**Transcript:**

**From the Ground Up Archive,**

**James Boyce & Elsa Noterman in-conversation**

00:00 ROSIE >> So I would like to introduce the first panel. And I'm going to introduce Elsa, and James in a moment. But just before I do that I just want to show you this image on your left-hand side, of the Fens. And it's an image of -- thank you -- it's an image that shows the Fens. So that blue square is Wysing, and the Fens is a bit north of that. That's a climate map 50 years into the future. And then on your right-hand side you can see that area with the black line around it, that's the flood. That shows the Fens in the Anglo Saxon period. About 1,000 years ago. So since I found this image, the flood map of the Fens in the future and the map of the Fens in the past, I've been really fascinated by the history of the Fens, the history of life on the Fens the possibility that that give us for thinking about the future of the Fens and where Wysing is, right on the edge of that. And really that question about what we can actually do from where we are, the resources we have available, the knowledge we can all bring. Just feels incredibly pertinent. Because we're in this... it's not like... you know now where we have this landscape that's not flooded. That's a blip. It was flooded before, it's going to be flooded again. What does this blip give us, where do we need to think– How can we think about our future from within the blip [chuckle]. And the reason we invited James and Elsa to come and really kind of present the first session to ground and really set some of the context for the whole day is really to think about really what we can do, what we can learn from, how we can make a future together from where we are. And this where we are is so urgent and important and I won't say more than that. Instead I will just introduce, first of all I'm going to introduce James who will then speak for 10 minutes



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about his book. And then I'll introduce Elsa who will also speak for 10 minutes about some of the amazing work she's doing and engaged with. And then there'll be time for questions, and a conversation between the two of them, and then questions from the floor. So first of all, I would like to welcome James Boyce, who's a multiaward winning Australian historian. His first book 'Demons' Land', was described as the most significant colonial history since 'The Fatal Shore, 1835: The Founding of Melbourne, and the conquest of Australia'. Ages book of the year, and Original Sin: The Making of the Western World' was hailed by the Washington Post as exhilarating. So pretty good. And his most recent book. 'Imperial Mud: The Fight for the Fens' is a postcolonial history of the destruction of the Fens in Eastern England. I would like to welcome James to speak to us about that work.

03:54 >> JAMES BOYCE : Thank you for the welcome, and thank you all for coming and the wonderful hospitality that I've been receiving here. Always feels a little bit impertinent to be talking about your home... you know, I will get around to explaining why an Australian is writing about the Fens. Most of my work, as Rosie said was in Australian colonial history. But I was living in Norwich many years ago, and I was a social worker with the elderly people's team, and I had the country patch. And it was really those stories the country folk were telling me that was almost at the beginning of the book. Because they were describing a really preindustrial way of life. They had memories that absolutely fascinated me. And it got me reading about this area that happened to be by coincidence also my ancestral homeland on my mother and father's side that probably encouraged further reading and exploration. I need to describe, really start with a picture of the Fens, just because, the sort of landscape we're talking about – it's provisionally lost, and it's a constantly changing and evolving landscape. You can



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never sort of fix it in time. But the predrainage Fen. The Fen that was here before the drainage schemes.  It's important to get some idea in your head. Because unfortunately the last drainage occurred just before photography.  Really before even the romantic art moment, which sort of has immoralized the lake district and other areas. And we're talking about the last really wild Part of lowland England that was left.

05:50 >> ROSIE COOPER : Can you say what the dates were of the drainage.

05:53 >> JAMES BOYCE : I mean there has been some drainage in the Fens , even back in Roman times, I mean people have always managed this landscape, there's been localised – but if you like industrial scale modern drainage began in the 17th century. And it was in Cambridgeshire, a bit later in some other parts of the Fens, so the area near us, where we're sitting now began in the 1630's. And there were two aspects to what occurred.  So we've got a landscape, we've got to imagine a landscape without these fixed rivers that we have now.  It's much more as you know, the rivers of central England flow down and empty into the wash, and when they came approaching this area there is not much gradient. So they no longer formed straight narrow banks, they started meandering all over the joint, not even the same place every year, and you get a sort of delta type landscape. And these are very rich in human history, we know from the Nile, and... these are areas ideal for human habitation, multiple food sources, the waters would recede in the summer months and there's be these nutrient-rich pastures in which you could put cattle, in which you could sow crops, and the slightly higher areas would be where the villages were like Ely, it's the isle of Ely because it was the island of Ely.  And so imagine, if you want to imagine... you are probably closer to imagining the Amazonian delta than the modern industrial farming landscape.  If you


