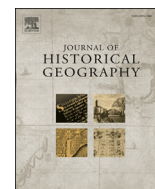


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## Detached gardens and the urban fringe of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English provincial towns



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### ABSTRACT

The distribution and extent of detached gardens in a sample of ten English provincial towns were examined for the eighteenth century, through cartographic analysis and the construction of GIS-generated zones parallel to the urban fence. The study revealed that detached gardens formed a distinct and abundant feature in the urban fringe, in particular within two hundred metres of the built-up area. A longitudinal case study of the processes of plot transformation in Shrewsbury, based on maps from 1830 to 1940, indicated that a reduction in provision of detached gardens was linked to booms in the house building cycle, while periods of increased provision in the form of urban allotments were occasioned by national emergencies. The system of provision was largely profit-motivated and it disintegrated as towns expanded in the middle and late nineteenth century. Garden ground provided the prime location for housing and an awareness of its morphological frame is essential for an understanding of expansion from the urban core. It is suggested that urban morphologists have neglected detached gardens in their attempts to develop models of urban land transformation using the concept of the fringe belt.

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The formation and later transformation of the urban fringe has been a distinct and fruitful area of research among urban morphologists ever since Conzen published his seminal work on Alnwick in 1960.<sup>1</sup> Yet, despite more than fifty years of detailed research, there remain some notable lacunae in our understanding, particularly in relation to the development processes at work on the fringes of towns in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This is the period that sees the first distinctive group of land uses and building types that have been recognised as typical of urban fringes. Some early examples, such as the tenter racks of cloth makers, are particular to their period and their plots were soon redeveloped as technological advances made them redundant, but others continued to characterise the fringe through the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries. This paper investigates the developmental history of one of those long-lived land uses: detached gardens.

Until now, detached gardens have hardly figured in the

interpretation of the morphology of the urban fringe. Our aim is to investigate their significance for the changes that occurred in these locations, particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We ask to what degree detached gardens are pertinent to an understanding of the pattern of outward expansion of English provincial towns, and whether the long-held hypothesis of residential development leap-frogging a belt of fringe features is a valid interpretation. We consider the nature of the processes that transformed the plots at the very edge of a town, whether local or national influences were most significant and what type of people and organisations were involved. Current geographical and historical literature provides only a few descriptions of detached gardens. These examples remain isolated and no attempt has been made to determine the abundance and distribution of these gardens on a wider scale. The research reported in this paper represents a starting point for an assessment of their importance in the landscape of towns from the eighteenth to early twentieth centuries. The research encompasses only long established and slowly expanding English provincial towns. Rapidly growing or newly founded industrial cities are excluded, as is London. Nonetheless, there is important research on London's gardens which provides comparative information and on which we draw in the conclusions. There are also comparisons to be made with towns elsewhere in

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<sup>1</sup> M.R.G. Conzen, *Alnwick, Northumberland: A Study in Town Plan Analysis*, Institute of British Geographers, Publication 27, London, 1960.

Europe.

The starting point for the research was Conzen's concept of urban fringe belt formation. Developing these ideas in the 1970s, Whitehand and other researchers demonstrated the processes at work behind fringe belt formation and development.<sup>2</sup> In their models, urban fringe uses established during periods of economic standstill were conceived as being embedded in the later built-up area in such a way that they remained distinctive in their plot sizes and land uses. Eventually, in larger and faster growing towns, housing development overtook them to use land clear of previous development, leaving the former fringe as a distinctive zone of irregular plot sizes and characteristic land uses. Some of these plots might eventually be sold for later housing development (ornamental villas were especially susceptible) but generally the fringe belts of a town remain distinctive zones through to the present. Since then, there have been specialised studies of particular fringe land uses, including golf courses, Victorian ornamental villas and institutions, as well as the impact of fringe belts on urban nature conservation.<sup>3</sup> There has also been research on the chronology of land use succession within the plots of fringe belt zones and the impact this has on plot transformation.<sup>4</sup> Most recently there have been comparative studies of fringe belt development in different countries and regions demonstrating that the concept is a useful way of describing and explaining very distinctive physical and land use patterns in cities of different sizes, origins and socio-political systems.<sup>5</sup>

### Provincial towns and their gardens in the eighteenth century

In the mid eighteenth century most English provincial towns still displayed a nucleated form. The increasing number of residents was housed through the infill of existing urban plots and by limited compact ribbon development along main roads. Urban boundaries remained visible and easily identifiable in the early eighteenth century, as is demonstrated by the prospects and panoramas dating from this period drawn by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck and others, usually depicting a densely clustered settlement viewed across fields (Fig. 1). Only one of these nearly eighty prospects, that for

Durham (1745), unambiguously shows detached gardens, in this case located on the steep western slopes of the incised meander on which the cathedral stands, but others, such as Norwich (1741), are highly suggestive of extramural gardens. The majority of these prospects use carefully drawn groups of people engaged in recreational pursuits to enliven the foreground, setting them in roughly sketched agricultural or woodland scenery. They do not pretend to accuracy, though we can note in passing that a number do show tenterfields and their characteristic drying racks.<sup>6</sup>

