

# Landscapes for Living



Housing was a priority across peacetime Britain, rebuilding homes that had been lost whilst also delivering a new residential programme through the 1946 New Towns Act and the 1952 Town Development Act. The new towns built upon the garden city model which had led to the creation of Letchworth and Welwyn, as well as creating a new mechanism which removed the provision of large-scale housing from local authorities and placed it in the care of development corporations. The ILA

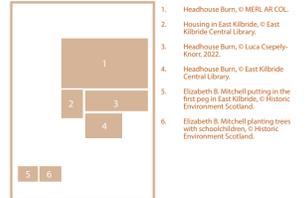
had been consulted by Lord Reith's New Towns Committee in 1946, ensuring that landscape architects had a critical role in the planning of new towns. Key to the endeavour was the importance of the 'landscape treatment', to which the Institute was critical to delivering. The principles that the ILA put forward as evidence to the New Towns Committee highlighted the importance of topography, hydrology, existing buildings, trees, soil, and climate, as well as situating any new habitation within both an

agricultural belt and a green belt. According to records held in the archives of the ILA, New Town Development Corporations and local authorities gave women many opportunities to work as landscape architects and consultants – Jane Wood, Mary Mitchell and Sheila Haywood all contributed to various new towns and housing estates. Brenda Colvin was engaged as landscape consultant for East Kilbride, Sylvia Crowe worked on several new towns including Harlow, Basildon, and Warrington.



# A Landscape Masterplan

## EAST KILBRIDE, SCOTLAND



When Colvin was elected first female president of the Institute of Landscape architects, she was referred to as Consultant to East Kilbride New Town, which shows the importance of such large-scale projects in both the public and the profession's perception of landscape architecture. She was appointed in 1949 to create an 'outline plan' for the landscapes of the New Town, that most probably created the backbone of the green infrastructure.

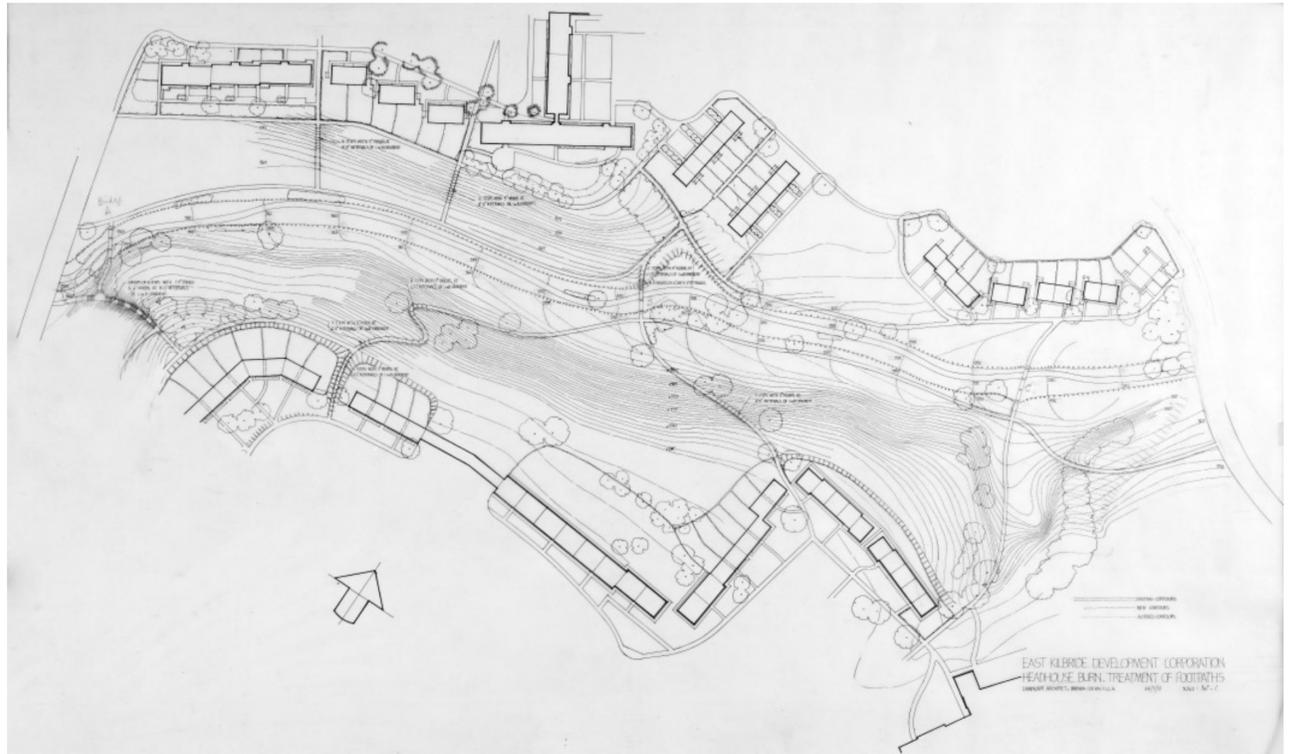
East Kilbride New Town was sited to the southwest of Glasgow as an extension of the existing village with the ambition of reducing pressure on the overcrowded and unsanitary tenement housing in the city.