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wanna, these bodies of permanent water, but a lot of seasonal water, a lot of sort of different meandering water systems, it was a wetland, which was home to a population of -- we don't really know, but let's, 4 or 5,000 commoners. The other aspect of this is that it was common land, now that doesn't mean that it wasn't owned by someone in the Medieval period. It was owned by the big monastic houses, later it had other land owners, but it had common rights over the whole area. So these people were making their living from the incredibly rich resources of the wetland. And so when the drainage came in that was accompanied by what's called in English history enclosure, which is the removal of all those common rights and the imposition of what we now understand as private property. Which is actually quite a new thing. We think it's eternal, and some people will tell us it's eternal, and it's almost innate to human nature as some of us were talking about last night. But in fact, it's a fairly modern idea that if you own the land you have the exclusive right to how it's going to be used, who's going to come on to that land, and who has the right to those resources: that's quite a modern idea. The commons, which is the much more common idea, around the world, and was the traditional system in England, is that those rights and use of the land are decided by local customary practice. So you've got the right to graze at certain times of year, you've got the right to traverse the land to collect fuel, to hunt, fish and so on. These are all managed communally. So when they come to drain the land they also want to enclose the land. So of course, unsurprisingly, the local people are in danger of losing not just their way of life, but their very home. Their whole way of being, their community... really their whole universe, it's almost not metaphorical exaggeration to say. Resist and fight those drainage schemes -- and it's not that difficult to destroy drainage projects, you know to go out at night, to dig holes where holes are not meant to be. And with local, there is often a lot of local ports and even some local landowners who are on side



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as well. So this fierce struggle breaks out in the Fens, it gets tangled up in the civil war. Cromwell himself was from the Fens -- there's a long story there I won't go into. Except to say for now that that struggle went on for 200 years, and don't just assume it was all a forlorn loss, that technology, and modern capitalism and the modern state would have to triumph. In many areas the commoners succeeded.... you know the Southern Lincolnshire Fens weren't drained, the first attempt at draining them was in the 1630's, it didn't succeed until the late 18th century – 150 years of victory if you like. We can call that a defeat. But doesn't sound like a defeat in my language. In Northern Lincolnshire, you can still visit open medieval open fields, precisely because of the long history of resistance there. And so that story fascinated me. But what particularly fascinated me as an Australian colonial history as I got more into that, were some of the overlaps with what was going on in the new world.  Often English history is compartmentalized from this imperial conquest that's going on, and there are clear differences which will talk about, I hope the differences are fairly obvious I mean it did make a difference that you're in England, and that you're White You know, I mean there's not a parallel between what happens to the Australian Aboriginal people that what happened to Finland is and when we're not talking about genocide here.  But there are also some real parallels – it's not just that the dispossession of the commoners and this enclosure that happened in this rich wetland, was about dispossession, it was also about vilifying the commoners, vilifying the land. We all carry that idea of the marsh as some sort of unproductive wasteland, where did that come from. That idea has a history – it's created by the drainers.  If you read the medieval accounts where you know, a lot of people are getting wealth, very wealthy off the wealth of the Fens. There's descriptions of the beauty of this country, the wonder and the richness of this country. This idea that the swamps are unhealthy, and improving the land and improving the people this is


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imperial discourse. And the drainage of the Fens went on in partnership with the state. It wasn't just a private enterprise as sometimes presented. It was very much a state and private enterprise collaboration. It's not just aprecursor to the empire, it's part of the imperial project I would argue.  We can talk about that more later, but let's leave it there for now.

13:16 >> ROSIE COOPER : Thanks so much James. I think that sense of how much has started and has been kind of rehearsed in this area.

13:27 >> JAMES BOYCE : M-hm.

