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# For the likes of us? Retelling the classed production of a British university campus

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## Abstract

This paper contributes to recent critical geographical writing on university campuses by setting their physical production and reproduction centre stage and taking an historical perspective. Focusing on a single case study campus in the UK we revisit the archival record on its planning and early years, revealing gaps between stated intentions of increasing equality between social classes and discourses and practices which reinforced middle and upper class cultural hegemony. We then draw on oral history interviews with residents of the social housing estates immediately adjacent to the campus, including its former builders and cleaners, to explore the spatialized subjectivities of people who were generally absent from the consultations conducted by the university's planners, and whose perspectives are not found in its official history. The findings confirm the idea of university campuses as paradoxical spaces for their working-class neighbours, at once excluding and, in unexpected ways, potentially transformational.



## Introduction

This paper responds to Yvette Taylor's recent injunction to social and cultural geographers 'to reengage class and to retell its relevancies, its changing shape, character and containment'... to ask '[what] presences and absences [we are] complicit in reproducing in "our" space... [and to] think through temporal and spatial residue or the way that class "sticks"' (2012: 547-8). We do this in the form of a case study of the making of higher educational space in one English city, which seeks to add to emerging critical geographies of university campuses (Hopkins, 2011). In common with other recent geographical writing on universities, including the large volume of work on the studentification of towns and cities since the late 1990s (eg Chatterton, 2000; 2010; Smith and Holt, 2007; Sage et al, 2012), we are concerned with the relationship between universities and the wider communities within which they are located. This paper makes two contributions. First, we bring in an *historical* frame, stretching back to the spate of building new universities in Britain in the early 1960s. Secondly, whereas other studies have focussed on students and white-collar staff (Andersson et al, 2012; Hopkins, 2011), this paper sets the role of building, cleaning and maintenance staff centre stage.

In spite of dramatic expansion of student numbers in the UK in the late 1990s and 2000s (Sage et al, 2012), access to higher education and particularly to courses and institutions leading to the best-paid and most prestigious occupations continues to be shaped by class background (Millburn, 2012). Applicants whose parents are wealthy and/ or have well-paid professional or managerial jobs and/ or who are university graduates themselves, retain greater access than the children of those unemployed people and manual workers who have not been to university (Brown and Carasso, 2013). In Taylor's terms, class *sticks*. Yet, how this happens is not always immediately visible. Our own retelling of the relevancies of class in the making of UK universities involves revisiting the early history of the case study university and re-examining the archival record. We explore some of the temporal and spatial residue of the classed representations of campus pasts, revealing how historical studies of this and other campus spaces (eg Sanderson, 2002; Gumprecht, 2007) have obscured the stories of people who, in David Harvey's words 'build and sustain urban life' and thus 'have a primary claim to that which they have produced' (2012: xvi). In this way, we will argue, 'we' (academics) have been complicit in reproducing the absence of non-student working-class stories in 'our' higher educational spaces.

In this paper we take a small step towards redressing this injustice through oral histories conducted with former builders and cleaners living in the working-class social housing estates adjacent to the case study university in the mid-2000s, and through concurrent ethnographic work. Our work clearly shows how the new university's neighbours experienced the coming of the campus as a loss rather than a gain in terms of amenity (contrast Gumprecht, 2007), and felt excluded from the opportunity to study there. Yet this was by no means the whole story. People who

had literally *made* the university and contributed to the production of its successful graduates, often remembered this work with a sense of ownership and pride. The campus was thus, for some oral history participants, a paradoxical space (Rose, 1993; see also Quinn, 2005; and Holdsworth 2009).

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section sets our critique of the connection between class inequality and the making of higher educational space within the geographical literature, and provides the broader historical background to our case study. The subsequent section briefly summarises the methods used before we move on, in section four, to re-examine the archival record on the building of a new university in 1960s England. The fifth section switches to oral histories of builders, cleaners and other working class neighbours to the university. The sixth section draws conclusions for contemporary debates on studentification and social class.<sup>2</sup>

### **Expanding higher education in 1960s Britain: the plate glass universities**

A major argument of this paper is that the expansion of British universities in the early 1960s, the stated intention of which was to contribute to addressing class inequalities (Robbins, 1963: 54), in practice also helped to reproduce them, while simultaneously silencing or devaluing working class cultures. This may seem like an ironic position to take, given that, as we write, a campaign is being waged in Britain to protect the public university and to prevent the deepening of a neoliberal approach to higher education<sup>3</sup> We should therefore state at the outset that, in our view, this campaign deserves full support and that, as with any political struggle, there is a need for strategic essentialism – in this case to construct public universities as serving the public good. Yet, while campaigners hold that the previous ‘system... by and large, worked well’ over several decades (Collini, 2011), this paper suggests that, analytically, a closer look is required.

Nationally, the early 1960s was a period of ‘galloping expansion’ for universities, as government tried to deal with the twin demands on the sector placed by the baby boom, and the increasing demand for a professionally and technically trained workforce: the 1945 Percy Report had asked for a quadrupling of engineers, and the Barlow Report (1946) for a doubling of scientists, along with the expansion of all existing universities and the creation of new ones in order to deal with the demands for a more highly qualified workforce more generally. As a result, the post-war era saw some existing institutions – for example Nottingham, Southampton, Hull and Exeter – being granted university charters, while the Robbins Report (1963) confirmed the planning and building of six new ‘plate

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<sup>2</sup> The paper thus adds to other recent work on the ‘range of cultural practices over a broad historical span’ that have given rise to the “absent presence” of the British working class’ (Kirk, 2007: 203). Like others (eg Devine, Savage, Scott and Crompton, 2005), we are concerned both with continuing class-based structural inequalities and with complex, ambivalent and situational subjective experiences of class.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the website of the Campaign for the Public University <http://publicuniversity.org.uk/>, last accessed 18<sup>th</sup> December 2012.

glass' campus universities in England: UEA, Sussex, Essex, Kent, Lancaster, Warwick and York (Shattock 1996: 3).

Our analysis involves a case study of one of these new English universities, the University of East Anglia (UEA), at Norwich, planning for which began in the late 1950s, with building commencing in the early 1960s. We are mindful that the sector is characterised by diversity (Hopkins, 2011: 167) and hierarchy (Rice, 2011: 333) and that one institution's history is therefore not necessarily typical of others. However, by setting our discussion in the context of historical discourses on the connections between universities, their students, and communities (local, regional and national), we are able to use our findings to contribute to wider debates.

