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'A fair share for all': care, welfare and landscape through a case study of a Scottish New Town

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ABSTRACT

This article uses the landscapes of East Kilbride, Scotland's first New Town, to introduce, analyse and understand the multiple ways they provide care for people and the environment. Brenda Colvin (1897-1981), landscape consultant to East Kilbride, held the ideal that landscapes could and should care equitably and equally for the welfare of people and the welfare of the broader ecosystem. Colvin's designs for the New Town were made between 1949-52 and constituted one of her first post-war projects. It was part of a wider turn in post-war reconstruction towards the creation of large-scale, collaborative projects for the new landscapes of the British Welfare State. Now, 75 years on, East Kilbride offers a unique perspective on the spatial and environmental aspects of care through landscapes that embodied the ethos of care of the Welfare State and the belief in a fair share for all.

KEYWORDS

New Towns; East Kilbride; welfare state; landscape planning; development corporations

'Think globally, act locally'

In the Museum of English Rural Life's (MERL) collection of the papers and projects of British landscape architect Brenda Colvin (1897-1981) is a previously unpublished plan drawing for a small green space in Scotland's first New Town, East Kilbride (Figure 1).¹ There is little by way of description, and the two supporting sections have been lost, but the 'landscape treatment' is the work of a designer of great skill and sensitivity. The plan shows existing and new vegetation, and a network of paths linking houses on the higher ground to both the immediate neighbourhood and the wider town. Subtle as it is, this plan communicates the aspirations and values, especially that of care, that were embodied in Colvin's thinking about landscapes of all scales.

In her paper, 'Care and stewardship: From home to planet', Joan Nassauer argued that 'Care may be a powerful concept for promoting sustainability because it [...] may be a way to engage people in planetary stewardship by connecting their responses to what they notice in everyday life with their effect on larger environmental systems' (Joan Nassauer 2011, p. 322). Through the analysis of Colvin's plans for East Kilbride we aim to highlight how her approach to care towards people and planet manifested in her ideas for the New Town, and how she aimed to

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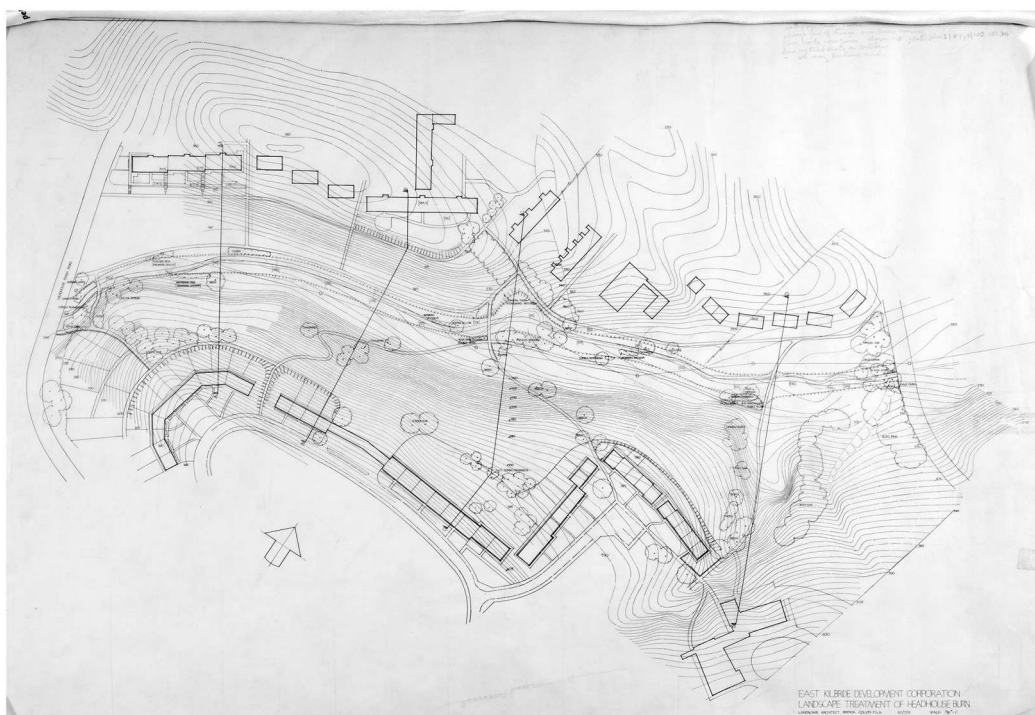


Figure 1. Landscape treatment of Headhouse Burn. MERL AR COL D01.

initiate stewardship and care for the environment by the town's residents. By triangulating her ideas with those of others who worked in East Kilbride, we aim to enrich our understanding about the ways landscapes are designed and created. Using the conceptual framework by Christine Milligan and Janine Wiles that describes landscapes of care as 'spatial manifestations of the interplay between the socio-structural processes and structures that shape experiences and practices of care' (Milligan & Wiles, 2010, p. 739), this paper focuses upon the contiguous dimensions of care and its complexity when applied to landscapes of the post-war Welfare State. The analysis of Colvin's work from this angle also allows us to contextualise her work in the genealogy of women who developed what Thaisa Way called an 'urban ecological design framework', that is 'grounded in the intersections and relationships of social and natural systems' and is addressing the city's 'cultural and social networks – while simultaneously expanding the concept of urban nature and urban ecology' (2016, p. 132). The article expands the critical historiography of British landscape architecture by contextualising East Kilbride and Colvin's work internationally as well as highlighting networks, plans and actors that have not been recognised. By so doing, we speculate how a more nuanced understanding of everyday landscapes of post-war Britain, such as the landscapes of New Towns, industrial estates or country parks could contribute to promoting sustainability and planetary stewardship in the future; an early embodiment of the 'think globally, act locally' concept.

