The Burnley Dog War: The Politics of Dog-Walking and the Battle over Public Parks in Post-Industrial Britain

Abstract

This article investigates controversies surrounding dog walking and dog fouling in 1970s and early 1980s Britain, focusing on the microhistory of a series of events in a Lancashire mill town that became known as the ‘Burnley Dog War.’ A ban on dog walkers from Burnley’s main public parks triggered a highly publicised seven-year struggle over access. On one level, the park ban served as a rallying cry for dog lovers across Britain, widening the dividing line between dog owners and dog haters. On another level, it constituted a struggle between antagonists over questions of belonging and exclusion in a town devastated by large-scale deindustrialisation. The dog war stimulated combatants to interrogate the nature and quality of their townscape and their sense of civic identity, the analysis of which allows scrutiny of the impact of deindustrialisation upon their sense of self and place. During the conflict, various aspects of the town’s economic history, civic traditions, and landscapes, were alternately disavowed, recovered, rearticulated and contested in relation to its post-industrial present. As it will be shown, the Burnley dispute over dog walking and dog fouling serves as a lens for exploring post-industrial fractiousness along class lines.

In 1982, a House of Lords committee inquiring into the decision to exclude dogs from a number of public parks in the northern English town of Burnley asked Mavis Thornton, a social worker, mother and dog walker, whether she considered dog faeces to be out of place in
such spaces. Thornton, who was speaking on behalf of dog walkers affected by the ban, replied as follows:

I never used to notice it [dog dirt] was a nuisance. It is no different from going in the country and seeing that sheep have done something or a cow. It is also part of nature. You did not notice it. But you notice it now. It has become so that if a dog does something in Burnley everybody notices it.¹

The committee’s deliberations—one of two parliamentary inquiries into the legality of the Burnley park dog bans—were part of a larger sequence of events, from direct action in the town to a hearing in the High Court, which were swiftly dubbed the ‘Burnley Dog War’. Although few readers of this article are likely to be aware of these events, they are far from forgotten in the town itself, where all but one of the public park bans remain in force. The retention of the ban testifies to the intensity of the conflict that earned Burnley the reputation of ‘Britain’s most anti-dog town’.² The Burnley Dog War enacted a clash between two competing notions of human culture: on the one hand, the assertion of the right to own and walk dogs and, on the other, the defence of the right to preserve the attractiveness and cleanliness of parkland. In this article I critically explore how dogs’ toiletry habits disrupted the potential harmony between these two cultures, when various townspeople came to believe that dog faeces in parks could no longer be reconciled with civic pride.

Two features of the Dog War require particular attention to appreciate the exceptionality of this episode. First, the conflict symbolized the high-water mark of a public-health panic about the perceived threat posed by canine excrement to child health, through the spread of the *Toxocara canis* worm. Responding to widespread public concerns, councils across the country made strident attempts to prevent the accumulation of dog faeces in parks by banishing dogs from these public spaces, at once calling into question the very status of the dog as a companion animal, and the right of owners to walk their canine partners in public space. Yet what is of special significance is that this panic did not succeed in transforming the country’s public parks into dog-free zones: across Britain, with the exception of the aforementioned Lancashire town, parkland remained open to dogs. Secondly, to twenty-first-century eyes, the decision to ban dogs from entire parks may seem extreme, as many dog walkers today pick up their canine companions’ excrement, whether in the street or parks, making it easier for humans

¹ Burnley Library Archives (hereafter, BLA), P.51, Minutes of evidence taken before the Committee on the County of Lancashire Bill, House of Lords, 17th, 18th, 21st and 25th June, 1982, 9 volumes. Evidence of Marvis Thornton, vol. 9, 10.

² Polly Toynbee, *Guardian*, 9 January 1978, 9.
and dogs to cohabit the same public spaces. At that time, however, few self-respecting dog walkers in Burnley—or indeed any other British town or city—would have crossed the dirt/pollution boundary to ‘scoop the poop’ in public parks or anywhere else; nor were they required to do so by local government authorities. In other words, no one was held responsible for cleaning up after their dogs.

Dog-human history is a reasonably developed subfield in the emerging historiography of animals. There has not yet been a systematic historical study of the significance of British discourses of dog dirt, nor of the rise and fall of past regimes of canine waste management. Perhaps the closest parallel to this study’s interest in exploring public contests over the status of dogs in the public sphere is seen in nineteenth-century studies of the conceptualization and risk management of rabies. Of particular significance is Philip Howell’s *At Home and Ashtray: The Domestic Dog in Victorian Britain*, a pioneering study of the cultural domestication of the dog within Victorian culture. Howell explores the creation of the ‘dog-walking city’, which he claims appeared towards the end of a Victorian period living under the shadow of rabies. As Howell explains, the ‘domestication’ of late-Victorian urban space was achieved through the public spectacle of dogs being dutifully exercised on leashes, thereby challenging ideas about the dangers of dogs in public space, communicating middle-class

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3 Kathleen Kete, *The Beast in the Boudoir: Pet Keeping in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley, 1995); Philip Howell, *At Home and Ashtray: the Domestic Dog in Victorian Britain* (Charlottesville and London, 2015); Chris Pearson, ‘Between Instinct and Intelligence: Harnessing Police Dog Agency in Early-Twentieth Century Paris’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 58 (2016), 463–90; Neil Pemberton, “Bloodhounds as Detectives”: Dogs, Slum Scents and Late-Victorian Murder Investigation’, *Cultural and Social History*, 10 (2013), 69–91; Neil Pemberton and Julie-Marie Strange, ‘Dogs and Modernity: Dogs in History and Culture’, *European Review of History*, 22 (2015), 705–8; Harriet Ritvo, *Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian age* (Cambridge, 1987); Aaron H. Skabelund, *Empire of Dogs: Canines, Japan, and the Making of the Modern Imperial World* (Ithaca, 2011); Ingrid H. Tague, *Animal Companions: Pets and Social Change in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Philadelphia, 2015).

4 For a popular account of the origins of the New York’s pooper scooper law see Michael Brandow, *New York’s Poop Scoop Law; Dogs, the Dirt, and Due Process* (West Lafayette, IN, 2008).

5 Philip Howell, ‘Between the Muzzle and the Leash: Dog-walking, Discipline and the Modern City’, in Peter Atkins (ed.), *Animal Cities: Beastly Urban Histories* (Farnham, 2012), 221–41; Claire Charlotte McKechnie, ‘Man’s Best Fiend: Evolution, Rabies, and the Gothic Dog’, *Nineteenth-Century Prospects*, 40 (2013), 115–40. Jesse S. Palsetia, ‘Mad Dogs and Parsees: The Bombay Dog Riots of 1832’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 11 (2001), 13–30; Neil Pemberton and Michael Worboys, *Mad Dogs and Englishmen: Rabies in Britain, 1830-2000* (Basingstoke, 2007); John K. Walton, ‘Mad Dogs and Englishmen: The Conflict over Rabies in Late Victorian England’, *Journal of Social History*, 13 (1979), 219–39; Jessica Wang, ‘Dogs and the Making of the American State: Voluntary Association, State Power, and the Politics of Animal Control in New York City, 1850-1920’, *Journal of American History*, 98 (2012), 998–1024.
notions of responsible dog ownership, and incorporating the distinctive needs and interests of the canine species into the public realm.6

Extending this interest into post-war Britain, I explore how the assemblage of dog-walking space is never absolute and always subject to fissure, as the rules by which dog walkers enter public space are continually in flux, fragile and dynamic. This essay presents a microhistory of the civic tensions created by dog dirt in one specific place: Burnley, a once prosperous industrial town that sits in a fold of the Pennines in East Lancashire.7 The fact that dogs were only successfully banned from parks in Burnley, despite widespread attempts to enact such prohibitions, suggests a topic that may repay closer scrutiny, and reveal opaque systems of meanings: the quarry of microhistorians.8 To understand why a dog war manifested in Burnley and not elsewhere requires immersion in the town’s thought-worlds, social relationships, and cultural logics and resources through which dog faeces were understood, interpreted and contested as ‘matter-out-of-place’—to use the anthropologist Mary Douglas’s much-quoted maxim—in the town’s public parks.9

A set of inter-related developments transformed Burnley into the stage for an extended drama in which dog faeces served as a compelling symbolic object around which a variety of historical actors could assemble. The discourse and management of dog dirt in Burnley linked dogs’ toilet performances to both the material and symbolic landscape of a town that was characterized by economic collapse, urban dereliction and socio-cultural disorientation. Burnley became a centre of weaving in the eighteenth century and, together with other towns in the North of England, rapidly expanded through the nineteenth century,

