

THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART

RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK 2014

Beneath the Surface / Hidden Place

A photographic project (2007-10) investigating the physical and emotional effects of economic change and regeneration in Scotland.

Submitted by Nicky Bird
Output No. 1



OUTPUT

This photographic project (2007-10) investigated the physical and emotional effects of economic change and regeneration. This involved close collaboration with individuals and communities across Scotland whose surroundings have undergone significant upheaval - whether caused by a decline in heavy industry, or housing regeneration.

The resulting body of work included 20 digital montages, which deployed two kinds of photographic language in articulating change to place: the family snap, and a contemporary landscape photograph. The contribution to knowledge is embodied, in the first instance, within these images.

Selected examples each have a caption that includes: the name of a collaborator; the location; and two dates. Image and caption together demonstrate a transferable methodology that evokes history within living memory connected to a changed, erased or hidden place.

Title

Beneath the Surface /Hidden Place

Submission No.

Output 1

Authors/Creators

Nicky Bird



Nicky Bird & Mark Scott: Ardler, Dundee. The 'Fieldy', 1973? / Turnberry Avenue, 2007

To view the full series, see Appendices on DVD and publication in the physical portfolio



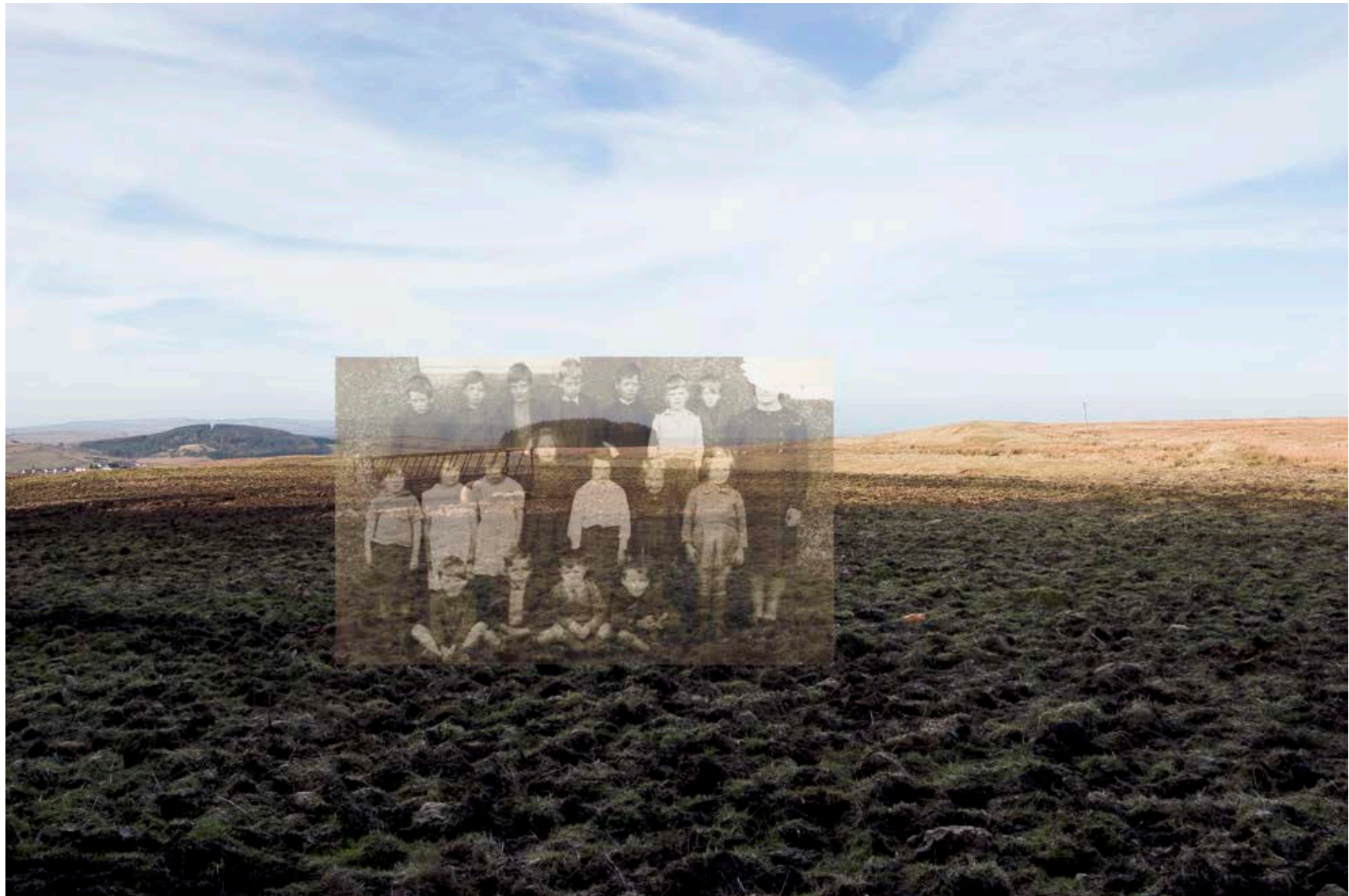
Nicky Bird & Jan McTaggart: Foxbar, Paisley
Back of Annan Drive, 1977? / Back of Springvale Drive, 2007