The early decades of UEA's existence have been given detailed treatment by historian Michael Sanderson (2002), whose work can be regarded as the official history of the university. Sanderson provides fascinating insights into the commissioning and design of the UEA campus. However, relations between the new university and its *immediate* neighbours in the mainly working class social housing estates that bordered the UEA site receive scant attention.

Our attempt to rectify this follows in a tradition of problematizing the territoriality of higher education provision (Chatterton 2000: 167; Chatterton and Goddard 2000), and takes its inspiration from more general critical geographical engagement with the role of class in the representation and production of space. As Harvey explores through his case study of the Basilica of Sacre-Coeur in nineteenth century Paris, the class-based struggle over the built landscape is both material and ideological – in the case of the Basilica containing the in-built irony that this dominating monument constructed on the hill at Montmartre in view of almost the entire city to emphasise the restoration of conservative, Catholic power, was simultaneously a site where the martyrs of the 1871 Paris Commune were commemorated (1979). Following Don Mitchell, we hold that 'the morphology of a place is in its own right a space that makes social relations. It is a produced space...'. We too attempt to 'understand the interplay between production and representation of [a landscape], while at the same time restoring an *ontology of labor* to the centre of landscape geography and history' (1996: 6 and 8, emphasis added; see also Latour and Hermant, 1998 [2006]). We attend to the manual labour involved in building, cleaning and maintaining the university and to the nuance, ambivalence and unfixity of working-class cultures.

The analysis within this paper reveals class-based assumptions, largely unacknowledged and implicit, that underlay, and helped to shape, the sociospatial process of the building of a new university and its early years. This is borne out by Charlesworth's biting spatial deconstruction of working-class experiences at university in the UK in the present century (2009: 264-5). Charlesworth draws heavily on Bourdieu's writings on higher education and class to emphasise the valuelessness and invisibility of working-class people in the eyes of the self-

reproducing middle-classes. Importantly for our study of the relation between a university and its neighbourhood, higher educational space is seen to be produced by valorising spatial mobility and thereby denigrating the local:

We should not be surprised that in the institutions that the dominant use to constitute the realm of international freedom in which they move... issues to do with locality become degraded... What this means is that academic knowledge is constituted in distinction to locality, and working-class people's experience is constituted as parochial (2009: 273; see also Chatterton 2010: 509-510).

The active programme of planning and expansion of universities in Britain in the late 1950s and early 1960s did lead to an increase in the absolute numbers of working-class students but the overall proportion hardly changed (Ross 2003: 49). Even today 'the disproportionate recruitment of middle-class students, and the parallel comparative exclusion of those from working-class origins, remain' (Ross 2003: 73-4; see also Chatterton 2010: 512 and 514).

The plateglass universities may have had outward appearances of modernism, but, as Lord Annan, a member of the nascent UEA's Academic Planning Board put it, looking back almost thirty years later, 'new universities were not created to do something new. They were created to do better and more imaginatively what was already being done in Oxbridge and the nineteenth-century universities' (Annan 1990: 505).

The campus universities of the 1960s were thus seen as the modern manifestation of 'the college' and the desire to create a total community for students, aiming to prepare them, in rarefied surroundings, for their future lives in positions of influence. And yet at the same time as the desire to create a total community for *students*, the theme of university interaction with the wider community was already establishing itself. Provincial cities were seen as the ideal type settlement to foster such links (Beloff 1968: 30). After a discussion of the methods, we turn to the UEA case study to consider how the tensions between these different types and understandings of community played out on the ground.

## Methods

The official record does speak of class and its role in the production of this higher educational space but it does so either implicitly, or in relation to the changing class make-up of the UEA student body and its academic staff in the 1960s and 1970s (Sanderson 2002: 119-122). It hardly mentions the people who built, maintained and cleaned the university, nor the mainly working class residents of the adjacent estates. Our oral history interviews with residents of these estates, explored participants' life stories, paying particular attention to how they had experienced and negotiated the stigmatisation - by the wider population of Norwich - of the area in which they lived.

Oral histories provide a means by which lost landscapes may be in part recaptured. For the narrator, this landscape is personal and part of their embodied experience. However, the point of using oral histories is not to promote the idea that they represent an authentic alternative to the written archive because they are spoken by people who lived through and themselves remember a particular place and time. They are, after all, ‘partial, subjective, reflexive, ambiguous [and] sometimes contradictory’ making them ‘like all historical narratives’ (Riley and Harvey 2005: 272-3). However, setting them alongside the archival sources enables us to shed new light on the meanings of a changing landscape through the rich and complex stories of people who both physically produced it and were marginalised in discussions around its initial conception (see Llewellyn 2003). Moreover, it responds to Lorimer’s call for geographers to ‘step outside their institutional and academic bounds to explore the fabric of everyday life’ (2003: 200), enabling us to reflect on, and make explicit, the social location and spatial imagination of the authors of the archived documents (Ogborn 2003).

While working (Rogaly) and studying (Taylor) at the University of East Anglia over several years leading up to the mid-2000s, we had both developed contacts in the social housing estates adjacent to the University of East Anglia. Rogaly, a lecturer in international development studies, was politically ill-at-ease with the apparent disconnect between the university, with its prestigious international standing, and the neighbouring estates that were variously held in disdain, feared, stigmatised, or simply ignored by many middle-class Norwich residents. He contacted the recently established New Deal for Communities programme based in the estates (see Rogaly and Taylor, 2009: 125-139) and organised two-way visits with residents coming to speak to students on campus and groups of students<sup>4</sup> engaging with New Deal projects in the estates. Meanwhile Taylor had long been familiar with the estates through her non-academic life as an activist and regularly visited friends and fellow activists who lived there. The two of us decided to work together on another Norfolk-based project (Taylor and Rogaly, 2004). With the support of the New Deal for Communities programme we sought to undertake archival, ethnographic and oral history research problematizing the idea/ stereotype of ‘deprived white community’ that was routinely applied to estates such as those neighbouring UEA.