6 Howell, At Home and Astray, 170.
7 Ben Campkin and Rosie Cox (eds), Dirt: New Geographies of Cleanliness and Contamination (London, 2007). Historical studies of dirt and hygiene include: David S. Barnes, The Great Stick of Paris and the Nineteen-Century Struggle Against Filth and Germs (Baltimore, 2006); Kathleen M. Brown, Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America (New Haven, 2009) Alain Corbin, The Foul and the Fragrant: Odour and the French Social Imaginations, trans. (Leamington Spa, NY, 1986); William A. Cohen and Ryan Johnson (eds), Filth: Dirt, Disgust and Modern Life (Minneapolis, 2005).
8 Robert Darnton, The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History (London, 1984).
9 In Purity and Danger, the anthropologist Mary Douglas defines dirt ‘as matter out of place’, which she argues suggests a ‘set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order’. In this sense, ‘dirt… is never a unique, isolated event’; rather, ‘where there is dirt there is system’. This ordering entails ‘rejecting inappropriate elements’ such as dirt: a ‘by-product’ that has to be removed if order is to be maintained. Douglas proposes that in our efforts to remove dirt, such as restoring objects to their rightful places, decorating and tidying, ‘we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea’. Mary Douglas, Purity and danger: an analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo (London, 1966), 4.
becoming the principal producer of cotton cloth in the world. The impact of the 1930s depression, however, sent Burnley into a state of terminal decline, characterized by dwindling industries and a landscape defined by deserted and decaying mills and warehouses, derelict land and silent machinery. Burnley’s fate prefigured the wholesale deindustrialization of Britain that occurred in the 1970s; the rapidity of economic change was greater in Britain than elsewhere, and the impact unevenly distributed across the country. This stage of deindustrialization reconstituted the North of England within the national imagination as sites of loss, abandonment and failure: remnants of a bygone era.10 The story of deindustrialization, thus, is not merely an economic process but also a socio-cultural phenomenon, one that reshapes material and symbolic landscapes and interlinked meanings of place and identity.11 Yet, as shown by sociologists, there is no complete break from the industrial past, as aspects of industrialism can survive into the post-industrial period in sentiments, what the sociologist David Byrne has termed ‘industrial structures of feeling’. These ‘residual’ sentiments can ‘inform and construct “ways of life,” ways of doing things, a sense not of personal but of collective identity’ and, for many social groups, not only the working-class, a particular conception of possibilities.12

Understanding the impact of deindustrialization upon the consciousness of the dog war protagonists enables us to reconstruct the perceived threats posed by the risky elements of the human–dog dyad: not so much the risk of disease and infection but the threat to social bonds and worlds and community attachment in the wake of deindustrialization. Despite appearances, this conflict was not primarily concerned with disputed obligations to dogs and people, or with addressing the vitality of both human and non-human lives and their co-flourishing. Rather, the terms and scope of dispute was inherently anthropomorphic, formed within and (in)formed by specific, historically embedded social relations, which asserted the priorities and prerogatives of human culture and excluded any consideration of animals as subjects and

10 Christoph Ehland (ed.), Thinking Northern: Textures of Identity in the North of England (Amsterdam, NY, 2007), Rob Shields, Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity (London and New York, 1991)
11 David Byrne, ‘Industrial Culture in a Post-industrial World: the Case of the North East of England’, City, 6 (2002), 278–88; Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott (eds), Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialisation (Cornell, 2003); James Rhodes, ‘Youngtown’s “Ghost”? Memory, Identity, and De-industrialization’, International Labour and Working-Class History, 84 (2013), 55–77. For a recent revisionist discussion of the case of British deindustrialization see Jim Tomlinson, ‘Deindustrialisation not Decline: A New Meta-Narrative for Post-War British History’, Twentieth Century British History, 27 (2015), 76–99.
12 Byrne, ‘Industrial Culture’, 287.
agents. The intellectual historian Dominick LaCapra stresses the need to concede how anthropomorphism continuously holds us captive, limiting our understandings and interactions with nonhuman animals. Acknowledgement of this forms a significant step towards challenging an acceptance of animals as ‘raw material or mere life adapted to purely human purposes’.

As I will argue, the distinct human–dog–dirt network that materialized in 1970s’ Burnley was constrained by the prevailing experiences of and responses to deindustrialization and ‘residual feelings’. The question of where dog excrement belonged in public space stimulated ‘post-industrial’ Burnley citizens to reflect upon the nature and quality of the townscape and to project memories, experiences and histories upon the town’s parks. As we shall see, the dog war gained metaphorical force beyond a means with which to recover and articulate attachments to place and traditions in a town shaped by nineteenth-century industrialism and its concomitant civic projects (such as the building of parks). It also provided a way of articulating less easily intimated experiences of and concerns about loss and injustices in a town transformed by recent decades of de-industrialization.

The Burnley Dog War

The Dog War began on Monday, 26 July 1977, when 300 dog walkers, accompanied by their canine companions assembled in opposition to a ‘No Dogs Allowed’ ruling recently enacted for Scott Park. All of the parks from which dogs were banned were once the private gardens of wealthy citizens, who donated their land to provide ‘lungs for the town’. Scott Park, the 18 acres of which feature curved paths running alongside, crossing and overlooking a stream, was Burnley’s first park, opening its gates in 1875. The second to open, the 28-acre Queens Park near the town centre, was established in 1893; it features ornamental flowerbeds, urban arboreta, sculptures and a bandstand. The third was Thompson Park, covering 27 acres, opened in 1930; it is also located

13 On history and animal agency see Chris Pearson, ‘Between Instinct and Intelligence’; Chris Pearson, ‘Beyond “Resistance”: Rethinking Nonhuman Agency for a “More-than-Human” World’, European Review of History, 22 (2015), 709–25.
14 Dominick LaCapra, History and Its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence (Ithaca, London, 2009), 159. For a sensitive and path-breaking response to LaCapra’s challenge see Rob Boddice (ed.), Anthropocentrism: Humans, Animals and Environments (Leiden, Boston, 2011), 3–5.
15 For a discussion of the modern-day symbolic politics of dog faeces see Jane Derges, Rebecca Lynch, Angela Clow, Mark Petticrew and Alizon Draper, ‘Complains About Dog Faeces as a Symbolic Representation of Incivility in London, UK: A Qualitative Study’, Critical Public Health, 22 (2012): 419–25.
near the town centre, and its main features are a 3-acre boating lake, sunken Italian gardens and a miniature railway.

Initially, the ‘No Dogs Allowed’ signage in Burnley’s oldest public parks was a response to widespread anxiety caused by well-publicized developments in medical science. According to testimonies later delivered to select committees of the House of Lords and the House of Commons, the ban originated from two Burnley environmental officers who attended a public-health conference in 1975. Here they witnessed the medical scientist Alan Woodruff present the alarming results of his laboratory investigations into the danger posed by toxocariasis to human health. Woodruff had carried out laboratory analysis of soil samples retrieved from the nation’s parks within which he detected the eggs of the worm *Toxocara canis*, originally shed in the faeces of infected dogs.¹⁶ He worried that if children were to accidentally swallow these eggs, they could produce the infection toxocariasis, causing—in some cases—blindness and asthma. His discovery of canine-borne parasites contaminating soil in the nation’s parks attracted sensationalist media coverage, particularly in the scare-mongering 1975 Thames documentary, *The Case Against Dogs*, which linked toxocariasis to a wider antipathy towards canine companionship articulated within and across public and political discourse of the period.

Whether one considers its social, economic, political or cultural dimensions, the 1970s was a turbulent decade, associated by many with crisis: industrial unrest and decline, successive financial and political crises, anxieties about urban decline and pollution, and concerns about immigration and civil rights; all generating a sense that Britain was in decline and, at worst, ungovernable.¹⁷ This sense of crisis, for some, opened a space in which dogs could be de-familiarized as a companionable species and transformed into a population of pests. Consider, for example, an article entitled ‘Down with Dogs’ penned in 1974 by the science correspondent for the *Sunday Times*, which claimed Britain ‘risked being completely overrun by dogs’ and asked whether ‘dogs have had their day?’ The correspondent presented the canine population as out of control and in need of sterilization: a filthy species requiring managing, regulating and controlling to prevent the country becoming overrun.¹⁸ Concerns such as these also need to be understood in terms of widespread fears about Europe being unable to stem the

¹⁶ Alan W. Woodruff, ‘Toxocariasis as Public Health Problem’, *Environmental Health*, (1976), 29–31: 30.
¹⁷ Lawrence Black, Hugh Pemberton and Pat Thane (eds), *Reassessing 1970s Britain* (Manchester, 2013); Laurel Forster and Sue Harper (eds), *British Culture and Society in the 1970s: The Lost Decade* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2010); Alan W. Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis? Britain in the 1970s* (London, 2013).
¹⁸ Brian Silcock, ‘Down with Dogs’, *Sunday Times*, 23 June 1974.
spread of rabies and the consequent risk of a possible outbreak in the country due to growing numbers of pet dogs allowed to stray in urban spaces.¹⁹

Positioning themselves at the vanguard of public health, the representatives of Burnley Council decided to act against dogs, excrement and toxocariasis, placing a notice in local newspapers announcing a new byelaw designed to restrict dog walkers’ access to parkland.²⁰ As ban opponents later pointed out, the notice did not refer directly to dogs. In the absence of any formally registered complaint, the Home Office approved the byelaw and Burnley Council proceeded to ban dogs from three of the town’s public parks. Events in the town escalated in the weeks following the first protest in Scott Park.²¹ When town councillors learned of plans for a second ‘walk-in’, to be held in Thompson Park a few weeks later, they successfully applied for an injunction from the High Court to restrain the ringleaders and prevent further civil disobedience.²² Although the leaders of the Burnley dog walking protests agreed not to participate in the procession or enter Thompson Park, it was impossible for the few park rangers to prevent hundreds of ban opponents from entering.²³ The situation reached a climax 4 months later in a High Court hearing in London when the legality of the ban was examined. After 6 days, Justice Davies adjourned the hearing for 9 months to allow time for representatives of each side to prepare their case.²⁴ During this period, the struggle was taken onto the streets.