13:28 >> ROSIE COOPER : Just really, really struck me, when I read your book, just the fact we're really there on the edge of so much.  And we'll come to that in the conversation. But I would love to bring you in now Elsa.  And similarly, I heard you speak, and was also really struck by a lot of the work that you are doing, and how, you know, we'll talk about this in the conversation, but perhaps I'll introduce you first. And so Dr. Elsa Noterman is junior research fellow and director of studies for geography at Queens College, Cambridge, she works on issues related to collective struggle over land and housing, with a current focus on urban vacancy, and effort to take back -- take over property, and she also writes about organizing within educational spaces and when I first heard you speak I was really struck by the very kind of direct work you are doing looking at the University of Cambridge, and how, you know, that university which also has this incredibly long history has been kind of continuing to secure very kind of... very sort of privatized approach to land ownership, and excluding approach to land ownership.  Which you can feel physically in the city as you walk around.  And I was so


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interested in the work you are doing, kind of from that context. And I think having you both together, and we'll talk together in the conversation, is amazing in terms of that past and future here where we are. So Elsa, I would love to hand over to you. And maybe we can start the slides as well.

15:27 >> ELSA NOTERMAN : Thank you so much Rosie. And thanks everyone for coming and I really look forward to talking to everyone here, and learning from everyone here. As I'll talk a little bit about I'm a newcomer to Cambridge. And as you might tell from my accent I'm from the US. My research is primarily focused on land struggles in the US context. So actually I'm very interested to have this conversation, both from settler colonial societies now talking about the UK, and the differences and similarities but we can sort of get to that in the conversation. So I work a lot on land struggles. And also written very critically around the university and now I'm trying to get more about how those come together within the City of Cambridge, so I'm just going to read because I want to stay on time, and leave time for conversation -- we have a tendency to ramble in academia. So I arrived in Cambridge in September 2020 amid pandemic lockdown. Walking around Cambridge, I was struck by the ways that the city was cut up by college and university spaces, an urban landscape, marked by extravagant yet efficient gates and walls, seen in the photos in the powepoint which I took around central Cambridge. And this iterative no, is reflected in the architecture which is made more apparent in the midst of a pandemic that accentuated the importance of access to public and outdoor space. As a newcomer, I found Cambridge difficult to navigate as I learned where I could and could not access, including the River Cam. Which seems to be a common one, with a local report earlier this year highlighting that many children living in Cambridge have never seen the river that flows through it. Even finding public bridges to cross the river

was a challenge.  I was happy to come across this helpful sign in shock directing me to one of the few public bridges in the city center. The universities often have a conflictual relationship with the communities in which they are embedded. A tension which is expressed in Cambridge by the phrase "Town and gown" divide. For those of you that don't know people wear gowns in Cambridge, so that's where the gown comes from – it was new to me coming here. While not unique to Cambridge, I found the social spatial separation between town and gown, especially exaggerated as it was reinforced by a history of enclosure and hostility, as well as in the city's landscape and architecture, walls you can't see over, gates which remain locked, signs of what behaviours are not tolerated. And there are a plethora of private Fellows' gardens. Spaces for students sports that are all enclosed behind walls and gates. In recent years, Cambridge has been ranked as the least equal city in the UK, reflecting severe income disparities among residences driven not only by the University and its colleges, but the related growth of the so called Silicon Fen. Which I think of tech and science, life science firms that have emerged in part because of Cambridge University. This inequality has been exacerbated by COVID-19 as in other places with more than 2500 households made homeless or threatened with eviction since the start of the pandemic. At the same time the University of Cambridge recently announced raising 2 billion pounds as part of a fundraising campaign. The extent of land ownership by Oxbridge colleges has long been highlighted, with an estimated 126,000 acres of land in the UK owned by Cambridge and Oxford colleges. A few years ago the Guardian estimated that collectively Cambridge and Oxford own more land than the Church of England.  With their Property Profile across the UK worth at least 3.5 billion pounds and actually that's probably a severe underestimation. Important work has been spearheaded by students in Oxford and now in Cambridge, to make, these holdings public in the service of accountability and justice.


