

## Thatcher's Progress

During the quarter of a century after the Second World War, the United Kingdom designated thirty-two new towns across England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Why, even before selling council houses or denationalising public industries, did Margaret Thatcher's government begin to privatise these new towns? By examining the most ambitious of these projects, Milton Keynes, Guy Ortolano recasts our understanding of British social democracy, arguing that the new towns comprised the spatial dimension of the welfare state. Following the Prime Minister's progress on a tour through Milton Keynes on 25 September 1979, Ortolano alights at successive stops to examine the broader histories of urban planning, modernist architecture, community development, international consulting, and municipal housing. Thatcher's journey reveals a dynamic social democracy during its decade of crisis, while also showing how public sector actors begrudgingly accommodated the alternative priorities of market liberalism.

GUY ORTOLANO is an Associate Professor of History at New York University. He serves as an editor of *Twentieth Century British History*, and is also the author of *The Two Cultures Controversy: Science, Literature, and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge, 2009).

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-48266-0 — Thatcher's Progress  
Guy Ortolano  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-48266-0 — Thatcher's Progress  
Guy Ortolano  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

*Modern British Histories*

Series Editors:

Deborah Cohen, *Northwestern University*

Margot Finn, *University College London*

Peter Mandler, *University of Cambridge*

'Modern British Histories' publishes original research monographs drawn from the full spectrum of a large and lively community of modern historians of Britain. Its goal is to keep metropolitan and national histories of Britain fresh and vital in an intellectual atmosphere increasingly attuned to, and enriched by, the transnational, the international and the comparative. It will include books that focus on British histories within the UK and that tackle the subject of Britain and the world inside and outside the boundaries of formal empire from 1750 to the present. An indicative – not exclusive – list of approaches and topics that the series welcomes includes material culture studies, modern intellectual history, gender, race and class histories, histories of modern science and histories of British capitalism within a global framework. Open and wide-ranging, the series will publish books by authoritative scholars, at all stages of their career, with something genuinely new to say.

A complete list of titles in the series can be found at:  
[www.cambridge.org/modernbritishhistories](http://www.cambridge.org/modernbritishhistories)



# Thatcher's Progress

*From Social Democracy to Market Liberalism  
through an English New Town*

---

Guy Ortolano

*New York University*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-48266-0 — Thatcher's Progress  
Guy Ortolano  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India

79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108482660](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108482660)

DOI: 10.1017/9781108697262

© Guy Ortolano 2019

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2019

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ International Ltd. Padstow Cornwall

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Ortolano, Guy, author.

Title: Thatcher's progress : from social democracy to market liberalism through an English new town / Guy Ortolano, New York University.

Description: New York : Cambridge University Press, 2019. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018059146 | ISBN 9781108482660 (alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Milton Keynes (England) – History. | New towns – England – Case studies. | City planning – England – Case studies. | Great Britain – Economic policy – 1979–1997.

Classification: LCC HT169.57.G72 M556 2019 | DDC 307.76/80942–dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018059146>

ISBN 978-1-108-48266-0 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-48266-0 — Thatcher's Progress  
Guy Ortolano  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

*For Jenny*

Truly, if I had been mindful of that country from whence I came out,  
I might have had opportunity to have returned; but now I desire a  
better country ....

John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*



Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> x
<i>List of Maps</i>	xii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
Introduction	1
1 Horizons	32
2 Planning	69
3 Architecture	108
4 Community	143
5 Consulting	184
6 Housing	212
7 Conclusion	253
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	264
<i>Index</i>	294

Figures

1.1 Plan of North Bucks New City. From the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies collections.	<i>page 36</i>
1.2 Model of North Bucks New City. From the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies collections.	48
1.3 View from the monorail. Drawing by Bill Berrett. From the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies collections.	49
2.1 Jock Campbell. Photograph by Godfrey Argent (1969). © National Portrait Gallery, London.	82
2.2 Richard Llewelyn-Davies. Courtesy of Llewelyn Davies Weeks Ltd.	88
2.3 The Plan for Milton Keynes. Produced by Llewelyn-Davies Weeks Forestier-Walker & Bor on behalf of Milton Keynes Development Corporation (1970). From the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies collections.	104
3.1 Housing at Beanhill, Milton Keynes. Photograph by John Donat (1975). RIBA Collections: RIBA 288894.	111
3.2 Balfron Tower, Poplar, London (1965). RIBA Collections: RIBA 3514-62.	117
3.3 Fishermead, Milton Keynes. Drawing by Helmut Jacoby (c.1974). From the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies collections.	118
3.4 Housing at Netherfield, Milton Keynes. Photograph by John Donat (1975). Architectural Press Archive/RIBA Collections: RIBA 63993.	122
3.5 Housing at Great Linford, Milton Keynes. Photograph by John Walker (1979). From the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies collections.	141
4.1 Community in Milton Keynes. Drawing by Peter Hutton. From the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies collections.	164
4.2 Liz Leyh. From the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies collections.	169