What had started as a protest outside a single park, however, quickly developed into an organized civil disobedience movement, transforming law-abiding dog walkers into criminals, with tactics echoing the militancy of the trade union movement. Ban opponents picketed the homes of local councillors; there was a ‘punch-up’ in a local public house; and the phrase ‘WOT NO DOGS?’ was sprayed on the steps and walls of Burnley Town Hall. The authorities stuck to their guns, locking ban opponents in Scott Park and ejecting them from council meetings;

¹⁹ Pemberton and Worboys, Mad Dogs and Englishmen, chapter 6.
²⁰ In their testimonies to the various legal and political hearings, and in newspaper coverage of their decisions, councillors not only justified the stringent measures by citing Woodruff’s name and work as an authority on the threat of Toxocariasis to human health, they also recruited him as an advisor before proceeding with the ban and retained his services throughout the conflict.
²¹ ‘Clamp-down on dog march seven’, Burnley Express, 6 August 1977, 1.
²² ‘When the tail wags the dog’, Burnley Evening Star, 19 August 1977, 5.
²³ ‘Dog-ban fighters seek legal advice’, Burnley Express, 19 August 1977, 3. Some dog walkers, it was reported, protested that ‘they were prepared to go to prison rather than agree to pay a fine’. ‘Dog owners defy park pet ban’, Burnley Express, 16 August 1977, 7.
²⁴ ‘Dog-owners to obey by-law’, Burnley Express, 2 September 1977, 1.
further confrontation occurred when local police officers arrested protestors handing out leaflets.  

News of the Burnley Dog War reached the House of Lords in December 1977, when self-professed dog lover Lord de Clifford introduced a motion opposing the ban. The concerned Lord received some support during a short debate. Few believed that dogs were a significant health risk, and the government promised to deal with the motion through the Interdepartmental Working Party on Dogs, a committee established in 1974 to address the dog crisis plus issues concerning urban strays and rabies quarantine. Pre-empting events in Burnley, the Working Party was inundated with requests from local authorities—alarmed by Woodruff’s discoveries—for greater power to prevent dogs fouling parks and streets. In response, they published a report in 1976, a year before the outbreak of the Burnley Dog War, warning all councils to tread carefully, avoid measures that discriminated against dog walkers and instead set out measures to deal with those ‘irresponsible’ owners who let their dogs roam. On the specific subject of dog fouling, the report’s conclusions were threefold: that the risks from toxocariasis were minimal; that local authorities’ requests for powers to ban responsible dog walkers from using parks, open spaces and grass verges was both unfair and unworkable; and that dogs’ fouling of these spaces was ‘preferable to that of pavements’.

Despite these recommendations, local authorities continued to request authorization from the Home Office to control the movements of dog walkers and reduce the faecal contamination of urban green spaces. Awareness of these requests had increased due to the political lobbying carried out by the charitable organization Pro-Dogs, led by the Irish Setter breeder Lesley Scott-Ordish, a southern-based organization established to combat what it characterized as the intensifying ‘anti-dog hysteria’ that had gripped the country. Pro-dogs directly challenged the association of dogs with dirt and disease: first, by emphasizing the low risks Toxocara canis posed to human health; and secondly, by drawing upon and popularizing new biomedical research exploring the health and psychological benefits of companion animal living, thereby promoting a positive message about the dog–human bond.

The organization brought together vets and breeders but also politicized ordinary dog owners, by establishing branches to help

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25 ‘Dog owners picket home’, *Burnley Express*, 4 October 1977, 6. ‘Police called to incidents’, *Burnley Express*, 14 October 1977, 15; ‘Dog ban provokes punch up’, *Burnley Express*, 25 October 1977, 1; ‘Slogans are daubed on walls’, *Burnley Evening Star*, 5 November 1977, 1; ‘Meeting breaks into an uproar’, *Burnley Express*, 19 January 1978, 1; ‘Daniel’s in the doghouse’, *Burnley Evening Star*, 20 January 1978, 12; ‘Dog row erupts’, *Burnley Express*, 10 February 1977, 1; ‘Dog protestors’ humiliation claim’, *Burnley Express*, 2 March 1978, 2.

26 *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 387, 14 December 1977, 2172–94.

27 *Report of the Working Party on Dogs* (London, 1976), 1.
coordinate protests against proposed byelaws expelling dogs from public parks.\textsuperscript{28} However, while Scott-Ordish considered the outcome of the conflict in Burnley to have ramifications for the rights and freedom of dogs and their human walkers across the country, she distanced Pro-Dogs from the northern militant tactics of the Burnley protestors, apparently finding their willingness to break the law unacceptable. Nonetheless, in light of the escalating events in Burnley and the publicity orchestrated by Pro-Dogs, the government took more time to evaluate the fairness of the local authorities’ requests than initially designated. Despite the multiple altercations between Pro-dogs, dog walkers and town councils across the country, the real ‘test case’ would be the town first to introduce a ban: Burnley.

Nearly a year after Davies’ injunction, the full High Court hearing began.\textsuperscript{29} After listening for 6 days to the evidence presented by both sides, Judge Davies declared that ‘parks cannot be used as dog lavatories’, and ruled in favour of the dog ban in Burnley’s parks. Back in the town, the newly formed Burnley Dog Action Committee decided they had no option but to break the High Court injunction, making it clear a significant number were prepared to face imprisonment. Some, such as Mavis Thornton, became martyrs for their cause.\textsuperscript{30} In the weeks leading up to her imprisonment, Thornton launched a publicity stunt designed to persuade people that children were not at risk of disease from dogs and their faeces in parks. She walked in Thompson Park with her dogs and children on a number of highly publicized occasions, during which she was greeted and accompanied by well-wishers and local and national news media representatives. She told reporters she was prepared to go to prison, to which she was duly sent following the High Court ruling.\textsuperscript{31} She used language suggestive of martyrdom to describe her sacrifice: ‘it [prison] is a degrading experience and I am not enjoying it, but I am continually thinking of the people back in Burnley’.\textsuperscript{32} Three weeks in Holloway Prison, however, brought her to heel; she issued a formal apology and was released.\textsuperscript{33}

However, the Burnley Dog War did not end with Mavis Thornton’s release, nor was she the last protestor sent to prison. Indeed, the standoff between walkers and the council lasted for another 5 years.

\textsuperscript{28} Arnold Rosen, ‘Obituary: Lesley Scott-Ordish’, \textit{Independent}, 23 October 2011.
\textsuperscript{29} ‘Judge gets down to the grass roots of the dog ban case’, \textit{Burnley Evening Star}, 1 July 1978, 1.
\textsuperscript{30} ‘Protesters plan vigil’, \textit{Burnley Express}, 9 March 1978, 1; ‘Mavis Faces Prison Today’, \textit{Burnley Express}, 9 March 1970, 21; ‘I won’t back down over jail threat’, \textit{Burnley Evening Star}, 7 March 1979, 1.
\textsuperscript{31} ‘I won’t back down over jail threat’, \textit{Burnley Evening Star}, 7 March 1979, 1.
\textsuperscript{32} ‘Mother of 6 in jail cell appeal’, \textit{Burnley Evening Star}, 12 March 1979, 1.
\textsuperscript{33} ‘Mavis home to great welcome’, \textit{Burnley Evening Star}, 31 March 1978, 1.
The substance of the disagreement between the two sides remained the same but in the early 1980s the stage on which the drama unfolded shifted to London and the Houses of Parliament. Central to this shift was the County of Lancashire Bill, a response to the Local Government Act (1972) designed to consolidate a myriad of special-purpose laws in the county. This legislative tidying-up prompted Burnley Council to request a clause preserving and extending the controversial byelaw. The Bill was debated in the House of Lords in March 1982, with a focus on the Burnley ban, and then referred to a select committee for scrutiny. The Committee listened to evidence on the Burnley ban section of the Bill for 10 days, an ordeal that Lord Houghton remembered as ‘a triumph for the democratic parliamentary procedure but—my goodness!—what a reflection upon the wisdom and sagacity of Lancastrians. If that is what they do, give me Yorkshire every time’. Houghton considered Burnley Council to have been at fault in its handling of the ban.

