

Dying quietly: English suburbs and the stiff upper lip

Danny Dorling (final draft August 21, 2018)

Abstract: The English suburbs are dying. Years of austerity have slowly changed the landscape. Poverty is now common in the suburbs. Since 2014 life expectancy has been falling across most of England, especially in the suburbs. Now infant mortality rates are also rising year on year (unlike anywhere else in Europe). In hindsight it is not surprising that the majority of suburban English people voted Brexit, most noticeably in the Home Counties. Middle England is understandably angry. No more fortitude in the face of adversity and the hiding of emotions. The stiff up lip has slipped. Change is in the air."

Keywords: Old-England, Dying, Empire-song, Dignified, Civilised, Suburbs

The New Suburbs

Mustn't grumble. Mustn't make a fuss. England's suburbs are slowly dying and changing. The elderly are now dying faster than before (Figure 1). Cuts to meals-on-wheels, social worker visits, day centres, bus routes, post-offices and many other suburban staples have hastened their exit. The few elderly in densely packed terraces living nearer the centre of cities can more easily look out for each other. In old age it is in the suburbs, far away from your children (if you had children), that you now much more often live and die alone in England.

The mantra that there is no such thing as society, just families and their children, rings both true and hollow in the suburbs. The suburbs are becoming places in which the elderly who have not quite made it into the best-off echelons reside. Not rich enough to decamp to idyllic villages, to private health care and eventually an exclusive retirement complex, those who did well, but not

exceptionally well, face an isolated suburban old age. Their grown-up children live in another suburb far away, or have not yet escaped the central city and renting – still waiting for the inheritance that is their ticket to suburbia.

The suburbs are changing more quickly today than they have changed in decades. The centres of cities are increasingly reserved for the young, the successful and those who can afford to avoid long commutes. Out of town villages are where the very affluent go when they age – the idyllic cottage in the country, ideally with one of the few remaining village schools nearby, geographically reserved for the children that England's upper middle class now have so very late in their lives. The most successful hop over the suburbs when making their jump from Notting Hill mews to North Oxfordshire cottage; from dinner parties to country suppers.

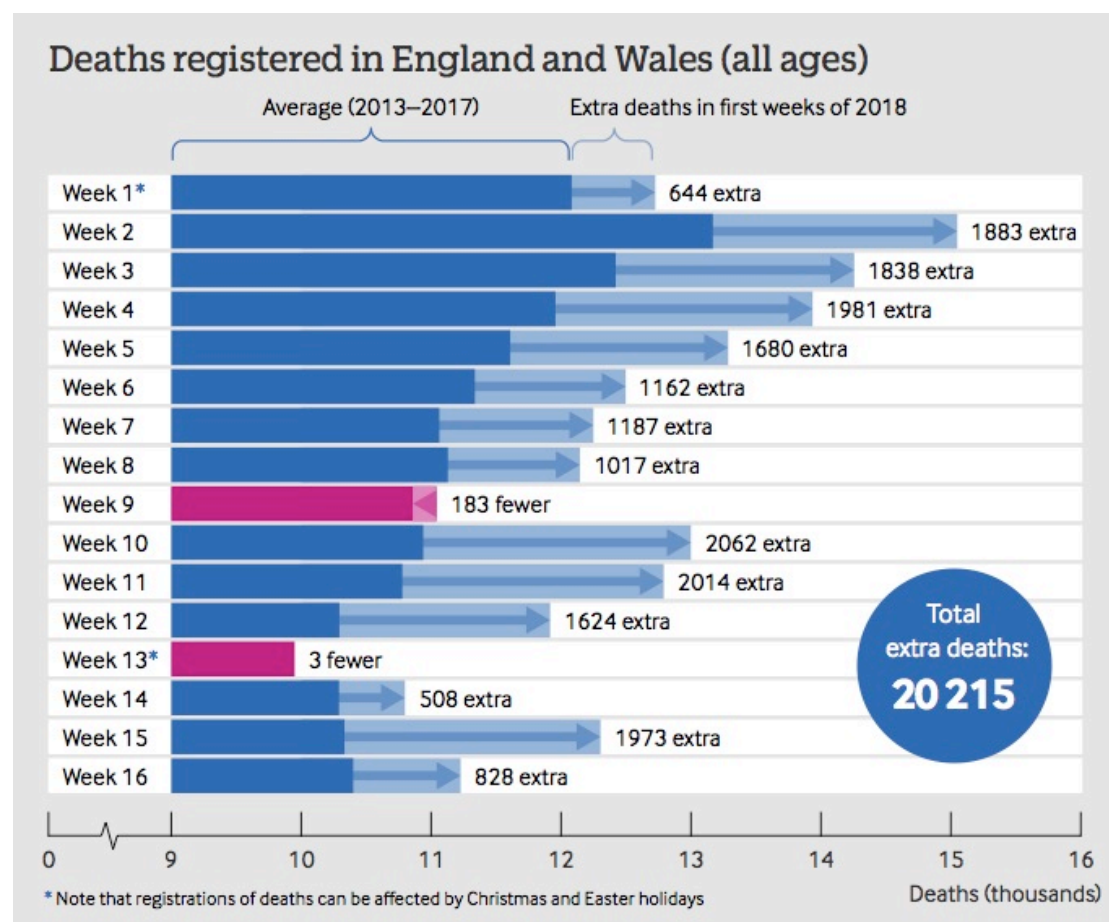
England accommodated its loss of empire by accepting rising economic inequality. After the 1970s the country as a whole became relatively poorer in comparison to the rest of the world and with most of Europe, but in the 1980s, 1990s and noughties those at the top took a greater and greater share of the pie each year. As they did so they took more and more from the poor and from suburban middle England, from the places where the majority lived, the places that saw progress stall.

