

Imagine Hillfields



**Imagine
Hillfields**

Thank you to all those who have contributed to this book and exhibition:

Jason Scott Tilley, John Blakemore, Richard Sadler, Masterji, Stanislaw-Jan Sakowicz-Librowski, Sandra Rooney, Mark Cook, Trish Evans, Ray Reid, Sherril Donaldson, Chris Capewell, Steve Compton, Mick Dubovsky, Kate Hills, Joan Haywood, Nick Stone, Kirsty Lohman, Peter Fitzgerald, Isaiah Williams, Andre Brewster, Patrick Kavanagh, Saber Ahmed, Baval Abdullah, Dorothy Senior, Mary Jones, Taj Rai, Pat Walsh, Jackie Smallridge, Gordon Riddy, John Lakin, Phillip and Andrea Jones, Morsal and Husna Amanzadah, Abs, Manny and AJ, Rose Muchengeti, Felistas Sakarombe, Anastasia Chakuwamba, Vanessa Muhwati, Sharda Tailor, Sister Elaine Tennant, Bob Nolan, Tanya Hayman, Tarla Patel, Martin Snook, Pete James, Rosie Addenbrooke, Rebecca Amadi, Berekti Fiseha, Adam Bickley, Rada Repally, Jericho Wilson, Nasra Seif, Waldemer Borucki, Bhupinder Birdee, Carmel James Smyth, Claire Zenuni, Baily Montague, Erminas Fiseha



About Imagine and the exhibition

Hillfields is an amazing place. Out of the bomb damage and planning blight of the post war period it renewed itself through inward migration and high-rise housing, became a laboratory for innovative community projects from the early 1970s, the birthplace of two-tone in the late 1970s, and a site of successive regeneration attempts since. Today it is one of the most internationally diverse areas of its size in Europe and is, as always, a place of hardworking people struggling against poverty, exploitation and a lack of voice.

For fifty years this story has been recorded by internationally renowned photographers and community photographers alike. This exhibition and book brings together the Richard Sadler, John Blakemore, Masterji and Jason Scott Tilley collections of Hillfields, together with the archives of Coventry City Council and Hillfields History Group, and a new body of work by re-photographer Nick Stone.

It is all part of *Imagine*, a community research project led by the University of Warwick which is revisiting past future visions of Coventry and Hillfields to help generate new ones. We ask: if Hillfields today is to participate in Coventry's wider development how can residents, planners and policy makers jointly learn from the past to understand the present and transform the future?

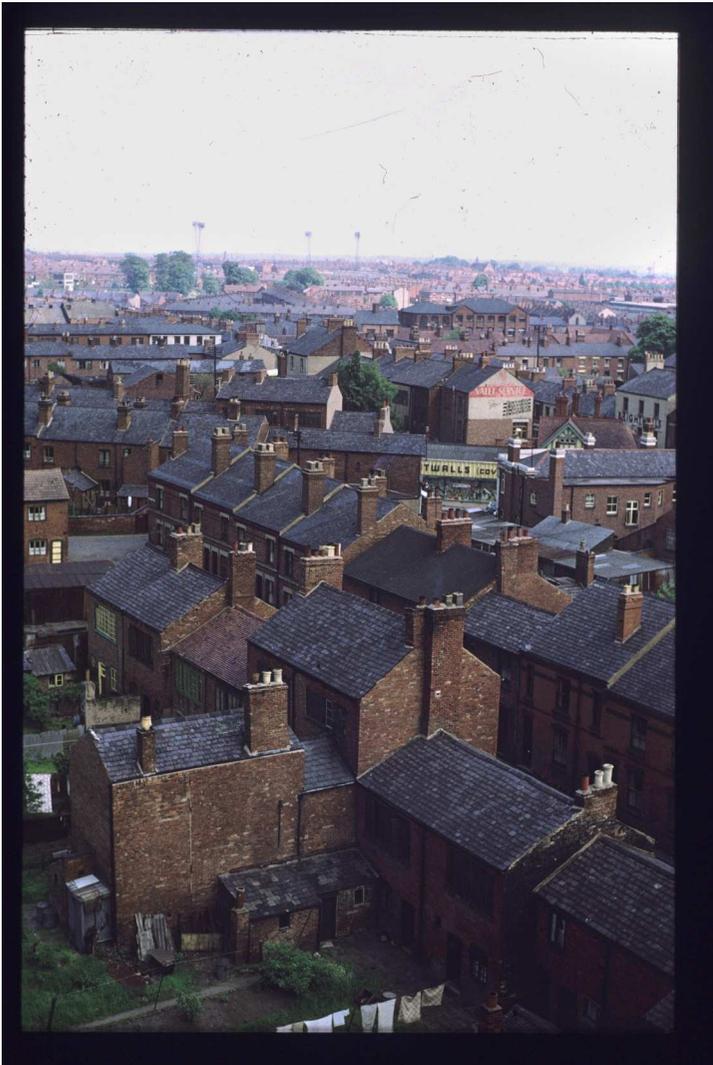
Ben Kyneswood
Mick Carpenter

August 2015

Hillfields Before the Modern Era



Hillfields was a suburb of independent silk weavers established in early Victorian times. Their home/ work lifestyle is perhaps best seen in the historic top shops, the most well known example of which was Eli Green's Triangle which was demolished by the Council in the early 1970s (courtesy of John Blakemore).



Above: Hillfields before the flats with the triangle site and Highfield Road to the top of the picture, early 1960s (courtesy of Coventry City Council)

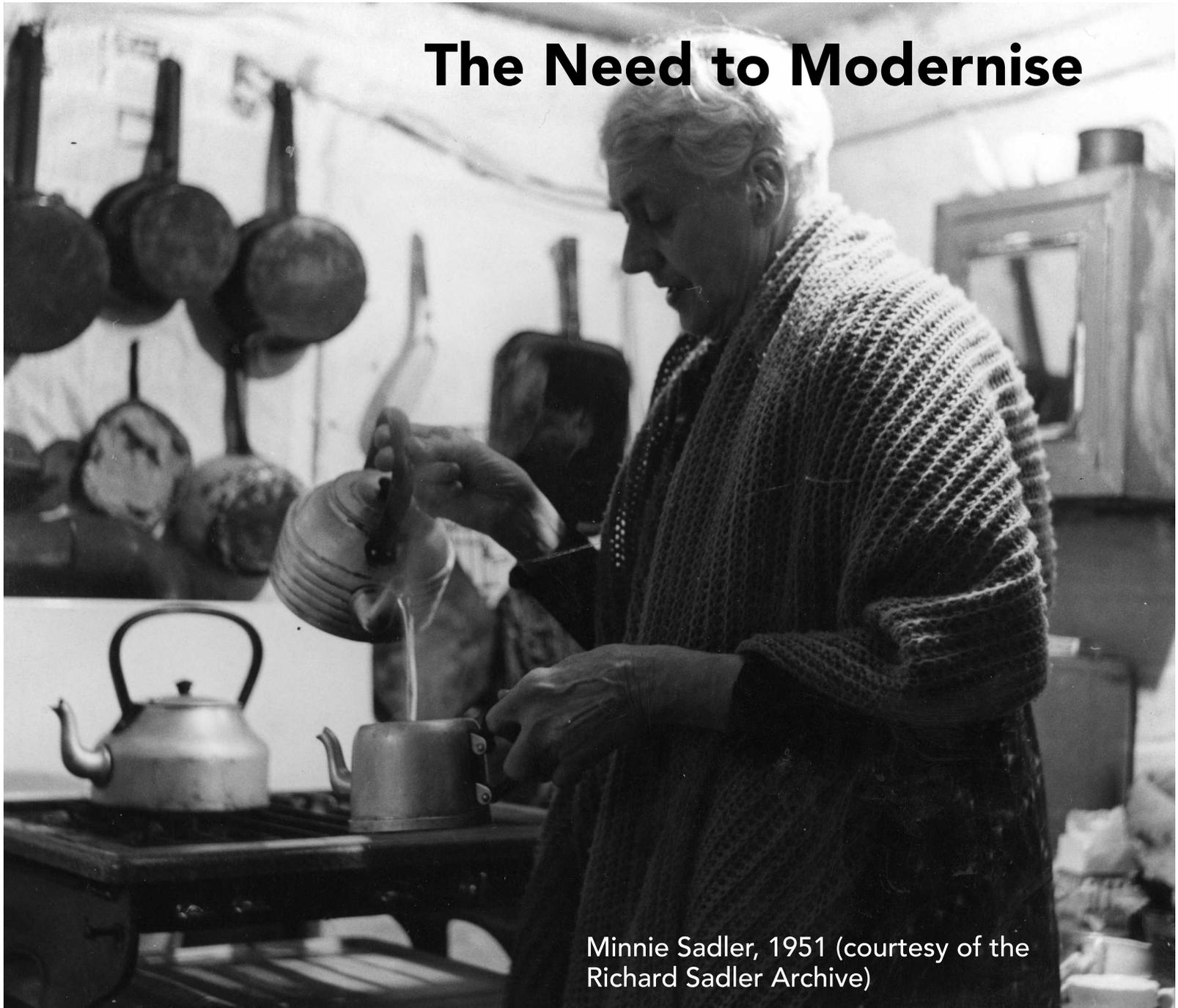
Right: Top shops on Payne's Lane near Oxford Street which is now the FarGo Village car park (courtesy of Coventry Forum)