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There are alo increasing efforts to interrogate the connections of this land ownership to colonial expropriation, as well as to the transatlantic slave trade. And importantly, to think about the potential of reparations and redistribution. The challenges of this work relate not only to the wariness on the part of these institutions to make the information public. But in some cases, they're not even clear on the full extent of what they own, which itself says something about the extent of ownership. Given this context, the question for me and my colleague Camilla Penny, who is actually now in New Zealand, and a geoscientist is, what is our responsibility as teachers and researchers in an institution that benefits from uneven access to and ownership of land. And relatedly, how can we mobilize our access to information and resources to support the important work that individuals and community groups are already doing locally and nationally to preserve and expand access to land. We therefore started a project in 2021 called Accessing Land Justice, in which we sought to engage students and the public in conversations around ongoing efforts to preserve threatened rights of way or paths that anyone can legally use as a means of opening up broader conversations around land justice, engaging students and participatory action research and developing related open access educational tools. Slide. One more slide. One more slide, actually. This one, yes. This is one of the paths that we're actually making a claim to, which is used by commuters from Coton to come to Cambridge, as well as bikers and walkers, and it's actually owned by Jesus College. And I would say two of the student interns are here, Claudia and Anna. So feel free to talk to them throughout the day as well. So the focus on rights of way was due partly to the approaching deadline of January 1, 2026, by which point rights of way, which existed prior to 1949 and remain unclaimed, will no longer be able to be officially recognized, they'll be lost. The Ramblers Association launched a project, Don't Lose Your Way to engage members of the public in the


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extensive work of researching and registering an estimated 49,000 miles of paths across England and Wales, and while the government recently indicated its indication to do away with this deadline it still remains unchanged. So as part of this project, we've held several public workshops with practitioners, activist, scholars, artists, students and residents of Cambridge and slide. This is a creative trespass we had on one of the unregistered rights of way. And are now working with some community groups along with several student interns to identify and apply to preserve threatened public rights of way in and around Cambridge. Through this research we are also supporting other local efforts to understand and increase access and ownership to land in Cambridge and work collaboratively to develop an open source curriculum that can be shared more broadly, in other contexts, through this work we aim to mobilize while thinking critically about the tools currently available to resist ongoing enclosure and to support relations to the land that do not foreground exclusion. In a time of climate crisis, pandemic and economic inequality, it's critically important as in James' book, to trace historic and ongoing resistances and actually existing alternatives. And this tracing is not only through time following histories of resistance in a particular place, but also mapping across spaces where efforts at land expropriation and reclamation connect across the globe, something that I've been thinking a lot about in my research, and hopefully we'll get a chance to talk about a little bit more. And this is my attempt – I did a creative mapping workshop with some colleagues and student in 2020. And this was my attempt to represent connections of my work across time and space. So at the intersection of these crises, more people are beginning to push back, and take up space, advocating not only for the preservation and creation of rights of way, but to expand rights of access, such as through the campaign for the rights to roam, working to reclaim land through collective ownership, such as the Community Land Trust . Opening up space by creating


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village and town greens and struggling for land reparations and spatial justice, as seen in the work of Land in Our Names, and The Black Land of Spatial Justice project. So during the pandemic as access to green space has become more important, there have also been some local resistances to the University and colleges' privatization of land in Cambridge. In a recent local example, last year when King's College tried to prohibit activities on the River Cam in Grantchester Meadows, a campaign demanding public use of the meadows, led the college to decide not to enforce the new bans on the use of the river in the meadow. In addition, people have begun using the ground in front of King's College as a space to sit and picnic, activity not formally tolerated by a college where only Fellows are allowed to walk on the grass. While these public uses of private space are not legally protected at the moment, they do represent efforts to challenge the exclusivity of this property and highlight the limits of its enforcement . In yet a perhaps clearer demonstration of what Nick Hayes calls 'the magic of property boundaries' in the Book of Trespass, as shown here when the meadows flooded, and in James' book, this is sort of the reflooding of the Fens as well, where nature reveals over and over that it has no respect for property. I suggest that this denaturalization of property is important, because it allows us to imagine and enact alternatives, and to consider a future outside our current bounded thinking. And so that's why I'm really excited about being at this event, and thinking about this space, and thinking with you all about the future of land more generally. [APPLAUSE]

25:49 >> ROSIE COOPER : Thank you so much to both of you. And I wanted to start with a question, just back to you James, which is really what it is – and I think we're finding real clues to that, particularly in the way that you just ended now Elsa, but just to speak a little to what feels timely to you about your book, which was published very recently.