Loft conversions in the city and barn conversions for a few in the countryside contrast with a spreading mediocrity for the majority in what had been the great suburban new hope of the 1930 to 1970 era. The suburbs were supposed to be safe. The suburbs had been where life's winners went. Suburban schools were 'good', suburban jobs were plentiful and well paid. Suburban doctors were not over-worked; hospitals were accessible – always there for when you needed them; until the money began to run out and the waiting lists began to grow.

The money began to run out in the 1970s. After that decade there was less and less building of new suburbs. Home building had fallen from a UK peak of around 400,000 new units a year in the 1960s to around 200,000 a year by the 1980s

after which it never recovered and slumped further after the 2008 crash. As of August 2018, levels of building are still below 200,000 a year despite the now huge pent-up need for more housing in the most overcrowded places.¹ At first there was little complaint from the suburbs where house prices rose and rose and homeowners began to think they were becoming richer and richer; but the real riches were being made by those who could lend huge sums to aspiring home-owners, or who could buy and then rent out property. And older homeowners were not “doing well”. In early 2018 the worse rise in mortality in England and Wales was seen since that of the Second World War (see Figure 1)

Figure 1: The rise in mortality in England and Wales in first sixteen weeks of 2018



Source: Hiam, L. and Dorling, D. (2018) Rise in mortality in England and Wales in first sixteen weeks of 2018: rapid response, *BMJ*, May 8th, <https://www.bmj.com/content/360/bmj.k1090/rr-8>

Today there are far fewer winners, so those fewer winners win so much more. The semi-detached three bedroom suburban house has switched from being the place you got to (if you made it), to the place you end up in if you have not failed but also have not succeeded. It is where you find that the good life has escaped you. The bills remain high, the council tax rises, the repairs have to be done and the incomes of those living around you appear to be slowly sinking downwards. And the old, the old are dying in greater and greater numbers, earlier as the welfare state is needed in suburbs where the elderly now live such a long way away from their family.

The suburbs, which used to be for winners, are now more and more often the destination of those who have only just avoided becoming losers. And those who have lost out are starting to move in too. This is beginning to swing suburbs in the South of England towards Labour.² Landlords buy up suburban semis and rent them out to families who no longer qualify for a mortgage. Poorer unrelated immigrants live two or three to a room in the poorer parts of the suburbs. But that is only in the suburbs of successful cities, the ones where the population is still rising. The suburbs that are faring worse are those in which the new private landlords who buy up property there have no interest other than financial, and to which few immigrants today arrive.

Suburban Conservative voting England, where the fewest immigrants arrive, is where UKIP did best in various votes before 2017. We try to pretend it is the poor council estates, the East Coast and 'The North' where this dissatisfaction was greatest; but that is not where the sense of loss was strongest. Council estates lost their pride in the 1980s as those homes that could be sold off were sold off under right-to-buy and then on to private landlords. The North had been repeatedly decimated during the 1990s when the end of deindustrialisation turned out to be low wage work. It took until the 2000s for the suburbs and the South to begin to decline, as homeownership began to fall, as the 1% took more and more. The 1% are the winners today and the 1% don't live in the suburbs. They have homes in the city centre and the countryside – often both.

In 1997 the best-off 1% of people in the UK took 12.1% of all income. This was more than twice what they took in Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark. It was more than their take in any other European country, even then. New Labour did not reduce the share of national income taken by those already receiving the most, but instead allowed their take to rise even higher, to 15.4% by 2007. That extra 3.3% of national income was, in effect, almost entirely taken from the suburbs, and is still taken from them each and every year.³ In other European countries, where the 1% take less, the poor do much better – but it is the suburbs that most benefit from greater economic equality.

When the 1% take so much there is not enough for the rest. Compared to Scandinavian norms the best-rewarded 1% of people in the UK take enough extra *to fund a second national health service*. The groups just beneath them also take more than in any other European country in a desperate attempt to keep up with the 1% above them, often just to be able to avoid a modest home in the city away from outlying suburbs. That again sucks out more and more from the suburbs. The income of the 1% is not recycled outside of the city and the countryside. It creates opulence in a very few places, and jobs that are mostly for servants.

The suburbs first rose up in England as working in service disappeared. Servants used to live in the large homes of the extremely rich. They were not allowed to have homes of their own and could not have afforded to rent – even if they had been allowed to move out.

The modern rise in people working in service is subtle today, but it is substantial. It is a rise in more being at the very bottom of the labour market. It is a rise which has hollowed out the jobs in the middle. It is the rise in people, such as school teachers in southern cities and labours in the north, who cannot afford to get by but cannot afford to start a family. To be a servant 'living in' in Victorian Britain was to be unable to start a family.

The suffering of the suburbs

The suburbs hold an iconic place in the identity of England. In South Wales the outer rim of homes on the edge of the Valley was the least desired and first to be demolished when industry (especially coal-mines) declined. Scotland's great cities still have more in common with mainland European tenements and the mainland European love of living in the city. It was mostly the English who wanted to live so far apart and then only some of the middle-class English. But who would not have wanted to live away from the grime and soot of London, Birmingham and Manchester a century ago?