During ethnographic fieldwork in 2005-06, including three months resident in the estates, we built on our previous contacts, and on new encounters in a variety of settings, to invite people to take part in oral history interviews. In total twenty-six men and forty-seven women of all ages were interviewed, with a greater proportion of them being middle-aged and older people. Almost all the interviews were recorded and transcribed. We contacted people through the New Deal for Communities project, through a local café, a sheltered housing scheme, pubs, shops and a weekly lunch club, as well as through casual encounters. We wanted to

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<sup>4</sup> These students, many of them international, were on taught masters programmes.

interview residents living in different streets and, though the estates were mainly working-class, to include middle-class residents as well. Twenty-five of the interviews were full-length life histories; several of these involved multiple sittings. By no means all of those interviewed had worked at UEA but a large proportion either had done so and/or had strong memories of their prior use of the land on which the campus was constructed.<sup>5</sup> For the present paper we also consulted documents concerning the planning and building of UEA in the late 1950s and early 1960s deposited at the University of East Anglia by Gordon Tilsley, who had been Norwich Town Clerk during the period of the establishment of UEA, as well as files generated by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government held at the National Archives.

In the next section of the paper, we argue that attitudes implying that planners constituted the ‘normal’ or mainstream community of experience gave rise to an absent presence of class in the archival record and an accompanying perpetuation of stereotypes.<sup>6</sup>

### **Critically Reconstructing the Origins of the University of East Anglia: the Official Story**

In revisiting the archival record we will now critically explore how the construction of UEA was variously presented as fulfilling the needs of the *region* as well as the *city* of Norwich, and how this tied in with a particular understanding and vision of ‘community’ which was also bound up with the notion of the ideal ‘student’ and the need for a campus-style university. We suggest that these ideas were class-based. In the final part of this section, we show the same to be true in debates and decisions around the siting of the campus within the city.

Scale was crucial to the successful campaign for a university in Norwich, then a centre for food processing, engineering, printing and boot and shoe industries, and the easternmost city in the relatively sparsely populated, rural region of East Anglia. There had been various unsuccessful moves in Norwich since the 1920s to try to create a university for the city. By the late 1950s, in order to capitalise on the national desire to expand university provision, the decision was taken within Norwich to push for a higher education institution to serve the entire region of East Anglia. So what had begun as Norwich City Council’s university promotion committee became a regional organisation which spoke of the ‘people of East Anglia’, and stressed how the:

present revival of the project has been accompanied by a great surge of enthusiasm throughout the whole of the geographical counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, and the University Promotion Committee which

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<sup>5</sup> For more details of the oral history research methodology, see Rogaly and Taylor (2009: 22-33).

<sup>6</sup> Thus, in Bourdieu’s terms, ‘concealing, by an apparently neutral attitude’ how higher education institutions have contributed to the ‘hereditary transmission of power and privileges’ (Bourdieu 1973: 72; see also Young, 1990: 59).

has been established is representative of the life of the whole community of East Anglia: industry and commerce, banking, agriculture, the professions, the church and teachers' organisations are all represented. Its membership includes the Lord Lieutenants, the Lord Bishops, the Lord Mayor of Norwich and the chairmen of all the education authorities of the area, with the chief education officers. It has truly been said that East Anglia has seldom been so united or so enthusiastic.<sup>7</sup>

We can see here how, in attempting to persuade central government that the interests of the city chimed with that of the nation, what was constructed in discourse (if not necessarily in reality) was the idea of a united region. And alongside the idea of the region, a particular idea of 'community' was also being assembled and represented. Yet 'East Anglia' as described here exclusively consisted of middle and upper class individuals, professions and offices. While the passing reference to 'agriculture' could have included labourers as well as land owners, the whole tone of the campaign suggests otherwise. At the forefront of the campaign was the elite Norwich Society, which had 250 members, an elected council of nineteen which included eight professional architects, the headmaster of Norwich School and two former Lord Mayors. Collectively the society welcomed the establishment of a university in Norwich 'heartily' as it was seen by them to represent the interests of the city.<sup>8</sup> Similarly the 'distinctive local culture' highlighted in a report on the issue emphasised the presence of an 'excellent and widely-read daily paper, a popular and thriving group of museums, the Norfolk Naturalists Trust, the triennial Music Festival, the Maddermarket Theatre, [and] the many bodies affiliated to the Arts Federation'.<sup>9</sup>

Entwined with such geographical and classed-based imaginings of community were educational communities that fitted into a certain way of conceiving of educational engagement and progression:

[T]he people of East Anglia eagerly look forward to the time when a university at Norwich will:

- a) afford a significant increase in the educational opportunities available in East Anglia. In saying this, it is recognised that many local students will still proceed to universities in other parts of the country;

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<sup>7</sup> University Promotions Committee (UPC), Norwich, Submissions to the UGC for the Establishment of an University of East Anglia, Norwich (hereafter Submissions), November 1959, 4, UEA/TIL/1, UEAA.

<sup>8</sup>Evidence of the Norwich Society, Submissions, HLG 79/1385, TNA. The Norwich School, founded in 1096, is an independent day school based within the cathedral close in Norwich.

<sup>9</sup>Workers' Educational Association, Norfolk Federation, Some problems of a new university. Report of a study group, July 1959, UEA/TIL/1, UEAA. The WEA's student body was overwhelmingly (lower) middle class in this period, with only 20% of students recorded as having manual backgrounds. See Kynaston (2007: 176).

- b) serve as an apex and focal point of the general system of education in East Anglia. In this way, the standards of the existing schools and other institutions will be heightened and enhanced;
- c) furnish an impetus to the cultural life of the whole area.<sup>10</sup>

None of these representations of the imagined community intended to use or benefit from a university seemed to value existing working-class cultures nor the majority of the population of the region.<sup>11</sup> The reality was somewhat different from the depictions:

In 1966 thirty per-cent of the denizens of Norwich had never noticed students in the city, thirty-four per cent did not know where the university was... Mr Average Citizen will probably never even go on campus... It is just in the nature of things (Beloff 1968: 33-4).

And contrary to the university being the peak of the county's educational system, in 1965 the Great Yarmouth Education Committee seriously considered cutting off funding as:

the University had no apparent policy of grooming local boys to make good. After all, however much the University authorities may mouth their appreciation of and commitment to their parent cities, their major aim is to build up the university and not the town (Beloff 1968: 36).

If a new university was to act as the pinnacle of culture and education for the region it is clear from this reference to 'local boys', the spatial term 'local' being a euphemism for working-class, that only a select group were envisaged as reaching that peak.