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26:15 >> JAMES BOYCE : Well there's something quite beautiful about that isn't there.

26:17 >> ROSIE COOPER : Yeah, there is.

26:18 >> JAMES BOYCE : Something instantly hopeful as well a bit of a paradox. As long as it's not our back garden of course. I mean in terms of timeliness, my book did come out in COVID time. So that's been out a couple of years, it feels like a new book to me because this has been my first chance to really talk about it in the last few weeks, other than online.  The timeliness... I think it's impossible really for us to do anything, you know, without living with the environmental crisis.  Where all our writing, all of our art, all of our being, all of our consumer choices. I mean they're not always conscious thinking in those deliberate terms. And that includes in the book, it's not as if I have got an environmental agenda in which I'm writing the book. But it serves the background for all of our living at the moment. This looming current catastrophe for so many other species. These extraordinary challenges, the rates of change, the scenarios that the scientist are pointing towards. This is what we live with, isn't it. And we also live with the struggle to not give in to despair. And I'm now conscious of being an ageing fellow, and I feel the responsibility that the failure of my generation in terms of its number one responsibility of handing over this earth to the next generation. And when I talk to young people there's an element of shame, you know, of what we've done. And so I think even though, again, it's not necessarily some deliberate strategy as a historian. I mean we work within creative projects, and I'm also working with the material as it is, with the sources as it is, and trying to convey truth, you know. But, they... the environmental, it's timely I hope that what we need --  stories that connect us with the

fact that how things are now is not how they innately or inevitably are. And that we're not alone in a sense in our struggle. I mean, it's very easy to feel like the past generations are just the problem. Or our Western consciousness is just the problem, or our Western religion is just the problem, or our Western culture is just the problem. In fact, there is no such thing as one Western culture, one Western history. One western story. It's been contested. And one of the most contested is this idea of how we live with the land. I hope the book is timely in the sense that it shows that in this area of England right in the -- what is it, 100 miles from London.  Bit over. Right in the centre of empire if you like. There was this vast common, this extraordinary rich, bountiful natural land, that had been home to people for 1000s of years, and was being worked and managed and lived off, and wealth extracted. And when that land was threatened, it was defended. Sometimes at the cost of lives. I mean the British army was employed in the Fens. The struggle went on for a long time. And what they were defending was not just common rights as it's now -- the commoners had to be reduced to a rather reductionist thinking for it to have any protection at all.  Something that has to fit into modern law, and this set of rights. And of course we all have to stand up for that don't we. We have to stand up for the rights of way.  These residual things that were left to us. But they're really small things compared to what the common was. Because the common was centred in relationship really, ultimately, relationship with the land. It wasn't centered on modern ideas of public — and relationship with each other: it wasn't an individualized thing, it was a communal thing. And people defended -- like we're defending. -- totally different context -- not totally different, but a very different context. So it's not a case of just applying what's past to the present. We have distinctive challenges of the 21st century, we also have different expectation and many liberating new ways of thought that we don't want to give up. But I hope that it can be


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an encouragement, a solace, but also an opening of the imagination and a source of strength to know that people have always cared for country and cared for their community, and have acted to defend it and that a lot of the ideas that we're told is inevitable and innate, and that there is no alternative to all have a history as well, and can be traced and have been contested over time. Including in the Western world. Including in England and including quite close to the very heart of the empire itself. So I hope it's a source of opening up our thinking, and... a source -- in a paradoxical way, hope. Even though the story is one of... quite a sad story and tragic story on many levels as of course so many stories of the empire are. And historians are looking for paradox and contradiction, and particularly recognizing the agency of dispossessed people, and Indigenous peoples. And you know, that these people are not just victims, these people have always acted and we stand in that history as well as the destructive history. Looking reality in the eye we need to be able to see all of these.

33:14 >> ROSIE COOPER : Thank you so much James. And I would like to ask the same question to you Elsa, you touched on it a bit. But just the urgency – to speak more directly to the urgency in your work right now.

