

A Journey Through Contemporary Land Use

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February 1992

My journey to work on foot and by rail from Belper to Nottingham City Centre offers a brief view of a wide variety of land use, both urban and rural. Walking down to the station you can see over the traditional small manufacturing town of Belper, which once produced textiles, famous name fireplaces such as 'Parkray' and manufactured Thornton Chocolates. Now half the textiles factories are gone and the remainder are struggling to survive. Only Glow Worm Ltd. remains as a manufacturer of gas central heating systems; 'Thortons' is moving to a 'greenfield site' in Alfreton. Across the valley is a hill, The Chevin, with some moorland and woods, much used by locals for walks.

As the rail line heads south we pass the essential service which makes 'civilisation' possible here in Belper, the sewage treatment works, and on through Stevenson's 19th Century tunnel to Duffield – a local upmarket commuter village where 1500 out of 2000 electors vote Tory. They have a way of life typical in its way. Upmarket pubs and restaurants, a Golf Club, a Squash Club, a Tennis Club, a local ex-grammar school which aspires to be the local 'snob' school – and expensive cars parked in the drives of big expensive homes.

On into Derby and aside from the large council housing estates and the private housing estates of 1930s, 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s build there are a few parks and green spaces but there is much more acreage in the vast area of derelict land, especially near the railway. Derby in the south has much space given over to Rolls Royce and other industry but the engineering sector, 'BREL' and Rolls Royce, are busy only in making workers redundant.

As the line sweeps west it passes alongside the A52 and some new developments on reclaimed land; a Sainsbury's Superstore; a hotel complex in process of construction. Then out of town past more council estates at Spondon, past the tourtauld's Acetate Plant' with its frequent stink, to the Trent Valley where 6 or 7 power stations lie on a 50 mile line from east of Birmingham to Trent Bridge on the west side of Nottingham. Clouds of steam rise to the heavens alongside less visible pollutants and fumes of CO₂, SO₂ etc. There are several gravel pits nearby at Attenborough where anglers can testify to the warmth of the water even in winter. The pits are given over to nature, anglers and sailing boats of a local Club.

Through Long Eaton we pass over another vestige of nineteenth century capitalism – the Erewash Canal. This has been reclaimed for ordinary mortals by a string of narrow boats; quite a few house boats among them. Leaving Long Eaton there is a large acreage of allotments –

immaculately laid out, maintained and productive, figures busy hoeing and digging morning and evening as the train passes by.

The journey into Nottingham passes through leafy spacious fashionable suburbs — past wide expanses of industrial estates, some tidy, some filthy, dealing in metals recycling and a thousand other trades. We pass more stretches of urban wasteland — in the speculator's phrase, 'ripe for redevelopment'. As we glide into the Centre the Castle sits high on its rock. The fashionable Victorian streets lie to the north west, and lurking on the flat, the impoverished depressed deprived inner city area of the 'Meadows' which nevertheless is intensely alive.

Inner Nottingham is being cleared up, built on and made into yet another plastic tourist/shopping/showpiece, with modern 'cobbles' in the traffic free zones, some pavement artists, buskers, but mainly shops by the hundred; shoppers by the thousand. The 'Broad Marsh Centre' and the 'Victoria Centre' modern shopping malls are temples to that act of worship we call shopping.

Everything here in the landscape and townscape, all the way from Belper, is for sale; homes, land, services, water, gravel, grazing and agriculture, sports clubs, roads and rail. Access to it and use of it for production and leisure (with a few exceptions; public footpaths, rights of way, allotments, commoners rights) is determined by rights of ownership, property and money. Profits, not needs, rule land use, urban and rural.

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Retrieved on 3 July 2022 from <https://libcom.org/article/raven-17-use-land>
This article was originally written for *The Raven Anarchist Quarterly* #17: Use of Land, pp.
80–82.

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