Above: St. Peter's Church and Victoria Street and the dense network of roads that were demolished to make way for Sidney Stringer School in the mid-1970s (courtesy of Coventry City Council)



The Need to Modernise



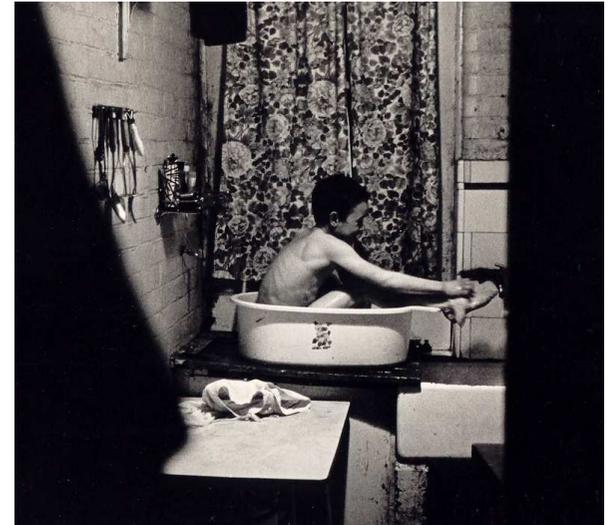
Minnie Sadler, 1951 (courtesy of the Richard Sadler Archive)



Above: five to a room in sub-standard housing in Hillfields, early 1970s (courtesy of ICA Studios/ Hillfields History Group)

Living conditions in Hillfields were well below expectations of post-war Britain in a city then regarded as one of the most affluent in the UK. The Community Development Project reported that in 1972 that only 27.5% of housing had the three basic facilities of bathroom, hot water and indoor toilet compared to a city average of 76.6%. One document on living conditions in Hillfields explains how a child had a view of the garden from the bedroom not through a window but a crack in the wall. The 1951 Comprehensive Development Plan contained 'bold measures for arresting the blight' but twenty years later John Benington, Director of the Community Development Project in Hillfields, noted 'this vision seems to be fading into the future'. Having the area earmarked for comprehensive redevelopment deterred owners, including the Council, from investing in their properties.

Below: bathing without a bathroom in the early 1970s (courtesy of ICA Studios/ Hillfields History Group)



Below: at home on Vernon Street, 1960s (courtesy of John Blakemore)





The Post-war Modernist Vision

The modernist vision for Hillfields, according to the 1951 Comprehensive Development Plan was to replace the mixed residence and factory units of the early 20th century with the 'light, air and cleanliness' of a residential area. The debate over low-rise (below in a garden city vision) and high-rise (right) was ended when central government made grants to local authorities conditional on building above six stories to solve a post-war housing crisis: the greater number of stories, more cash for the Council.

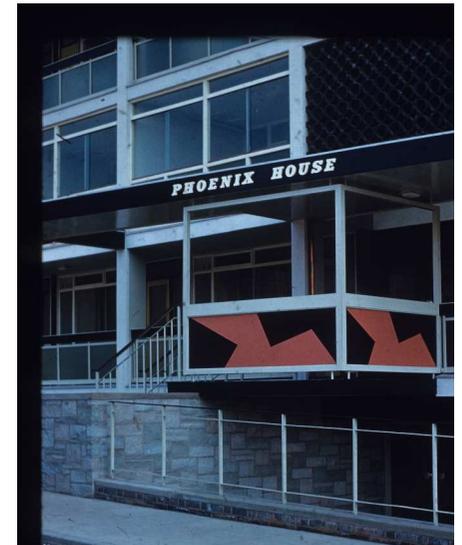
The tight Victorian shops of Primrose Hill Street (centre of the image on the left page) were not to be replaced with new ones. Residents would visit the newly built city centre for shopping.

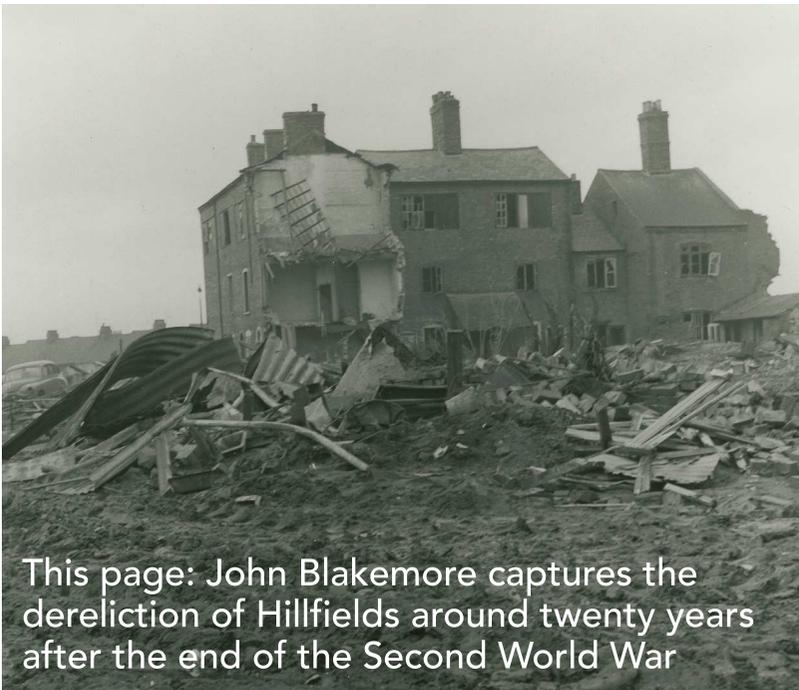
Page left and below: the scale of the 1950s vision of the future, centering on Primrose Hill Street where even Swanswell Pool is tamed, left, into what appears to be a lido (courtesy of Coventry City Council)



Left: an early plan details a mix of smaller low-rise developments to the left of Primrose Hill Street

Right, the modernist entrance to Phoenix House, one of the flats (courtesy of Coventry City Council)