It was an awful mess. Indeed, it was the select committee of your Lordships’ House that got Burnley out of that mess by a compromise solution which was proposed by the select committee. It was something awful, and merely because the local authority had no more nous than to put up a statutory notice which merely referred to a section of an Act of Parliament passed in 1876. Houghton’s memory of dates was incorrect: the legislation in question comprised the Burnley Act of 1871 and the Public Health Act of 1875, although his view that the duration and bitterness of the dispute were out of proportion to the matter at stake was widely held in the House of Lords. In 1982, the House of Lords select committee proposed a further compromise: to lift the dog-walking ban from Scott Park but retain it in the others. The House of Commons Select Committee on the Lancashire Bill ratified this decision in 1984. The passing of the Lancashire Bill in 1984, which ultimately allowed the byelaw to remain, ended the bitter 7-year conflict that had engulfed the town.

Dogs, Parks and Civic Pride in Burnley

Although the Burnley Dog War was a singular episode, it had consequences across the country. While the government reached a verdict largely in favour of Burnley Council, the Home Office did not support the many requests from other local authorities for Burnley-style byelaws excluding dogs from urban spaces; this strategy contained the

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34 Parliamentary Debates (Lords), 443, 14 July 1983, 900.
35 Parliamentary Debates (Lords), 464, 4 June 1965, 737.
conflict and stopped it from spreading into other areas. The govern-
ment, then, recognized byelaws prohibiting dogs from parts of parks,
such as ornamental gardens and children’s playgrounds, but not from
entire parks, as enacted so controversially in Burnley. Despite
acceptance of the statutory and disciplinary power of Burnley
Council, the government asserted a more inclusive attitude towards
dog walkers and public space, a position that had been set out in the
Inter-departmental report published several years earlier. In its refusal
to approve byelaws designed to ban dogs from entire parks, the
government endorsed the view that parks were multi-species environ-
ments that could be shared by both dog owners and other members of
the public. Thus, the government considered neither toxocariasis nor
dog fouling sufficiently severe problems to warrant the creation of
separate dog-free and dog-friendly parks, although a consensus was
reached that children’s playgrounds required fencing to keep out dogs
and their potentially infected excrement.

Yet, importantly, the manner in which toxocariasis, dog fouling and
park access to dog walkers were discussed by Burnley combatants
differed—in an explicit and highly significant way—from how
outsiders to the town understood and evaluated the problems posed
by dogs. In the multiple venues where Burnley residents were called
upon to present their evidence, they repeatedly returned to the nature
of the local parks from which dogs had been excluded and their
significance to the identity of the town. Although dogs were banned
from thirty-three sites in Burnley, such as tennis courts, sports grounds
and children’s playgrounds, the towns’ oldest and largest public parks
physically and imaginatively served as the main battlegrounds of the
dog conflict. From the outset of the dog war and throughout its
duration, the nature, character and qualities of these sites stimulated
strong feelings of attachment and civic pride in representatives of both
sides; neither was willing to relinquish what they considered the
symbolic heartland of the town. The Environmental Health Officer and
ban advocate, John Dryer acknowledged this sentiment in his
testimony: ‘[s]ince they were created each [park] occupies a place in
the hearts of the people of Burnley’.36

In their letters to local newspapers and testimonies before various
committees, representatives of both sides celebrated the parks as an
important vestige of a prosperous and munificent past, reminding their
audience that the citizens responsible for the town’s industrial wealth
and achievement had bequeathed the parks, and together they
constituted a heritage and legacy that required protection and

36 House of Lords transcripts, evidence of John Dryer, BLA, P.51, vol. 7, 56.
conservation. For example, both sides spoke of the ‘illustrious families’ and ‘wealthy mill owners’ who had gifted the parks to enable mill workers to escape the adverse effects of industrialization.37 For others, the parks had always enhanced the town’s attractiveness, grandeur and reputation: in the words of one ban advocate, Burnley possessed ‘the most exquisite parks in England’, with impressive features such as flowerbeds of ‘breathtaking beauty’ and ‘delicate edging plants’.38 Others stressed that the parks embodied the Victorian ideal of cultivated nature as a source of moral improvement and a ‘civilising influence’ that purified the spirit and inspired tranquillity and contemplation. In contrast to the moors and hills nearby, the parks were ‘beautiful, well cared for oases’, specifically designed for ‘the many tired cotton workers and others’ to enjoy on the weekends.39 In a landscape formerly dominated by mills and factories with towering chimneys filling the air with smoke, citizens were protected by the parks alone, which served as the figurative and literal ‘lungs’ for this ‘densely populated [and industrialized] town’.40

The various ways in which the dog war protagonists mobilized Victorian public park traditions and ideals to explain why these recreational spaces mattered and appeared as they did, and for whom they were intended, permits a number of readings.41 First, protagonists conveyed imaginings of civic pride and identity by drawing upon the historically privileged position occupied by the parks within local popular culture. As a number of historians have convincingly demonstrated, parks were far from self-contained, natural and politically neutral entities but rather fluid and contested socio-ecological sites centred around the spatial expression of particular ideas about ‘nature’. More specifically, the Victorian and Edwardian project of public parks was enmeshed in a complex cultural and material network of social relations that drew upon ideals of cultivated nature, civic pride, industrial culture and the prevailing ideal of ‘rational recreation’ to instil the working-classes with moral discipline and refinement.42 Thus combatants renewed in public discourse a nostalgic and implicitly

37 Dog-Lover, ‘High-handed attitude’, Burnley Express, 8 July 1977, 10; Anxious, ‘Majority do care’, Burnley Express, 15 July 1977, 7.
38 Brun Lee, ‘Our Thanks to the Council’, Burnley Express, 20 March 1979, 5.
39 Burnley Express, 11 August 1978, 1.
40 House of Lords transcripts, Burnley Council legal case, BLA, P.51, vol. 6, 29.
41 On the creation of public parks, see Hazel Conway, The Design and Development of Victorian Parks in Britain (Cambridge, 1991); on middle-class culture in Victorian provincial cities, see Simon Gunn, The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority in the English Industrial City (Manchester, 2000).
42 On the disciplinary and moral aspects of Victorian public parks see Tim Brown, The Making of Urban “Healtheries”: The Transformation of Cemeteries and Burial Grounds in Late-Victorian East London’, Journal of Historical Geography, 42 (2013), 12–23.
conservative view of the natural world, a view rooted in Victorian middle-class notions of what was considered aesthetically pleasing and of cultivated nature as a moral counterpoint and outlet to the social dangers posed by industrial-urban environment and the drudgery of industrial labour. Despite disagreeing on the issue of dogs, by reaffirming the parks’ close association with industrialism, the power of civic belonging, and the civilizing effects of cultivated nature, combatants emphasized the continuing significance played by the town’s nineteenth-century heritage to the present and future of contemporary Burnley.

Secondly, grappling with the potentially negative imagery of deindustrialization in a period of industrial inactivity, dog war combatants rallied around the town’s parks as steadfast reminders of the town’s prosperous past. Crucially, this industrial heritage had been wrought into the very architecture of the townscape, providing a characteristically dense combination of industrial, residential and leisure spaces. However, as industry departed, the increasing derelict and disused spaces added urban deterioration to economic decline. This meant the town was no longer shaped by the presence of industry but rather by its absence. Thus, as the modern economy became less of an arena in which the town’s image could be articulated, the parks represented an increasingly important site for Burnley’s former industrial and prosperous past to be commemorated and re-asserted, and against which ideas of local citizenship and belonging could be crystallized in the post-industrial era.

Considered in this light, the Burnley Dog War represented more than a mere battle over dog walkers’ access to, and the presence of dog faeces in some ‘ordinary’ parks in some ‘ordinary’ town. For all involved, the Burnley parks constituted an important vestige of past affluence and a clear source of civic pride, implicitly evoking in all individuals involved a sense of deep connection to a bygone era. The seemingly unchanging landscaped grass and ornamental gardens were a secure place of domesticated nature protected from the rusting carnage of deindustrialization. As a consequence, an essentially conservative and conservationist rhetoric permeated and structured

43 As Karen Jones and John Willis have most recently observed, the nineteenth-century endeavour to open parks was inscribed within a ‘paradigm of reaction against social problems, promising a green tonic, a natural remedy, to civic alienation’ and the drudgery of manual labour in the age of industrialism. Karen Jones and John Wills, *The Invention of the Park: Recreational Landscapes from the Garden of Eden to Disney’s Magic Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA, 2005), 173–4. For an expert reading of the relationships between the Victorian park movement and health see Clare Hickman, “‘To Brighten the Aspects of Our Streets and Increase the Health and Enjoyment of Our City’: The National Health Society and Urban Green Space in late Nineteenth-Century London”, *Landscape and Planning*, 118 (2013), 112–9.
the terms and scope of the Burnley Dog War, fuelling a preoccupation with a past imagined as socially harmonious, productive and ordered. It was in this context that combatants, physically, rhetorically and ideologically, clashed over the question of where dogs and their faeces belonged in the town’s oldest and most beautiful parks, when their presence had previously been at the very least tolerated.