Nicky Bird & Jan McTaggart: Foxbar, Paisley
Front-garden, 3 Annan Drive, 1978?/ Springvale Drive, 2007



Nicky Bird & Mary Kennedy: Lethanhill, Dunaskin
Middle Pad, Lethanhill, 1930s? / Lethanhill, 2008



Nicky Bird & Mary Kennedy: Lethanhill, Dunaskin
Lethanhill Old School, 1940-1? / Lethanhill, 2008



Nicky Bird & Drew Johnstone: Burnton, Dalmellington
59 Burnton, 1929-30? / 2008



Nicky Bird & Drew Johnstone: Burnton, Dalmellington
59 Burnton, 1937-38? / 2008



Nicky Bird & Anne Park: Dalmellington
Camlarg Gates, 1940 / 2009



Nicky Bird & Lesley Weir: Ardler, Dundee
Multi Park, 1977-78? / Scotsraig Road, 2007



Nicky Bird & Lesley Weir with Martin Peter: Ardler, Dundee
In the Squarey, Rosemount Road, 1973 / Hazelhead, Rosemount Road, 2007



Nicky Bird & Lesley Weir: Ardler, Dundee
Grass Area outside Gleneagles Court, Summer 1972 / Scotsraig Court, 2007



Nicky Bird & Mark Scott: Ardler, Dundee
The 'Fieldy', Summer 1973? / Turnberry Avenue, 2007



Nicky Bird & Alexander Brown: Craigmillar, Edinburgh
Back Green, Back of Niddrie Mains Drive, Summer 1968 / Winter 2007