In Britain, the sacrifices of WW2 led to the election of a Labour government in 1945, keen to deliver upon the 1942 Beveridge Report and address what the author, William Beveridge (1879-1963), personified as the five 'giants' afflicting Britain: idleness, ignorance, disease, squalor and want, recognised as the 'founding document of the UK's modern welfare state' (Timmins, 2017). Beveridge envisioned a new system of social care from cradle to grave, and the creation of the Welfare State and the attendant institutions and infrastructure that would come from it (Blackwell and Seabrook, 1985, p. 63).

Parallel to the changes in the socio-political context, the profession of landscape architecture in Britain had also seen major changes. As landscape architect Sylvia Crowe noted, 'Before the war landscape design was confined almost entirely to the creation of gardens and parks; even if some industry called in a landscape architect it was with the idea of creating a garden round their buildings. [...] Gradually this is changing: the pressure of population, transport and economics is upsetting the balance of great areas of landscape, and it is evident that positive design is needed to restore them to a state of balance' (MERL AR CRO SP4/2). Along with power stations, motorways, reservoirs and other conventionally recognised infrastructure, housing - and the New Towns in particular - represented a key part of the collaboration necessary across architecture, engineering, landscape architecture and other allied professions (Csepely-Knorr et al, 2020, p. 6).

By reinterpreting Beveridge's 'giants' - idleness, ignorance, disease, squalor and want - through a holistic approach to planning and design, the New Towns provided opportunities for employment, access to education, sanitary and aspirational housing, reflecting a new social consensus that there could be a 'fair share for all' (Bar-Haim, 2021). Within this context, as Alistair Fair argued, 'East Kilbride offered an early post-war response to the question of what 'modern Scotland' might be: architecturally, socially and economically' (Fair, 2025, p. 25). Colvin's involvement in the early planning stage of the New Town, signalled the growing acknowledgement that landscape architecture as a profession was important in large-scale, strategic decisions making in New Towns.²

Land and Landscape

Brenda Colvin, landscape consultant to East Kilbride between 1949-1952, held the ideal that we should think of the earth as a single organism, and therefore landscapes could and should care for both the welfare of people and the welfare of the broader ecosystem (1948, 1970, p. 2). (Figure 2) As opposed to many of her male colleagues involved in the creation of landscapes for New Towns who had a background in planning or architecture, Colvin had studied horticulture and landscape design at the women-only Swanley Horticultural College in Kent.³ This practical - and land-focused - grounding defined the micro and macro aspects of her life-long practice and gave her the skills and attributes to think radically about the future of the environment at the end of WW2.

Her plans for the landscapes of East Kilbride can be interpreted as a design manifestation of her philosophy as expressed in her many articles and in her pioneering book, *Land and Landscape*, which questioned the benevolence of human care of the planet:

'The earth's surface today exhibits many scars, sores and mangy patches, nearly all due to human activity, but still capable of renewal through human care. Is this civilisation yet sufficiently mature to recognise its responsibility (before causing further devastation) for the care of this organism over which it ventures to assume control?' (Colvin 1948 & 1970, p. 2).

During WW2 Colvin had taught at the Regent Street Polytechnic (today the University of Westminster) and at the Architectural Association, as well as contributing to the Women's Farm and Garden Association (WFGA) and the work of the Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction (APRR). As one of the founding members of the Institute of Landscape Architects in 1929, Colvin was a key part of the executive which was consulted as part of Lord Reith's New Towns Committee in 1946. Colvin, along with Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, had published *Trees for Town and Country* in 1947, a reference book to guide and facilitate tree planting as a critical part of post-war reconstruction, and itself providing a 'respite' to its contributors (p. 5). The three years that Colvin was engaged as landscape consultant in East Kilbride constituted one of her first main post-war projects and was followed by ground-breaking work on the landscapes of coal-fired power stations, universities, reservoirs, quarries and rural recreation.⁴

The New President

Miss Brenda Colvin

Brenda Colvin, the newly elected President of the Institute of Landscape Architects, has probably done more than anyone in the profession to foster a recognition of the organic basis of landscape architecture.

Receiving her first professional training at Swanley Horticultural College, where she studied under Miss Agar, her great interest from that time forward has been in the creation of landscape from the living material of plants and landforms.

Before the war the greater part of her work was in private gardens, both here and abroad, but now, in common with most other members of the profession, she is largely occupied with work for



public authorities and industry. Miss Colvin is at present Landscape Consultant to East Kilbride Development Corporation, and is also working on the problem of the siting and treatment of quarries in Derbyshire. Amongst her recent work is a most successful small garden for the Port of London Authority, near Tower Hill.

For over ten years Miss Colvin acted as Honorary Secretary to the Institute of Landscape Architects, whose progress owes a great deal to her energy and devotion.

Amongst members of the Architectural and Town Planning professions Miss Colvin is known for the lectures she gave for many years at the Architectural Association and Polytechnic, and also as the author of 'Trees for Town and Country'. But perhaps her greatest contribution has been her book 'Land and Landscape', which for the first time, related the science of the land to the art of landscape design.

Figure 2. 'The New President' *Journal of the Institute of Landscape Architects*, 1951.