Consequently, the project of supporting a new university was as much about a certain kind of cultural endeavour as it was about education: engrained deeply and hidden within the attempts to promote a higher education institution for East Anglia were certain classed assumptions about the kind of community both being promoted and intended to benefit from the enterprise. And this was embodied at the individual level in the idea of 'the student' (Dyhouse 2002). As one University Grants Committee memo put it:

[A pre-war student would] come from a home in which he would have acquired cultural interest, so that the university could concentrate on

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<sup>10</sup> Submissions, November 1959, 4-5, HLG 79/1385, The National Archives, Kew, London (hereafter TNA).

<sup>11</sup> In his reexamination of the more recent cultural role of the university through a comparison of the civic redbrick University of Bristol with the post-1992 University of the West of England, Chatterton (2000) showed both that this had become more complex and diverse, and emphasized the important differences in the class and locality backgrounds of students in elite and non-elite higher education institutions.

turning him into an expert without risk to the general development of the whole man.<sup>12</sup>

Because such a cultural background could no longer be assumed (although as we have seen in fact most students were middle class), a campus-style university life was an essential component in the creation of an appropriate student experience.

Given this, it is unsurprising that the importance of a unified campus for the university in Norwich was expressed publicly by the Chairman of the University Grants Committee. He emphasised ‘the great importance of the student being given the opportunity of acquiring interests outside those of his own special subject, and of taking part in the mutual education of student by student’ [emphasis added].<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the future Vice Chancellor of UEA, Frank Thistlethwaite, stressed how:

a university should be more than a collection of faculties and schools... This was not going to be a “nine to five” university. The aim was for an institution in which there would be an active life at all times with common centralized amenities... whether or not a student lived in lodgings or in the student residences, this would be less important to him or her than the life of the university itself with its library, seminar rooms, laboratories, refectories, and common rooms, open for long hours, seven days a week.<sup>14</sup>

All this then suggests that the university was to be an all-embracing experience, in common with the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. And while, as we shall see, the elites of the city did not have their way in siting the university in the historic city centre, there were nevertheless self-conscious attempts to replicate other aspects of the elite university way of life. Like the early comprehensive schools, which contemporary researchers found busy, through ‘surface signs – Latin mottoes, gowned prefects, first boat on the river, the race for Oxbridge awards’, training people in ‘middle-class comportment... the transmission of the culture which matters’ (Jackson and Marsden 1962: 250), not only were UEA’s student residences based around the model of the college ‘staircases’ of Oxbridge colleges, but the early years of the university involved country-house style entertaining at Earlham hall, complete with butler and wine cellar (Sanderson 2002: 123). What all this implies of course, is that despite claims of how a university in Norwich

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<sup>12</sup> The University Grants Committee had been established in 1918 to try and co-ordinate funding for Britain’s universities. Following the recommendations of the 1946 Barlow Report it also took on a strategic planning role and acted as a liaison between the universities and central government. UGC, University Development, 1952-57, London: HMSO, 1958, Cmnd, 534, 39, UEA/TIL/1, UEAA.

<sup>13</sup> Report of the Public Local Inquiry that was set up on behalf of Henry Brooke, M.P., Minister of Housing and Local Government under Inspector R.G.M. Chase on 13 December 1960 into the Application by the UPC, Norwich. File number 1464/40621/20, dated 4<sup>th</sup> February 1961 (hereafter Public Inquiry Report), HLG 79/1385, TNA.

<sup>14</sup> ‘East Anglia not a 9 to 5 University. Sense of Coherence’, from our special correspondent, The Times, 25 Apr. 1963.

would be fully integrated into the wider community, there was a carefully constructed, and implicitly classed, idea of who was included in that community, and how that might be expressed physically through the daily life of ‘a student’ on campus.

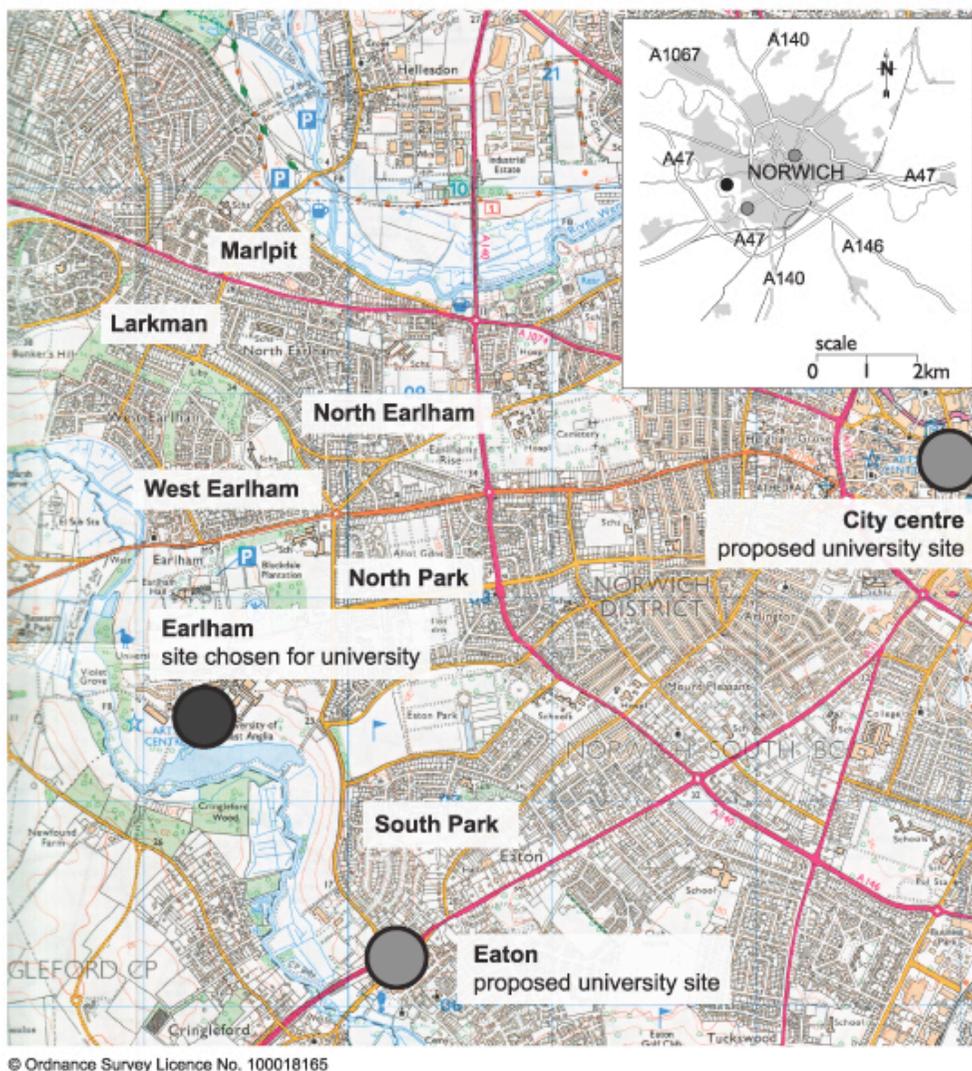


Figure 1: Location of the proposed and actual sites for the University of East Anglia

If we see the absent presence of class in the discourses relating to the need for a university for Norwich and East Anglia and who might be thought of as being a ‘student’, we can also see how this took on a physical form through the siting and building of the university. Within the city there were three locations that were given serious consideration: the city centre, the leafy Eaton suburb, and a council-owned piece of land in Earlham on the very edge of Norwich (see Figure 1). This

was a still semi-rural area that contained an old hall with adjoining parkland as well as the subsidised municipal golf course.