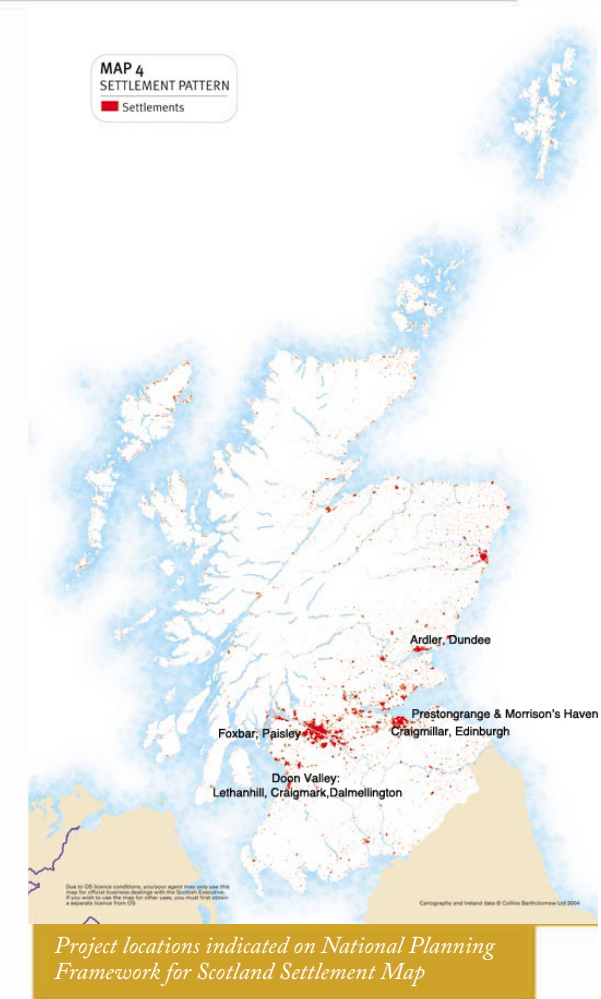
CONTEXT

This project worked in five locations that evidenced either the process of regeneration or abandonment of an area to which a family photograph originally belonged. The context is therefore shaped by discourses surrounding vernacular family photographs and landscape art photography in particular ways. In this case, family photographs have direct relationships to living subjects and personal histories whose physical traces are on the brink of erasure.

This inevitably leads to photography's role in mediating memory (Kuhn & McAllister 2006, Hirsch 1997, Williams 1994) and art practices in which vernacular photographs act as prompts for collaborations (Bäckström & Höller 2005, Mir *Living & Loving* Series 2004, Huyghe & Coupland, 2002). In terms of landscape photography, aesthetic approaches depicting dereliction and 'aftermath' scenes (Doherty 2005, Norfolk 2002, Meyerowitz 2001) have been scrutinized for social implications (Campany 2003, Wells 2011).

The contribution of this output therefore operates across critical fields of photography, engages with debates on the subject of collaboration in other 'socially engaged' art practices, and discourses connected to social and architectural histories largely associated with British working class communities.

In the Scottish context, extensive demolition programmes of social housing have included the Gorbals in Glasgow. This iconic and infamous area has been the subject of social documentary photography (McKenzie 1990, Marzaroli 1987) and more recent artist-led initiatives that address the role of art and place-making in regeneration projects (Warwick 2006). The failure of postwar social housing schemes, the significance of the removal of tenement and tower blocks from Glasgow's landscape has been discussed in terms of 'self-harm' by both architects and architectural historians alike (Fraser 2010, Rodger 2006), which in turn raise further questions relating to memory erasure, urban planning and myth making (Klein [2008] 1998).



CONTEXT

These debates and practices centre on a major city, but are relevant to the locations of *Beneath the Surface / Hidden Place*. For example, the last of six 'multi' tower blocks in Ardler, Dundee, was demolished in June 2007, signalling the final phase of extensive housing regeneration. Initial photography began at this point, and it was clear the collaborators identified this demolition as a physical and psychological landmark, since all had grown up living in multi-storey tower blocks. The names of these buildings form the basis of Ardler's new street names, evidencing how urban planning attempted to retain connections between housing past and present. This was strikingly different from the project's other locations. In Doon Valley, local people refer to remnants as their 'lost villages' of former mining communities; in Foxbar, Paisley, tenement housing was knocked down in the 1990s, replaced with private housing, and streets renamed.

This context, in different ways, asks what visual strategies were needed to avoid certain pitfalls. Willie Doherty's memorable critique (1988) of Paul Graham's depictions of Northern Ireland (1986) makes an important distinction between 'recoding' and 'representing' landscapes, with 'recoding' (in Doherty's case, Northern Ireland) avoiding obvious signs of conflict that photographers 'outside' of location, experience, are likely to depict. Doherty's notion of recoding the landscape offers a self-reflective position for the practitioner-as-outsider.