The vision of the planners was to create a community around new industries, surrounded by a protected green belt, and Colvin delivered a range of schemes for gardens and greenways in the new conurbation whilst contributing to the overall planning and execution of the landscape plan. Reflecting upon her involvement in the landscape architecture of the New Town, Colvin highlighted the challenge faced in creating a distinct local character, and the role of climate, soil and vegetation in shaping such an identity.

In East Kilbride, particular attention was given to tree planting, the creation and preservation of shelterbelts, and a plan for continuous forest belt round the south and west of the built-up areas. Retained trees added character and a sense of place to the New Town. According to the Development Corporation's minutes, Colvin's focus on trees was supported by planner Elizabeth B. Mitchell.

Part of the proposed green system for the New Town, Headhouse Burn was the clearest manifestation of the approach that Colvin described to manage storm water in the steep valleys that cut through East Kilbride. The stream was planned to be altered, and a wider floodable basin was designed, with gently undulating topography and amenity tree planting on the upper edges.

Headhouse Burn, now known as Headhouse Greenway, exemplified Colvin's approach to landform, vegetation, and water management. Although according to a much simplified design, the valley which cuts through The Murray area was enhanced so that it could be a place where children played and people walked to work.



### ELIZABETH B. MITCHELL



Elizabeth Buchanan Mitchell (1880-1980) is regarded as the 'First Lady Town Planner in Scotland' and played a key role in the creation of Scottish New Towns, including East Kilbride. She was praised for her clear-thinking and tactical skills she shared with the champions of the New Town movement in Scotland. Mitchell was born and grew up in 'nobly planned' Edinburgh. Her childhood was spent exploring the city, intuitively drawn to beautiful and playful spaces that were part of the Georgian design.

She became interested in town planning at the time that Welwyn Garden City was built, and was very well connected to the practitioners and activists who were lobbying and creating the first Garden Cities in England. In East Kilbride, Mitchell sat on the committee for the Development Corporation and was involved in a variety of aspects of the planning and life of the new town of which she was expected to provide the 'woman's' perspective, for which she joked she wasn't entirely qualified for as

she wasn't a wife or mother. As one of the leading figures in the town planning movement, she believed that people should have parks and greenspaces close to where they lived and worked and instilled this in the planning of East Kilbride. In her memoir, *The Plan That Pleased*, she gave a special mention to Colvin and praised her understanding of the landscapes of Scotland and around East Kilbride, despite being English.