Bruce Henderson-Gray, a prominent architect, member of the Norwich society and fervent promoter of a university for Norwich believed that the central location was the most attractive, as not only would it solve the problem of how to redevelop certain areas following slum clearance, but would also allow Norwich to become 'a true University City'.<sup>15</sup> The image of university buildings scattered throughout Norwich's historic centre resonated strongly with local elites' vision that 'a real university is one peopled by students with bicycles, gowns, and copies of Horace in tweed pockets' (Beloff 1968: 103). However, despite his influence and such imagery, the necessarily cramped nature of an inner-city location meant that practical considerations weighed against it.

We find similarly classed and normative ideas in arguments supporting the alternative, suburban site at Eaton. Both the Town Clerk and the City Engineer stated it was the most obvious site for the university:

although it is impossible to do anything but generalise, this seems to be the area of the city where the university would naturally be expected, having regard to the surrounding features... houses adjoining the area are likely to be suitable for the university staff, and within a radius of a half to three-quarters of a mile are houses of a type which might provide lodgings for undergraduates.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, there was a perceived tension between the advantages presented by the Earlham site – it was only two miles from the city centre, was over 160 acres and was already owned by the council – and the disadvantage of its proximity to the largely working-class council estates of North and West Earlham, Larkman, North Park and South Park. In the planning enquiry on the location of the university, Henderson-Gray submitted that the 'university is something to be proud of and should be in a prominent position adding to the life of the city and not ostracised behind a curtain of council houses as at Earlham'. He felt strongly that the entire city was 'decaying as a result of the sprawling of housing estates all round the perimeter to the great detriment of the urban quality of this delightful place'.<sup>17</sup>

The proximity of the council estates to the Earlham site was seen as particularly detrimental in two key areas:

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<sup>15</sup> Letter from Bruce Henderson-Gray, architect, to the Minister of Housing and Local Government, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1960, HLG 79/1385, TNA.

<sup>16</sup> Report of the Town Clerk and the City Engineer to the Town Planning Committee relative to a site for the proposed university, 20<sup>th</sup> August 1959, UEA/TIL/5, UEAA.

<sup>17</sup> Letter from Bruce Henderson-Gray, architect, to the Minister of Housing and Local Government, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1960, HLG 79/1385, TNA ; and Public Inquiry Report , HLG 79/1385, TNA.

i) it would mean that the teaching staff would not be able to live as close at hand as many of them would wish, and would not be as closely associated with the university in their everyday life as is commonly the case.

ii) although it is impossible to be dogmatic, it is unlikely that students' lodgings would be found as easily upon housing estates as in private development, and students in lodgings would, therefore, have further to travel to and from the university.<sup>18</sup>

As a result of these attitudes the city's Town Planning Committee voted six to two in favour of supporting the Eaton site.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately however, the matter was set before a public enquiry at which the inspector adjudicating declared, showing a dismissiveness towards everyday working-class life, that the existence of social housing in the area was immaterial when set against the projected history and influence of UEA: 'The council estate is not a perfect setting, but it will not last for ever – fifty to eighty years perhaps compared with the university's many hundreds of years',<sup>20</sup> a rather ironic prediction given the current housing shortage and collapse in state funding for university teaching.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, this argument formed part of the final decision that the university would be built at Earlham.

Overall, this section has shown how despite an argument for the need for a university being couched in terms of the whole community of East Anglia, this was in fact deeply partial, with class issues implicit throughout. Similarly, debates over the location of the university in relation to the council estates of Earlham, which tapped into deeply held ideas about the nature of university life as well as ideas of the student, both implicitly and explicitly marginalised and stereotyped residents of those estates. In the next section we turn to the memories and experiences of those living in local council estates, who found themselves 'out of place' in their own locale.

### **Speaking from the Margins: Memories of the University's Working-Class Neighbours**

What is notable in the official story is the absence of those most likely to be affected by the building of the university in Earlham: the residents of the

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<sup>18</sup> Report of the Town Clerk and the City Engineer to the Town Planning Committee relative to a site for the proposed university, 20<sup>th</sup> August 1959, UEA/TIL/5, UEAA.

<sup>19</sup> Education Committee minutes containing decision of Town Planning Committee, site for the proposed University of East Anglia, Norwich, 17<sup>th</sup> September 1959 UEA/TIL/5, UEAA.

<sup>20</sup> Judgement of Inspector R.G.M. Chase, Public Inquiry Report, HLG 79/1385, TNA.

<sup>21</sup> In 2010 Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government reforms to higher education withdrew state subsidies to humanities and social science teaching. The reforms also tripled the maximum annual tuition fee chargeable by universities to £9000 per year and abolished the caps on student numbers for students with higher school-leaving qualifications. At the time of writing (September 2013) a continuing failure to build new social housing in Britain contributed to lengthy waiting lists.

surrounding estates.<sup>22</sup> Michael Sanderson's history of UEA says much about the university itself, and the class backgrounds of both students and lecturers are explicitly (and illuminatingly) discussed. However, there is almost no engagement with the working-class residents of the immediate neighbourhood. As in the archival material on which Sanderson drew, local residents and building workers are present in his book, but it is an absent presence, as unlike other actors in the UEA story, they generally remain unnamed and undifferentiated. Yet suggestions of anger on the part of some local residents can be found in Sanderson's book:

The initial attitude of Norwich to the University was almost uniformly favourable... it was felt that UEA had "fitted comfortably into Norwich", apart from some jealous rowdiness from the "Earlham teds" (Sanderson 2002: 117)<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, a newspaper story from the 1980s, suggested a complex history of interaction between the land and the people of the neighbouring estates:

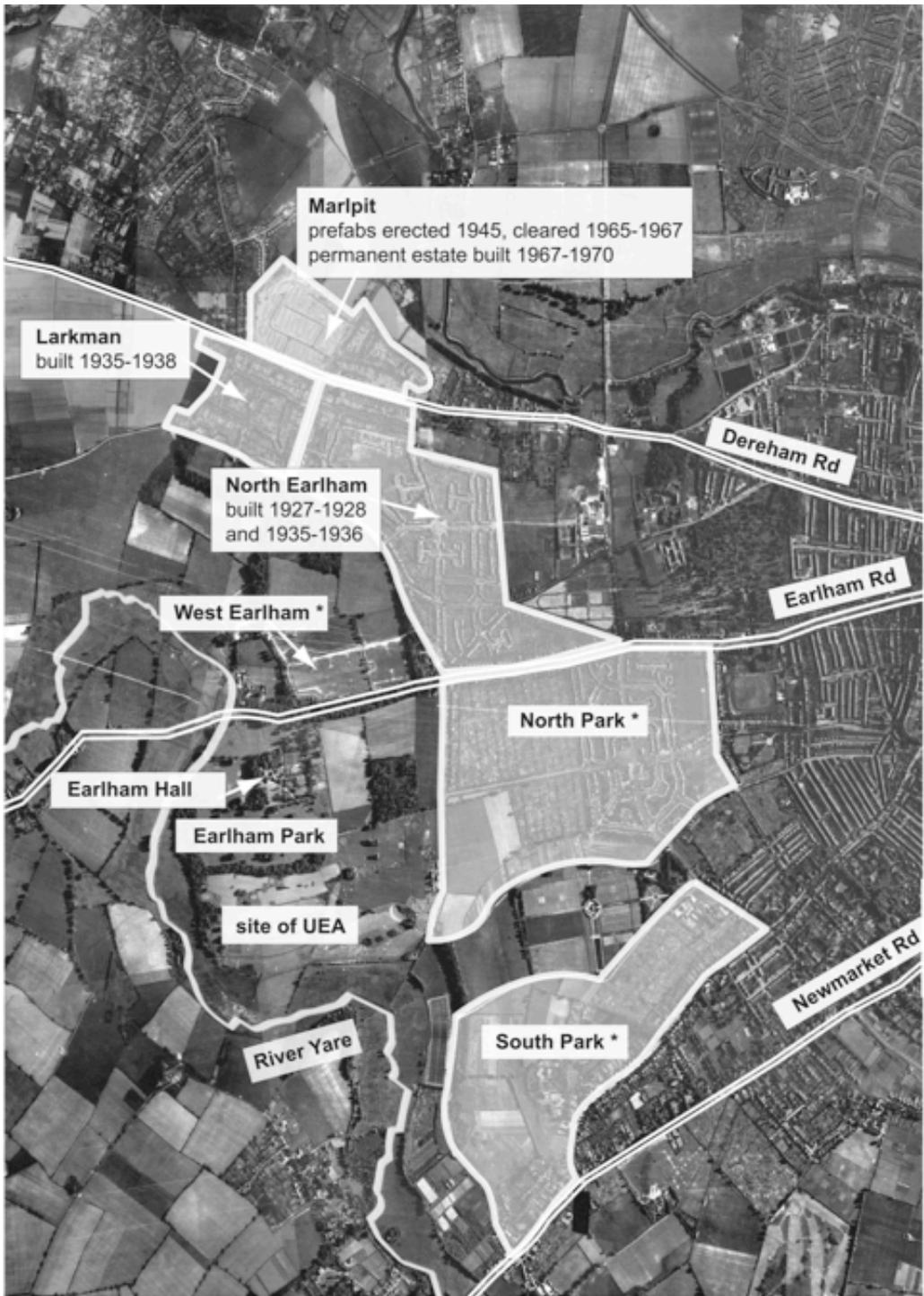
In 1925 the hall and park passed into the hands of the City of Norwich. It was transformed into a golf course by unemployed men on a job creation scheme. The hall was used as a nursing home and then as an infants' school for the newly-built West Earlham estate before becoming the first home of the University at Earlham. It is not uncommon to meet people who were born and went to school there, some of whom even ended up working there!<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Although the local inquiry did take a submission from the golf club based at Earlham Park, we have no way of knowing how many, or if indeed any, estate residents were club members.

<sup>23</sup>Sanderson's source for this was the Eastern Evening News, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1963. 'Earlham' signifies that what was referred to as 'rowdiness' came from people residing close to the site of the university. 'Teds' can read as a reference to an expression of contemporary working class youth culture.

<sup>24</sup>'Earlham: the hall in the park', Zigg, No.2, June, 1986, 25-6.



\*denotes estates built after this photograph was taken (1947) but completed by the time university construction was underway © Norfolk County Council

Figure 2: The Earlham site and its surrounding neighbourhoods before the arrival of the university

The Earlham estates were built between the late 1920s and the 1950s right at the western edge of Norwich (see Figure 2). People who remembered their lives in the estates before the building of UEA often recalled the amenity that Earlham Park and the nearby municipal golf course had represented in their lives when they were younger. Their stories also revealed how the open spaces on the fringes of Norwich, gave their childhood a sense of freedom and rural adventure not normally associated with deprived social housing estates:

*Yvonne Hall:* I always thought I lived in the country. It was like country to me... Yeah, that was all country.

*Becky:* So did you used to play out in the fields?

*Yvonne:* Yeah, yeah. All the time. Go over the woods. Go down the river. Swim, fish. Picnic if you had any food.<sup>25</sup>

What was clear, when we listened to the memories of those living and brought up in the area during this period is how they perceived the space very differently to how it was conceived by the planners and University Promotion Committee.

This area is considered to be one of the most beautiful tracts of country in and around the city... The contours and woodlands both in and around the land will give the architect wonderful opportunities for comprehensive planning and design.<sup>26</sup>

Contrast this conception of the space as a drawing board for the architects with how the land was used on a daily (and nightly) basis by young people, such as Yvonne's husband Fred, who had also been brought up in the area:

I mean that wood up there, Ten Acre Wood. When I was a youngster in short trousers, you could look from Earlham Green Lane, you couldn't see through, because that lane went right the way up where the university is. And you could easily, very easily get lost in there.