This leads to the crucial role of collaboration and authorial control in the project's images. The importance of a collaborator's agency as part of the art process is reflected in influential debates within contemporary art (Beech 2008, Bishop 2006) and in new philosophies of photography (University of Warwick's AHRC *Aesthetics After Photography*, 2007-10).



Ardler's last multi-story, June 2007

CONTEXT

In the latter, Dawn Phillips identified how conceptual and post-conceptual artists have valued photography 'in so far as it brackets artistic agency and authorial control.' Other more skeptical voices interrogate the artistic connotations of the terms agency, participation and collaboration. Dave Beech argues how collaborators should more radically 'share authorial rights' and '...make fundamental decisions about key structural features of the work'.

This is demonstrated further in the next section on Methodology. Other critical questions that have emerged - from photographing the erased home to the meaning of the current ubiquity of overlaying the past on the present - are further addressed through a series of key conferences (2009-2013) discussed in the Dissemination section.



Collaborator Jan McTaggart looking for remnant, Foxbar Paisley, 2007

METHODOLOGY

The following sequence of images demonstrates how the project developed a transferable methodology, working directly with collaborators, their family photographs, and specific sites where their original photograph was taken. The sequence concentrates on one collaborator, Jan McTaggart, in Foxbar, Paisley. It shows how under the direction of a collaborator, I re-photographed the place as it stands today. The importance of an insider's memory, knowledge & experience, when looking at a location where all previous reference points have gone, was paramount. The original analogue family photograph was scanned, and now working with this as a digital file, the collaborator would also direct the positioning inside the new landscape image. The resulting digital montages from this methodology, traced the erosion of past realities whilst achieving an unnerving conflation of time and space for viewers. Other methods included archeological approaches to photography, archival research into Ordnance survey maps, press and industrial photography, aspects of social, architectural and oral histories.