A landscape treatment

In 1951, when Colvin was elected president of the Institute of Landscape Architects, she was the first woman to hold such a prestigious position amongst the built-environment professional institutes in the United Kingdom. Her election was discussed in both professional journals and local newspapers, with the East Kilbride Development Corporation keeping cuttings of all the announcements made across publications like *The Builder*, *Architect's Journal* and *Dundee Evening Telegraph*.⁵ Colvin's election was also covered in the 'A Woman in London' series in an article titled 'If we must move mountains (Coxhead, 1951)'. In all these announcements her role as landscape consultant for East Kilbride was mentioned, demonstrating the importance and prestige of this position (Coxhead, 1951). This prestige – and her professional standing to be chosen for

this position – is also crucial in terms of discussing the roles women played in new town developments in the UK. Recent research, published by the Town and Country Planning Association concluded, that '[d]espite women's increasing involvement in the New Towns programme [...] their representation on governing and executive boards was piecemeal'⁶ (TCPA, 2021). However, feminist historians have been calling for more inclusive histories, including a more detailed analysis of women's agency and impact beyond realised design proposals. The inclusion of women's work in New Towns on a variety of levels – even if their contribution is hard to see in the realised materiality of the current space – is an area this article aims to contribute to.⁷

The role of landscape architects in New Town development has only been researched sporadically, and no comparative analysis has been published to date. In several cases, landscape consultants created strategic overview reports, - like Sylvia Crowe and Wendy Powell's report for Warrington New Town or Michael Brown's report for Redditch New Town⁸ - that consisted of broad recommendations and principles to define the green infrastructure of the New Town. These strategic masterplans were then implemented in detail at neighbourhood level by either the same designers, or the New Town Development Corporations' own landscape architecture teams.⁹ Colvin's involvement in East Kilbride has been described as short-lived, and it was highlighted, that many of her ideas had not materialised or have been altered significantly. However, the set of plans in the collections at MERL sheds light on the in-depth scale and scope of the designs that Colvin delivered for the East Kilbride Development Corporation.¹⁰ The drawings show how her theoretical understanding of care on both a human and non-human level was translated into her design proposals. (Figure 3) Whether or not these plans materialised, their analysis and triangulation with other sources reveal important lessons about Colvin and her collaborations, and allow us to get closer to a more nuanced and inclusive history of post-war landscape architecture.

Scotland's New Town programme

The development of New Towns in Scotland and the north of England had a different trajectory to those in the Southeast.¹¹ The area surrounding Glasgow, and the Clyde Valley in particular, was an issue of strategic importance because of overcrowded and unsanitary housing, the depopulation of the countryside and the decline of heavy industry. The development of East Kilbride - led by the Department of Health for Scotland with an in-house team within the Development Corporation - may not have been able to resolve all the issues; however, delivering a spacious and sanitary housing programme along with the creation of a new industrial centre was a priority (Smith, 1979, p. 6). Contextualising Edinburgh's New Town with other examples in Scotland, architectural historian Alistair Fair noted that the planners behind East Kilbride brought a particularly paternalistic attitude to the new state machinery that took 'greater responsibility for the lives and welfare of its citizens than had hitherto been the case' (2019, p. 208).

Hugh T. MacCalman, Chairman of the Clyde Valley Regional Planning Advisory Committee, wrote in 1949 that the vision for the region meant that in practice

'Homes had to be built to wipe out the squalor and slumdom which the nineteenth century had left, new factories had to be created to enrich and enliven the industrial life of the region and to utilise in new ways its traditional and world-famed skills, there were new communications to be opened up and, finally, perhaps most vital of all, the land itself, from which the people draw their sustenance and in which they find recreation and refreshment, and to be protected from being completely submerged by the sprawling development of each separate community grasping at its own future and thinking only of itself. (1949, p. v).

The report itself states that the treatment of gardens and open spaces was 'inseparable' from architectural form, and that 'every housing development should have a carefully worked out landscape and planting plan, and that special emphasis should be placed on this aspect of layout by the Department of Health for Scotland, in approving local development plans.' (p. 16).



Figure 3. A line of trees shades a footpath on the edge of Headhouse Greenway. The Authors, 2023.

This relationship between landscape and health was not just a technical condition, but also resulted in the creation and development of a network of practitioners who worked to a shared set of values and objectives.

East Kilbride was envisioned along Garden City lines, as a conurbation sat within a green belt and with six neighbourhoods built around a 44-acre town centre which was designed with elements like sloped and heated paths in the shopping precinct (Schaffer, 1970, p. 311). In the Clyde Valley Regional Plan's open space analysis (Figure 4), an extensive green belt extends from Helensburgh in the north to Hamilton in the south. East Kilbride sits both on the edge of the city of Glasgow's green belt, whilst also being surrounded by its own. Aspirations underpinning the New Town were clear, with Abrams et al. noting that 'At the heart of the planners' vision for East Kilbride was the belief that high-quality, low-density housing in a planned environment would promote a sense of health and wellbeing amongst residents' (Abrams et al., 2018, p. 11).

As Sylvia Borda has noted, the planning, design and architecture of East Kilbride articulated ideas which would today be seen as embodying 'eco' principles, long before the term was coined (2006, p. 32). Colvin, writing in the 1948 edition of *Land and Landscape*, stated that 'Just as the child needs the care and protection, the love and companionship of the family if he is to develop fully and freely, so does humanity need contact with nature and with the soil, and the comfort and refreshment of natural beauty in the surroundings' (p. 4). The first generation of New Towns were planned with this in mind: 'The spacing of dwellings at a comparatively low density ensured the provision of gardens, ample light and fresh air together with land for open spaces and playing fields' (Edwards, 1964, p. 284).