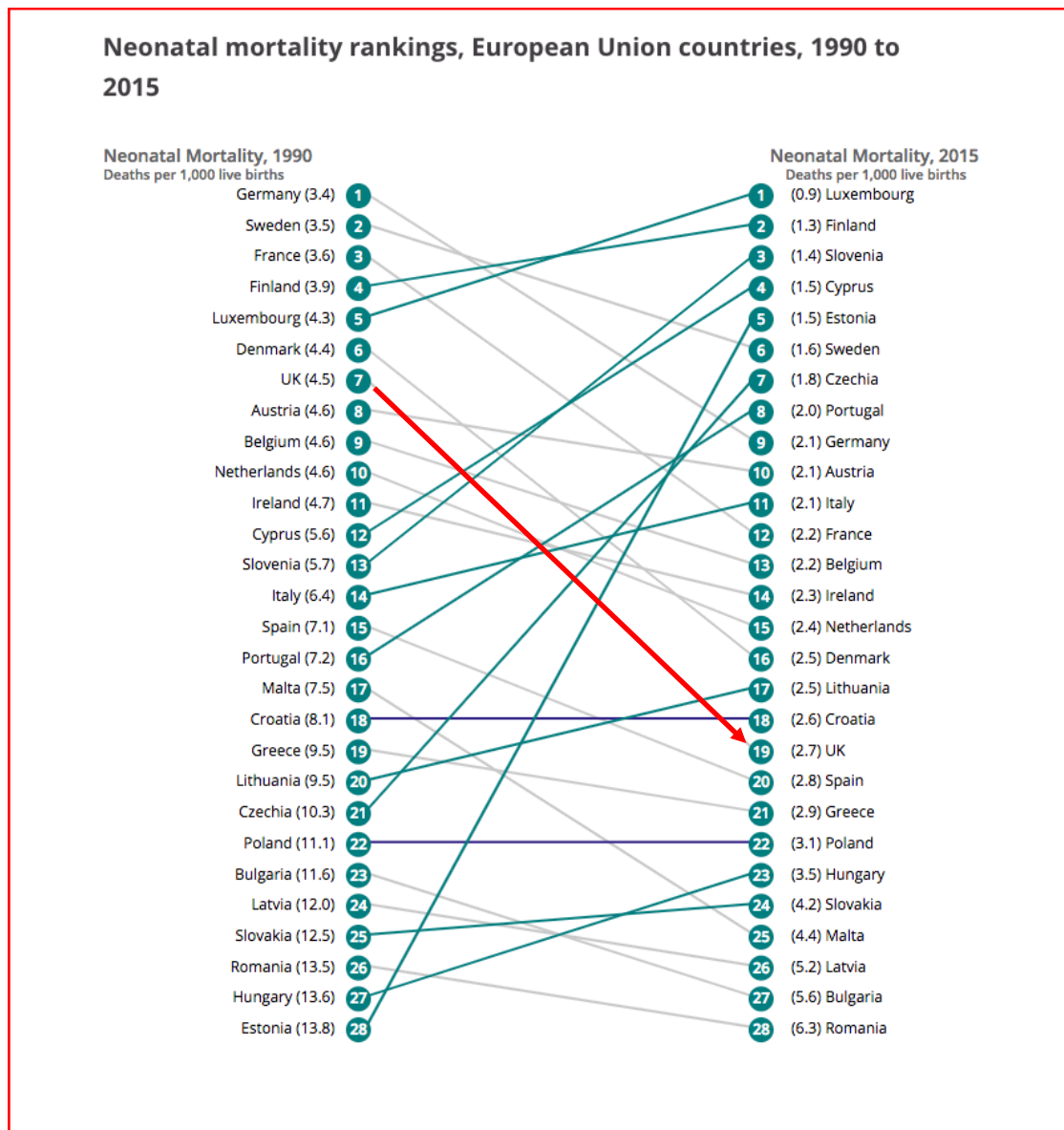
For decades the suburbs flourished. Land wealth declined as inheritance tax was increased. The stately homes were handed to the National Trust not out of altruism but because their owners could not pay the taxes or afford their upkeep anymore, all as England became more economically equal. London town houses were divided up into separate flats. More and more suburbs were built as slums were flattened as the growing population won the right to be treated with decency. Population growth then slowed as people had fewer children in the suburbs. For the first time ever most children got their own bedroom, one they did not have to share with a sibling. Their heyday of such affluence was the 1970s.⁴

At first when inequalities rose in the 1980s the Southern English suburbs appeared to do well. Thatcher's government not only rewarded the best-off 1% but also a large group of those below that group, who overwhelmingly lived in the suburbs. Rotting bay windows were replaced. Double garages built, and spare bedrooms added in attics and over the garages. But that was then, and it was mostly only in the South East.

In the 1990s many inner city homes and tower blocks in the North of England, in Scotland, and in Wales were demolished. At the end of the decade Northern Ireland experienced a mini housing boom when the troubles ended and in the

wake of economic boom in the Republic, but that turned out to be short lived. House prices between the South East of England and the rest of the UK diverged rapidly. And slowly, steadily the South East began to become ‘unaffordable’.