From the perspective of Burnley Council, the protests were hopelessly misguided. The councillors, council employees and other ban supporters presented themselves as the rightful custodians of the town’s parks, who most understood their civic function and symbolic value. Although the council could not completely hold off or reverse Burnley’s decline, it could demonstrate its effectiveness by removing dogs from the symbolic heartlands of the town. In testimonies delivered to various committees and legal hearings, the ban advocates divested dogs of their highly domesticated status, casting them as beyond acceptable in the parkscapes through the rhetoric of animality combined with notions of dirt and pollution; rhetoric often used to legitimate projects of exclusion and dehumanization.44

According to ban advocates, both dog and owner possessed faecally filthy habits. Burnley Borough Recreation Officer, Michael Woodhead, explained that before the ban, dogs ‘entered the parks in large numbers’, which ‘led to indiscriminate fouling’. He expressed concerns about this behaviour, complaining that many dog owners ‘resorted to parks with their pets specifically for them to defecate’.45 For others, canine excrement was not only an affront to the aesthetic ideal of ornamentation but also an obstacle to recreation. John Dryer explained that users who risked getting ‘mess on their shoes or clothes’ could not ‘savour the essence of the park without being distracted’; after all, he argued, this is ‘what recreation is about, being able to get into that relaxed detached atmosphere to reflect and recreate’.46 Dryer also explained that the health of plants was threatened as there had been instances of damage to floral displays and grass from the ‘chemical action’ of excreta.47

Burnley’s ban advocates highlighted wider concerns about the danger posed to human health by Toxocara canis eggs in dog faeces to cast dogs as a threatening Other: an invading species and potential contaminant of the purity of the town’s precious parks. The probable

44 David Inglis, ‘Dirt and Denigration: The Faecal Imagery and Rhetorics of Abuse’, Postcolonial Studies, 5 (2002), 207–21.
45 House of Lords transcripts, evidence of Michael Woodhead, BLA, P.51, vol. 8, 11, 44.
46 House of Lords transcripts, evidence of John Dryer testimony, BLA, P.51, vol. 7, 60.
47 Recreation officer Jon Mattocks testimony at the High Court cited in ‘Too much time wasted—Judge’, Burnley Express, 20 July 1978, 11.
presence of worms in faeces and the threat of toxocariasis, furthermore, was said to undermine the reputation of parkland as a source of health and well-being. Faeces served as visible signs of possible contamination by *Toxocara canis* eggs, but there was in addition the persistent and insidious danger after the decomposition of excrement, when the eggs settled into the ground soil and eventually contaminated surfaces and objects that had not come into direct contact with excrement. Before the ban, advocates argued, all the parks’ features and facilities—from picnic tables to mowed lawns, children’s playground equipment to railings—had been subject to contamination: a nightmarish threat vanquished by the dog-walking ban. For its advocates, the exclusion of dogs and dog walkers from the parks created a *cordon sanitaire*, keeping park users at a safe distance from unsanitary dogs and the resilient *Toxocara canis* eggs, and protecting the purity and status of the parks, which had conserved the health of the town’s citizens since their gates first opened.

Just as threatening as dog-borne parasites were dogs’ manipulation and transgression of the conventions and normalizing boundaries of the parks. According to ban advocates, the boisterous, uncontrolled and spontaneous behaviour of dogs was unacceptable in the park environment. By failing to conform to the behavioural protocols established for such a space, dogs disrupted the boundaries established by the harmonious order of the parks, and their movement caused a ‘great deal of physical damage to flowerbeds, shrubs, grassed areas’. Exceeding the inscribed amount of space that bodies were expected to occupy and colonizing the space of others, dogs were said to territorialize parks. Woodhead maintained that by turning places of order and predictability into places of disorder and anxiety, running dogs became ‘over-excited by groups of playing children’, ‘intimidating and attacking’ other dogs and park users, especially young people and staff.

The park managers further disliked dogs’ habit of marking their space with urine to communicate with other members of their own species. The inevitable ‘scent trails’ leading into the parks attracted strays, increasing the likelihood of dog fights. Walking bitches

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48 In a letter to the *Burnley Express* hailing Professor Woodruff as ‘the leading authority in the country on the subject of Toxocariasis’, the Burnley Borough Environmental Officer Milton Stott explained that although the incidence of the disease ‘might be very small compared to the total amount of human disease, the risk is real and not imaginary’. Milton Stood, ‘Risk to health is real’, *Burnley Express*, 30 August 1977, 12.

49 Vera Hartley, ‘Disease that can cause blindness’, *Burnley Express*, 30 August 1977, 12.

50 Minutes of evidence taken before the Committee on the County of Lancashire Bill: 6th, 7th, 8th, 12th and 13th March, House of Commons, BLA, P.52, 7 volumes: evidence of Michael Woodhead, vol 8, 44.

51 Evidence of Michael Woodhead, 47.

52 Evidence of Michael Woodhead, 47.
through the park was considered particularly problematic: female scent represented a further attraction to roaming male strays, encouraging excitement, competition and aggression.\(^{53}\) In associating dogs with sexual promiscuity and a primordial scent world, the ban advocates delineated the canine species as immodest, dirty and impure, with no place in an ordered parkscape.

Thus, to justify species separation, ban advocates emphasized dogs’ animality, presenting them as creatures driven by their physical needs, in stark contrast to the self-restraint and civility of humans. Burnley’s ban opponents, however, had very different views on the compatibility of ‘dogginess’ and parks. They sought to destabilize the associations of dogs with filth and impurity and humans with purity and cleanliness, to emphasize a shared animality. A significant articulation of their refusal of the restrictive spatialization of species was ban opponents’ dismissal of toxocariasis as nothing more than ‘a fable’ and ‘pure speculation’, echoing the stance taken by Pro-Dogs.\(^{54}\) There had been no cases of the disease in Burnley, nor had any of the soil from the town’s parks been collected by Woodruff and subjected to laboratory analysis to determine its level of contamination. By emphasizing dogs’ disease-free status, ban opponents further aimed to counteract the abusive discourse of filth, a rhetorical strategy that challenged human exceptionalism by asserting that human users of the parks were far more like ‘animals’ than ban advocates were comfortable admitting. Human filth, as much as canine, threatened the purity of the parks; as one ban critic declared, ‘people [are] filthier than animals, and in many cases dogs are better trained’.\(^{55}\) The most obvious source of germs and filth, according to one vocal dog walker, was ‘the amount of human sputum covering our parks’.\(^{56}\) Another commentator even called for certain people to be banned from Burnley’s parks: ‘how many drunks, youths and throw-outs, even courting couples, leave their traces?’\(^{57}\) Too preoccupied with repressing ‘ordinary people exercising their dogs’, the council was said to be failing to persecute ‘the vandals whose senseless thuggery is destroying those very parks’.\(^{58}\)

\(^{53}\) Evidence of Michael Woodhead, 47.

\(^{54}\) ‘Dog-Lovers speak out, but parks ban stays’, Burnley Evening Star, 9 August 1977, 2.

\(^{55}\) Burnley Express, 4 April 1978, 9.

\(^{56}\) Dog Owner, ‘It is dirtier since the ban’, Burnley Evening Star, 14 March 1977, 1.

\(^{57}\) M. K. Connolly, ‘Dogs Serve’, Burnley Express, 4 August 1978, 9.