List of Figures	xi
4.3 <i>Netherfield News</i> (1976). From the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies collections.	176
5.1 Prince Khalid al-Faisal of Saudi Arabia, with Frank Henshaw of MKDC (1981/1982). From the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies collections.	207
6.1 Margaret Thatcher with the King family, Galley Hill, Milton Keynes. Photograph by Keystone / Hutton Archive / Getty Images (1979).	213
7.1 <i>Mahood's Map of Milton Friedman New Town</i> . By Kenneth Mahood. <i>Punch</i> Magazine Cartoon Archive.	258

# Maps

---

*Produced by Blackmer Maps; copyright rests with the author.*

Frontispiece: Margaret Thatcher’s progress through Milton Keynes, 25 September 1979	
1 New towns in the United Kingdom	<i>page 7</i>
2 International consultancies of Milton Keynes Development Corporation	187

## Acknowledgments

---

This book about planning began accidentally. In January 2010, at the suggestion of Mark Clapson, I visited the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies in Aylesbury. I was researching the county's plan to build a monorail city and, while awaiting some files, asked the archivists whether they had anything on new towns. They shared a wry look, before offering a jovial, if cryptic, reference to "Strong Room 5." Strong Room 5, it turned out, holds the records of Milton Keynes Development Corporation, the agency responsible for building Milton Keynes from 1967 to 1992. It represents, in my estimation, the best new town archive – and one of the best planning archives – anywhere in Britain. To the archivists' knowledge, no historian had ever worked through the collection – and, consequently, its hundreds of boxes and thousands of documents lacked any index. This did not prevent me from badgering the staff to dig around for more on, say, that visit from Thailand's housing minister, but for the most part I learned to accept whatever Strong Room 5 offered each day. The collection has since been indexed, twice. My footnotes refer to the first of these indices, since superseded, but the citations remain legible. In the years since my first visit, the Centre has endured painful cuts, a blow to the residents who arrive daily to learn more about their families, their properties, and their communities. Nevertheless, today this remarkable archive supports the work of ever-more urban historians, a tribute not only to its contents, but also to its keepers. I am indebted to the staff who aided me these past eight years, including Roger Bettridge, Laura Cotton, Lisa Edwards, Sally Mason, June Wailing, and, especially, the heroic Chris Low.

Milton Keynes has its critics, of course, but I am painfully aware that, in the time it has taken me to write this book, this book's subjects built a city. True, they could draw on a staff more than a thousand strong, but I'm certain that I've enjoyed nearly as much help. This project had its origins at Washington University in St. Louis, where Nancy Reynolds introduced me to urban history. At the University of Virginia, Paul Halliday saw something in the subject, Allan Megill gave me James Holston's book on

xiv Acknowledgments

Brasília, Alon Confino pulled my reading beyond Britain, and I regret not having been able to stay for many more lunches with Krishan Kumar. At NYU, a purportedly impersonal place, I am lucky in my colleagues, including – to name only those who read drafts – Karl Appuhn, Tom Bender, Herrick Chapman, Stéphane Gerson, Martha Hodes, Julie Livingston, Andrew Needham, Molly Nolan, Kim Phillips-Fein, Andrew Sartori, John Shovlin, and Danny Walkowitz. Financial support was provided by a Franklin Research Grant from the American Philosophical Association, a Bernadotte E. Schmitt Grant from the American Historical Association, and a Charles A. Ryskamp Fellowship from the ACLS. Wash U funded an exploratory research trip, and NYU has unfailingly provided releases and leaves. I want to particularly thank my deans and chairs at NYU, who still understand their jobs as facilitating faculty research: especially Joanna Waley-Cohen, Barbara Weinstein, David Ludden, and Joy Connolly.

My arguments have been sharpened through seminars at Harvard, Cambridge, Northwestern, Leicester, King's College London, Columbia (twice), and NYU; for these invitations, I thank Jim Cronin, Peter Mandler, Deborah Cohen, Simon Gunn, David Edgerton, Susan Pedersen, and Martha Hodes. I benefited from colleagues' responses at two meetings of the North American Conference on British Studies, in Baltimore (2010) and Washington DC (2016). I had the privilege of delivering conference keynote lectures at Fordham, Leicester, and KCL; for these invitations, I thank Rosemary Wakeman, Simon Gunn, and David Edgerton. And once the book was drafted, I received invaluable feedback as Astor Visiting Lecturer at Oxford. I am indebted to the Astor Travel Fund, the Faculty of History, the Architectural History Seminar, the Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (TORCH), and St. John's College; Elizabeth Darling, John Davis, Matthew Grimley, and Otto Saumarez Smith; and, most of all, my host – one of the finest architectural historians working today – William Whyte.