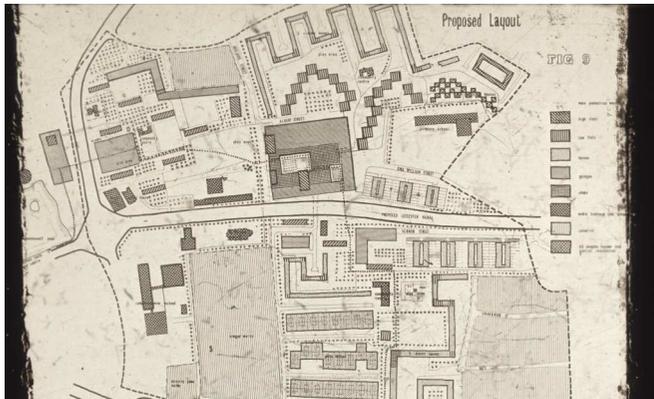


This page: John Blakemore captures the dereliction of Hillfields around twenty years after the end of the Second World War

Post-war Planning Blight

In the immediate post-war period thirteen acres of land were cleared but in the twenty years that followed slow progress left large plots undeveloped. Those houses that remained, some earmarked for demolition, became a magnet for crime and squalor. Derelict properties were often next to tenanted houses in poor repair.

A 1969 review of development by national government replaced clearance with General Improvement Areas which sought to improve rather than demolish old streets. In addition with social programmes such as the Educational Priority Areas and Urban Aid programme, the future of Hillfields was once again being re-imagined.

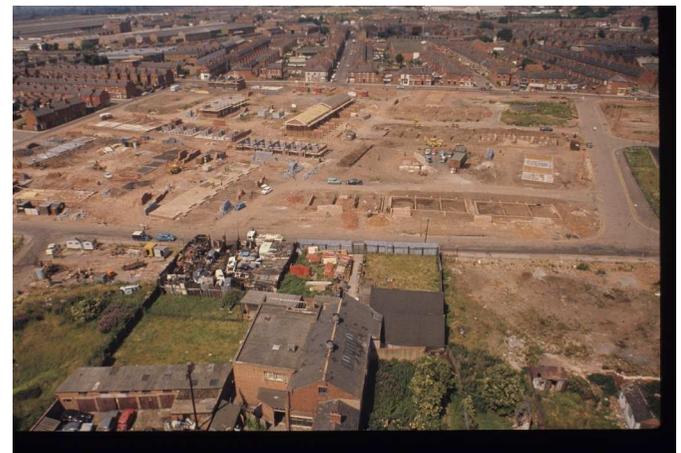


Left: a plan detailing the scale of development residents lived through for decades (courtesy of Coventry City Council)

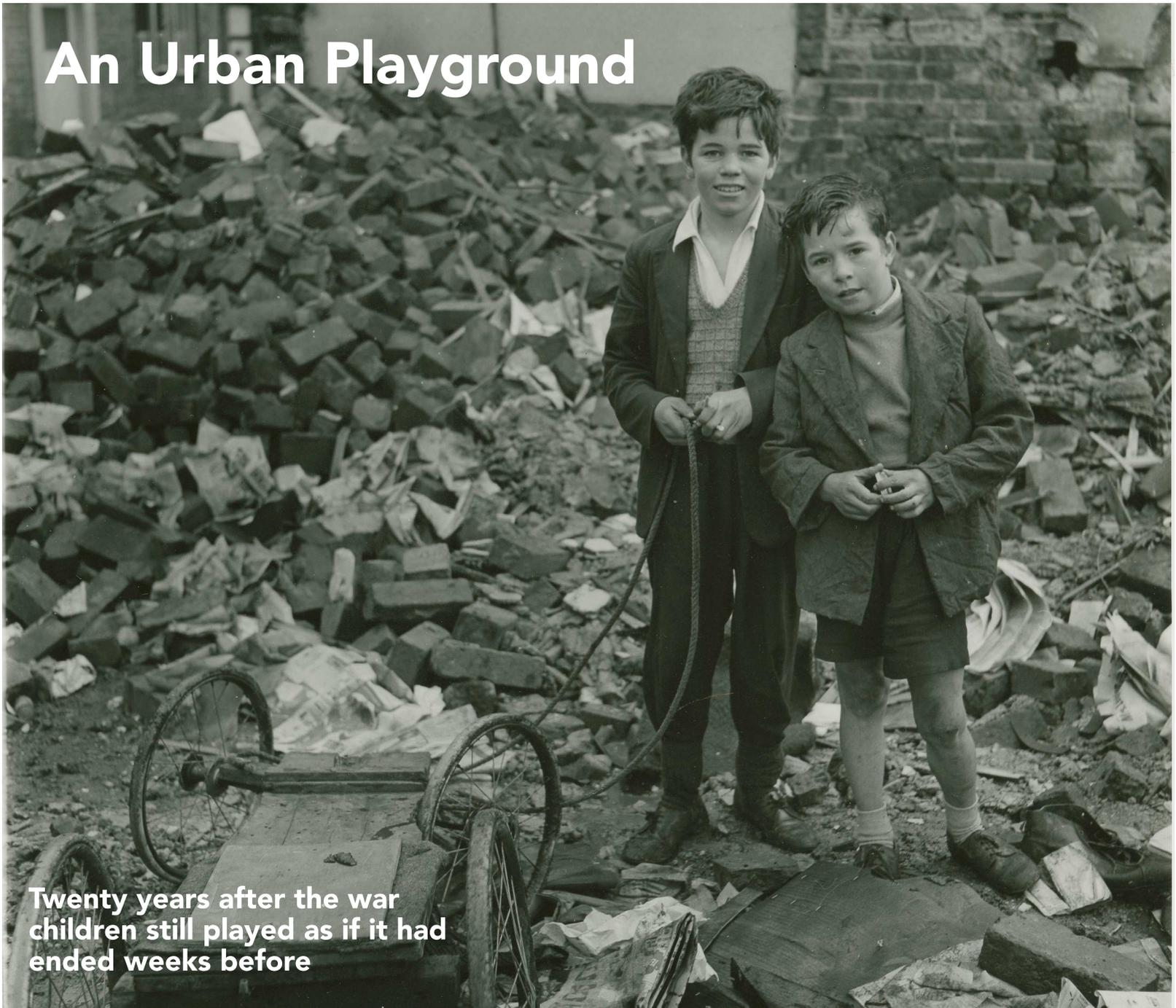


Above: a derelict garden next to a tenanted house, Colchester Street (courtesy of Hillfields History Group)

Below: huge cleared areas survived well into the 1970s (courtesy of Coventry City Council)