# A New Town for Scotland

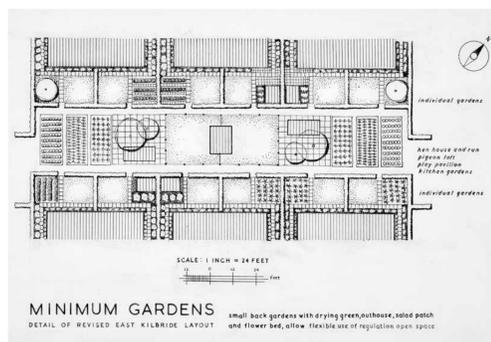
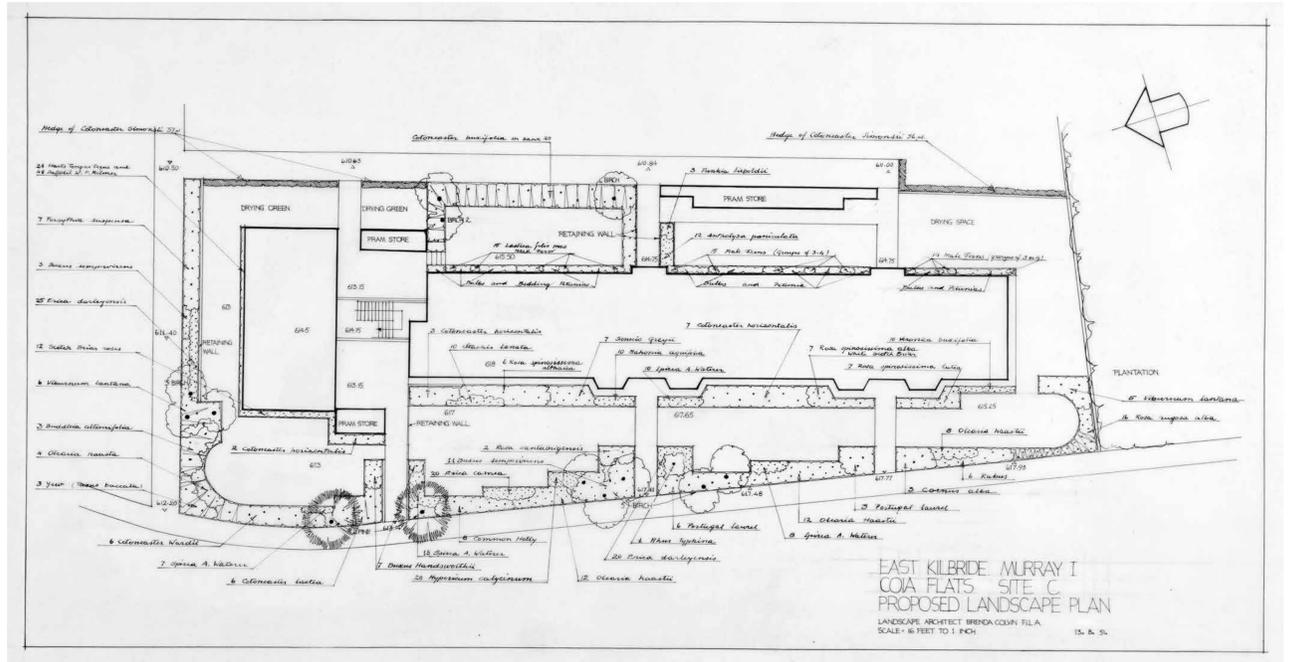
## EAST KILBRIDE, SOUTH LANARKSHIRE

1. Detailed landscape and planting plan for Coia Flats, Murray I, East Kilbride, 1961 © MERL, AR COI.
2. East Kilbride in the 1960s. © East Kilbride Central Library.
3. Minimum Gardens plan by Jane Wood. © Historic Environment Scotland.
4. Westwood Landscape Plan, 1952. © MERL, AR COI.
5. Jane Wood's I.A. application. © Landscape Institute Archives, MERL, Jane Wood's personal file SR LI AD.
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Maurice Brown who worked with Colvin in East Kilbride recalled 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'.

This 'grand design' included the detailed design of housing areas as well as major green spaces such as Headhouse Burn. The majority of the surviving Colvin plans for East Kilbride are for areas within The Murray which won accolades from the Saltire Society for the quality of the housing. The plans specified areas for 'drying greens', children's play in the green spaces around the housing areas and provided the Corporation with detailed plans for planting. Further drawings depict areas like Westwood 1, Lymekilns, Whitemoss playing fields and Philipshill sewage works.

Individual gardens in the New Town were not less important in the system of green spaces. Landscape architect Jane Wood's archive includes a drawing for East Kilbride, that show 'small back gardens with drying green, outhouse, salad patch and flower bed, allow flexible use of regulation open space', with regimental hedges and a scattering of small trees.