I regret that I cannot name all of the friends and colleagues who have helped me in various ways, but I must salute those who offered written feedback: Tim Alborn, Bonnie Anderson, Nick Beech, Tom Cordiner, Greg Downs, Jason Freitag, James Greenhalgh, Ben Jackson, Peter Jones, Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, Jon Lawrence, Stuart Middleton, Hannah Neate, Victor Pickard, Gayle Rogers, Andrew Seaton, Robert Travers, Judy Walkowitz, and Sam Wetherell. I have learned an enormous amount from graduate students at NYU and in the New York–Cambridge Training Collaboration (NYCTC), including Ademide Adelusi-Adeluyi, Anna Danziger Halperin, Roslyn Dubler, Alma Igra, Lynton Lees, Daniel London, Nicole Longpré, Laura Quinton, Emily

Rutherford, Andrew Seaton, and Divya Subramanian. I have tried not to burden longtime advisors and friends with (too much of) this project, but I continually learn from – and am challenged by – David Edgerton, Peter Mandler, Susan Pedersen, and Larry Wolff. Alas, that rule did not keep me from cornering Ken Alder for much advice during his visits to New York. While writing, I indulged the on-demand answer services of John Gold, Simon Gunn, Peter Mandler, Otto Saumarez Smith, and Lee Shostak. And most special thanks to those who read the entire manuscript: Deborah Cohen, Otto Saumarez Smith, and Kirk Willis. The involvement of Kirk and Deborah ensures that this book, like its author, is at least partly a product of Georgia and Northwestern.

If planners rely upon infrastructure and hope for community, I've been lucky in both. Peter and Chris May keep me returning annually to south London. Rob and Arden Marshall run the best accommodation in Aylesbury, the Malt House; Rob doubles as an editor, and meticulously read the penultimate text. An early conversation with Michael Synnott at the Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre suggested that there might be a book here; when I still wasn't certain, Peter Stansky reassured me with a shrug of his shoulders: "Why not?" Mark Clapson gave me my first tour around Milton Keynes, sharing his peerless knowledge of the city's history and archives. Iqbal Aalam, whose Flickr page on modernist architecture has justly achieved cult status, offered insights on Milton Keynes's early buildings on another tour. Seth Sethna loaned me his bicycle, so that I could undertake my own journeys through MK; thanks, too, to Seth's wife, Janet Maybin, of the Open University, and to Sam Wetherell for putting us in touch. Lauren Piko generously answered several questions about Liz Leyh. Mike Teitz shared his memories of Mel Webber. And three veterans of Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) offered me their hospitality, their memories, and even their papers: the late Bill Berrett, Tim Skelton, and Lee Shostak. Lee, in particular, has been a model of collegiality. I know he will not agree with all of these arguments, and anyone interested in Milton Keynes from the perspective of one its most significant makers will want to read his forthcoming book.

At Cambridge University Press, it has been a pleasure to work with Michael Watson, Liz Friend-Smith, and Abigail Walkington; thanks, too, to my copyeditor, Carol Fellingham Webb, and to the press's entire production team. To the press's readers, still anonymous: I appreciate the care that you took, and did my best to respond to each critique. Kate Blackmer produces the best maps in the business. For help affording images, I thank the Leonard Hastings Schoff Publication Fund of the University Seminars at Columbia – and Alma Igra, who alerted me to this resource. All quotations from papers produced by MKDC officers are

xvi      Acknowledgments

reproduced by permission of the Homes and Communities Agency; all quotations from papers produced by Buckinghamshire county officers are reproduced by permission of the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (CBS). Still more thanks to Chris Low, for reproducing the images from the CBS collections. Thanks, too, to the librarians and archivists who facilitated my work at the Bancroft Library, Berkeley; Bartlett Library, UCL; Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge; Milton Keynes Central Library; and the Schlesinger Library, Harvard. At Churchill, I particularly appreciated the enthusiastic assistance of Andrew Riley. A version of Chapter 1 appeared as “Planning the Urban Future in 1960s Britain,” *The Historical Journal* 54 (2011): 477–507; I am grateful to the editors, and to Cambridge University Press, for permission to reprint.

Books mark time. Since I began this project, my Ph.D. advisor and friend, Bill Heyck, passed away. I wish he were here now to say something devastating about devoting a decade to unpacking a morning. More happily, Annika and Sam arrived. They claim to want to see their names in a book, despite striving mightily to forestall its writing. This book is dedicated to my wife, Jenny Mann, with whom I share everything, including a distaste for cloying dedications.