33:27 >> ELSA NOTERMAN : I guess to follow on from what James was saying. Certainly the climate crisis, and access to land and water are increasingly going to be important going into the future. But I also want to maybe make a point also about the law, and the turn toward criminalization trespass in UK: the Police Crimes Sentencing court bill just went to effect at the end of June. Which of course as many of you probably know, criminalizes forms of protest, but also forms of trespassing specifically Traveller communities, and their use of, occupations of space. So I think this raises the urgency of

what the stakes are of reclaiming land. I think coming from the States where the stakes of trespassing are quite high in a country with more guns than people, and very rigid property boundaries, coming here, where there has been some acceptance of historic rights of use, and forms of trespass, now turning towards a criminalization of that is very concerning. And so I think there's ongoing efforts to try to push back against that and to think not only about legal tactics to try to reclaim and expand our rights to land, but also illegal tactics, and recognizing that actually laws are often the very things that are enclosing space and excluding people. So I think we can learn from history in those ways, but we can also learn from contemporary movements which are challenging unjust laws, and to me that's really precedent at this current moment.

35:22 >> ROSIE COOPER : Totally, and I think – I had a question for you James which is very closely connected to that actually. Which is, I really felt your book articulates really clearly how the State forms its laws and government systems to preserve power in the hands of the few. And can you just say a bit more about how that played out, and was rehearsed within the context of the Fens and wall closures

35:49 >> JAMES BOYCE : Yeah, what we're dealing with in the 17th century is the rise of the all powerful centralized state. It's still not fully emerged in our contemporary idea. The idea of the nation state has also got a history. And the idea of a nation state that can impose its will all around its territory has a relatively recent history. A lot of these things are done locally. I'm not saying justice, but not necessarily – But these drainage schemes are really interesting in the 17th century. The ones that are happening so close to where we're sitting now. In that they're a partnership between the state and what we might call private enterprise. They called them adventurers, they were speculators

really. They would put up the capital. The capital's coming from the emergence, the beginning of capitalism. And they're hoping then when the land is drained -- well the idea is once the land is drained and enclosed, remember, they will have this highly productive, rich farmland, that they can then have tenant farmers on, who'll be paying them rent, so they'll be claiming all the income from the land, while it's common wetland, it's all these diverse sources of wealth going in all sort of directions, very hard to monopolize that wealth, very hard to claim it exclusively. So it's a state, private enterprise partnership. It's often presented, even in histories today the drainage, as if it's the Earl of Bedford, and uses these Dutch engineers, as if it's all about a private enterprise thing. But in fact the drainage of the Fens as with the whole Imperial project elsewhere it's a state private enterprise partnership, they're working together. Now, there's contradictions within that and you know, that's also true. Like the commoners are also appealing to parliament, appealing to state. Again like invaded peoples across the Empire were doing there's multiple – Resistance is not just a western movie with firing guns at the cowboys. Resistance takes so many forms, and that you people – We're practicing that today. We do all sorts of things don't we, sometimes that can even involve accommodation, and adaptation, as well as things like petitions and court actioning. These things were used in the 17th century as well. Parliament got caught up in the civil war as I said, in the debates leading up to the civil war. So local courts often initially were on side of commoners in a paradoxical way. And really the triumph of the drainage schemes is ultimately dependent on the growth of what we would really start to see as the modern state by the late 18th century. Where they're in control of the courts now. They can actually impose so that people who are trespassing, people who are putting their stock into what was common land and destroying the crops of the new tenant farmers, the protection of the colonizers – colonizers were also brought into the



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Fens.  And so again similar to the New World pattern. Mainly sort of Northern European, we got French and Dutch Protestant refugees. At the very same time people are leaving Boston seeking religious freedom in the New World, similar people seeking religious freedom are arriving in Boston to be colonizers on the enclosed land, and so the State is working to enforce this enclosure, often not just on the ordinary commons, but even some of the local landowners and that's dependent on developing the infrastructure of the modern state, what we take for granted. They can impose a law, and that law can be enforced, and the people can be punished, and it's really not until the late 18th century that that can be done with confidence, and then it is done with great severity and they even do things that seem to be contrary to the law, again which is common around the empire, it's very difficult to find who's the perpetrator, who actually destroyed that drainage work, who dug that hole. So they start to punish whole villages. Those of you who are familiar with the tragic story that unfolded around the empire know only too well, but that was the classic tactic. And of course it's not confined to the British empire. It was done in Vietnam. It was done in all Guerilla campaigns, because you don't know who is the farmer, who's the enemy, who's the friend. And so the way it's often done, the final resort is to punish people communally. And that went on as well.