Figure 2 : Neonatal mortality rates, EU countries, 1990-2015



Source, ONS (2017) UK drops in European child mortality rankings, October 13th 2017, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/childhealth/articles/ukdropsineuropeanchildmortalityrankings/2017-10-13>

Between the censuses of 2001 and 2011 the number of people who had to resort to private renting in the UK doubled. The increases were greatest in the South East and especially within London. This was portrayed as a 'buy-to-let revolution' but it was led by landlords who owned multiple properties, not by 'small investors'. And all the time living standards in the UK, especially in England, were falling in relation to those in the rest of Europe. Illustrated most dramatically by the changing ranking in neonatal (first 28 days) mortality rates changing from 1990 to 2015 (Figure 2).

The decline in living standard was felt most acutely in the suburbs, places that had become used to affluence, but no longer places that could avoid losing out. From slowing improvements in infant mortality, through to declining school budgets, low wage work for the majority, the introduction of crippling students loads leading to precious jobs, and then paying the highest rents in Europe, the problems of the English were no longer concentrated in 'those inner cities'.

Turnover of the ownership of dwellings slowed dramatically as people could move home without the ownership of that home needing to change and this accelerated with the housing market slump of 2007/8 when it became harder and harder to secure a mortgage. The suburbs might in theory be worth a great deal, but many of their inhabitants had nowhere they could easily afford to move to that would allow them to cash-in on their apparent windfall, at least not near their existing friends, neighbours and local hospital.

Since 2008 it has been the suburbs that have suffered most in relative terms. Poverty rose faster in outer London than inner London. People who could not afford to live in London, or Oxford, or Brighton, or the more salubrious parts of York, Bristol or Exeter were mostly living in the suburbs of average towns and cities and slowly seeing opportunities around where they lived diminish. These included opportunities for well-rewarded work, opportunities to attend a well-funded school, opportunities to go to university without incurring that huge debt. Half of all young women in England now go to university but only the very

richest avoid student debt by paying their fees up front (8% of all). These are often children from the same families that buy property in cash – seeing mortgages as necessities only for the ‘little people’.

It in Southern England’s suburbs where poverty rose the most between the 2001 and 2011 censuses. So gradual and hidden was the rise that without a census it could not be seen.⁵ And people didn’t grumble, they kept a stiff upper lip, at least through 2012, 2013, 2014 and even 2015. The suburbs are where loneliness is now concentrated. They are where more and more of the food banks are placed and the gas bills are not paid on time. At first it was just in the inner city that people did badly, but by 2018 it became apparent that all across the UK life expectancy had peaked in 2014 and had declined since then. Most of that decline had to occur in the suburbs because the majority of people in the UK live in towns and cities but not in the inner city.⁶

Despite their recent woes, the suburbs are where, politically, people can still be found who most strongly hold onto the dream that if only they worked hard enough they would be alright, they would own their home. And one day they would sell that home for a small fortune and retire to a warmer friendlier country. But who will buy the 1930s semis in 2030? Will you sell up to a landlord when you leave suburbia? And how much will suburbia then really be worth? What is it becoming?

When, in 2016 and early 2017 young adults in Britain looked at what was increasingly on offer they began to balk at the unfairness of it all. Large numbers did not vote in the General Election of 2015, Labour did not offer them much of an alternative then. Almost as many young adults did not vote in the referendum of 2016, for either side. Again, what was there for them to vote for? But come June 2017 their votes against the landlords, against student fees, and against the decay of the suburbs that was increasingly looking like their fate.

The architecture of wealth extraction

‘The architecture of wealth extraction is a cancer on this planet. It continually corrupts our governments, poisons the natural environment, and pits us against each other in a “race to the bottom” that has only one logical outcome—the wholesale destruction of life-giving capacities for the only home planet we’ll ever have.’

Joe Brewer, 2016⁷

It is easy to become despondent. ‘Progressives’ (you the reader are likely to label yourself as one – or be so labelled by others) are especially good at despondency, not least because they see the madness of carrying on as we are.