The *Master Plan* for East Kilbride, published by the Development Corporation in 1950, synthesises the context and ambition of the New Town, and includes elements over which Colvin

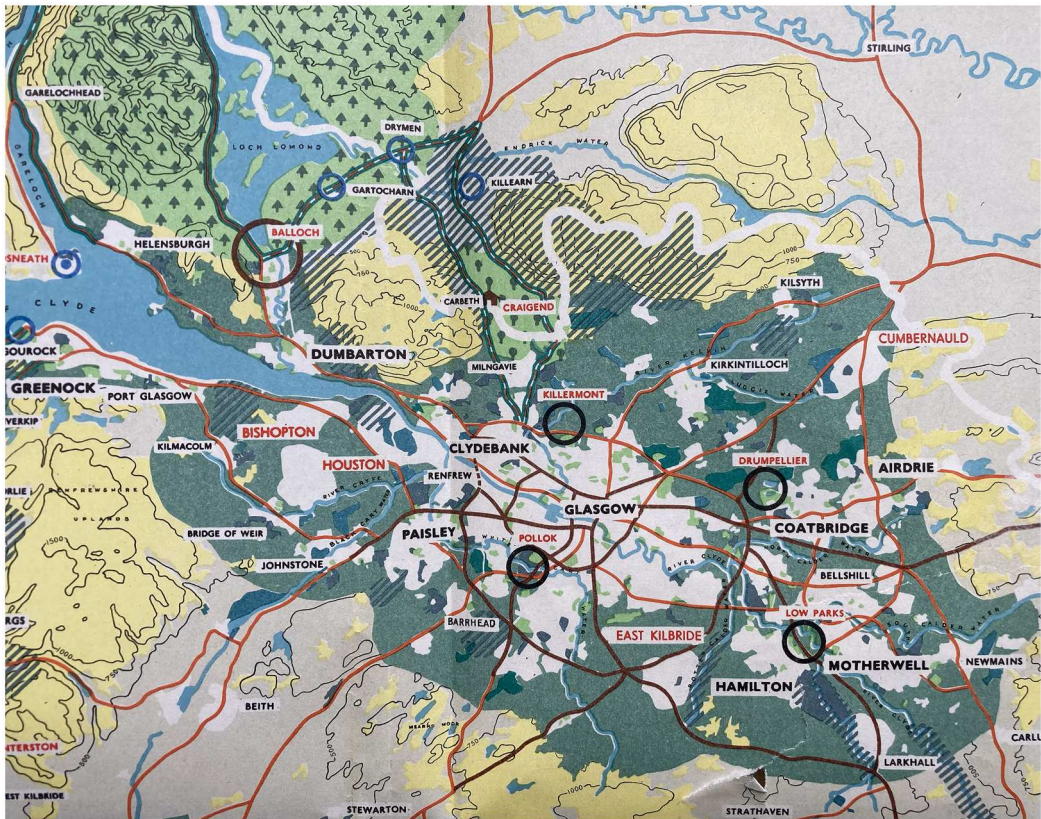


Figure 4. Detail of the Clyde Valley Regional Plan's open space analysis. HMSO 1946.

would have had input, including the location of parks and open spaces (Figure 5). According to the memoirs of town planner Maurice Brown (no date) Colvin was invited in April 1949 to support the Development Corporation on the parks and open spaces elements of their plans. The Development Corporation's minutes recorded that her first report was submitted in June the same year, and that its recommendations were incorporated in the 'the early planting programme to be undertaken during the autumn and early winter of 1949 and 1950' (DCM 25/6/1949). While the report itself is not in Colvin's or the Development Corporation's archive, the triangulation of a series of other archival materials and contemporary articles allow us to reconstruct elements.

One account of Colvin's work in the New Town is Elisabeth Coxhead's account, which describes Colvin's work in surprising detail:

'It is a challenging site, a series of high, windswept ridges and valleys with a subsoil of intractable boulder clay. She is using trees lavishly to soften and shelter it, where possible running them along the tops of the ridges, so that they form a more attractive skyline than would row of little houses. But the trees have to be most carefully selected, for quickly growing kinds like poplars would dry out the clay and cause land (Coxhead, 1951).

Colvin herself described these aspects of her work in a conference paper and subsequent article in the *Journal of the Institute of Landscape Architects* (Colvin, Crowe and Clark, 1950). The article gives a more professional account of the existing conditions – geography, soil, climate, wind, natural vegetation – and their impact on her design thinking, showing her deeply ecological methodology.

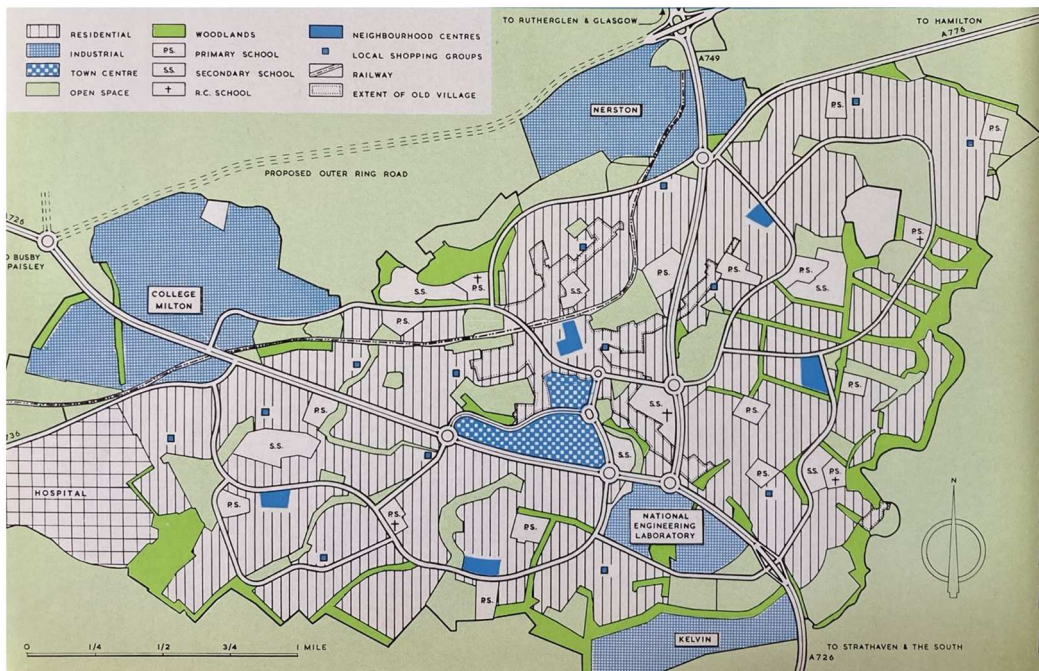


Figure 5. Woodlands and open spaces in the East Kilbride master plan. East Kilbride Development Corporation, 1967.