\(^{58}\) Indignant Ratepayer, ‘Values’, Burnley Express, 23 August 1977, 4. Nor was the filth generated by humans deemed only corporeal. In a letter to the Burnley Express, Mrs O Wilkinson contended the priority in the campaign against filth in Burnley should be focused on the ‘filthy minds and sex, pushed down’ the throats of readers ‘in every daily paper’. She continued: ‘[name] a film in either Burnley or surrounding districts which does not reek of eroticism or violence?’ For others, graffiti ‘filth’ around the town was judged as corrupting and foul as anything left by a canine. Mrs O. Wilkinson, ‘Human Filth’, Burnley Express, 4 April 1978, 9; K. Rawlinson, Burnley Express, 30 August 1977, 12.
It must be borne in mind that while highlighting humans’ animal-like impulses and behaviour, the ban opponent’s rhetorical strategies were articulated within the same frame of civility that had been used to justify the exclusion of dogs. Ban opponents would ideally welcome ‘good’ humans and expel ‘bad’ ones for failing to adhere to idealized human moral qualities demanded by the codes of urban civility inscribed into the material and symbolic order of the parks by their designers. And yet, just as it was possible to distinguish between civil people and uncivil people, so it was possible to distinguish well-behaved and respectable dogs from ill-behaved and disreputable ones. Ban opponents not necessarily seeking to defend the reputations of all dogs and owners, urged action against ‘the real offenders’: dog owners ‘who didn’t care enough to look after their dogs properly, letting them loose to roam around, causing a nuisance to everybody’.59 All sides regarded strays as undisciplined and thus uncontrollable spreaders of excrement. The ban opponents urged the council only to purge Burnley’s parkland of stray dogs, not those accompanied by responsible human companions and disciplined by the leash.

The moral and civil consciousness produced by the parks, argued ban opponents, was dependent on human–dog interspecies dependencies and interdependencies: exposure to dog walkers helped humans to become better humans and care for others. The key term used by Lesley Scott-Ordish to describe the contribution made by dog walkers to the civility and harmony of parks was ‘social lubrication’.60 In her testimony to the House of Lords committee considering the Burnley byelaw, Scott-Ordish drew on recent psychological studies of dog walking. She explained that human users engage in virtually no communication with other park users in dog-free parks, unlike areas in which dog walkers are allowed and welcomed.61

[The dog acts] as a form of social lubrication, allowing people to converse with complete strangers. People start to talk to the dog first of all, which breaks down social barriers by giving people something to talk about.62 Scott-Ordish considered dog walking to play an important role in training people to recognize their common humanity, turning strangers into acquaintances or friends and easing interactions with members of our own species.63 Local ban opponents warned that since the removal

59 George Gibson, ‘We need more tolerance’, Burnley Express, 8 July 1977, 10.
60 House of Commons transcripts, Lesley Scott Ordish, BLA, P.52, vol 5, 65.
61 Evidence of Lesley Scott-Ordish, 65.
62 Evidence of Lesley Scott-Ordish, 65.
63 This argument amounted to a reversal of the accepted companion species narrative: dogs domesticated humans.
of this form of social lubrication, the town’s symbolic heartland parks had become less civil, less frequented and even frightening places. In an interview with the Daily Express in 1980, a particularly outspoken activist, Ken Spencer, explained that without dog walkers Burnley’s main parks had become refuges for deviance, home to perverts, glue sniffers, vandals and unwanted teenagers: ‘[the parks are now] a clear field for flashers and the like; there have already been two convictions for indecent exposure this year’. Others argued that by maintaining the ban and designating dogs as filthy and impure, the Council were provoking and condoning a dangerous intolerance in Burnley’s heartlands and, as such, the town risked losing its humanity. One ban opponent graphically described how the dog was being ostracized:

[the dog]...is no longer an accepted member of the community. He is not wanted in the park and he is [now] not wanted in street. The town is not Rhodesia and Northern Ireland. The Council created a problem by victimising the dog.

To ensure the town’s sense of self remained liberal-minded, civil and humane ban opponents were prepared to tolerate dogs and their excrement in the town’s symbolic heartlands.

Dog Walking in Post-Industrial Landscapes

In the wake of the wholesale deindustrialization of the country during the 1970s and early 1980s, British cities and towns, like Burnley, came to be perceived as sites of decay and backwardness. The media generated representations of abandoned and collapsed structures, landscapes that evoked an image of an outdated era. However, there were renewal stories of hard-hit towns and cities reinventing their image. Local authorities and business leaders keen to initiate change developed ‘a strategic role with regard to economic policy and saw in tourism a way of generating jobs directly and through more general publicity about their area’. In Burnley, the result fostered a new regime of representation that promoted newly revised stories about the deindustrialized nature of the town and its relationship to the past, present and future. Consider, for example, the publicity booklet Burnley: Official Guide, published annually by the local authority and intended to sell the town not only to tourists but also to potential investors concerned about the availability of services for their local employees.

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64 ‘Ken the rebel dog lover in walking out of town’, Daily Express, 28 February 1980, 9.
65 J. Biggins, Letter to Editor, Burnley Express, 4 October 1977, 2
66 John Urry, “Gazing on History,” in David Boswell and Jessica Evans (eds), Representing the Nation: A Reader: Histories, Heritage and Museums (London, 1999), 211.
These booklets consistently presented Burnley in a state of transformation from ‘a decaying, run-down smokey old mill town into a clean, modern, thriving and attractive place to live while carefully retaining the best of the old’. A vision of clearing slums, demolishing and redeveloping disused, derelict industrial sites, and building an extensive housing building scheme, motorway and new shopping centre, was balanced by a will to retain and remodel physical features that evoked the industrially prosperous past and the ‘vitaliy essential tangibles of civic pride, a powerfully binding community spirit and a sense of tradition that blended with history’.

To reverse decades of symbolic and material denigration and meet post-industrial needs, council leaders promoted urban revival through reinvigorating past civic traditions of building parkland. For instance, the redevelopment of the derelict site of Burnley’s biggest former colliery at Bank Hall into 50 acres of riverside parkland with more than 1,000 trees, as the publicity brochure described, formed part of ‘a wider vision for bringing the countryside right into the town centre itself’. By extending the existing acreage of parkland, civic leaders insisted they had turned the industrial dereliction caused by de-industrialization to their advantage, as a way of reclaiming a sense of the town’s prosperous past, while transcending and disavowing decades of decline. Civic leaders proudly declared that thanks to redevelopment Burnley was now in the top 15 per cent of the country’s towns in terms of the extent of its open public areas, exceeded only by seaside resorts, which one would expect to have considerable recreational space.

For ban advocates, the reclamation and transformation of derelict industrial sites had inadvertently provided a unique opportunity and spatial solution for the protection of the town’s prestigious parks from dogs’ polluting powers; as evidenced in Chief Recreation Officer Michael Woodhead’s confident estimation, ‘we have moved it [the problem of dogs and their excrement] to other areas’.

Civic leaders argued that Burnley, far from being the most anti-dog town in the country, was in fact exemplary in its attempts to balance the needs of dog owners and non-dog owners. As John Dryer explained to the House of Lords select committee, the decline of industry had ‘provided an opportunity for the reclamation of derelict industrial sites’ and their subsequent transformation into new recreational landscapes. Despite the impression conveyed by ban opponents, no blanket ban had been placed on dog walkers in the town’s urban green spaces and the vast majority remained open: of 600 acres of green space, dogs were only...
banned from 120. Dog owners’ claims that they were no longer able or willing to walk their dogs thus bewildered the ban advocates, who reminded Burnley’s dog walkers that the town was in the rare ‘position of having a substantial amount of public open space that allowed the implementation of [a] ban without detriment to dog owners’.  

How was the claim made that redeveloped sites were more suitable for dogs and their faeces than ornamental parkland? Three arguments were advanced. First, the alternative sites were ‘areas where children do not actively play in the same way as they do in the parks’. As most of the new sites ‘lacked children’s playgrounds’, children were argued to less likely encounter equipment that had been defiled by dog excrement or contaminated by *Toxocara canis* eggs. Secondly, there were fewer physical boundaries for dogs to breach. The erratic movement of dogs was felt to be less problematic in an environment that was not designed, maintained or expected to reach the aesthetic level of the town’s mature ornamental gardens. Dryer spelt out the point.

Because they [the alternative sites] are not so well used I think they provide an ideal and adequate opportunity for people to exercise their dogs, to exercise their dogs well because many of these are large open spaces but also they can do it in a way that causes the least amount of offence and nuisance to the majority.  

The ban supporters argued that in an emptier and less regulated recreational environment, dogs could be dogs: unrestrained and unbounded. The location of many of the new leisure areas permitted ban advocates to claim these dog-friendly sites across the town minimized disruption to residents’ lives, as many former industrial sites were adjacent to residential and leisure areas, reflecting an industrial past where houses and industrialism had nestled cheek by jowl. Thirdly, as many of the substitute spaces were larger than the mature parks, canine excrement would be distributed more widely, making it less ‘visible’ and crucially less dangerous. In this understanding, the new sites—less manicured and domesticated than the town’s prestigious and highly ornamented parks—were assumed to be either dirty and impure themselves or robust enough to be relatively unaffected by the pollution caused by dog faeces. Thus, by assigning different conceptions of nature to different parks and defining different standards of civility and hygiene, civic leaders hoped to limit the disruptive potential of dogs and dirt as matter out of place, while at the same time recover from pristine parks a sense of civic pride and re-inscribe this into the townscape.