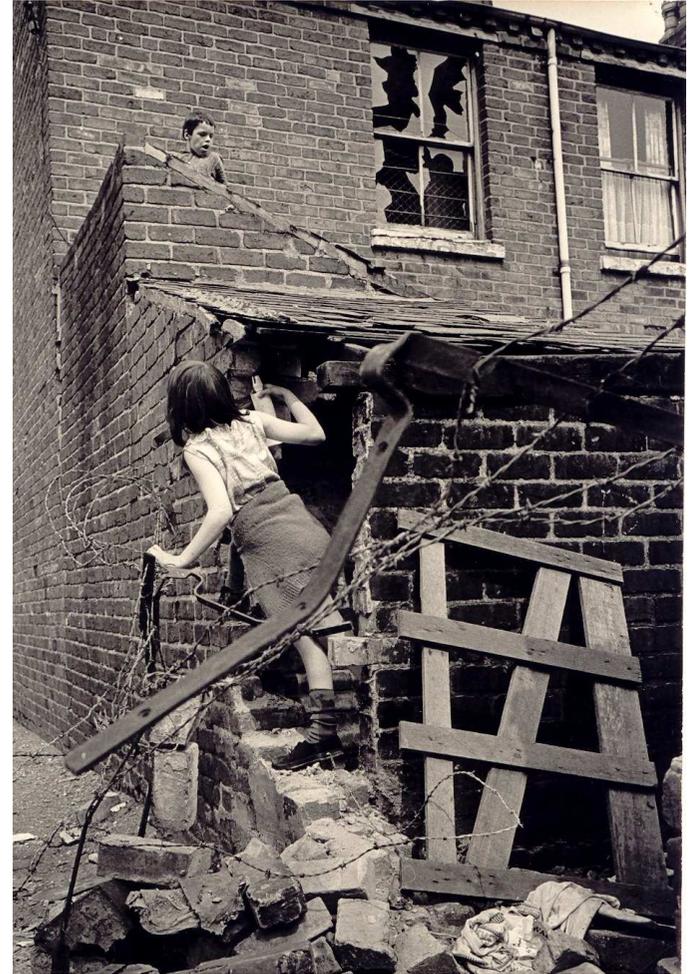


An Urban Playground



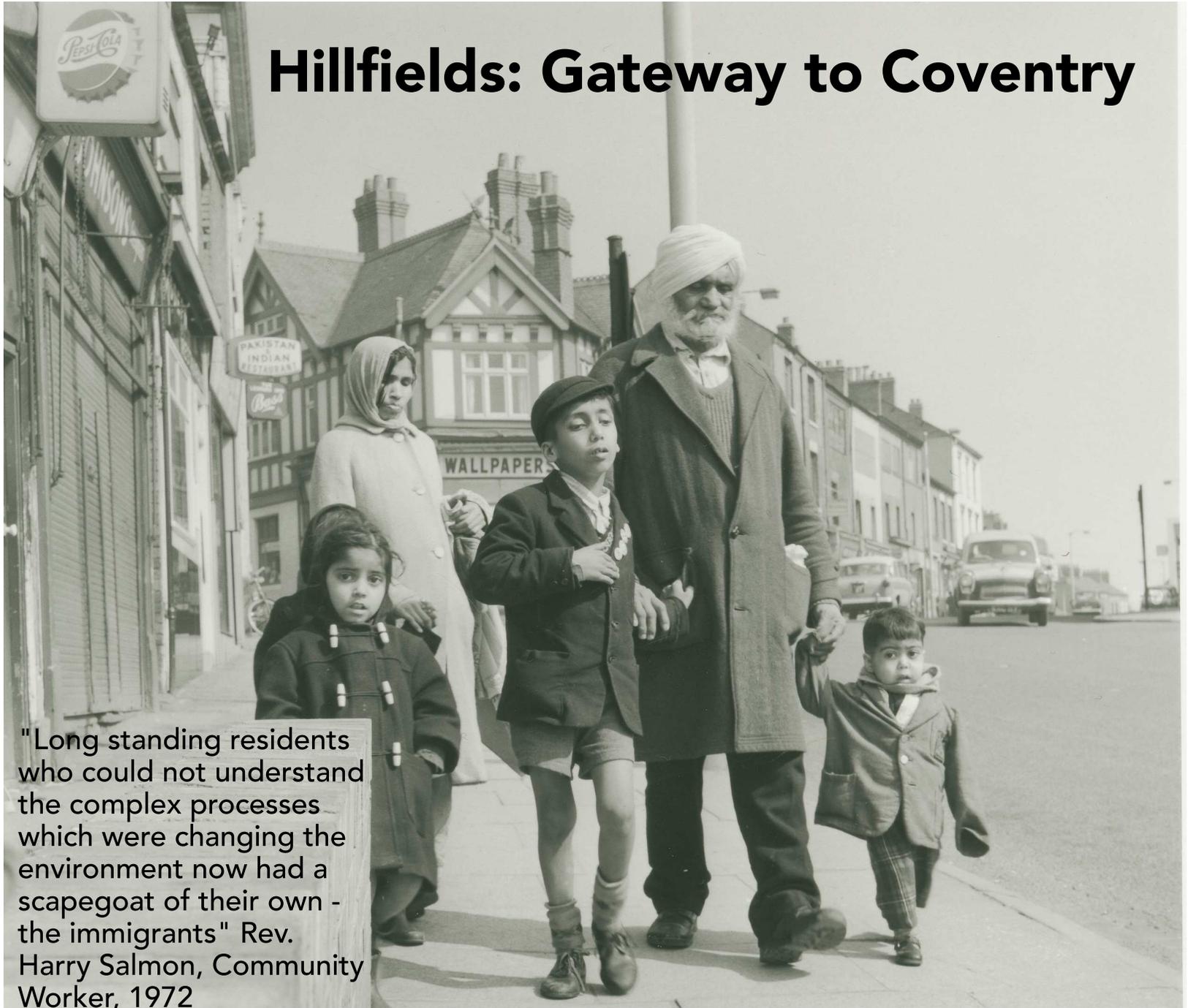
Twenty years after the war
children still played as if it had
ended weeks before

The slow rate of progress in developing Hillfields after the war led to twenty years of young people playing amongst the dangerous rubble of clearance areas, captured by John Blakemore in the mid 1960s and right by ICA studios with two children playing on a condemned house in the early 1970s.



This gave way in the 1970s to the redevelopment of Primrose Hill Park and the creation of other small parks, including one paid for from a General Improvement Area grant given to residents of Hartlepool, Redcar and Stockton Roads. Note the use of sewage pipes for tunnels (above left, courtesy of Hillfields History Group).

Hillfields: Gateway to Coventry



"Long standing residents who could not understand the complex processes which were changing the environment now had a scapegoat of their own - the immigrants" Rev. Harry Salmon, Community Worker, 1972



Many people from across the world who have moved to Coventry have settled first in Hillfields. This has made Hillfields a place of rich culture. Whilst there have at times been tensions between and within communities, Hillfields has a strong tradition of tolerance and acceptance.

Newcomers worked in the many factories in Hillfields, including women who found work making telephone exchanges at the GEC plant on Lower Ford Street. Many newcomers also started shops and businesses, and as they moved on, others quickly moved in.



Left: young Asian woman working at GEC Lower Ford Street plant, 1976 (courtesy of Victor Burgin)



Left and above: Masterji photographs the sikh community, including the bodybuilders at Sidney Stringer School, late 1970s



The Syncopaters band played the first Hillfields Carnival, 1971 (courtesy of ICA Studios)

HILLFIELDS INFORMATION & OPINION CENTRE

Wheatley St.
Daygroup
Monday -
Friday 9-30
to 12-00
50p per week
Children aged
2½-5 yrs.

Hillfields
Ladies Group
Next Meeting
Monday
September 13
6.00pm
You will find the
group very friendly
& helpful to
newcomers.

HILLFIELDS
INFORMATION
OPINION CENTRE
OPENING HOURS
MON - FRI 9.30 - 12.00
SAT 10.00 - 11.00
SUN 10.00 - 11.00
100 WHEATLEY ST. WOLVERTON
LEICESTERSHIRE LE19 1JH
TEL 0533 611111
AN ANTIPOVERTY STRATEGY
PROJECT OF THE LEICESTERSHIRE
COUNCIL



The Social Vision of the 1970s

The 1970s saw Coventry City Council respond to the findings of the national government's Plowden and Seebohm reports through changes in how educational and social services were delivered. In Hillfields, the Council of Churches appointed Rev. Harry Salmon to work with young people; the innovative Community Development Project, funded by the Home Office, researched residents' problems and supported them to do something about it (left); the first Sidney Stringer Community School was built; (right) and Hillfields Carnival, later to be revived as Hillfields Happening, also began (below).