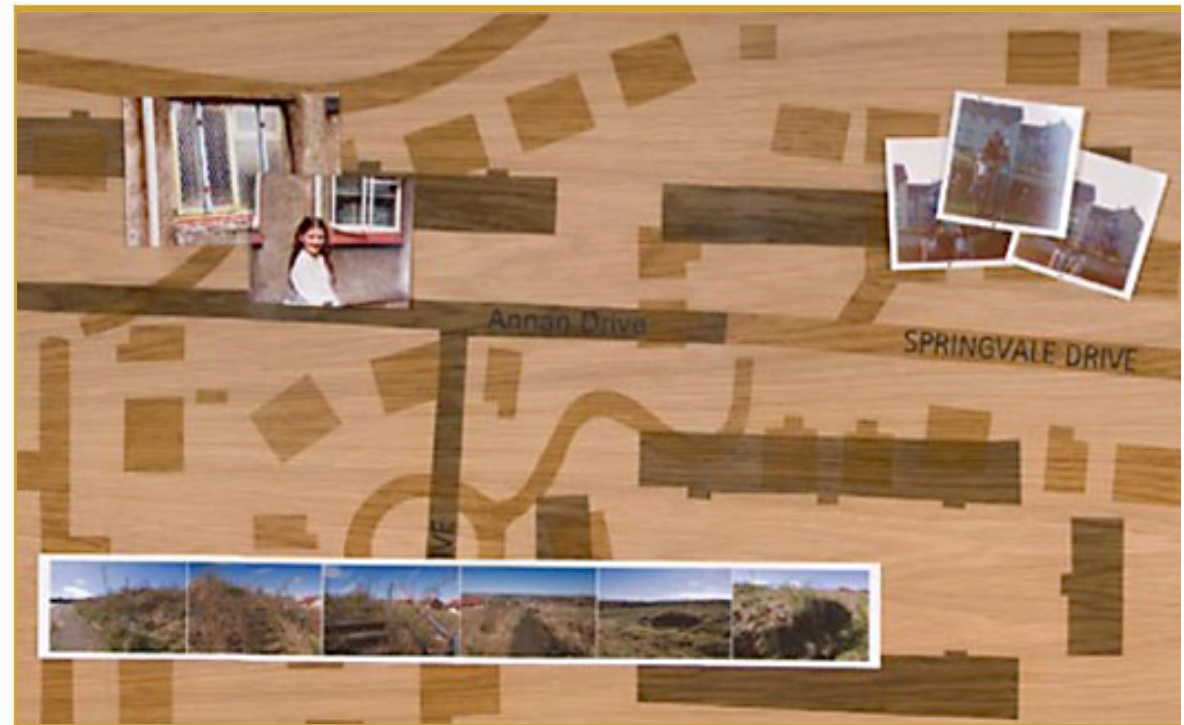


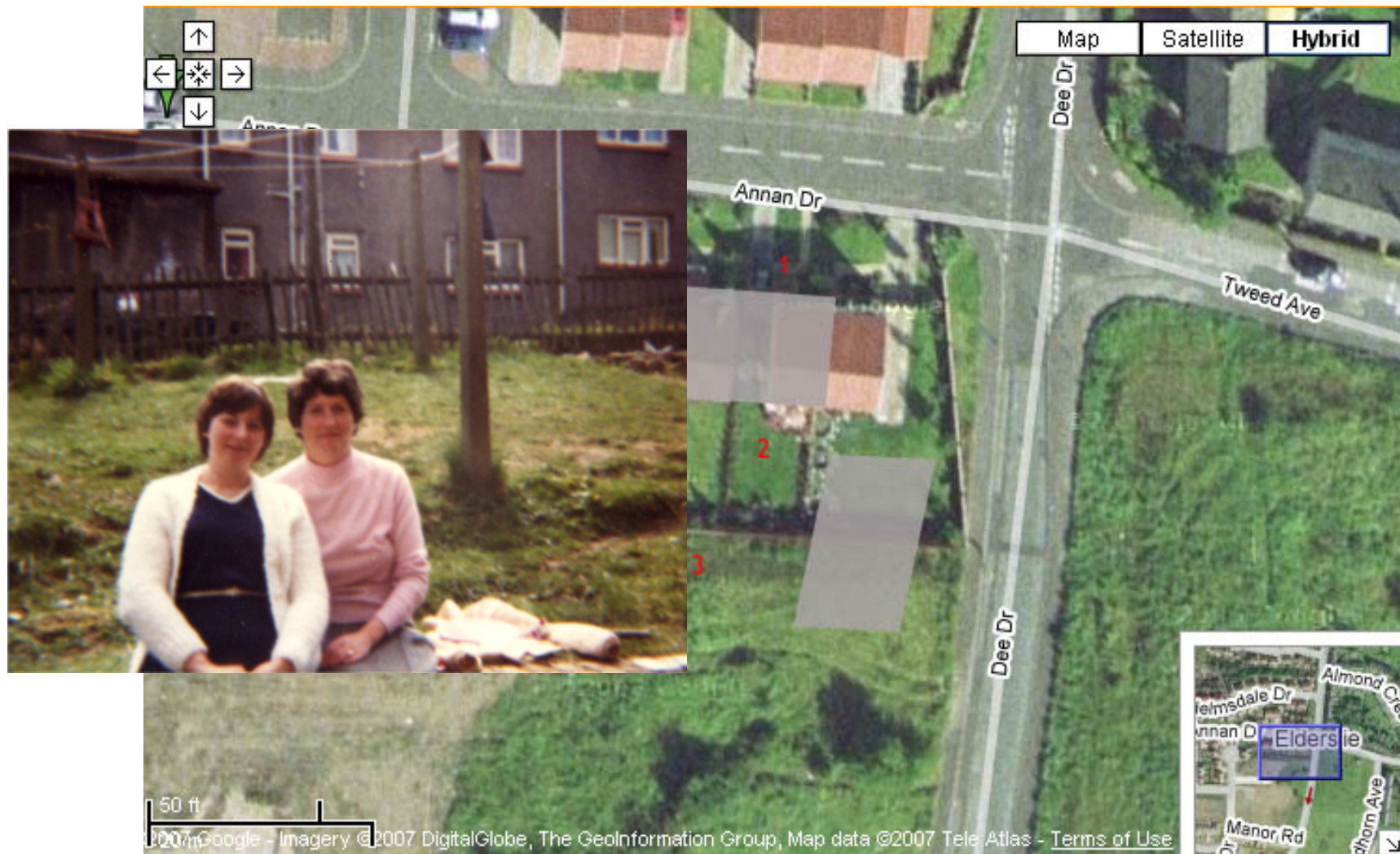
Table Top: Redrawn maps 1992/2006; McTaggart family photos 1978-1992; location images 2007



