

Prospection 03 – James Dixon

A Visual Archaeology of Construction, continued and revised

Prospection 03 afforded me the opportunity to revisit my work from the previous year in which I attempted to put aside my urge to document and instead to allow the site to dictate to me what a visual archaeology of it ought to be. That year I came up with a series of themes for the archaeological interpretation of a construction site based on what I saw wandering around it, i.e. a site-responsive archaeology that did not reply on trying to accomplish preconceived documentary tasks.

This year I wanted to see what had happened to my 2016 idea. Before I went to Eddington, I assumed that now the site was at least partially inhabited, my construction phase themes would have been replaced with a series of new ones for this new period of use. That was not quite the case. Much of what I had seen in 2016 remained, although now differently configured or touching on new interpretive contexts. Importantly, this gives a new temporal dynamism to archaeological interpretation of the site, as in the fates of the 2016 themes and the discovery of new themes in 2017, we can start to discern processes of atrophy, development, replacement, persistence, arrival and more of onsite phenomena.

The following phenomena were observed during *Prospection 03*.

ACCESS



There are still signs everywhere, only now there are even more and they are confused.

Directions for workers remain, now interspersed with signs for the public. Some of these will remain, street signs and so on. But we also have temporary signs to destinations that have not yet acquired permanent signage, or even for places that do not exist yet.

It is so new that many visitors do not know where to go. Eddington is not yet familiar. And so access continues to be highly directed. Muscle memory will come in time.

BARRIERS



Barriers are again everywhere. They still frame many of our views of the site. Yet now they mark the difference between what is now and what is to come. Barriers surround compounds, but they also surround ongoing works in public spaces, bits of landscape that exist but on which we are not yet allowed to walk.

There is a difference between the acceptable barrier – that which cuts us off from the obviously dangerous – and the barrier that seems entirely arbitrary. Works completed yet the barrier not removed. Barrier erected yet the works not begun.

There will never be no barriers.

COMPOUND



Compounds dot the public space, to varying degrees hidden. In some places the compound is visible and works within open to see, history being made. Other compounds are hidden, behind 'finished' frontages or even behind 'camouflage' netting.

It is no secret that Eddington is not yet finished, but the coexistence of the public spaces and the work compounds marks a distinct point in time.

The public spaces are largely populated by people from the compounds, released for breaks.

Two populations, two mutually exclusive landscapes, they cross over outside Sainsbury.

IDYLL



There is an overlap with the Construction Pastoral of 2016.

Small spaces, moments of 'done', 'calm', 'nice', clean'.

Parts of the development are finished and look it, with no easy-to-find trace of construction.

A temporary idyll was created for a recent open day, but now we are back to business as usual.

However, idyllic nodes remain. They feel calm. Are they standing out because of their completedness in the present, or because, among the ongoing making, they allude to the future, implying amid the relative chaos that it will all be ok?

IMMINENT



So near and yet so far! The physical completion of a thing does not guarantee it is ready for use.

We see things in the landscape and yet we cannot touch them, paths we are not allowed to walk, bins we cannot use.

The result can be clunky. It looks like we're waiting for an opening moment and yet the opening moment has already passed.

Eddington will come online slowly.

NEW! OPEN!



Of course everything is new, Eddington is new.

As well as the signs declaring shops open, we see other signs of newness. In the post-graduate centre, heaters and kitchen appliances still sit next to their boxes, enjoying their first use.

Nobody has yet used the whiteboard.

PALETTE



In 2016, hi-vis things stood out because of the general dustiness and muted colours of the construction site.

In 2017 they stand out because of the intentionally soft palette of the new development.

The browns, greys, greens contrast with adverts, safety gear, people's clothes and the bright blue sky.

PEOPLE



One of the most obvious differences about the site in 2017 is the arrival of 'civilians'. Literally moving in as we arrived, the site is suddenly home to people from all over the world.

The site was always about people of course, but in the controlled, day to day way of the construction industry.

The people on site are not controlled by inductions and HSSE regulations. The people on site will behave in ways we don't expect.

PRIVACY



With people comes ownership and the cutting off of access to those who do not meet certain criteria. They can be observed through cracks, over walls and, occasionally, by trespassing.

SEEPAGE



Before, seepage marked an end point and a relaxing of maintenance regimes. Now it marks accidents or a lack of care. But we also see new seepage. Bits of before coming to light. Weeds growing through paving bricks. Rubbish collecting underneath the benches outside Sainsbury.

Seepage was a natural degradation, not it is, perhaps, the reclamation of Eddington by the outside world.

TRACE



The real archaeology of construction. Marks of what was before. Traces of the construction phase living on in the new, finished spaces. The marks in a parking bay of a long-sat pile of Heras fencing, the street cleaning vehicle still working its route, bits of the packing still left on the stairwells of the postgraduate centre.

UNEARTHED



Things are already being dug up. This is exciting.

VIEWING CONSTRUCTION



Now that Eddington has inhabited, built spaces, construction becomes something that happens outside.

One of the most striking phenomena of 2017 was the viewing of construction from inside warm, used, populated spaces.

Construction is elsewhere. It is spoiling the view.

Wipe your feet before coming in, we have brand new carpets.