### JANE WOOD



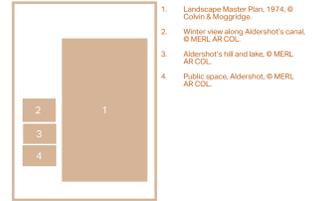
Jane Wood (1925-1996) was the first Scottish woman to become a member of the Institute of Landscape Architects. She was born in Southern Rhodesia where her family lived until she was eleven. Upon their return to Scotland, the family lived in Fife and Wood went to university in Edinburgh where she studied Geography during the Second World War. After graduating she joined the Civil Service as a Cartographer, but was encouraged by her husband, architect Tom Jeffryes, to continue her studies and pursue a career

in Landscape Architecture. Wood became a member of the Institute in 1952, with Colvin signing her application. She worked first as a Landscape Architect at the Housing and Planning Department of St Andrew's House, before setting up her own private practice and carried out and published on a number of private and public projects, including housing and public realm commissions in Linlithgow, East Kilbride, and Pollockshaws. Alongside her practice, she was a keen educator, organised the Institute in

Scotland and represented it at national and international conferences, curated a number of exhibitions, and contributed to the recruitment of others into the profession. Brian Coulston described meeting her as a 'revelation' which put him on a course to train in Landscape Architecture and that without her vision he would not have joined the Institute in its 'most formative years', working alongside Jellicoe, Crowe, Colvin and Youngman.