As part of this approach, she identified the areas around Calder Glen as of special interest, due to its value to biodiversity. As she described,

'I should like to see a part of the Calder Glen treated as a Nature Reserve, though nothing is decided in regard to that matter. That would provide a region where natural ecology could be studied. The old quarry sites are more likely to be used as children's playgrounds, or some other purpose which, even if it permitted existing saplings to develop, might check further natural regeneration' (Colvin, Crowe and Clark, 1950, p. 7).¹²

She also aimed to foster the development of '[n]atural self-sown scrub, in various stages of reversion to the mixed forest' to further diversify and support natural vegetation to regain areas of previously agricultural land now designated within the town.

Her idea that visitors need to be educated about ecology and the need for and importance of landscapes was visible in another initiative she started. On Wednesday, 8th March at 2.30 pm in 1950, a Schools Planting Day was organised, in collaboration with the Corporation, the Education Department of the County Council of the County of Lanark and the Glasgow Tree Lovers' Society (DCM 4/3/50). Around 130 pupils from the Secondary Department of East Kilbride Junior Secondary School were present and planted trees in the Town Centre Park, in order to 'encourage an appreciation of the town's landscape in the rising generation'¹³ (Colvin, Crowe and Clark, 1950 p. 7). Colvin's tree-planting schemes were both ecologically and economically valuable proposals. As Brown (no date) described,

'In landscape, also, she saw the means of enhancing the micro-climate after the fashion of Scottish Border estates and the great houses of Northumbria. Accordingly, she proposed to plant or re-plant 450 acres of woodland, composed largely of self-sustaining and economically profitable shelter belts – wide enough to be cropped in rotation. These would give protection from the prevailing south-west winds and arrest the downward flow of cold air from the moors above, and divert it via the valleys on each side of the town.'

Although her plans were not executed, owing to the shelter belts being seen as using up 'valuable agricultural land', these ideas show how exceptional her large-scale understanding of

newspapers also tell a story of the success of the tradition, that was established, to celebrate the ongoing care towards the gardens by the residents. Garden Competitions were organised yearly in collaboration with the local newspaper, the *Evening Citizen*, and were an important feature of the yearly calendar. By the mid-1960s, different categories were needed for residents who had previously won and those who were entering the competition for the first time (DCM 30/4/55 and 26/10/65). The focus on small-scale residential gardens and the promotion of gardening as an effort towards providing care for the environment and improving society has been a long-standing area of activism for women, and this aspect of the history of New Towns is an area that deserve further research.¹⁸

Colvin's work in the New Town also included more public-facing events, such as giving an informal talk about the plans for the New Town (DCM 1/4/50). Her work seemed to have received positively, as her original contract was extended in the late 1950s, and in July 1951, the Minutes noted that 'The Corporation granted authority for the employment, at a cost of £5 4s 1d per week, of an assistant (part-time) in the office of Miss Colvin, Landscape Consultant, in order to overtake arrears of work caused by the recent absence owing to illness of Mr Grocock, the Landscape Architect' (DCM 3/7/51).

However, the Corporation was instructed in 1951 to cut their budget and 'look at their staffing arrangements to see what savings could be achieved'. (DCM 29/12/51). Their decision meant that the role of the Landscape Consultant was terminated, and Colvin's contract ended in February 1952. While there are different interpretations of the extent of her work in East Kilbride, Maurice Brown's description that 'together we incorporated her proposals into a system which brought trees, playing fields, informal open spaces and the network of pedestrian greenways into one grand design embracing the whole town, which reminded me of "the gardens bright with sinuous rills and forests ancient as the hills" described by Coleridge in *Kubla Khan*' (Brown, no date, p. 40) suggests that the legacy of her thinking remained important in the New Town's landscape.

The women who planted trees

Colvin's engagement by the Development Corporation meant that she crossed paths with Scottish planner Elizabeth B. Mitchell (1880-1980). Edinburgh-born Mitchell had a robust practical and theoretical knowledge and understanding of the implications of the kind of planning and delivery that was taking place in East Kilbride. Writing in her memoir, *The Plan that Pleased*, Mitchell recounted that she was put on the Development Corporation board to provide a woman's perspective, something she thought was rather odd as she was neither a wife nor a mother (Mitchell, 1967, p. 28).

What Mitchell did have, however, was a longstanding interest and involvement with the Garden City movement, and her childhood and international travels gave her a perspective on what constituted robust planning principles. An insight into the pioneering atmosphere that was shaping East Kilbride was illustrated by Mitchell through an encounter with Colvin on one of the latter's early visits, in which Mitchell impressed on Colvin the necessity of planting trees for shelter rather than shade. Their dialogue, as recalled by Mitchell, gives the impression of two knowledgeable and self-assured women, "'You're English," I said. "In England you have a use for shady avenues. In Scotland, you know, especially high up, we need shelter rather than shade." She laughed. "I've been walking about here for a fortnight," she said, "and don't I know it!"' (1967, p. 33).