Jan McTaggart family photos:
Jan as a girl, photographed outside the window of her tenement home, Foxbar, Paisley 1978
Jan's photograph of home pending demolition, 1992
These photographs were discussed at the first meeting in 2007



This image shows a collaborator's attempt to map the past on the present using Google Earth. Jan plotted the old street names along with the new. The grey blocks were her way of working out, from memory where tenement blocks used to be, now in relation to private semi-detached housing.



Using this example of a McTaggart family photograph, this sequence will now move to the Map library, for more detailed information before going on location



Paisley, 1972 and 2006: using maps from the Map Library of Scotland
Jan McTaggart sketched in buildings, backyards into the green space
With this material and her family photographs, we go to the location



Location Photography, Foxbar, Paisley, 2007:
 Selection showing Jan orientating herself, remnants of tenement life and areas of significance photographed under Jan's direction
 Digital SLR camera on tripod , f22 depth of field



Springvale Drive, 2007



Nicky Bird & Jan McTaggart: Foxbar, Paisley
Back-garden, 3 Annan Drive, 1979? / Springvale Drive, 2007

DISSEMINATION

The output has been disseminated through exhibitions, conferences and publications. This section begins with a timeline listing exhibition venues. Stills, Scotland's Centre for Photography, has a reputation for showing work of national and international significance; other venues were prime locations with large and broad audiences relevant to the collaborators. The exhibition tour therefore reflected a strategy to reach a community of interests through a high quality research project. A list of international conferences below indicates how the project's wider questions have been disseminated, from ethical questions raised by collaboration and narratives told informally during the art process (Plymouth, 2009); to questions of belonging and citizenship (Loughborough, 2012), and how Web 2.0 plays a definitive role in the current ubiquity of overlaying the past on the present (New York, 2013). Publication includes a book (Bird, 2010) with selected contributions from collaborators, community advocates, and historians reflecting the project's process.



*Exhibition tour including Stills, Edinburgh, Ardler
Memory Map (detail) & Sited work, 2008–2010*

*Exhibition documentation, conference papers, and
publication: see Appendices in physical portfolio*

DISSEMINATION

Project timeline

2007-2009	Location photography
2007	Awards, Creative & Production Artist: Creative Scotland
2008	Project production
	Awards, major commission: Stills, Creative Scotland
2008	Launch Exhibition
	Stills, Scotland's Centre of Photography, Edinburgh (audience figures of 3,793)
2009	Awards, publication: The Kraszna-Krausz Foundation
2009-10	Touring Exhibition Ninewells Hospital, Dundee (2009)
	Dick Institute, Kilmarnock, East Ayrshire (2009)
	Doon Valley Mining Museum, East Ayrshire (2009-10)
	Installation of site-specific permanent public works
2009	Publication: Ardler Memory Map
	Prestongrange Museum & Morrison's Haven, East Lothian (2010)
2009-2013	Contributions to key international conferences
2010	Publication: <i>Beneath the Surface /Hidden Place</i>
2013	Group Exhibition in conjunction with conference 'Nostalgias - Visualising Longing'
	Normand, Tom. 'Reconfiguring Documentary Photography in a Globalised World: some contemporary projects from Scotland'. In <i>Studies in Photography</i> , pp 48.57