Other older people we spoke with remembered the parkland as a place for courting. Mark Fry remembered how it had been the local 'Lovers' Lane', while Harry Collins gave a sense of the variety of functions the area provided for estate residents:

I remember when that was a golf course... I remember I had my first girlfriend on there [laughter]... I remember when someone live in [Earlham Hall]... and at the back of that there used to be all peacocks and budgeries and things like that and beautiful gardens and we used to walk through them, when we were boys, 'cos that was open to the public... That was all, all one big golf course. That was beautiful.

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<sup>25</sup> All research participants' names have been changed.

<sup>26</sup>UPC, Submissions, November 1959, UEA/TIL/5, UEAA.

For the planners, the estates were an obstacle to the development of the university on the municipal golf course and surrounding land. A contemporary critique of education provision for working-class people argued that planners of new institutions at the time did not value or necessarily even notice working-class culture: ‘All that ordinary living might offer is treated as a blank: on this blank we build the Institution’ (Jackson and Marsden 1962: 13). Yet, what may have been a blank to outsiders, was in fact, for local residents, a space very much alive and resonant with multiple meanings.

There was no simple process of exclusion of local people from the newly emerging university institution. Working-class people, including people in the immediate neighbourhood, were deeply involved in the university from late 1962 when buildings needed to be erected for the arrival of the first students in autumn 1963. Yet, although Sanderson’s official history describes the construction work – it was, for example, a particularly hard job to break ground in the freezing winter of 1962-63 - there is almost no mention of actual workers, indeed he reports no attempt to interview them. The exception that proves the rule related to a fatality during the building of the University Village, adjacent to the main campus. Even then, the worker who was killed was not mentioned by name: ‘By a gravel car turnaround were a bookshop and a banking hall where a workman was tragically killed falling from its low roof during construction’.

In contrast to the namelessness of the mass of the workers and the one who was killed during the construction, the credit for the achievement of building the Village went to the architect: ‘construction against adversity and urgency was an impressive achievement by David Luckhurst [architect with Norwich firm Fielden and Mawson]’. Only one worker is named in the official history, who was a “‘very skilled and sensitive digger driver Cyril Loynes” who deserves credit for the sharply eye-catching, now tree covered feature of the otherwise gently sloping landscape of the Plain’ (2002: 144-5 and 155).<sup>27</sup>

Building the university, and cleaning it, were occupations remembered well by several research participants. Their detailed memories of such work at the University of East Anglia revealed what was for them a space around which they built both livelihoods and a sense of occupational identity. Harry Collins had started training in building work while he was at approved school.<sup>28</sup> On return to Norwich, he remembered continuing to learn his trade as a builder during the construction of the university. Decades later he remained strongly appreciative of the financial benefits of the work:

I was apprentice bricklayer then with R.G. Carters and we were building the university or start building the university... There was the

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<sup>27</sup>The quote within Sanderson’s quote here is from a letter written by architect Bernard Feilden to Frank Thistlethwaite, UEA’s first vice-chancellor, in 1989.

<sup>28</sup>‘Corrective’ residential institutions where young people could be sent by a court.

two big towers - the boilerhouse - I helped to build them, in the concrete gang, and we were getting thirty pound a week, which was a lot of money then.

For John Langley, it had also been a significant work experience. He had gone into scaffolding assisting his father as soon as he left school at fifteen:

Everybody went with the father and done what they were doing. Like when my oldest boy left, he came in the building trade with me. And I taught him, you know, so that was, trying to hand it down. My brother, he was taught, when he left school.

He remembered maintenance work on the university clearly:

We done some of the lecture rooms. All the plaster was coming off the wall. We had to knock it off and replaster the walls. Carpenters were with us, putting all the benches back in and that. You know, table tops and... long while ago.

Having worked to maintain it, John did not rate the university architecture:

*Ben:* What do you think of it now?

*John:* Well, mixed feeling, 'cos I've actually worked in there as well. I've done building work in there as well. The place is so, what's the word, 's not designed right, is it... they ain't built nothing to it...

*Ben:* Do you feel it's welcoming for the local people?

*John:* No. You got so many steps to get to places and you know, when, like when I was working in one room I had to go up one set of stairs, down another to get to

*Ben:* Sometimes you have to walk right round a wall to go the staircase!

*John:* Yeah. The only thing I like about it is that big lake at the back.

In contrast with men with whom we spoke, women's interactions commonly came through becoming cleaners of the university buildings including student accommodation, and also through providing other caring services for students. Rita Hastings, who ran her own dressmaking business from home, for example, had students coming to her house for clothes alterations. Margaret Brooke worked for seven years as a cleaner in the student halls of residence. Reflecting on her time there (from the late 1970s), she said 'when I was there that was just to give local people employment to be honest really'. And yet, when she spoke in more depth what rapidly became clear was that what often began as purely labour-based contact through employment in the early years of a relationship with the institution could rapidly become complicated through the impact it had on home lives as well as the establishment and flowering of relationships with individuals. This led to the destabilisation of social and spatial boundaries:

*Ben:* And did you ever get involved in the unions or anything like that?

*Margaret:* No but my students used to take me to their graduation dos and stuff and I've seen Garry Glitter many a time. They used to have all these weird people like Elvis Costello and things like that, they always used to take me along to midsummer ball and... they used to come round mine like at weekends and like if they were sort of going away for the summer and they had sort of personal stuff that they weren't gonna take they used to keep it round mine. I had many a student bike in my shed.

Friendships with students were also formed by residents who were not workers at the university. Rita Hastings and her husband Joe remembered their daughter 'getting friendly with this chap from the University', and him visiting their house. Rather than evoking hostility or exclusion, their memories revealed an ambivalence over class and respectability. If there was a problem with the student, it was his scruffiness. Their daughter was told to tell her friend 'to wear socks, cos Dad don't like it if he don't wear socks':

And Jonathan his name was, he was posh. Like come in with like a fancy coat, velvet jacket... he had this bloke with him, and he looked like John Lennon, he had one of them caps like John Lennon wear and his wire glasses... they were a load of freaks, I must be honest. Some of them I don't think had ever been introduced sober or anything like that.

Yet at the same time Rita and Joe expressed a certain pride in how well they all got on one time when they went out, although it was clearly on Joe's own terms:

Anyway, we gave [him] something to eat and a cup of tea and we were going out that night, to the Railway Club, so Joe said, would they like to come with us. And they came with us. And Joe got on with this boy really well, and he said, 'Rebecca, I wouldn't mind marrying your father, he's a great bloke'!