This was a time in which Hillfields residents began to express their voice. Residents associations sprang up representing people of just a few streets or a particular tower block. Hillfields Voice was widely read and contributed to residents' understanding of their legal rights; they were not afraid to criticise the Council through the Corporation Payback section. Demands for engagement in decision making, with the support of the Community Development Project team, resulted in some gains for residents and, through the free Coventry Income and Legal Rights Service, welfare entitlements were fought for.



The End of the Triangle



Pictures courtesy of Hillfields History Group



Above, Vernon Street and below, Vernon Street and Brook Street corner, 1960s (courtesy of John Blakemore)



Eli Green's Triangle represents a lost part of Hillfields heritage. The triangular block was originally the site of a cooperative for ribbon weavers who worked above their homes in top shops; by collectively paying for the steam engine that ran in the central space of the triangle they avoided the factories that commodified their labour. This vision ended in the 1860s when free trade and cheap imports destroyed demand for Coventry ribbons. The triangle then became just another block of housing in Hillfields.

It was an impressive building that ran on one side straight towards St. Peter's Church (see left) and Berry Street to a point (below right) at Payne's Lane. It was demolished during the early 1970s to make way for low-rise housing, a disappointing end to an important set of buildings.



Where Vernon Street and Berry Street joined at Payne's Lane (courtesy of Hillfields History Group)

COMING DOWN ON US

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE



EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MINUTES

Start	Scheme	Cost	Decision
HOUSING			
1971/72	SERVICE ROAD TO WESTON STREET	£ 5,000	Deleted
	SWANSWELL STREET - CAR PARK AND LANDSCAPING	£ 60,000	Deleted
	THOMAS KING HOUSE - SURFACE CAR PARK AND LANDSCAPING	£ 13,000	Omitted
	PIONEER HOUSE - SURFACE CAR PARK	£ 5,600	Omitted
	BROOK STREET - ROAD WORKS (PART)	£ 30,000	Deleted
1972/73	BROOK STREET (PART)	£ 297,000	60 dwellings and 60 garages deleted
			69 dwellings and 69 garages deleted
1973/74	EAGLE STREET COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT AREA	£ 372,000	Deleted
	ROADWORKS	£ 34,500	Deleted
1970/71	SLUM CLEARANCE COMPENSATION	£ 20,000	Original proposal was to increase from
1975/76		per annum.	£15,000 to £70,000 per annum.
			Reduce to £50,000 per annum.
	REHABILITATION - GENERAL IMPROVEMENT AREAS.	£ 200,000	Reduce to:-
		per annum.	£20,000 1971/72
			£50,000 1972/73.
			£75,000 1973/74 to 1975/76.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

1971/72	ADELAIDE STREET - PAVING WORKS	£ 15,000	Deferred to 1972/73.
	LAND ASSEMBLY - BROOK STREET C.P.O. - CANTERBURY STREET	£ 100,000	Deferred to 1972/73.
		£ 55,000	Cut by £32,000
			Balance to be met from 1953 Act Capital Fund.

RECREATION

1971/72	PRIMROSE HILL PARK OPEN SPACE	£ 13,000	Deferred to 1972/73.
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TRANSPORTATION AND HIGHWAYS

1971/72	VERNON STREET - REALIGNMENT	£ 18,000	Deferred to 1973/74.
	CANTERBURY ST./WELLINGTON ST. CAR PARK	£ 50,000	Omitted.
	ALL SAINTS LANE IMPROVEMENT	£ 16,200	Reduced to £2,000

HILLFIELDS VOICE

£ 50	No further Corporation Playback.
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OBSCURING REALITY?



The Editorial Committee could not understand the words "deleted" and "omitted" as used in the Council Minutes. The Concise Oxford Dictionary states: "Deleted": strike out, obliterate
Omitted: leave out, not insert or include....

We asked Councillor Shepherd: "Deleted means that it will be coming back into the programme and it will take priority over the omitted items". (Why not then "deferred".)
The Associate Town Clerk's Department could not give an immediate answer, but phoned back to say: "Deleted refers to schemes which were in the approved capital programme but which have now been cut out. Omitted refers to schemes which were prepared to be included in the programme but had never been approved".

We are left with the question; does "deleted" really mean deferred? or does the Council hope that we will forget these schemes in time? Could the Council clarify the position?

Crisis Years and the End of 'Affluence'

HILLFIELDS VOICE

OCTOBER 1971 No 17.

PEOPLE -V- COUNCIL AND PLANNING

I wonder how naive the Council think people in Hillfields are? So naive that they cannot see through the blackmail practiced in Compulsory Purchase Orders.

At the moment the two Compulsory Purchase Orders in people's minds are the one that takes in the Primrose Hill Shops and the second is the Swanswell Street one that includes the Swanswell Tavern Public House.

Neither of these have been confirmed by the Department of the Environment but they are closely related. If the shops stay, the Swanswell Tavern has a good chance of staying, and Sidney Stringer School is obstructed because there will not be enough room for the hard play area. Again, if the shops stay, which is very doubtful, because the Council have the Department of the Environment over the "proverbial barrel", a large slice of Vine Street will have to go for the hard play area. I wonder if anyone has ever asked the people in Vine Street if they wish to go, or even prior to this enquiry over the shops, has anyone asked the shopkeepers if they want to go? Planning is now such an interrelated item, one mistake upsets the whole apple cart, and the Planning Department has split a lot of apples!!

Come on now, we are not children to be pushed and pulled around by (expert)ise advice by professionals. We are the voters, we are the rate-payers and we have to live with their ideas and mistakes. So the force of Public Enquiries must be stopped, and Public Consultation take its place.

Think back to 1951, that was the year it all started, the year that the Hillfields area was classed as a Re-development Area. At that time the Council's idea of informing the public was to put on a display outside the Planning Department. No wonder no objections were forthcoming, who the hell looks into that showcase? No-one, unless they are waiting for a bus.

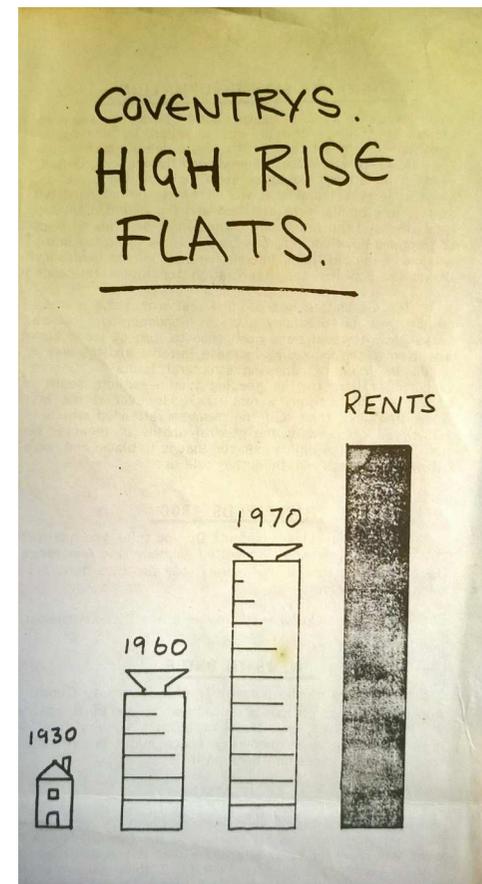
Once again, may I point out that there is a vast quantity of land vacant in our area; what is the Council's plan, or are secrets so important to the experts that surprise is part of the "plan"?

Look at the list of clangers that have been dropped.