# A Strategic Masterplan

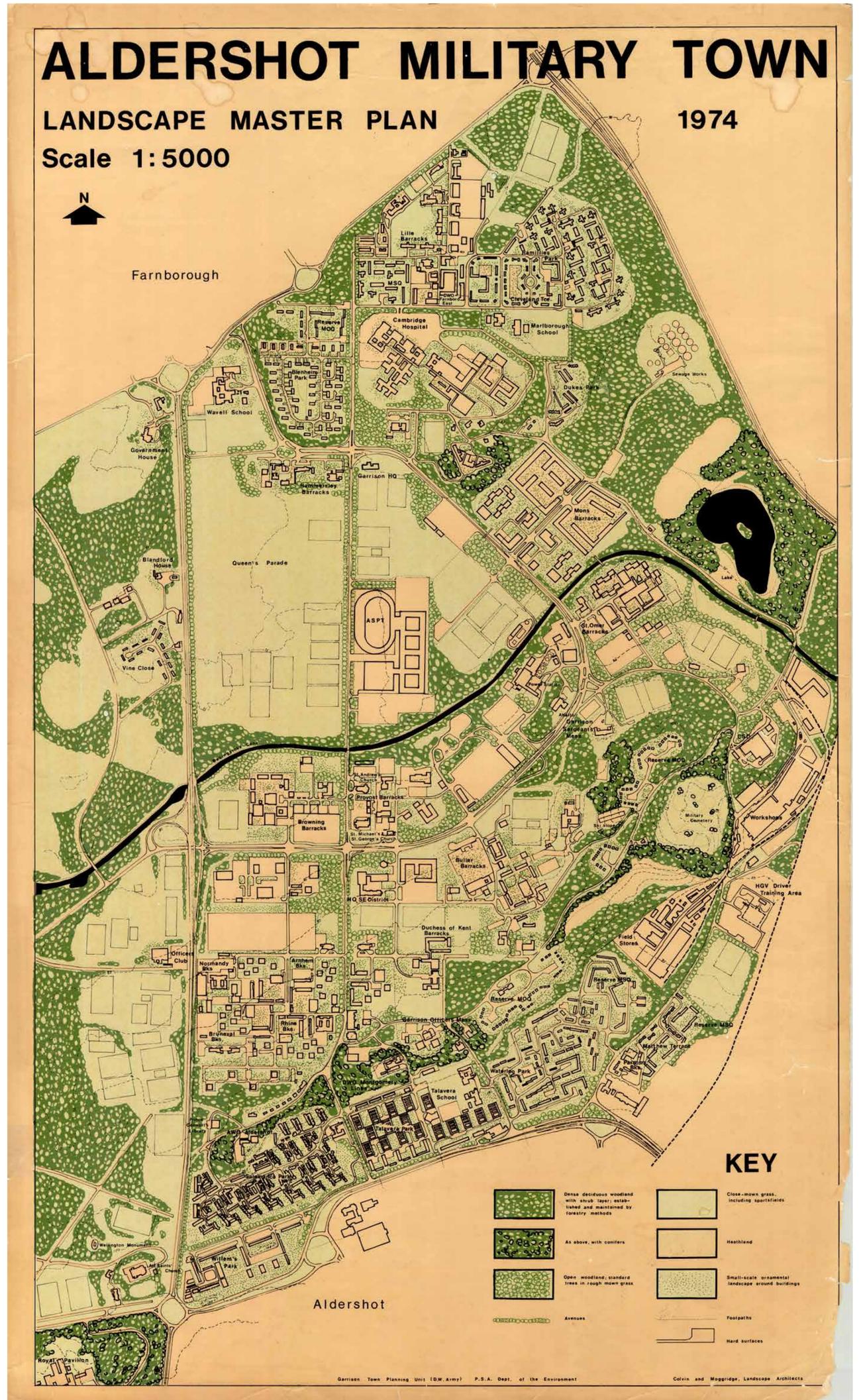
## ALDERSHOT, HAMPSHIRE



Aldershot Military Town presented the opportunity for Colvin to implement the design approach that she had developed when working on East Kilbride. In this case, Colvin and Moggridge's decades long involvement meant that questions of maintenance and a continuously evolving scheme led to her vision being fulfilled.

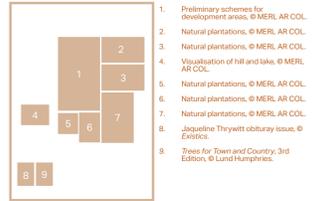
The rebuilding of the town on the outskirts of Farnborough in Hampshire in the 1960s led to Colvin's appointment as landscape consultant in 1963, with a remit that covered the town as a whole in her role as overall landscape consultant as well as a number of 'landscape development areas'. Colvin worked with the Aldershot Planning Group, set up with representatives from the War Office as well as planners and architects from Building Design Partnership.

As opposed to the rigid grid system of the original Victorian town, Colvin's masterplan worked with the existing features of the site, including its distinctive ridges and canal, and created an environment that the resident recruits would find both enjoyable and encouraging. Hal Moggridge noted that the holistic approach resulted in a town 'without undesigned fragments of land or ill-considered edges of schemes', that also created distinctive areas 'with marked identity without firm enclosure'.



# Natural Plantations

## ALDERSHOT, HAMPSHIRE

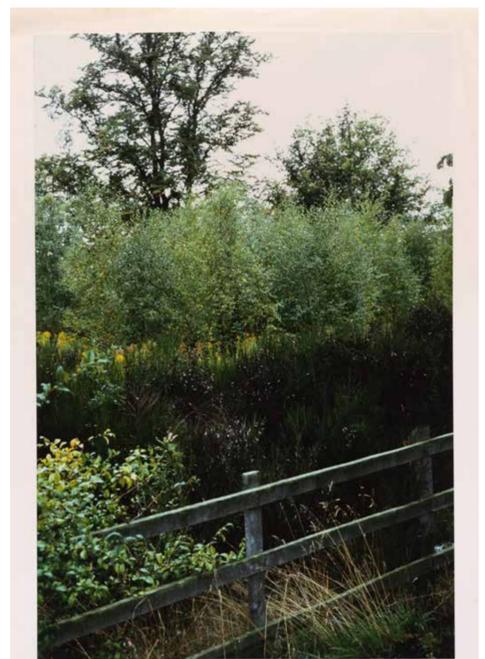
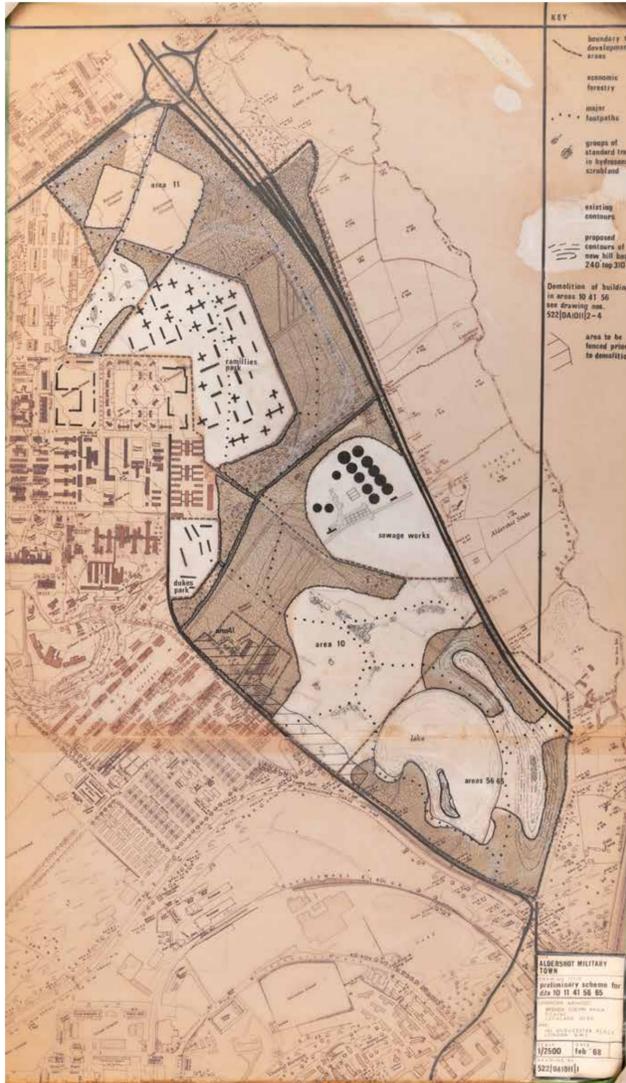