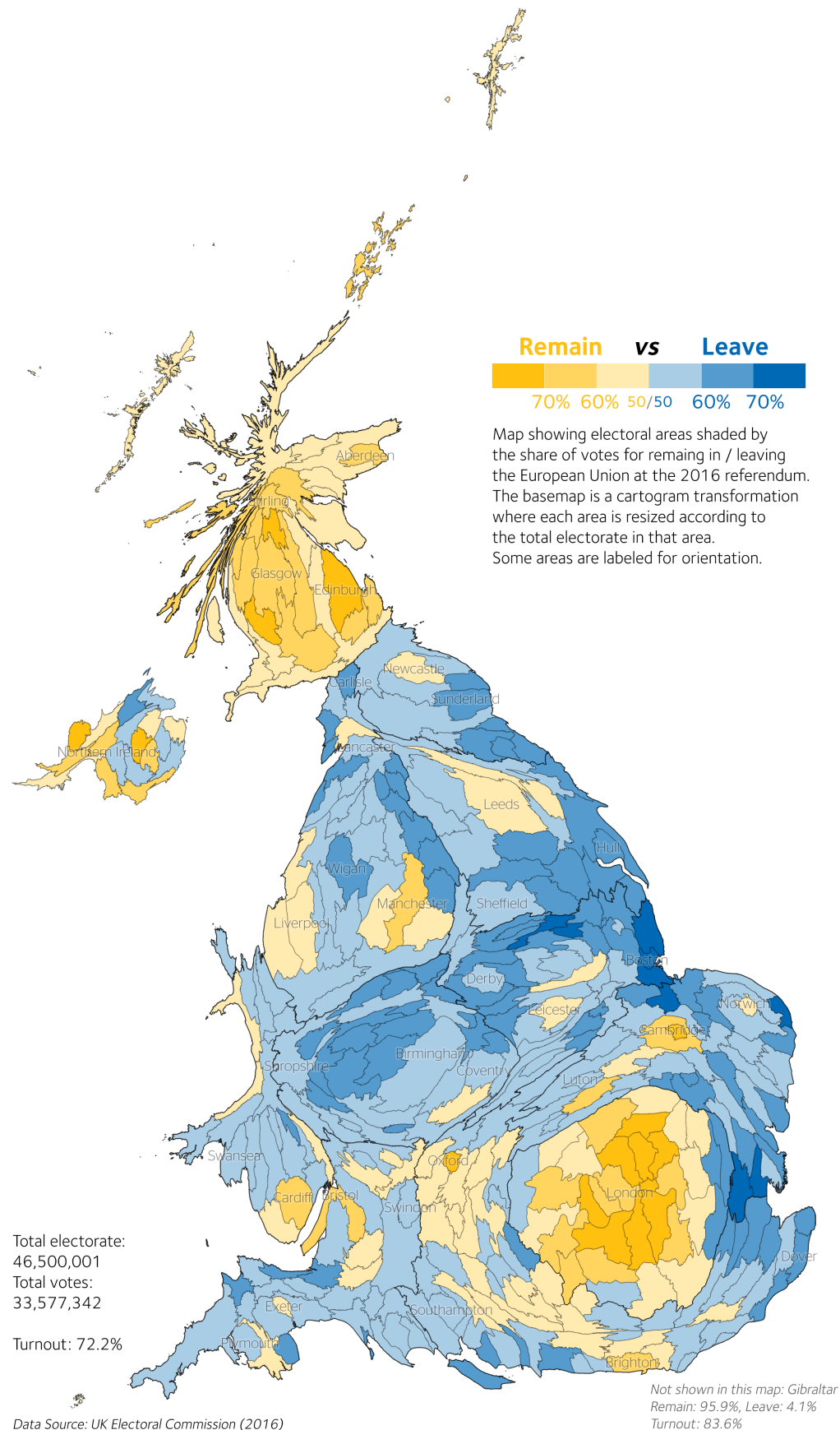
In contrast, those few who are in favour of high inequality tend to be very optimistic about their own prospects and say the future will be fine; the planet will sort itself out. If the suburbs are slowly dying, homeowners being replaced by renters, stability giving way to precarity, then that will become ‘creative destruction’ – or so they claim. Progressives are relegated to carping from the side-lines. Or at least it can appear that way.

Joe Brewer’s consultancy is based in the northern suburbs of Seattle. His words, quoted above, were written a few months before the UK Brexit and USA Trump votes. Both were suburban driven votes. It was the places where the often less physically fit, older, somewhat whiter and slightly better-off lived that swung both referendum and election on either sides of the Atlantic. Elsewhere, in most of the affluent world, where the race to the bottom is better held back than in the UK or USA, the suburbs continue to prosper and innovate.

The map below (Figure 3) shows how the suburbs voted to ‘Leave’ in 2016, even in London, even around the edge of Liverpool, which Stuart Wilks-Heeg so clearly explains (in this issue) is different, even there the suburbs voted to leave the EU.¹

¹Wilks-Hegg (2018) Safe Labour Suburbia? The changing politics of the Merseyside suburbs, Political Quarterly, this issue.

Figure 3: The Human Geography of the EU Referenced vote, 2016



Source: drawn by Benjamin Hennig, reproduced with permission.

If you want a modern day definition of suburb in England it could be: *“That part of the end of your town or city where the majority of people quietly, desperately and angrily voted to leave the EU as they felt on the edge”*.

Look carefully at the map in Figure 3 – can’t you see the suburbs? Look around Bristol, around Brighton, go a little further out from Cambridge than you might normally and there you will find suburbia beginning, where the area turns light blue: ‘weak majority leave’. It was the suburbs that were Brexit. Just look at the map and forget your preconceived prejudices. The map shows the pattern.

As David Gilbert, Claire Dwyer and Nazneen Ahmed explain, again in this issue, it is the suburbs where Leave and Remain most often met, with Leave being in the majority in the more outer suburbs and the very outer suburbs (places we once referred to as countryside – but aren’t).

However, if the map does not convince you then look at the graph (Figure 4). Figure 4 was drawn by Daniel Watts. It shows that only the very most privileged areas of England voted solidly for remain. The 10% of England with the lowest rates of deprivation were the only places to solidly vote Remain. These are now urban areas – not suburban. Many are in the more affluent and gentrified parts of London.

Figure 4 shows that it was middle England – suburban England – that voted leave most strongly. It was in the middle four bars of areas – in average constituencies in England that the largest number and highest overall proportions voted leave. The poorest three tens and the richest three tenths were more likely remain. Academics tend to hate this result because it was so often people living near where they lived, where they could afford to live, that voted leave.

Political analysts produced sophisticated regression models to try to show it was the disaffected “white” working class with an identity crisis that voted out; but it

wasn't. Instead it was the successful boss of a small firm of electricians living next door to you (dear reader) in middle Britain, in the other half of your 1930s semi – you know the one – the one who wonders what the hell you are paid to do all day as you go off to lecture on 'political economy'.