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1. Evidence of John Dryer, 62.
2. Evidence of Michael Woodhead, 60.
3. Evidence of Michael Woodhead, 56.
However, the ban opponents repeatedly voiced their dissatisfaction with the alternative sites, speaking as if something had been given up rather than gained and arguing against councillors’ view that the town’s redundant industrial landscape had virtues. Dog walkers claimed that in banishing their dogs from the town’s symbolic heartlands, the prohibition also excluded them from places of history, civility, and community, forcing them to occupy marginal, disorderly, and deindustrialized landscapes, which, despite their recent refurbishment, still evoked rather than effaced the ugly results of deindustrialization. In this way, dog walkers asserted a sense of entitlement to the parks not only in relation to those places linked to an imagined prosperous past but also through and against the recently constructed recreational landscapes.

By invoking the image of a town overcome by filth and decay, ban opponents maintained that the council’s preoccupation with dogs and their faeces was nothing more than a distraction from solving the real pressing problems facing a town suffering de-industrialization, as one ban opponent summed up for the *Burnley Evening Star* in 1979.

Burnley has been the product of the growth of industry. It is also regrettably a product of the decline of some of these industries. The scars that decline has left are all too obvious. From my observations, the man-made filth associated with these scars is a far greater environmental problem than all the dogs in Lancashire could create in their lifetime. At least the problems they create will wash away.74

Thus ban opponents distinguished between canine and industrial ‘waste’, between the natural and the artificial, to describe a town ravaged by the forces of de-industrialization, decay and ‘man-made’ pollution. In their letters to the local press, the ban opponents related a gloomy story of non-biodegradable waste, decline and ineffective town management to convey their experience of environmental and social neglect. Parts of the town were ‘unfit for walking, of any kind’, beauty spots had become ‘illicit tipping areas’, streets were ‘littered with paper and other rubbish’, and footpaths and roads were ‘shoddy’.75 By drawing upon the tropes of abandonment and loss, ban opponents made it clear that while excluded from the towns’ major parks they were unable to express any pride in a townscape marked by the absence of municipal management and a failure to deal with litter and

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74 E. Mclroy, *Burnley Evening Star*, 6 March 1979, 5.
75 S. Furniss, ‘Control real pollution’, *Burnley Express*, 23 August 1977, 4; E. Heap, ‘Not by dogs’, *Burnley Express*, 14 October 1977, 7; Doreen Lopresi, ‘Dirty Town’, *Burnley Express*, 3 February 1978, 8; Julie S. Marshall, ‘It’s humans who foul our town’, *Burnley Express*, 4 October 1977, 1; Ratepayer, ‘Disgusting’, *Burnley Express*, 14 February 1978, 7; K. Rawlinson, ‘Our town has been shamed’, *Burnley Express*, 30 August 1977, 12.
pollution. A bit of dog excrement in the town’s precious parks, it was implied, was the least of the town’s concerns.

Vacant, characterless, uncultivated and ugly: these were the words used by the defenders of dogs’ access to parks to describe the alternative sites and the very opposite of those used in connection with the town’s older parkscapes. Ban opponents drawing a material and symbolic distinction in the quality and character of the town’s old parks and the alternative sites, argued that the landscapes reclaimed from dereliction failed to offer the beauty and amenities of the older parks, and were ‘less used and less attractive, because they were recent and not matured’. 76 Consider, for example, the ban opponents’ perception of the hillside site known as Healey Heights, which they characterized as a featureless landscape subject to the levelling effects of wind and water: a place bearing little resemblance to the cultivated nature of the town’s oldest parks. In the words of one ban opponent, Healey Heights might have ‘magnificent views’, but ‘there is nothing there’: no flora and no children playing. 77 Healey Heights was nothing more than a rain-soaked empty space: ‘[i]t is very windswept. It is very steep. It is on a hillside… It is open to the elements’. 78 Compared with the town’s parks, these venues militated against social cohesion, as such venues provided neither facilities nor spaces in which walkers might linger and socialize. The Bank Hall area, near Thompson Park, formerly the site of a wharf and numerous factory buildings, was now ‘a very open space’, but its transformation was far from complete, with ‘immature and wild’ shrubbery and a lack of toilets, shelters and playground facilities. 79

Ban opponents were thus quick to dismiss the alternative sites as unattractive, unsafe and socially divisive. They were quicker still to assert their identities as community insiders and locally and historically embedded residents, who were respectable and morally ‘decent’ and who lay claim to being ‘authentic’ Burnley citizens on account of their class, age, ethnicity and gender. Some ban opponents considered the substitute sites to challenge their class identities, due to the sites’ perceived proximity to disreputable areas and disordered lives. Despite its ‘pleasing view of Pendle Hill’, and the prominent summit of Kinder Scout in the Peak District, the open space at Melrose Avenue was condemned as unsuitable for leisure use: it was ‘a piece of open grassland bordered on all sides’ by ‘council housing’, used ‘extensively by laddies from the council estates’ and home to ‘all sorts of bits of rubbish’. 80 The alternative sites were imagined through a projected

76 House of Commons transcripts, evidence of Frank Clifford, BLA, P.52 vol. 2, 22.
77 House of Lords transcripts, evidence of Frank Clifford, BLA, P.51, vol 8. 52.
78 House of Lords transcripts, evidence of Mrs E. Eccles, BLA, P.51, vol 8, 44.
79 Evidence of Frank Clifford, 58.
80 Evidence of Frank Clifford, 52.
post-industrial landscape of fear and crime that threatened the identities of respectable female dog walkers. A former mineral rail line that ran alongside the canal, connecting factories and coal mines beyond the town, was described by Mavis Thornton as a ‘danger zone’ for any woman walking alone, with or without a dog. She was concerned about the prospect of meeting ‘a shady character coming along the other way’.81

Age and access were particular concerns through which narratives and images of the town’s demise were projected. Ban opponents argued that being prevented from walking their dogs in the town’s prestigious parks and relegated to alternative large and inaccessible sites devastated the area’s elderly population, whose networks of friends and even their identity had been located and embedded in the older parks. Ernest Broadley explained to the House of Commons select committee that he lived in one of a few terraced houses northwest of Scott Park, where ‘a fair amount of old people’ lived.82 Broadley’s ill-health prevented him from reaching alternative sites, as he was unable to walk up a ‘sharp incline’. His nearest alternative in Every Street had been created by the clearing of old terraced houses and was ‘more of a man-made basin... than a place of beauty’; it was also flooded for 90 per cent of the year.83 Broadley seemed to feel he no longer belonged anywhere, as the ban obliged him to sit in his small terraced house with only his dogs for company: ‘I sit at my window and watch motors go by now, I have to’.84 Such testimonies evoked the imagery of a town struggling to cling to its past and of a place where traditional social bonds and local attachments had been dissolved.

The ‘Liberation’ and Decline of Scott Park

We are now in a better position to understand how the Burnley dog conflict ended and, in particular, the circumstances in which Scott Park was released from the ban. While both sides reaffirmed the significance of the town’s old parks, they told qualitatively different stories about the nature of Scott Park and its relationship to both the past and present.

From the outset of the dispute, ban opponents drew upon the tropes of abandonment and vacancy to reveal a striking mismatch between the imaginary of ornamentation and the actual appearance of Scott Park, casting it as a neglected and impoverished parkscape that did not

81 Evidence of Mavis Thornton, 11.
82 House of Lords transcripts, evidence of Ernest Broadley, BLA, P.51, vol. 8, 25.
82 Evidence of Ernest Broadley, 28.
84 Evidence of Ernest Broadley, 28.
require special protection from dogs and their faeces. Ban opponents were prepared to accept that Queens Park and Thompson Park possessed tangible value and well-maintained exemplary ornamental features, but they insisted that those in Scott Park had suffered years of municipal neglect. The park’s hillsides were eroded, its woods overgrown and littered, its pavements broken and its pools and ponds clogged with weeds and silt. Originally, the now-dense woods had comprised groves of trees, shrubs and picturesque water features. The anticipated balance of conifers and deciduous species, large trees and delicate ornamental shrubs, had given way to visually undifferentiated hardwoods that obstructed many areas intended as open vistas; as one ban opponent reported,85 ‘I went to our beloved Scott Park. The whole outlook was, to me, one of desolation’.86 The ban opponents, furthermore, used historical accounts, maps and photographs of the park to demonstrate that its ornamentation had changed over time, portraying the council as clinging to the former glory of Scott Park. By figuratively aligning the park with the town’s reclaimed post-industrial landscapes, dog walkers revealed the spectre of decline and municipal neglect at one of Burnley’s so-called heartlands, a landscape failing to embody and preserve the town’s past and identity in the ways other public parks did. In their view, Scott Park, like the refurnished post-industrial landscapes, deserved no special protection from dog faeces.