Exhibition tour including community events, workshops and seminars 2008 – 2011

DISSEMINATION

Conference papers, guest lectures & artist talks

- 2009 'Returning home, coming back with questions,' *Framing Time & Place: Repeats & Returns in Photography*, University of Plymouth, Plymouth, April 2009
- 2010 Guest Artist, *The Future in The Past: 3 Artists on High Rise*. CCA, Glasgow, with *The Drouth* and *The Urban Lab*. October 2010
- 'Artist at the listening Post,' *Transmission: Hospitality*, Sheffield Hallam University, July 2010 (paper online, February 2011)
- 2011 'Whither the roots', Seminar event, Stills, Edinburgh, April 2011
- 2012 'Whither the roots: photographing the erased home', *Home/Land: Women, Citizenship, Photographies*, Loughborough University, Loughborough, July 2012
- Guest Lecture, *Between Nature & Culture: Photography as Mediation & Method*
The Photographers' Gallery, London, June 2012
- 2013 'Saw this and thought of you,' *Remembering, Forgetting, Imagining: The Practices of Memory* Fordham University, New York, USA, March 2013
- 'Returning to Sites of Erased Homes'
The Place of Memory, UAAC - AAUC, Banff, Canada, October 2013



DISSEMINATION

Authoried Published Works Relating to the Output

- 2010 *Beneath the Surface /Hidden Place*, **Authoried publication**, edited by Cheryl Connell (Edinburgh: Stills, 2010)
- 2013 'Looking a Gift Horse in the Mouth: Generosity and the Digital Exchange of Family photographs'. In *The Photograph and the Album*. MuseumsEtc., Edinburgh, UK & Cambridge, USA.
- 2014 'Whither the Roots: Photographing the Erased Home.' In *Home/Land: Women, Citizenship, Photographies* edited by Marsha Meskimmon and Marion Arnold, Liverpool University Press (publication in development)

Web Based Media Relating to the Output

<http://www.stills.org/exhibition/past/nicky-bird-beneath-surface-hidden-place>

<http://nickybird.com/projects/beneath-the-surface/>

<http://extra.shu.ac.uk/transmission/papers/BIRD%20Nicky.pdf>

<http://www.stills.org/news/talks-and-events/whither-roots>

<http://www.h-net.org/announce/show.cgi?ID=185580>

<http://stillsgallery.myshopify.com/collections/books/products/nicky-bird>



Beneath the Surface / Hidden Place 2007-2010

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Collaborators: Alexander Brown, Karen Hamilton, Drew Johnstone, Mary Kennedy, Jan McTaggart & George McTaggart, Anne Park, Martin Peter, Mark Scott and Lesley Weir

Community Advocates: Alastair MacLeod & the Ardler Village Trust; Mike Greenlaw, Craigmillar Arts Centre; Elaine Mackie, Doon Valley Mining Museum, East Ayrshire Council; Biddy Simpson & Kate Maynard, Museums & Heritage, East Lothian Council; Dr Melanie Johnson & Dr Mike Cressey of CFA Archaeology Ltd;

Production Support: ~ *in-the-fields*; Stephen Jackson; Mark Morris of A&M Imaging Services, Colin Parker, all Stills staff including Deirdre MacKenna, Kirsten Lloyd, Cheryl Connell, and Evan Thomas.

Residents of Ardler, Burnton, Dalmellington, and Foxbar.

Individuals for their critical insights: Pamela Brown, Mary Currie, Glyn Davis, Malcolm Dobson, Iain Frame, Laura Gonzalez, Rod Gordon, Arabella Harvey, Joanna Kane, Rosemary Lloyd, Gordon Laurie, Brian MacDonald, Hugh McGhee, Bill McLoughlin, Janet Martin, Anita Mulder, Christina Pieraccini, Alec Ralton, Gary Robertson, Graham Robinson; Peter Ross, Stanley Sarsfield, Ellen Searle, David Stott, Damian Sutton, Karol Swanson, Diane Sykes, Kate Wimpers, John Yeoman, and Yvonne Young.

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