- The Play Centre built alongside Unity House and Alice Stevens House; flats where the elderly people live.
- The Play Area sited next to Douglas House, where elderly people's flats are. There has been no consultation with residents and has been the cause of numerous complaints.
- The design of certain flats which have kitchens without windows and bedrooms on different levels.
- No pavements around the flats which have car access.
- Starting to build Sidney Stringer School without adequate land available.
- Replacing badly needed shops with tennis courts.
- Demolishing of the Swanswell Tavern, one of the few Public Houses in the area.
- The locations of carparks for the flats without discussion with the Resident Associations.
- Spending over £2,500 on Council Improvement Houses in Winchester Street when owners can do it for £500 with Grants.
- Blocks of Flats which have been up 10 yrs and are still without carparks, footpaths and gardens.

WOLF. S. JAGODIC.

Despite progressive social policies the national picture of the 1970s is one of local councils struggling with debt and major manufacturers leaving the UK for more profitable working conditions overseas. For Coventry, the most prosperous city in the UK for much of the 20th century, these troubles spelled disaster. Hillfields people had never shared in the 'affluent society' and were the first to feel the impact of cuts and economic decline. The redevelopment that had taken so long was in large parts cancelled (see Council minutes extract from the Hillfields Voice, left opposite); social provision, particularly welfare support, became tighter with more sanctions and more appeals; rents rose despite little council investment to justify the rises; and the factories that residents had worked in, such as GEC, were the first to close.



Left and right: cartoons from Hillfields Voice

Opposite: extracts from Hillfields Voice, including an article by resident Wolf Jagodic, highlights the levels of engagement in local issues.



Hillfields residents, with the Community Development Project staff, fought back through a campaign of awareness raising and action. Their message, that whilst Hillfields had its share of problems the solutions to them lay in radical economic change, was not received well by those in power. This position put them on a collision course with some local councillors and the project's Home Office funders.



Independent Hillfields

Above and right: sound systems asserted cultural identity but also independence. The film *Champion Sound* explores this time in Coventry's past (Photos courtesy of Isaiah Williams).

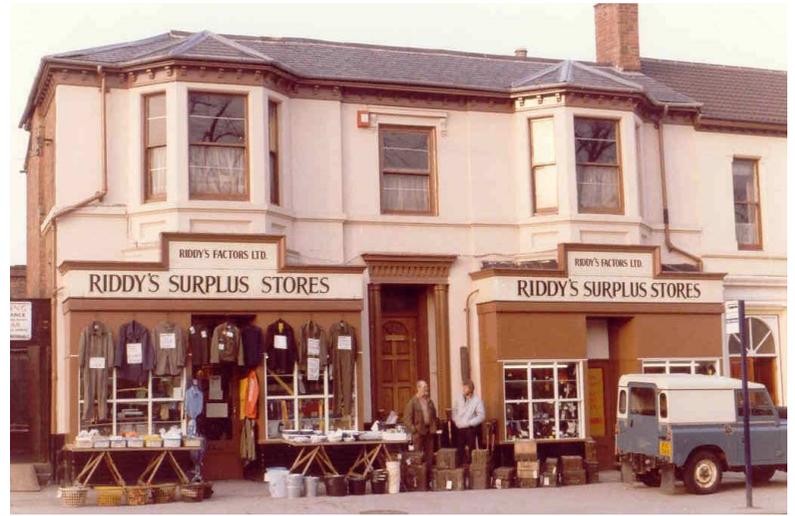
The period between the late 1970s and early 1990s saw Hillfields residents attempt to assert cultural and political autonomy in the vacuum left by the retreat of the state under Thatcherism. The black community revived Hillfields Carnival as Hillfields Happening which began on the lawn outside Unity House with sound systems playing loud music, running electricity from nearby houses and shops, and unlicensed by the Council. Blues parties in the flats and other places likewise were loud and went late into the night.

In this period Hillfields became widely known for drugs and prostitution although these had been prevalent in earlier decades. The black community sought to work with the Council through community spaces like the Vine Street Centre and Holyhead Youth Centre. In later years, the Osaba Women's Centre and ACCOL again sought to represent community voices to those in power.



In 1998 Hillfields, as part of St Michael's Ward, asserted political independence by electing Dave Nellist as Socialist Party Councillor, and by 2006, with the election of Rob Windsor and Karen McKay, the party defeated the Labour Party incumbents and gained all three seats.

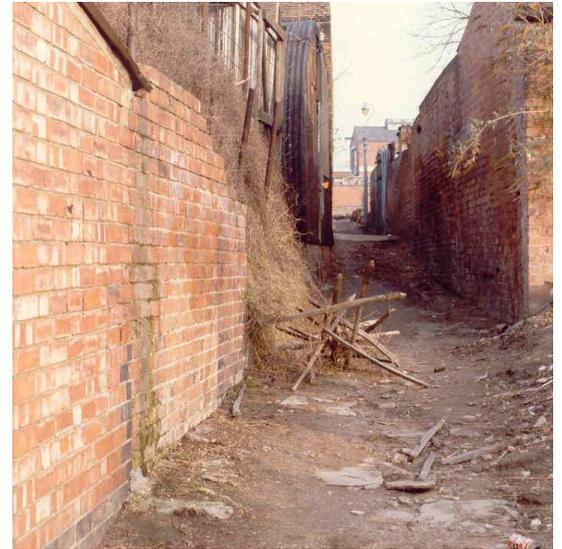
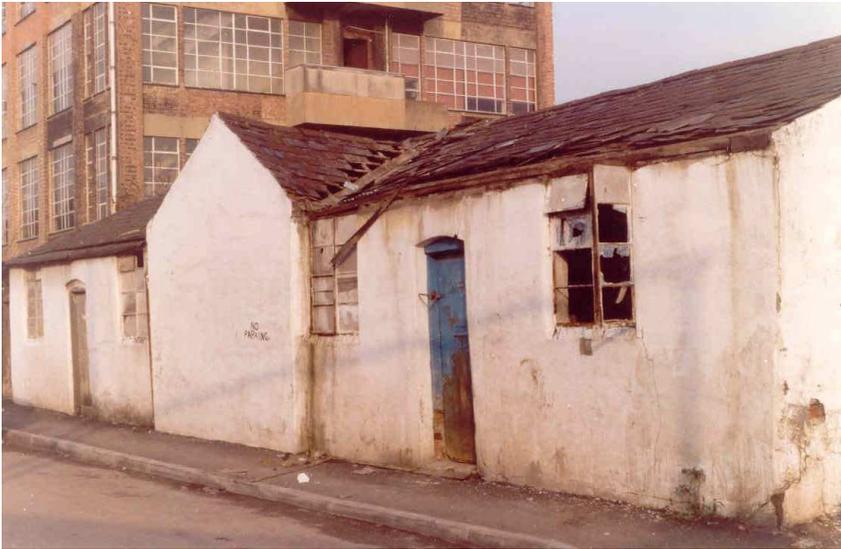
Nellist had been the Labour MP for the constituency in the 1980s but had been deselected for supporting the Militant Tendency, as the party turned to the middle ground. Standing as an independent Labour candidate in the 1992 general election he narrowly lost to Jim Cunningham MP, but gained considerable support in Hillfields. By 2012 Labour had recaptured all three local Council seats.



