Urbanwords

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Urbanwords is a project with the ambitious aim of recording the meanings and tracking the development of the words we use to talk and write about our urban environment. Its ground-breaking 500-page book *The Dictionary of Urbanism* (Cowan, 2005) has been hailed as the standard reference on urban design, planning, regeneration and the culture of cities. Since its publication in 2005, the Urbanwords project has continued to add entries, many of which have been posted on the free-to-access online supplement (www.citydefined.com).

Urban Design and Planning's Urbanwords column appears in each issue, presenting some of the terms being added to the online supplement. Readers are invited to contribute their own additions or amendments (contributors will be acknowledged). Please send them to rob@urbandesignskills.com.

Follow Rob Cowan on Twitter (@cowanrob) to receive an urban word-of-the-day.

Big Arch St Louis, Missouri, nicknamed after the Gateway Arch.

blockhead A person committed to reviving the art of wood-block paving. A group of people who restored Chicago's last complete wood block alley (originally constructed in 1909) in 2011 gave themselves this name.

bowellism Exposing elements such as a building's services (such as heating and ventilation), stairs and lifts on its exterior. The Pompidou Centre in Paris, designed by Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano, and completed in 1977, and Rogers' Lloyd's Building in London, completed in 1986, are famous examples.

bubble city Champaign, Illinois, nicknamed after the wine for which it is a homonym. The place name Champaign comes from the French word meaning open, level country.

bullshit city Washington DC, pre-eminent city of politics.

capital of America London in the colonial days of the mid-eighteenth century, in the words of Julie Flavell's 2011 book *When London was the Capital of America*.

Cheap Hardly Effective Virtually Runs on Luck Every Time A jocular backformation for a Chevrolet vehicle.

city of three spires Coventry, West Midlands. The three spires are St Michael's, Christchurch (the ruined cathedral, whose spire survives), Greyfriars, Christchurch (where the spire has

survived the destruction of two churches) and Holy Trinity, Lichfield, Staffordshire, whose cathedral has three spires, has a Three Spires Shopping Centre.

democratic conservation Conserving ordinary buildings from the past, such as workhouses and working-class housing, rather than buildings such as stately homes.

double deuce Route 22, USA.

double-decant To move residents out of their homes prior to making improvements, and back again afterwards.

eco-tage Sabotaging industrial equipment and infrastructure to protect the environment. Also known as monkey wrenching, the activity is described in Edward Abbey's 1975 novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang*.

ghost town Casper, Wyoming, nicknamed after the cartoon character Casper the Friendly Ghost.

granny lane (US) The far right (slow) lane of a highway.

guitar town (also music town) Nashville, Tennessee.

hair-shirt architecture Buildings designed to be efficient in their use of resources rather than attractive.

hammer lane (US) The far left (fast) lane of a highway.

hippocampus 1 An area of the brain thought to be associated with finding routes between places. A study at University College London in 2000 showed that part of the hippocampus was larger in taxi drivers than in the general population. The hippocampus (a Latin word derived from the Greek for a seahorse, whose shape it resembles) is one of the few parts of the brain that can grow new brain cells. **2** A jocular term for a university campus where a large proportion of the students are obese.

human microphone (also human megaphone and people's mike) A method of amplifying a speech or announcement at a public demonstration by people surrounding the speaker repeating his or her words in unison line by line.

inherited character Organisers of public consultation about what people regard as *historic character* sometimes use this term on the grounds that it is less likely to lead to people excluding characteristics that they associate with the past 100 years.

juice (US street talk) Street credibility; the ability to get things done.

Little Chicago A nickname for the area of slum housing with a reputation for violence in central Sheffield that was replaced by the modernist Park Hill development.

lost wages Las Vegas, Nevada, jokily nicknamed after a common consequence of gambling.

Madin, John (1924–2012) Architect. He designed many buildings (many of them in brutalist style) in Birmingham, West Midlands, in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. His practice planned the new town of Telford, Shropshire.

managed decline The process of planning for population decline. In 1981, following riots in Liverpool's Toxteth area, Chancellor of the Exchequer Geoffrey Howe privately criticised the government's plans for additional public spending to stabilise inner city areas. 'Isn't this pumping water uphill?' he wrote confidentially to cabinet colleague Michael Heseltine. 'Should we go rather for "managed decline"? This is not a term for use, even privately. It is much too negative, when it must imply a sustained effort to absorb Liverpool manpower elsewhere'.

mathematical tiles Used on the elevations of timber-framed buildings, particularly in the eighteenth century in Sussex and Kent, to give the impression of brickwork.

mews (plural mews or mewses) **1** A short dead-end street. **2** A street or yard of stabling, often now converted to housing, garages or other uses. **3** A house in a mews street. The word originally meant a place where birds were kept. When the royal stables were built on the site of the royal hawk mews at Charing Cross in London, the term transferred to them, and in turn to any group of stables.

micro-urban community (US) A population centre of up to 250 000 people that has highly uncommon desirable attributes normally exclusively associated with much larger metropolitan centres.

Mohenjo-daro (literally Mound of the Dead) A former city, now an archeological site, in Sindh, Pakistan. Built around 2600 BC with a planned layout based on a grid of streets, Mohenjo-daro was abandoned around 1800 BC and rediscovered in 1922. With a population of around 35 000 residents, it was one of the largest settlements of the ancient Indus Valley civilisation. It is a UNESCO world heritage site.

multi-planet living Using resources and imposing an urban footprint at a rate that, if widely followed, would require the resources of more than one planet Earth.

Opzoomeren Groups of people who organise community activities and neighbourhood improvements. The Opzoomeren movement began in Rotterdam's Opzoomer Street (named after

the philosopher Cornelis Willem Opzoomer, 1821–1892) in 1994. It involved more than one in 10 of the people of Rotterdam in the next few years, spreading to other Dutch cities and beyond, including Denmark.

penny-ruled pointing Brickwork pointed so that the mortar is flush with the faces of the bricks, except for a groove of the thickness of a coin (2–3 mm) along the centre. This makes a colour-washed wall look as though the bricks have been tightly laid.

playful landscape A place that is suitable for children's play, as well as accommodating other uses. Such places are sometimes advocated as an alternative to children's playgrounds on the one hand, and places where children are unsafe or unwelcome on the other.

range anxiety The feeling experienced by the driver of an electric car who fears that the battery will run down before reaching the destination.

road pizza (US) Roadkill; an animal that has been run over and looks something like a pizza.

roading (New Zealand) Providing roads.

rubbed brick A soft red brick that has been sawn and ground ('rubbed') to make it the right shape to form part of a high-quality gauged brick arch in a building elevation. The arch's rubbed bricks (also known as rubbers) would be joined by very fine joints of lime putty.

shaketown Los Angeles, nicknamed after its earthquakes.

site-driven development That whose form is determined by the characteristics of the site itself, rather than other factors.

REFERENCES

- Abbey E (1975) *The Monkey Wrench Gang*.
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Flavell J (2011) *When London was the Capital of America*.

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