Figure 4: Decile of Deprivation and the 2016 EU Referendum: England



Source: drawn by Daniel Watts, reproduced with permission.

Figure 4 shows that the very poorest three tenth of constituencies in England voted disproportionately for remain. There is far more yellow in the three bars to the left. So much more valuable than a 1970s style linear regression analysis or a 1980s logistic regression. Figure 4, using Chris Hanretty's estimates⁸ but produced by a lone researcher away from any research team, explains what Figure 3 is all about. Middle England, suburbia, the bulk of the middle class and the south have not been having a good time of it lately and when offered a chance to vote for "anything but this" did so. In contrast, the poorest third of the country had not been having a good time for some time and were less jumpy.

It is easy to become skeptical, but cross the ocean again to where the quote at the start of this section came from and there is still hope to be had. In Seattle there is progress. And often progress is measured in the simplest of ways: In 2016 a 20 miles per hour residential speed limit was agreed for all the residential streets, along with arterial routes in the downtown area limited to 25 miles an hour. So 25mph downtown, 20mph in the suburbs.

The Seattle city leaders have a vision to prevent all serious traffic injuries within Seattle by the year 2030. There were 130 serious injuries from road crashes there last year and 20 deaths on its roads.⁹ But even as the most progressive of cities tries to make life more liveable for its residents, there is a sense that the clock is turning back and progress has – at the very least – stalled, the innovations now being made can feel too little too late. Suburbs can be denser, safer, and alive, as in much of Europe and Japan, or they can remain spaced-out, selfish and suspicious.

The English and American suburbs are both quietly dying. They are no longer places of success, but have become places of social and political retreat (where people hark after "being great again"). Both the United Kingdom and the United States are now unions that are in economic and financial decline. As economic inequalities in both unions reach new post-war maxima the suburbs have become their latest victim. The suburbs are no longer well off. People in the

suburbs are beginning to experience real income falls too. The US vote for Trump was highest in those suburbs in which the health of Americans was declining most quickly.¹⁰ So much of suburban USA was faring badly that Trump could win his presidency on the back of that failure. The *Economist* article just referenced (endnote 10) suggests that he won in the suburbs.

In the UK too, there is of course still hope that we could rebuilt our society and see our health and welfare improve again as it improved so often in the past. In May and June 2017, the fastest ever rise in the polls for any political party propelled Labour's fortunes up to force a hung parliament. The vote swing was bigger than any seen since 1945, and arguably greater even than that considering that the 1945 swing occurred over the course of ten years (and one war), from when the 1935 election had been held. The 2017 General election also saw the first fall in political segregation in the UK since 1979. At every election from 1979 to 2015 the Conservative share of the vote rose most (or fell least) in those areas where the Tories were already most popular (see Figure 5). That ratchet of ever-increasing political polarisation appeared to break in June 2017, whether the break is permanent is yet to be seen.

What matters for this analysis is that the break occurred between 2015 and 2017. Before then the situation simply appeared to be worsening continuously. It was in suburban England in the years 2012, 2013 and 2014 that more and more people at first described their own health in worsening terms and in which, in 2015, we saw life expectancy improvements stall and government deny any responsibility for the large rises in deaths among the elderly. The overall increases in mortality in 2015 were amongst the three highest annual rises seen since the Second World War in the UK. From mid-year 2014 to mid-year 2015 they were almost certainly the highest recorded.¹¹ Mortality rates in the UK remained high in 2016 and among the elderly peaked again in early 2017. What was most shocking was how little attention this received. It is as if we now expect it. But as the June 2017 UK election result showed, people had begun to notice and to react. As I write in May 2018 support for Corbyn's Labour party still lies at 38% of all voters – as it did in June 2017.

The revolt of the suburbs - Brexit

When living standards no longer improve, when public services are cut, when the life expectancy of the frail falls in the suburbs (not the inner city) people look around for who to blame. They are told to blame themselves for not looking after their own health, or to blame immigrants for using too much of the already depleted public services, and then they are told that if they vote in particular ways all will be well again. They are told to 'take back control'. To get back to how things were in the early 1970s. Eventually, after they have blamed everyone else they may turn to blame those in power.

In America, to maintain pride, a small number of suburbanites organised 'Tea Party' rallies. The rallies held on April 15th 2009 have been shown to increase subsequent voting for the Republican party from between 7 and 14 votes for every Tea Party protestor that took part in those rallies. This was the independent effect just of protesting on just that one day. An ingenious political analysis of whether it rained on the day of the rallies (as opposed to the day before or after) and hence who protestor turnout correlated with subsequent vote swings has confirmed this. A small group of disgruntled suburbanites can galvanize many others when and where the circumstances are right.¹²

So, while campaigners in Seattle secure a commitment to 20 mile an hour speed limits on residential roads, other campaigners across much of the rest of the USA secured a commitment to (possibly) build a wall along the entire Mexican border, to (possibly, but almost certainly not) bring industry back to the USA and (almost certainly not) 'make America Great Again'.

The residential road speed restrictions are achievable but difficult to achieve; the latter aspirations are all fantasy but sounds so much more impressive than simply making suburban roads safer, especially for local children and the elderly. In the UK too campaigning bifurcates between successful local campaigns to improve one neighbourhood after another, and successful national campaigns to

convince enough people that they need to 'take back control', build walls, repatriate industry and become 'Great Again'.