In 1979, the High Court dismissed the ban opponents’ presentation of Scott Park as a fallen landscape undeserving of special status. Having listened to all of the arguments, Judge Davies chose to visit Burnley to inform his verdict. Representatives of both sides took it in turns to escort the judge around in what became a media spectacle.87 In the columns of Burnley’s newspapers, the ban opponents accused the council of deception, as some restoration work had been undertaken in Scott Park prior to Davies’s visit.88 It was alleged that gardeners had been seen planting flowers and mowing lawns. The judge decided that all of the parks from which dogs were banned, including Scott Park, possessed admirable ornamental features, and that the ban should thus be upheld. Davies stated that:

To my eyes each of them was a beautiful park and very well maintained. To describe them as grasslands strikes me as inept because it conveys nothing of their real beauty. No doubt there are a

85 House of Lords transcripts, evidence of Miss Bailey, BLA, P.51, 8, 16.
86 Evidence of Miss Bailey, 16.
85 ‘Judge gets down to the grass roots of dog ban case’, Burnley Evening Star, 1 July 1978, 1.
88 ‘Dog ban “alert”: but council denies park accusation’, Burnley Evening Express, 30 June 1878, 1.
few substantial areas covered with grass and deciduous trees but they form an integral part of a larger scene.89

Judge Davies agreed with the view held by the council: that the parks not only contained easily identifiable ornamental features, such as sunken flowerbeds, mowed and landscaped lawns and well-kept Italian gardens, but also their entire gated landscape embodied the ideal of ornamentation, with areas of high scenic quality and exemplary horticulture. Such arguments reinscribed Scott Park’s status as a timeless civil and picturesque place of domesticated and cultivated nature, which deserved protection from dogs and their faeces, into the local imaginary. Scott Park, then, remained an iconic park through which the town’s past and identity could be remembered and traditional values reasserted.

In 1982, however, a House of Lords committee reconsidered the issue. Ban opponents presented their argument—by now well rehearsed—that Scott Park had suffered a decline, making it impossible to compare the park with others from which dogs were banned. Confronted with a selection of photographs of Scott Park it in its prime state at the turn of the twentieth century, Burnley Council’s representative Dryer agreed that significant change had occurred, but insisted this was ‘a change in degree rather than in the basic concept’, reasserting the centrality of the park to the town. While acknowledging the pride engendered by Scott Park had failed to be reproduced over the years, Dryer claimed it still had the ‘potential to become more ornamental... something approaching its former level’, suggesting that the values associated with this landscape could be recaptured and even restored.90 In the end, the House of Lords agreed with the ban opponents that Scott Park was of a lower quality than the other parks, and recommended its dog ban be lifted. Burnley Council did not capitulate, and when illegal trespassing resumed, placed notices on the gates explaining that until the Lancashire Bill was passed, any dog walkers entering Scott Park were still breaking the law.

The ban supporters hoped that the recommendation of the House of Lords on Scott Park would be dropped when the House of Commons considered the Lancashire bill. Ban opponents attempted to be more constructive, insisting there were ways of conserving the park tradition while allowing dogs. Representatives of the Burnley Dog Action Committee offered to provide new railings for all ornamental sites in Queens Park and Thompson Park, to ensure that their precious features were preserved, thereby both accommodating and limiting the behaviour of dogs. However, Burnley Council representatives argued that such fencing, no matter how ornamental, was undesirable and

89 Glasgow Herald, 15 July 1978, 2.
90 Evidence of John Dryer, 44.
unfeasible. Their main objection was that the proposed ornamentation would be distributed throughout the parks rather than localized. Woodhead, the council’s recreation officer, was uncompromising, asserting that ‘it would not be practical or even aesthetically pleasing’ to construct such fencing in the parks.\textsuperscript{91} To keep dogs and their excrement out of the parks, the ban advocates maintained a broad definition of ornamentation that covered various kinds of horticulture, from very formal gardens and mowed lawns to informal open grass areas with trees and shrubbery.

However, the recommendation of the House of Lords on Scott Park was supported by the Commons. The ‘liberation’ of Scott Park was confirmed and the long drawn out Burnley Dog War ended. Yet in lifting the ban from Scott Park while leaving bans in place for other urban spaces, Parliament endorsed the Burnley bylaw and ratified its legal status as a legitimate measure to protect ornamental parks. Moreover, the Lancashire Bill made the removal of the ban from Scott Park ‘non-permanent’. Summing up the House of Lords committee’s deliberations, the chairman Lord Hinton had stated that ‘the condition of Scott Park has deteriorated... the dog ban should be lifted from Scott Park until such time as the Borough Council has restored the park to its pristine condition’.\textsuperscript{92} The House of Commons committee concurred, and ban opponents celebrated the outcome.\textsuperscript{93} Despite a partial victory for dog lovers, the decision to remove the Scott Park ban had little to do with meeting dogs’ needs; human culture remained the primary focus of attention. The decision recognized the material and symbolic importance of maintaining the park tradition in Burnley, through which the town could recover and express civic pride in its post-industrial present. However, the removal of the ban confirmed that Scott Park was not reminiscent of its past glory but rather evocative of the more recent decades of dereliction and neglect, and as with those spaces, canine defaecation was not out of place. While the decision registered Burnley’s civic leaders’ tendency to look backwards, to recover values forged in its industrial era to meet the challenges of the de-industrialized present, it also reveals the material and symbolic difficulties in historicizing the imagery of decline.

**Conclusion**

In a rallying essay that underscores the importance of cooperation and interdependencies between human and non-human lives in companion species alliances, historian and theorist Donna Haraway asked ‘who

\textsuperscript{91} Evidence of Michael Woodhead, 77.

\textsuperscript{92} House of Lords transcripts, Chairman Lord Hinton, BLA, P.51, vol. 9, 33.

\textsuperscript{93} Chairman Lord Hinton, 33.
takes care of the shit in a companion species relationship?' In this article I have explored that question through a microhistorical analysis of one town entangled in a dispute about where dogs and their faeces were welcome, at a time when no owners were compelled to take responsibility for cleaning up after their canine companions in public spaces. During this period, concerns about dogs' polluting powers and toxocariasis were in many respects an extreme manifestation of a much wider set of public and political concerns about dangerous or troublesome dogs that began in the 1970s and intensified throughout the decade. These concerns stimulated significant anti-dog sentiment, leading to attempts to exclude dog walkers from public parks, but for the most part, park bans failed to materialize.

A different story took shape in Burnley. What had started with concerns about the possibility of humans contracting a disease from dog excrement was, over a short period, absorbed and transformed into a multi-layered set of concerns that went well beyond anxiety to escape disease and a straightforward rallying card for dog lovers. On another level, it became a struggle between antagonists preoccupied with the town's prosperous past, with park traditions forged in the industrial era and their recovery and re-articulation in the post-industrial era. It is clear that the Burnley Dog War enacted and dramatized the material-cultural shifts, indeterminacies and tensions catalysed by deindustrialization.

It is important to acknowledge that the Burnley Dog War did not necessarily pave the way for our modern regime of picking up dog faeces. Few combatants mentioned this as a solution. Beyond Burnley there was little appetite in British political and reforming circles to emulate New York Mayor Edward Koch's 1978 'Pooper Scooper Law'. This was an indigenously generated sanitary revolution, which grew out of that city's attempts to combat its environmental problems and change its public image; a regime of canine waste management that has now become widespread. Indeed, it was not until 1996 that Britain introduced the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act, which places responsibility on owners to remove dog waste from public spaces, and introduced a regime of bins, signs and legally sanctioned fines to reinforce the understanding that waste from a dog legally belongs to the owner. Rather than laying the foundations for the regime of 'scooping the poop', the Burnley Dog War reveals how different sets of sensibilities and political, economic and cultural configurations and priorities shape perceptions of the status of dog faeces as a source of pollution.

94 Donna Haraway, ‘Cyborgs to Companion Species: Reconfiguring Kinship in Technoscience’, in Don Ihde and Evan Selinger (eds), Chasing Technologies: Matrix for Materiality (Bloomington, 2003), 79. D. Haraway, Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Others (Chicago, 2003).
Finally, the Burnley Dog War shows that the interspecies sharing of public space is not a straightforward expression of human care and obligations to dogs. It demonstrates the significant roles of culture, human priorities and ideas about risk in framing the rules by which dogs enter public space, rules that create and police dog-walking space. More specifically, we have seen how dog-walking is performed within a socio-eco network, one in which the contested status of dog faeces made the network’s interconnectivity to symbolic and material landscapes apparent and their relational interconnectivities with local identity and meanings. Today the sight of dog faeces continues to outrage local communities across Britain, at times triggering local crusades against dogs and attempts to restrict their access to public environments. In light of the history of the Burnley Dog War, which continues to divide the town today, messy disputes over dog faeces must be understood situationally, to reach the deeper meanings about place, attachment and identity with which they are fuelled.