The Plan that Pleased also adds weight to our understanding of the wider dialogue within the planning team about the landscape, and the necessity of responding to existing conditions wherever possible. Mitchell praised the landscape of East Kilbride as one of the elements of the New Town that gave her real pleasure, pointing out that the qualities included a 'fine woodland

ravine of the Calder inherited from the past, the pleasant little new Headhouse parkway in one of the shallow valleys upon the plateau, [...] I think the planner has been, as it were, respectful and tender with the landscape, realising and using its opportunities' (1967, p. 40).

Mitchell's role was strategic as she was a member of the Development Corporation and had input into the direction they took. However, she was a passionate, hands-on member of the New Town's community. It was Mitchell who was there to be on site at the school's tree planting day in 1950. (Figure 7) In 1955, the Corporation Minutes also noted that 'Miss Mitchell had made an offer of suitable trees for planting in the town centre roundabout. The Corporation accepted the offer with appreciation and remitted to the officials to discuss the matter further with Miss Mitchell and report with detailed proposals.' (DCM 30/4/55 and 28/5/55). In a film made by the Development Corporation in the early 1950s, the importance of the New Town's tree nurseries is highlighted, along with tree-planting activities for children which were initiated by Colvin and Mitchell, contributing to a 'dual legacy, one in which the children felt pride and accomplishment and a certain ownership in the land which they managed and occupied.' (Borda, 2006, p. 36).

Another person who played a part in the development of East Kilbride was Jane Wood (1925-1996), the first Scottish woman landscape architect to become a Fellow of the Institute of Landscape Architects. Wood was born in Rhodesia, returning to Fife in 1936, and went on to study Geography at the University of Edinburgh during WW2. Having trained as a cartographer, she later pursued a career in landscape architecture, a choice which led her to make a distinguished contribution to the profession in Scotland, working on several housing and public realm schemes. In Wood's papers held by Historic Environment Scotland, is a small plan for an approach for 'minimum gardens' (Figure 8) that sets out general principles for the layout of the



Figure 7. Elizabeth B. Mitchell at a tree planting event in East Kilbride. HES Archives.

space between six semi-detached houses. The drawing includes a play pavilion for children, a hen house and run, pigeon loft, and communal space for food growing. It is unclear whether the design was ever implemented, and it is more likely that it was a theoretical study.

Embodied care

The research findings of our enquiry into the embodied care in Colvin's proposals for East Kilbride are manifest in several areas. Firstly, the discourses evident in Colvin's plans and writings as well as in Development Corporation minutes demonstrate how the landscapes of the New Town were shaped by different political, economic and social issues. Secondly, our research also highlights the significance of women on Development Corporation Boards and as landscape architects, answering what Lady Allen of Hurtwood saw as a necessity for women to play a leading role in the design of New Towns (1936). Thirdly, a significant addition is the inclusion of contemporary accounts of the lived experiences of people who grew up in East Kilbride and their perspectives on the landscapes of the New Town.

Through the collection of new oral histories, it was possible to gain insight from people whose lives had been affected by the ethos and values embodied in East Kilbride's landscape, without necessarily ever connecting them to the intentions and person of the planners and designers who had shaped them.¹⁹ These interviews provide a critical element of the 'thickening' of source material and perspectives, which are essential to understanding the landscape of the New Town.²⁰ There were marked differences in the experiences of people growing up in different decades and the interviews gave a sense of what childhood and adulthood meant in the 1950s, 60s, 70s and 80s, as well as reflecting on it now. A consistent theme was the freedom that the landscape offered: a safe place to play, explore, and move. The network of underpasses and greenways, especially in their heyday, provided the means of getting around without having to cross busy roads and deal with car traffic.

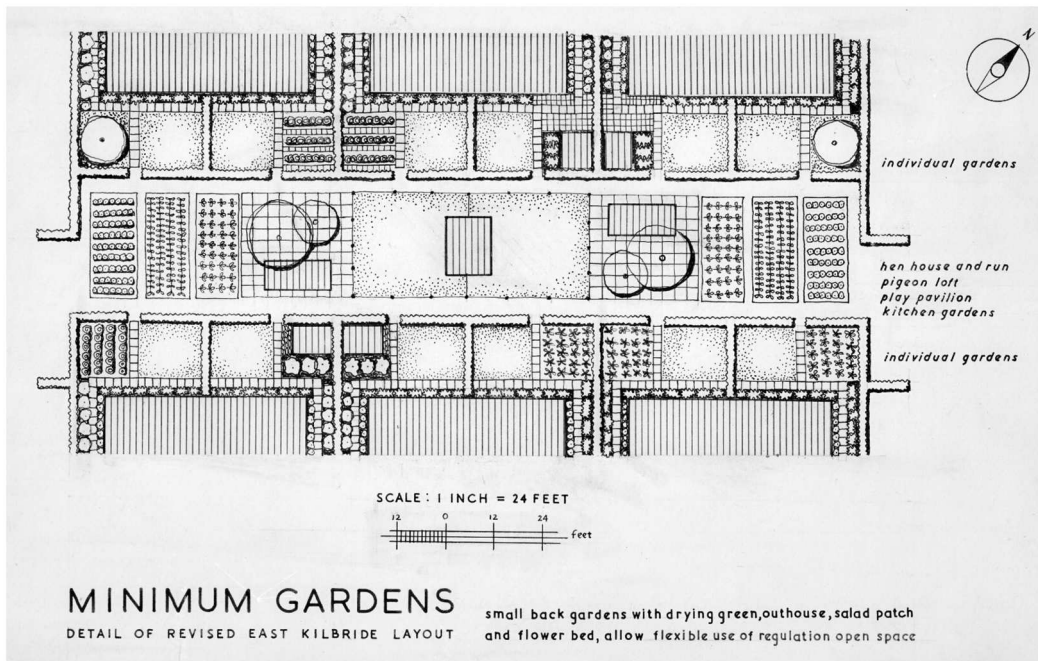


Figure 8. 'Minimum Gardens,' Jane Wood. HES, Jane Wood Archives.