In the UK the new party growing in particular parts of the suburbs had been UKIP. That party is almost dead now. One analysis published in early 2017 showed that UKIP party members are 99% white, ten times more likely to have voted Conservative before UKIP than to have voted Labour in the past (which explains why they are so suburban), and are made up of mostly old men people harbouring a significantly greater dislike of Muslims than the majority of the population.¹³ That analysis, like so many others, did not foresee UKIP's fall from grace in June 2017 nor Labour's rapid rise in popularity, largely a rise among people who didn't normally vote, and switchers from Liberals and Greens.

The old party of the suburbs were the Conservatives. Their suburban grip remains strong but was then weakened by UKIP. Today most of the UKIP vote has returned to the Tories as today they now offer Brexit as suburban salvation – a new hope to cling onto for a few years, a return to an imagined past of great progress. The Conservatives too will now build a wall to stop more migrants, but it will be an invisible electronic wall of visa restrictions and entitlements reduced. This, they promise, will 'Make Britain Great Again'.

The stiff upper lip of Nigel Farage is a caricature of 1950s suburbia, an era in which he never lived. His Brexit promise of a return to glory days is of a return to when suburbia was newly built, on the back of stocks and shares traded by people like his (and David Cameron's) father, which in turn was on the back of profits made from trading with an empire that was never acknowledged as the source of the boom. We sold dear to the Empire and brought cheap from it. Those days are gone. Failure to replace the empire with an alternative, while allowing the 1% to take more and more, is what has been killing suburbia.

The Suburban Stability of the 1960s and 1970s

Perry Anderson wrote the words quoted below in 1964. Today the English population is a little larger. Other than that, much else feels very familiar, but it should not feel that familiar. It was, perhaps, because Perry and those who agreed with him complained too much that they did not see the possibility of change that was then in the air:

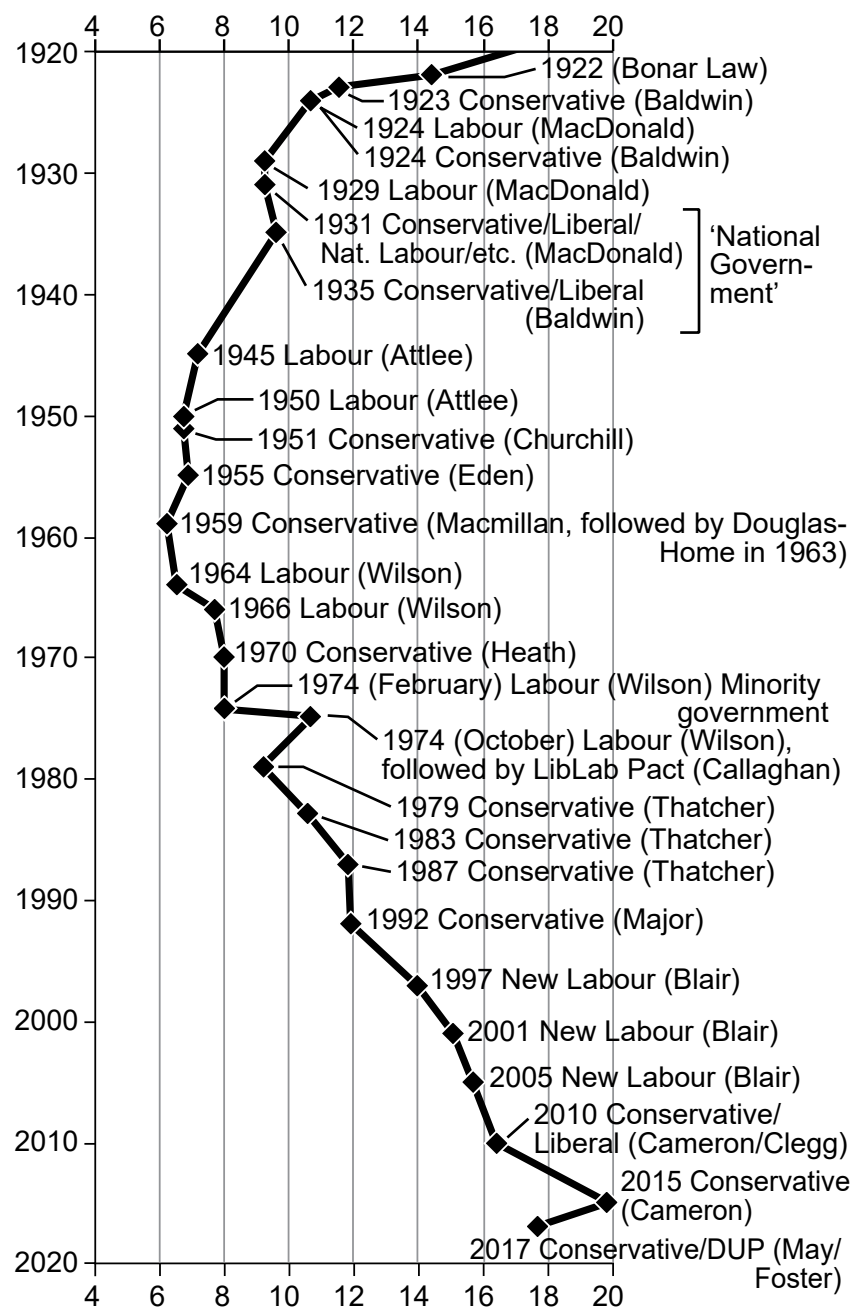
*'The present equilibrium in England remains a crushingly capitalist one, with inequalities which rival or outdistance those anywhere in the capitalist world: 1 per cent of the population owns 43 per cent of the fixed property, 50 per cent of Cabinet Ministers come from a school of 1,000 out of a nation of 50,000,000. The narrow area in which at any given period it moves back and forth can be defined as the precise elasticity of the hegemonic order at that conjuncture.'*¹⁴