1. Preliminary schemes for development areas, © MERL, AR COL.
2. Natural plantations, © MERL, AR COL.
3. Natural plantations, © MERL, AR COL.
4. Visualisation of hill and lake, © MERL, AR COL.
5. Natural plantations, © MERL, AR COL.
6. Natural plantations, © MERL, AR COL.
7. Natural plantations, © MERL, AR COL.
8. Jaqueline Thrywhitt obituary issue, © Ekistics.
9. Trees for Town and Country, 3rd Edition, © Land Humphries.

The Military Town was also the place where Colvin was able to realise her innovative approach to management and natural regeneration, designing subtle fence lines which contained masses of spontaneous vegetation, in which natural succession could take place. The ground on the exterior of the fence could then be kept neatly mown, ensuring that the required 'order' was maintained.

A significant project within the Military Town was the Hill and Lake Country Park. The project originated with the closing down of town's refuse disposal grounds. The adjacent area to the refuse mound was excavated, creating a lake with nesting islands for birds, used on the long term for recreation. The excavated materials, together with the city waste created the hill. Clay was used to stabilise the hill construction and the rich soil from the lake was used to improve the sandy conditions of the area, allowing a forestry cover to be planted at the hill.

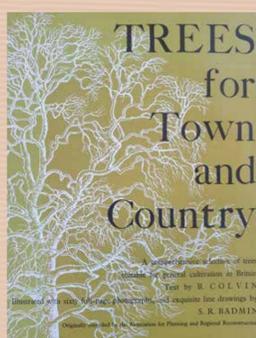
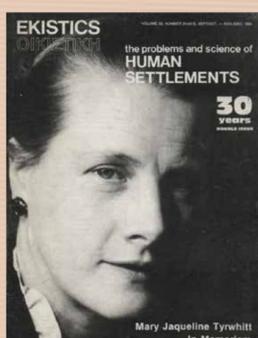
Writing about Aldershot, Moggridge recognised it as one of Colvin's favourite jobs, in which 'the tarmac military town was being converted into a green place, using ecological perception to extract tree growth from derelict parade grounds at minimal cost and finding methods to convert the process of rubbish disposal into the creation of habitats for nature, wooded hill and bird-filled lake.'



ALDERSHOT. An example of natural plantations; the dense woodland keeping maintenance to a minimum. Outside the fence the landscape is normally neat mown grass.

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## JAQUELINE THRYWITT



As Jaqueline Thrywhitt's sister remembered 'My parents were indeed in the unenviable position of being the first in their respective families for many generations to have to equip their daughters to earn their living. Teaching and nursing was considered unsuitable, any association with commerce unthinkable; a great deal of thought was given to the matter and finally it was decided that Jacky should become a Landscape Designer'. However, designing private gardens for wealthy clients was not a career that fulfilled her,

so she decided to study at the London School of Economics, followed by the Technische Hochschule in Berlin and the School of Planning for Regional Development in London. Thrywhitt is most well known for her work as a town planner, journalist, editor and educator. She was at the centre of the CIAM transnational network – and therefore in the heart of the international modern movement in architecture and planning. After the Second World War Thrywhitt worked at the University of Toronto, and at the Harvard Graduate School of

Design. She collaborated with Colvin on a number of initiatives, including creating opportunities to teach landscape architecture, or to train women gardeners, who could not afford tuition fees. Their book, *Trees for Town and Country*, was already in its third edition only two years after the first publication. It described 60 trees suitable for general cultivation in Britain and looked at the various species 'as material for use in landscape composition' rather than describing them in botanical terms.