The landscape of East Kilbride was not an exclusively positive place, with one participant describing the decline in the 1980s which led to many of the public spaces being defined by anti-social behaviour, and litter caused by drug and alcohol abuse. This experience stood at odds with the experience of the interviewee's parents who had grown up in East Kilbride in the 1950s, in which the parks, shelterbelts and greenways provided a safe space. Maintenance was another theme that emerged, with the contemporary challenges of looking after a conurbation with such an extensive network of greenspaces which have, to date, been managed in a relatively conventional manner.

An unexpected insight centred around a remark from one of the interviewees whose partner had seen East Kilbride in a totally new way: '[they] were seeing all of these green sort of grassy hills in between rows of houses and, you know, by the roadsides and [they were] experiencing this as a kind of well-maintained park', i.e. that the network of gardens, trees and green spaces made it appear as if the houses sat within a manicured landscape. This prompted a reflection about passive and active care: that many of the areas of mown grass were ostensibly 'cared for' and maintained, but that they were somewhat detached and off-limits: one would not cross the lawn outside one of East Kilbride's many churches or put down a blanket and have a picnic as it might feel like trespass or transgression. An experience of being 'careful' rather than being 'cared for'.

Cues to care

Colvin did not work on another major housing scheme until she was engaged to work on Aldershot Military Town in Hampshire, in which she was able to further develop and see through to implement many of the ideas she originally tested in Scotland. Colvin's approach to maintenance balanced natural regeneration as a means of woodland creation by fencing off areas, with a more explicitly manicured look through the mowing of grass. An approach Nassauer described as 'cues to care' in her analysis of different landscape design and management approaches, and the attendant impact on ecosystems (Nassauer, 1995). Recognising and co-opting established cues to care afforded the possibility that 'messy' ecosystems like prairies could be integrated into gardens, with all the benefits to biodiversity that it might bring.

Writing in 1969, Colvin was firm in her expression of the intertwined wellbeing of humans and the earth, stating that

'At last we are realizing that the aesthetic pleasure we derive from fine landscape is also a most precious national resource. A capital fund, on which the future welfare of the people may depend: it reflects a healthy soil and a means of self support as well as contributing in its widest sense embraces conservation of soil and landscape. The beauty of the country scene depends on the maintenance of sound biological balance, which must now be consciously conserved.'

In 1980, Opher and Bird reflected that despite East Kilbride having come under fire for reflecting a 'prairie planting' approach and being the product of garden suburb sentimentalists, the New Town ultimately became 'a spacious, well-ordered town and apparently a pleasant place to live'. (p. 2). The Development Corporation was wound up in 1996, and for almost thirty years the New Town has been administered by South Lanarkshire District Council. The form and fabric of the town have changed over the decades, with a recent decline in the shopping centre reflecting wider trends. Casting the net more widely, many of the architectural details which defined the early stages of the construction of the New Town are also weathering poorly: concrete in need of repair, coping stones on walls cracked, planting unmaintained. A photographic survey revealed a contrast between the immaculate underpasses of the 1950s and their state today (Figures 9 and 10).

With the built landscapes showing much altered and simplified plans from that of Colvin's, large-scale plans of shelterbelts abandoned, and with little materiality attached to the work of

Elizabeth Mitchell or Jane Wood, how can we best describe their legacy in East Kilbride? To answer this question, we will rely on Maurice Brown's account, who described the following:

'[Colvin's] first designs, for one or two small open spaces, soon arrived for the Corporation to deal with. On a subsequent visit she noticed three circular flower-beds on the bank of the Kittoch Water below the bridge to Kirktonholme. It turned out that the man on the spot could not actually read plans, so he just went ahead and did what he reckoned people generally expected in such situations. This merely amused her. She was more concerned with establishing the central role of landscape in the field of environmental design. Too often landscape architects were called in for cosmetic exercises – to be embarked upon if enough money was left over at the end. They should, she maintained, be brought in at the very beginning to create a background against which the work of architects and civil engineers could be shown at best advantage' (no date).



Figure 9. HM Queen Elizabeth II unveiling a plaque to her father, George VI in 1962. East Kilbride Development Corporation Archives, South Lanarkshire Council.



Figure 10. The underpass today. The Authors, 2023.
The authors have secured permission to publish all the images in this article.

While an argument can be made that material evidence of her ‘short-lived’ involvement with the long history of East Kilbride’s planning process is hard to evidence, it is unquestionable that landscape is - and has been - central to East Kilbride. As Nassauer argued, in an environment where residents’ everyday life is so embedded in the landscape, it can be a powerful tool to talk about - and care for - the environment and the long-term health of the planet, something Colvin deeply cared about. But this consequence is a result of what Colvin herself described as the most ‘fascinating and instructive aspect’ of her work: collaboration between disciplines, grass-roots initiatives, residents and policymakers. And a lesson that 75 years later is as important as it was when East Kilbride was on the drawing board.

Notes

1. Colvin’s work in East Kilbride was discussed in two key publications to date: in her biography by Trish Gibson (2011) and in East Kilbride’s biography by Sylvia Borda (2006). This paper aims to further the discussion

presented by Gibson and Borda through the analysis of a set of 14 previously unpublished drawings in the Museum of English Rural Life's Brenda Colvin Collection (MERL AR COL DO1/2/19/2). These activities formed part of the Women of the Welfare Landscape project, that aimed to define and map the wider contributions women made to the development of the landscapes of post-war Britain and beyond through analysing and understanding Colvin's professional networks. The previous narrative is further complicated in this paper through the inclusion of the work of Elizabeth Mitchell and Jane Wood in the discussion and analysis.