What Perry Anderson was describing above was the 'Old Right', but he was wrong about the extent of inequalities back then. They were far narrower than he knew and getting even narrower in 1964 – but the seeds of a reversal were already being sown. Four years after Anderson was writing David Collard would identify the UK's 'New Right' who believed that *'state provided services should be taken into the private sector on normal market principles except for those hard cases really needing state intervention'*.¹⁵ This was the group who would come to hold power and influence in the UK from May 1979 until June 2016 when the ex-pupils of that same school, Eton (and a few similar schools) again dominated the Conservative cabinet, until they were forced to resign or were sacked by the incoming Prime Minister Theresa May in the summer of 2016.

David Cameron's Etonian cabinet, formed in May 2010 and reformed after the election of May 2015, fell apart following the Brexit referendum of June 2016. Sometime things change quickly, but even then we could not see what would happen within just another twelve months. The old right of 1963, which Perry was writing about in 1964, were similarly the end of an era. The Suez crisis and a

country that would soon laugh at judges asking whether ‘this was a book you would wish your wife and servants to read’ saw to that. The suburbs were mocked in the 1960s and made the butt of jokes in 1970s TV Sitcoms. ‘The Good Life’ ran from 1975 to 1978, when the suburbs had come of age.

Figure 5: Conservative voters 1920-2017, a segregation index



Source: Dorling, D. (2018) *Peak Inequality*, Bristol: Policy Press.

A similar 'New Right' began to grow stronger and later dominant in the USA from the 1963 assassination of John F. Kennedy through to at least the 2017 inauguration of Donald J. Trump. The golden age of US suburbia was seen in the years immediately prior to 1980 when two thirds of all population growth was in new developments outside of the traditional metropolitan centres.¹⁶ After that came inner city decline, loss of confidence in the city, then initially suburban housing booms but ones that were stoked on fear rather than hope. What began in the inner city would slowly spread to the suburbs, cumulating in the 2008 sub-prime mortgage disaster of US suburbia.

Figure 5 (above) shows how geographically segregated Conservative voters were at each general election: the minimal proportion who would have to move constituency for there to be an even distribution. The date of each election is also shown alongside the party that won and the surname of its leader(s).

Conclusion – recapturing the suburbs

The architecture of wealth creation has not been developed along the same lines in every affluent country. In the US and UK it was been allowed to take a particular form which was originally at the expense of the poor and which is now harming the well-being of the majority, especially the young. This is why suburbia is now suffering, why we talk of rising poverty, overcrowding and (ironically too) rising loneliness in the suburbs; of social dislocation and greater anomie where not too long ago there was the greatest sense of progress.

In 1977 during the celebrations of Queen Elizabeth's Silver Jubilee I sat at a trestle table put out in the road in our suburban street. I was 9 years old but had not had to fear the looming 11-plus because it had recently been abolished in the city where I grew up. Suburbia was the home of great equality. People did a wide

variety of jobs on my street, but all were in work. There was still full employment and because of that not many jobs were very lowly paid. This was because you could leave a low paid job and get a better paid one relatively easily back then.

Suburbia was varied and aspirational, although racism was rife. But there was a sense of progress. The suburb was relatively new; a few older people were still the first occupants of their homes. Today only the relatively affluent can afford to buy a home where I grew up and increasing numbers of people rent the 1930s semis of my childhood Oxford suburban street. Like Seattle the residential roads are now 20 mile per hour speed limited; but far fewer children play on the streets. Residential turnover is far higher than it was because of more short-term renting. Fewer people know their neighbours. More are very probably lonely.

All across England suburbs have been slowly dying, changing from places of aspiration to neighbourhoods where many can be frightened into voting to 'take back control'. Even for the very affluent so many of their futures depend on housing prices remaining high, in places that are now amongst the most expensive to live in worldwide. This cannot be sustained for long. Just as the inner city changed, so too will the suburbs, but they cannot be changed in the same way. Not everywhere can gentrify. Instead the suburbs need to be recaptured by the young.

If the next generation are to settle down and have their children in the suburbs then they need to win those suburbs back – politically – from the Landlord and the ideology of let the Devil take the hindmost. Figure 6 shows what happens when the suburbs are lost.

Figure 6: From The Economist

Local health outcomes predict Trumpward swings

Nov 19th 2016 | NEW YORK | From the print edition



1.8K



Vitality and the vote

United States, health metrics against swing to Donald Trump, by county



Sources: Atlas of US Presidential Elections; Census Bureau; IPUMS; Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation; *The Economist*

*Weighted index of obesity, diabetes, heavy drinking, physical exercise and life expectancy, 2010-12

Source: <http://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21710265-local-health-outcomes-predict-trumpward-swings-illness-indicator>

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