Contact with the university not only meant estate residents met people with different backgrounds, but it could also shift dynamics within households. The very act of working as a cleaner at the university – undertaken in order to supplement the family income – changed Marjorie Lovell's relations with her own family. She remembered that after she had been accepted for the post at the university she waited to tell her husband:

'I gave him his evening meal. He was a calm man most of the time but when he did get angry he could explode'. Then she told him 'I've got a job'. 'Where?' 'At the university'. 'You're not going up there with them young lads!'. The rowing went all weekend 'but I started work on the Monday'... 'My eldest son would get jealous: "Don't tell us about your students - we're your boys"...I believe it helped me cope with my

boys better being with the young ones. When my boys got older I knew what made them tick.'

Here we see the charged and personal nature of what was, on the face of it, an economic transaction arising out of poverty: not only did it shift gender relations within the household, providing Marjorie with independent access to money, but it also unsettled both her husband and sons through her intimate contact with the students of the university. If the university trickled into her home life, however, the traffic was not simply one way: although her own schooling had been chequered and her sons were not destined for university, this did not stop her from trying to support the education of 'her' students. She related to us a story about one of the students, David, who refused to get up for an important exam:

I opened the door, he was in bed. So I went 'David, David its Marj'. He got up, you know sat up, so I say... 'Look' I say 'your parents want you to do well here... I would like you to do well, all your friends in the kitchen want you to do well, now' I say 'I want you to get up' and I say 'I want you to get dressed and get changed and get over that exam' I said 'if you don't' I said 'I'll go and get the house mother' he said 'you won't' I said 'I will David' I said 'if you're not ready and out there in ten minutes'. So I carried on ten minutes up, went back again, he's in bed so I... the house mother she hauled him up... and do you know afterwards he thanked me.

Speaking to women who had cleaned at the university thus revealed multiple stories of intimate entanglements, some of which could be transformative. And as Marjorie's story shows, these could unsettle easy classed assumptions over the direction of those transformations. Just as the lives of women on the estates may have been opened to new cultural and social influences through meeting students, so too could students' lives be materially affected by the women who cleaned their halls of residence, as achieving a degree level qualification was likely to enhance a student's prospects of well-paid professional or managerial work.

So while the new university located next door to the estates did create feelings of exclusion for working-class residents, talking to older residents about their memories of working as cleaners, builders or service providers at UEA revealed a more complex and ambivalent picture. Moreover, while for people growing up locally there remained a sense of UEA itself being, in Mark Fry's words, 'not for the likes of us', increasing numbers of estate residents were experiencing further or higher education at the time of our interviews in the mid-2000s than they had in the past. Margaret Brooke stressed how she felt things had changed since her time as a cleaner:

there weren't many people who actually went there as students [then] but... now there's more people. I mean some of my people who I put through on courses have done university and college courses and stuff like that and have really sort of gone up in the world.

The university could be seen as a paradoxical space for its working class neighbours. On the one hand it evoked a continuing sense of exclusion as well as resistance to that, for example through pranks and vandalism as teenagers. As Leah Price told us: ‘we used to go over the UEA... and nick stuff out the kitchens off the students’. On the other hand, it could be transformational. That transformation came for several research participants through employment at the university as a worker – and it was not all in one direction. Students themselves were, to an extent, *made* through the hard work of the cleaners and builders whose lives do not appear in the official history.

## Conclusion

Looked at side-by-side the evidence from archival and oral history sources evokes different imagined and produced landscapes, or ‘multiple notions of a single environment’ (Baker 2003: 103). Together they make visible class-based understandings and practices that were submerged in the official history of UEA, and highlight the discursive and material power inequalities in the class relations of the period. While the selection of official records for archiving, and the language used within them, reflects the broader social and political dynamics of the time they are created and stored (Ogborn 2003), the process of analysis of any data varies according to different epistemological and ontological perspectives. Here, diverging from official and more positivist scholarly approaches, we have offered a critical historical geography of a higher education institution in place. In doing this, we have explored the silences in the archive (Duncan 2001), silences that can be more clearly heard through the setting of our analysis of the written record alongside oral history sources gathered from one particular institution’s working class neighbours. Moreover, building on Mitchell’s ontology of labour we have begun to bring back into the written record the central role of manual workers, not only in the physical making of higher educational space but also in how such space is represented and can be appropriated (see also Allen and Pryke 1994).

Higher educational space being produced in the 1950s and 1960s was paradoxical, not least as shown here, in its simultaneous aim of achieving social mobility, for example by making the new larger post-war student body into ‘gentlemen’, and its continued relative exclusion of working-class local residents (Ross, 2003: 73-4). Indeed, the inspector’s hyperbole in stating that the university would last for centuries whereas the housing estates would be gone within a much shorter period, suggests that the university’s neighbours were of no concern – these people and their relationship to the new campus space could simply be forgotten. Never mind that the university promotion committee had claimed that the university would benefit the whole ‘community’ of East Anglia, as well as the whole city of Norwich.

Contemporary studies of student-community-relations have tended to consider the ways in which the in-migration of students to particular areas of cities have transformed those areas, a process referred to as studentification (Smith,

2002). This paper contributes to that literature by injecting a much-needed temporal perspective (Sage, Smith and Hubbard, 2012: 610). And yet our interviews have shown that alongside a sense of being shut out, of being irrelevant to the university-building agenda, residents carried intimate, emotional and ambivalent memories of their relationship to the university and its students. But class-based stereotypes continued to be deployed: according to an address to the American University Presidents in 1969 by the then vice-chancellor of UEA, one of the causes of unrest was ‘the large working class element [of students] who were first generation students and who often brought trade union attitudes with them’ (Sanderson 2002: 218 and 220).

Exploring people’s memories of the manual and emotional work, both unpaid and paid, involved in producing higher educational spaces, and the changed identities and relationships that work may entail, can undo the further layer of exclusion represented by official histories that exude inequality through the absent presence of class. In contemporary times there is a fundamental struggle for the very existence of higher education in the UK. Class is not being named but the further entrenchment of class inequality is evident in the new fee system and the complicated allocation of additional places to those with high A-level qualifications, likely to come disproportionately from fee-paying schools.<sup>29</sup> Combatting this is a class struggle – one that can be aided by learning from the history of what now seems a distant period of university expansion.

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<sup>29</sup> See footnote 21

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