palisade’. It also notes that the majority of the surviving wall follows ‘outcropping rock’ with the internal face of the wall hard against the rock up to parapet level. Haslam continues to deny the evidence of historical record, archaeology and cartographic analysis. He tells us fairy stories.

References

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Mind the gap

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Two days after returning to the UK from the ISUF 2019 Conference in Cyprus I attended an event organized by the Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes (BOB-MK) urban design network. This comprised six presentations under the title of ‘Garden Towns – past, present and

future, a wider perspective’ and dealt with aspects of the current programme of garden towns and villages being promoted as a solution for England’s housing shortage. It was held in Didcot, the site of one of these initiatives (South Oxford District Council, 2017)

It was a much smaller event than the ISUF Conference (www.urbanform.org/conferences.html), where there were over 200 presentations over 3 days from a wide variety of disciplines and contexts. Even making allowances for these differences I was bewildered at finding myself in such a different world from that of the ISUF Conference, even though both conferences were concerned with urban form. There were 73 participants in the Didcot audience, more than in most of the parallel sessions at the ISUF Conference. However, with the exception of three private architects and myself, all the participants were from local authority planning departments in this part of the UK.

The BOB-MK presentations were slick, with effective graphics and all ending on time. All the speakers were fluent to the point of being irritating through their frequent use of current clichés – ‘making great places’, ‘growing the community’ (like turnips?), and so on. They were preoccupied with promoting their organizations and, in the process of marketing themselves, they were not very critical. They offered advice but never referred to past proposals that may have gone wrong and from which their advice might have been derived. Above all they were preoccupied with administrative arrangements and the legal, and especially financial, structures of the proposals for the garden towns and villages.

It felt strange to be presented with material about urban form that figured little in the ISUF Conference, except in very different ways in the presentations of the four keynote speakers who, as ISUF veterans, were well aware of the need to bridge the growing gulf between academia and practice. Of course, since there were five or six parallel sessions each day of the ISUF Conference there was the usual difficulty of selecting which sessions to attend: since titles do not always reveal the contents, there may have been presentations buried in those sessions that were relevant

to the relationship between research and practice.

The gulf between practitioners and the academy seems to have got wider as practice becomes increasingly managerial and academia gets ever more specialized and abstruse in the pursuit of scoring points within a particular realm of academic research. This trend is exacerbated by the way journals have been taken over by commercial firms that obtain their material without cost from authors, get their papers peer reviewed free of charge, and then charge academic institutions so that their members can read them online. Books are also increasingly being published online and, with the notable exceptions of some open access works, they are becoming exorbitantly expensive for private readers: so professionals without academic connections, such as most UK local authority planners, have little prospect of accessing this work.

These tendencies are by no means limited to those disciplines that are central to the ISUF community. For instance, *The Economist* recently lamented that ‘the historical profession has turned in on itself. Historians spend their lives learning more and more about less and less, producing narrow PhDs and turning them into monographs and academic articles, in the hamster-wheel pursuit of tenure and promotion’ (Bagehot, 2019).

If this is a problem for a discipline that is concerned with the past, how much more serious is the problem for disciplines concerned with the present and the future of our towns and cities?

References

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