2. The Institute of Landscape Architects devised, that Colvin was active member and during the time of employment in East Kilbride also president of, have been active throughout the War to advise the New Towns Committee on landscape aspects. Their evidence was submitted in 1946. MERL SR LI AD 2/1/2/38.
3. At the time Colvin studied at Swanley, the college offered a Landscape Design course taught by pioneering designer Madeleine Agar. The college's decision to offer this opportunity was in line with similar examples of training centres for women, because as Thaisa Way (2016, p. 136) argued, 'women were attracted to landscape architecture in part because it engaged the knowledge of horticulture, botany, gardening and the fine arts – all considered appropriately feminine areas of study'. The course's offering showed a number of similarities with female only training places in the USA. For more context see: Anderson 1980.
4. See the Women of the Welfare Landscape Exhibition Catalogue (The Modernist Society, 2023), Trish Gibson's *Brenda Colvin: A Career in Landscape* (Frances Lincoln, 2011) and the Women of the Welfare Landscape online HistoryPin collection for a full breakdown of Colvin's post-war projects.
5. The East Kilbride Development Corporation's archives include five decades of press cuttings, kept in the South Lanarkshire Records Office in East Kilbride, EK 9/1/1.
6. For more information on the role women played in New Towns see Meryl Aldridge (1996) 'Only demi-paradise? Women in garden cities and new towns', *Planning Perspectives*, 11:1, 23-39 and Mark Clapson (2015) 'The rise and fall of Monica Felton, British town planner and peace activist, 1930s to 1950s' *Planning Perspectives*, 30:2, 211-229.
7. Key publications include: Darling, E. and Whitworth, L. (eds) (2007), *Women and the Making of Built Space in England, 1870-1940*. Ashgate; Darling, E. and Walker, N. (eds) (2019) *Suffragette City*. Routledge; Bendson, J.R., Riesto, S. and Steiner, H. (2023) *Untold Stories. Women, Gender, and Architecture in Denmark*. Strandberg Publishing. To learn more about US context see: Way, T. (2016) 'Urban Ecological Design as Feminist Practice' in: Orff, K., *Toward and urban ecology*. The Monacelli Press. 132-138; Lickwar, P. & Thoren R. (2020) 'Merchiston Farm: Morris County, New Jersey Martha Brookes Hutcheson 1911-1959' in *Farmscape: the design of productive landscapes*, 73-87; Way, T. (2016) 'Early Social Agendas of Women in Landscape Architecture' *Landscape Journal* 25:2 pp. 187-204.; Way, T. (2005) 'Designing garden city landscapes: Works by Marjorie L. Sewell Cautley, 1922-1937' *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 25:4, 297-316; Way, T. (2013) *Unbounded Practice: Women and Landscape Architecture in the Early Twentieth Century*. University of Virginia Press. For an international context, see: DümpeImann, S. & Beardsley, J. (2015) *Women, Modernity, and Landscape Architecture*. Routledge.
8. For more details about the Warrington report and Crowe and Powell's work on other New Town projects, see: Powell, W. & Collens, G. (2000) *Sylvia Crowe LDT Monographs 2*. Landscape Design Trust.
9. In the case of Warrington, the neighbourhood-level was designed by the Development Corporation's landscape team, while in Redditch Michael Brown designed one neighbourhood in detail and the rest was designed by the Development Corporation's team.
10. The drawings were triangulated with the archives of the Development Corporation in East Kilbride Library and the South Lanarkshire Records Office, the archives of Maurice Brown, who was Assistant Chief Architect (Planning) with East Kilbride Development Corporation from 1948-1951, having previously worked with the Department of Health for Scotland where he had worked with the early test plans for East Kilbride and with other primary and secondary sources, such as local newspaper archives, the memoirs of planner and member Development Corporation Board Elizabeth Mitchell.
11. For a comparative analysis of Scottish New Towns see: Fair, A. (2025) *Building Modern Scotland. A Social and Architectural History of the New Towns, 1947-1997*. Bloomsbury.
12. As the *Hamilton Advertiser* reported in October 1949, that the Development Corporation asked the Scottish Wildlife Conservation Committee to assess the site. EK Development Corporation, press cuttings collection EK 9/1/1.
13. This approach to make sure children are involved in the design of their future environment was also championed by several female designers, including Cornelia Hahn Oberlander. For more details see: Herrington, S. (2014) *Cornelia Hahn Oberlander: Making the Modern Landscape*. The University of Virginia Press.
14. The 'valuable agricultural land' was later built up by the residential areas of Greenhills and Whitehills and industrial estate.
15. After Colvin's departure from East Kilbride, a number of these plans were simplified by the Development Corporation and were not built according to her plans.
16. For exploring similar questions in the US context see: Way, T. (2005) 'Designing Garden City Landscapes: Works by Marjorie L. Sewell Cautley, 1922-1937' *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 25:4, 297-316.
17. The article was kept in Colvin's press cutting book MERL AR COL B/2/10.
18. Way, T. (2006) 'Early Social Agendas of Women in Landscape Architecture' *Landscape Journal* 25:2 pp. 187-204.

19. While we believe the interviews played a key part in creating a better understanding of Colvin's work, we know that the method had its clear limits and biases. For more discussion see: 'Oral History: the sound of memory' in S. Barber and C. Peniston-Bird (eds) (2013) *History Beyond the Text*, p.105.
20. Each conversation took around 30 minutes, and used an unstructured dialogue that was responsive to the individual's circumstances.

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Data availability statement

Archival data that support the findings of this study are openly available in the Museum of English Rural Life, East Kilbride Library and the East Kilbride Development Corporation Archive. Participants in the oral history interviews did not give written consent for their data and full interviews to be shared publicly, and therefore this supporting data is not available.

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