Sky Blue Way



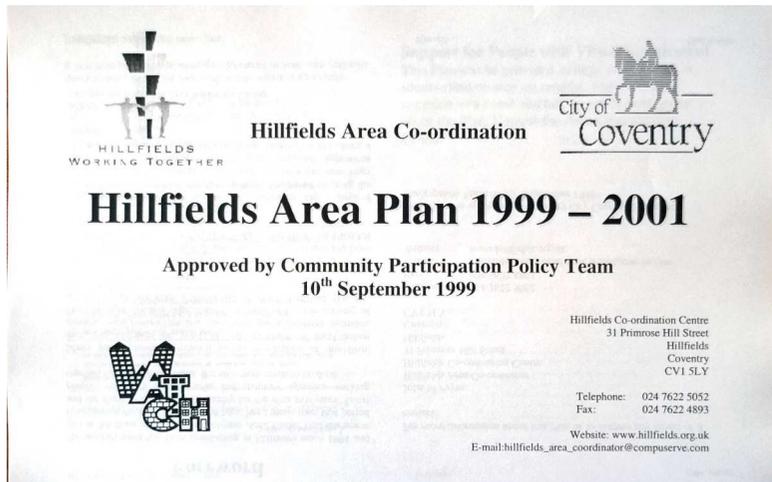
Sky Blue Way may have been just what the city centre and its commuters needed but it impacted badly on the Hillfields community. Gosford Road and Binley Road became increasingly busy as Coventry expanded. A variety of ideas to relieve congestion were proposed but it was the houses around All Saints Lane that were demolished to make way for Sky Blue Way (images below). You could call it All Saints Way.



Sky Blue Way divorced Far Gosford Street from the rest of Hillfields, a situation that remains today. The buildings and businesses demolished included Riddy's, Sweeney Todd's barbers and the White Lion pub as well as part of Gosford Green. Lower Ford Street, All Saint's Lane and Payne's Lane and Oxford Street, three previous routes into Far Gosford Street now all stop abruptly at Sky Blue Way rather than flowing into Far Gosford Street at various points.







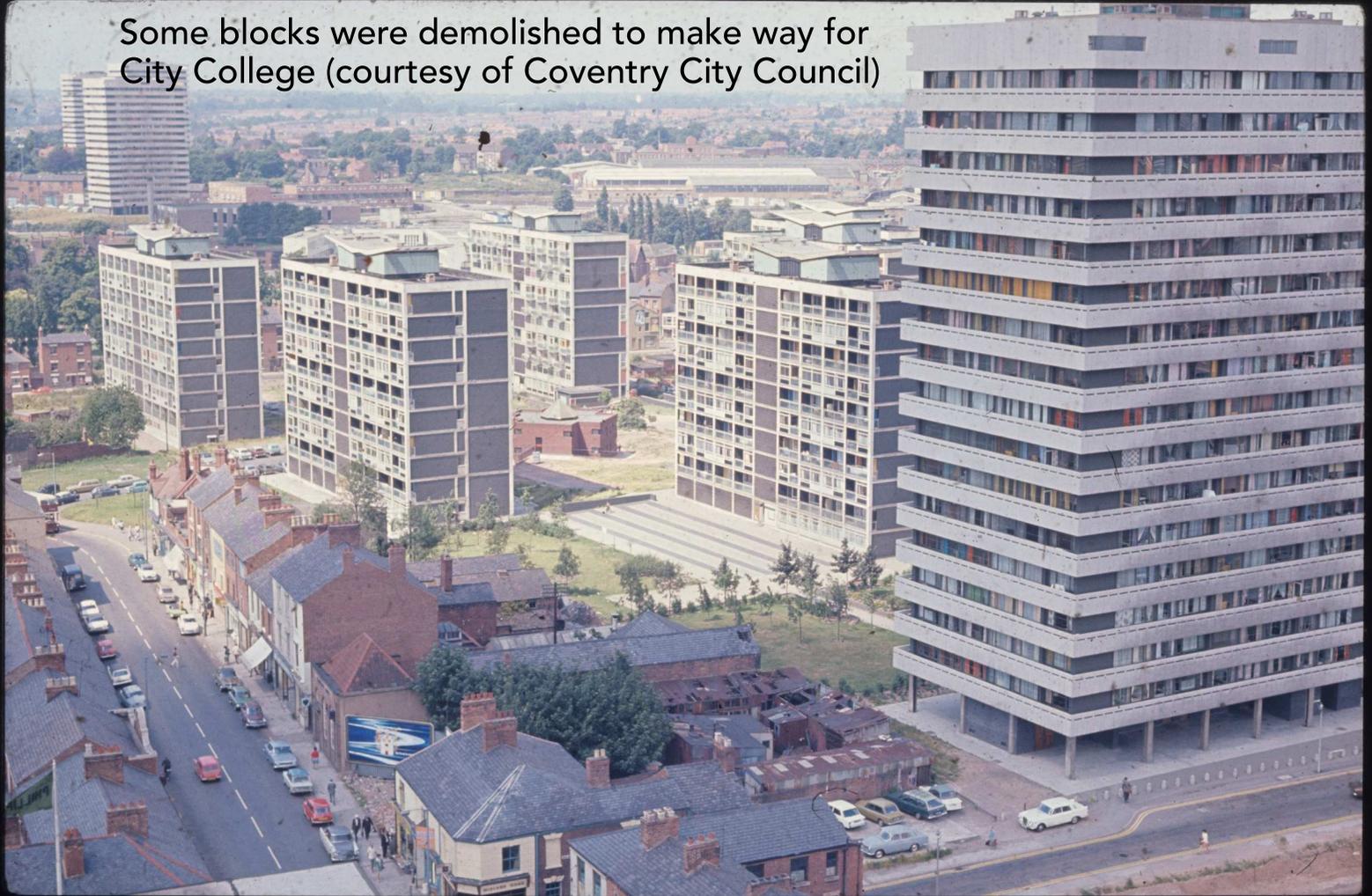
Victoria Street and Square: Urban Renewal and Community Engagement

A renewed vision during the New Labour era (1997-2010) saw Hillfields again physically altered but with stronger elements of community engagement. Richard Hallett, a community development worker for the 1970s Community Development Project returned to work with the community nearly thirty years later. A 'Core Working Group' of residents were trained to garner community views and hold the Council to account. From this time Working Actively to Change Hillfields (WATCH), Osaba Women's Centre (left), Nino Resource Centre and other community organisations sprang up to provide services, and the flats received community safety investment of fences, electronic gates and CCTV.

This period also saw the shops on either side of Victoria Road, including the Brightwalls Building, demolished to make way for EU funded housing built in part by apprentices. The early 2000s saw Adelaide Street disappear (right, courtesy of Coventry City Council), along with a row of shops, to create Victoria Square, around which community organisations operated.



Some blocks were demolished to make way for City College (courtesy of Coventry City Council)



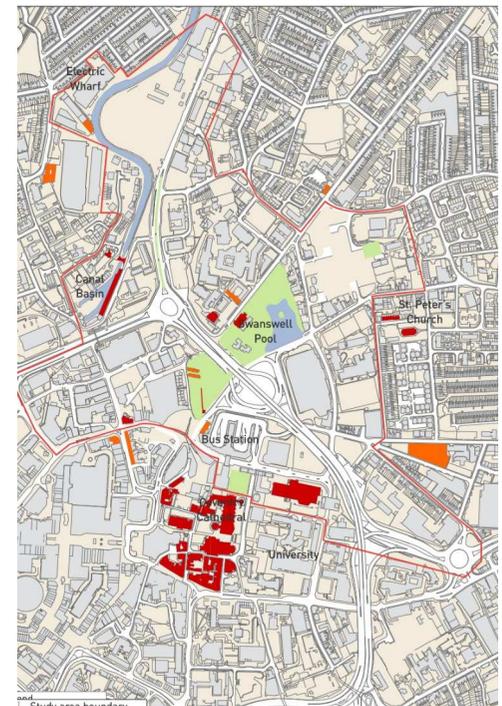
Swanswell: the Flats Fall

The early 2000s saw Coventry City Council planning ambitiously for the city centre with Swanswell Pool at the centre of one new vision (see map below right, courtesy of Coventry City Council). For Hillfields this meant the developers, including the Council and Whitefriars Housing, preferred to demolish the flats that dominated the view of the Swanswell to make way for new developments.