Over the past thirty years urban historians and historical geographers have gradually built up a rounded picture of provincial towns, detailing population growth, economy, administration, building types, improvements and recreational opportunities. However, references to activities outside the urban core are largely limited to analysis of the improvement of transport links and the beginnings of villa development beyond the town limits. Little attention has been paid to land uses in the immediate fringe of the built-up zone.<sup>7</sup> Some consideration has been given to the provision of essential fresh foods which, as von Thünen hypothesised as far back as 1826, were limited by slow transport and lack of refrigeration and had to be produced in a zone 0.1–0.6 km wide, where soil fertility was maintained by manure from cattle in cow sheds and stables in the town centre.<sup>8</sup> Milk was the major example and it must have been produced either by nearby farms or suburban cowkeepers from where it could have been delivered daily.<sup>9</sup> It is also assumed that vegetables were grown commercially near towns and brought freshly to markets on a regular basis, though few details are available for towns other than London.<sup>10</sup> However, it is important to note that the detached gardens which are the subject of this paper are not commercial vegetable gardens of this kind. Neither are these detached gardens commercial nursery gardens. Most provincial towns had one or more of these on their fringe, supplying plants to the owners of ornamental villas and country estates in the vicinity. Veitch's of Exeter and Pope's of Handsworth, near Birmingham, are notable examples.<sup>11</sup> They increased in number through the early nineteenth century but few towns had more than two or three such nursery gardens.

The compact nature of provincial towns meant that most residents lived within walking distance of the surrounding countryside. Although the labouring classes had little spare time for leisure, there is some evidence that the urban fringe was commonly used

<sup>2</sup> J.W.R. Whitehand, Building cycles and the spatial pattern of urban growth, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 55 (1972) 39–55; J.W.R. Whitehand, Urban rent theory, time series and morphogenesis: an example of eclecticism in geographical research, *Area* 4 (1972) 218–222; J.W.R. Whitehand, The changing nature of the urban fringe: a time perspective, in: J.H. Johnson (Ed.), *Suburban Growth: Geographical Processes at the Edge of the Western City*, London, 1974, 31–52.

<sup>3</sup> M. Barke, Morphogenesis, fringe belts and urban size: an exploratory essay, in: T.R. Slater (Ed.), *The Built Form of Western Cities*, Leicester, 1990, 279–299; R.F. Broadrick, *An Investigation into the Location of Institutional Land Uses in Birmingham*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1981; M.I.W. Hopkins, The ecological significance of urban fringe belts, *Urban Morphology* 16 (2012) 41–54; M.I.W. Hopkins, Vegetation as a component of urban form, *Urban Morphology* 17 (2013) 57–59; T.R. Slater, Family, society and the ornamental villa on the fringes of English country towns, *Journal of Historical Geography* 4 (1978) 129–144.

<sup>4</sup> M. Barke, Land use succession: a factor in fringe belt modification, *Area* 8 (1976) 303–306; B. von der Dollen, An historic-geographical perspective on urban fringe-belt phenomena, in: Slater (Ed.), *The Built Form of Western Cities*, 319–345; Slater, Family, society and the ornamental villa; J.W.R. Whitehand and N.J. Morton, Fringe belt and the recycling of urban land: an academic concept and planning practice, *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design* 30 (2003) 819–839.

<sup>5</sup> M.P. Conzen, How cities internalize their former inner fringes: a cross-cultural comparison, *Urban Morphology* 13 (2009) 29–54; K. Gu and J. Zhang, Cartographical sources for urban morphological research in China, *Urban Morphology* 18 (2014) 5–21; K. Gu, Y. Tian, J.W.R. Whitehand and S.M. Whitehand, Residential building types as an evolutionary process: the Guangzhou area, China, *Urban Morphology* 12 (2008) 97–115; R.L. Rego and K.S. Meneguetti, Planted towns and territorial organisation: the morphology of a settlement process in Brazil, *Urban Morphology* 14 (2010) 101–109.

<sup>6</sup> R. Hyde, *A Prospect of Britain: The Town Panoramas of Samuel and Nathaniel Buck*, London, 1994; for tenterfields see, for example, S. and N. Buck's prospects of Exeter (1736), Leeds (1745), Reading (1734) and Salisbury (1734). By way of comparison, John Rocque's map of Exeter (1744) shows eight tenterfields in the extramural fringe.

<sup>7</sup> For example: P. Borsay (Ed.), *The Eighteenth-Century Town: A Reader in English Urban History 1688–1820*, London, 1990; P. Borsay, The English urban renaissance: the development of provincial urban culture c.1680–c.1760, *Social History* 2 (1990) 581–603; C.W. Chalklin, *The Provincial Towns of Georgian England: A Study of the Building Process 1740–1820*, London, 1974; J. Summerson, *Georgian London*, Harmondsworth, 1982.

<sup>8</sup> J.H. Von Thünen, *Der Isolierte Stadt: Beziehung auf Landwirtschaft und Nationalökonomie*, Berlin, 1826.

<sup>9</sup> Few details are available for provincial towns, but research has been conducted on London and Liverpool: P.J. Atkins, London's intra-urban milk supply, circa 1790–1914, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers NS* 2 (1977) 383–399; H.J. Dyos and M. Wolff (Eds), *The Victorian City: Images and Realities. Volume 2: Shapes on the Ground and A Change of Accent*, London, 1978; H. Hill, Liverpool – last stronghold of town cowkeepers, *Dairy Engineering* 73 (1956) 107–110; A.P. Mathias, Agriculture and the brewing and distilling industries in the eighteenth century, *Economic History Review* 2nd Series 5 (1952) 249–257.

<sup>10</sup> G.B.G. Bull, Thomas Milne's land utilisation map of the London area in 1800, *Geographical Journal* 122 (1956) 25–30.

<sup>11</sup> S. Heriz-Smith, James Veitch and Sons of Exeter and Chelsea, 1853–1870, *Garden History* 17 (1989) 135–153; J.C. Loudon, Provincial nurseries, Warwickshire, *Gardener's Magazine* 8 (1832) 104–114.

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