Not all residents were pleased with the consultation as some believed that the final planning decision was a forgone conclusion as detailed in the clipping from the Coventry Evening Telegraph, right.

The T12 group of residents that mobilised to challenge Whitefriars argued that investment not demolition was needed - much like the groups of the 1960s and 1970s who defended the Victorian streets and houses. A national report *Streets in the Sky* inspired the T12 group to make recommendations to Whitefriars. The group also offered to set up their own housing association - Skyview Developments - in order to manage the 819 flats themselves, and community development support was provided by WATCH, mirroring community efforts during the 1970s.

The fact that five tower blocks furthest from Swanswell Pool were saved and refurbished resulted from a decision taken in private by the Whitefriars Board without community or councillor consultation. At a time when consultation mattered on smaller projects such as Victoria Square some residents wondered whether it mattered less on larger regeneration schemes.





The Cultural and Learning Quarters of ...the City Centre



The concerns of the late Councillor Rob Windsor in 2002 that the demolition of the flats would lead to an expansion of the city centre were realised in the March 2015 City Centre Area Action Plan, right. Two areas thought of by many as Hillfields have been sites of multi-million pound investment. These are the site of the flats on Primrose Hill Street, now the Learning Quarter with the City College, below right, and Far Gosford Street, site of a heritage regeneration project and commercial-cultural investment FarGo Village, page left. These two areas of historic Hillfields are now defined by the Council as part of the city centre.



Wider issues than Hillfields are at stake as the Council attempt to restore prosperity to Coventry but some of the residents we interviewed have expressed concern that they will not share the benefits of this investment. They claim they are already burdened with higher rents due to the influx of students and a damaged sense of community resulting from redevelopment. This highlights the stigma that Hillfields residents' experience: a lack of voice in powerful places and their need to be understood as living in a place with potential.

Ensuring that the people of Hillfields feel part of and have an assured place in the grand visions of planners remains an enduring challenge. Yet our research indicates residents have often felt sidelined by planners.

Left: FarGo Village and the Far Gosford Street heritage redevelopment has regenerated this area once considered Hillfields (courtesy of FarGo)

Right: The City College developed out of the Swanswell plan to expand the city centre into Hillfields (photo courtesy of City College)





The weekly free raffle for donated items includes buggies, nappies and other essential items. Carriers of Hope has over 400 registered families, many of whom need to return regularly.

'She works and has children at the school over there but arranges her week to volunteer here on Tuesdays. She's done that for years now. That man over there came as someone who needed our help six years ago. He now works in Walsall but does the same. He's here at 7am, every Tuesday.' Volunteer Manager about two volunteers, Hillfields.

According to government data the loss to the local economy from the reduction in welfare payments in Coventry is £513 per head of population. The effects of recent austerity in Hillfields has resulted in the growth of use of foodbanks and other charities giving donations to families.

In 2013 Hillfields saw a reduction in those claiming out of work benefits, including lone parents and disabled people, from 2325 in 2011 to 1900 in 2014. The number of registered job seekers has dropped from 840 to 425 over the same period.

The rise in foodbanks and loss of welfare payments suggests that how poverty is managed in communities is changing. It also suggests an increase in in-work poverty.



Austerity and Hillfields

Austerity has also meant that local voluntary and statutory services have been altered. The work of Foleshillfields, bringing communities together to share culture and knowledge and the community development work at WATCH are two examples of community work in Hillfields lost as a result of changes in how community services are funded and delivered.

Instead volunteers fill the gap giving what little they can to help those negatively affected by welfare reform and low pay. Community groups looking for a space to meet have to pay room rental to raise revenue and front line community services with well established staff and volunteers are forced to rent space out instead of delivering front line services.



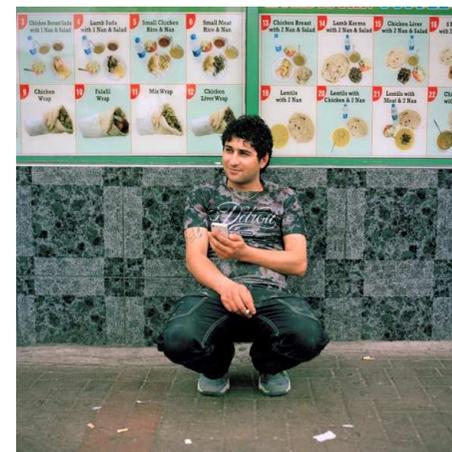
Recent Newcomers

The New Labour era of grant funded organisations based at Victoria Square have recently given way to a café culture of recent newcomers. The cafés represent Kurdistan, Turkey, Eritrea, each with its own cultural dimension. For instance, the Selam Café offers an Eriteran coffee ceremony every afternoon where freshly roasted beans are taken around for customers to smell whilst another cafe has no name above the door or menu; customers eat one set meal of five dishes. Mixed in with a couple of chicken and pizza places popular with students from the nearby college, the cultural cafés present businesses that foster cultural recognition and belonging. Industrious owners, such as Beretki, right, bring skills and knowledge previously acquired in their own country to Hillfields and contribute to a new dynamism in the area.

Left: recent newcomers photographed as part of a community project between Imagine and Herbert Media



Above, Beretki from Selam Café and barbers on Canterbury Street; below right, Saber from the Kurdistan Coffee Shop; below left, the Turkish restaurant that occupies upstairs at Phillips (courtesy of Jason Scott Tilley)





Jason Scott Tilley's response to the John Blakemore images from 50 years ago reveal an international community of hardworking but also concerned residents. Business owners watch with anticipation as the city centre moves closer and the business this might bring, whilst residents complain about the rise in rents, the reduction in community services and their lack of voice at high levels of the Council. Once again as so often in the past residents identify opportunities and problems that need to be responded to by people in power.

Imagine the Future for Hillfields

What was once the community of Hillfields has now been 'sandwiched' by the city planners between the Swanswell Learning Quarter and the FarGo Cultural Quarter. Yet the voices of the diverse and resourceful people of Hillfields need to be urgently included as a vital part of debates about the future of this part of Coventry. We hope that the photographs of the peoples, buildings and streets that have made Hillfields such an amazing area will lead to renewed efforts to address the central question: What part can Hillfields residents play in contributing to the wider development of the city whilst attending to their own needs and issues?

'People come together to learn different cultures, the food, the language; just good morning and things because you're better able to understand each other' - Hillfields resident



Roma boys pose in Primrose Hill Park, late 2014, courtesy of Imagine Project. Below, Rebecca and her children relocated from London to Hillfields, with Colchester Street behind them. Far left, residents and workers of Hillfields in spring 2015 (courtesy of Jason Scott Tilley).





The exhibition at FarGo Village, between the 11th and 31st of August 2015, also involved a co-produced project between Nick Stone, a re-photographer, and the Hillfields History Group. Archive images were identified and Nick took new photographs from the same location as the original photographer before merging the two to reconnect people and places in the past to those in the present. The images highlight points of continuity and change, raising questions about how our relationship between the past and present can help us imagine the future.





Minnie Sadler, 1951, of Bath Street, Hillfields, courtesy of the Richard Sadler archive

This book accompanies the #imaginehillfields exhibition at The Box, FarGo Village, Coventry, August 2015.

They tell a story of Hillfields through a photographic exhibition of professional and community photographers throughout the last fifty years.

Both exhibition and book have been produced with the community to provide both a narrative and a visual story to the redevelopment and regeneration of post-war Hillfields as part of Imagine, a community-university research partnership examining visions and redevelopment of place.

The research has raised questions about Hillfields's historical role in Coventry as a place of poverty; the inability of residents and workers to change things; and their relationship with those with the power to make that change.

<http://www.imaginehillfields.org>