41:22 >> ROSIE COOPER: Thank you. I'm just conscious of time, I'm wanting to open up questions to the floor. Because we are running a little bit behind. What we're going to do is just – we have an hour and a half scheduled for lunch, so we've got a bit of a buffer. But don't worry, we won't cut your lunch too short. But I just had one question I would like to ask both of you to share your thoughts on just before opening up to the floor, which is really about the future. As we're seeing in this image which we've kept up here as kind of the water levels rise again around us. What futures are available to us.



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What kind of tools and tactics do we have.  And I would like to invite Elsa to talk about that first.

42:16 >> ELSA NOTERMAN : Yeah, that's a big question, and I hope that we get to talk collectively about that going forward.

42:21 >> ROSIE COOPER : Yes, indeed.

42:23 >> ELSA NOTERMAN : I think there are a number of legal tools --  as we talked about in terms of boundaries and rights of way. But also efforts to try to push the limits of that, through rights to roam, through reparations and reclamations of land, so I think the solutions are already here they're already being created. There's a lot of innovation thinking about the legal and currently illegal tools that we have at our disposal. I think a lot of that comes out of creative work too in terms of thinking about speculative fiction that really allows us to get out of our bounded thinking about what the possibilities are for the future. And so I think actually there has been a turn to think more creatively about property, and land. You know, something I like to think about also is rather than focusing on the forms of land use that we have historically been doing or in the contemporary moment, but also our land relations, what are our new and iterative land relations over time, and how can we imagine that going forward.  But certainly -- I don't want to be a downer, but it is also a scary moment in terms of thinking about the increased crack down on protests, and uses of land, and increasing privatization of space. But there is ongoing resistance that I think we have to hold on to. And as we have seen under the pandemic, there has been a real recognition of the importance of land,


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and I think people are coming together in more innovative ways in order to try to enact some of those. So there's little spaces opening up.

44:22 >> ROSIE COOPER James, what would you like to reflect on?

44:26 >> JAMES BOYCE : I did want to mention briefly, in case some of you might not heard of the Great Fen Project, just because it touches on I think some of the things we're talking about - it's a nature restoration project where they're trying to link some of the existing reserves with Walton Fen and Home Fen, much of it covers the site of the old Whittlesea Meer -- which was the largest lowland -- in England, and its drainage in mid 1850's really marked the end of the old fen. And the great fen project -- I've had some conversations with now. What is so exciting about it, is it's not just nature restoration, and sort of nature out there, and trying to restore inverted commas wilderness. It's actually got farming and food production, and new ways at its very centre, and its dealing with this contradiction, that peat drys out and disappears, and once it drys out it goes. And so there's nothing really you can do to stop it, you can slow it down with various techniques, other than getting the soil wet again. And as Elsa said, the challenges of climate change, that's even more real. And exaggerating – many of the areas of the Fens now, well below sea level. So the amount of energy involved in pumping that water out is getting higher and higher as land sinks further and further. And so this is both a crisis, and it's also really an opportunity, because it's forcing everybody, even those who are making the most money out of the current status quo are confronting this environmental reality, that the peat is disappearing. And the landscape that we're dealing with is a provisional landscape as we talked about, it's always varied over time through waters the impact of modern industrial landscape that

we see now it's really only a postwar one. As I describe in the book there are many chapters after the drainage, it wasn't like oh, the technology drained it and then the story was over. Nature, as we saw in the slide, didn't take it quite so easily. Areas kept reflooding, and the Victorians thought they'd finally sorted it all out with steam power. But in fact, that was provisional as well. So the Great Fen Project is using three things, and this is I think what we need to use generally, it's using science, it's using memory, that Simon Sharmer said, his source of hope is that humans might be -- the problem is we've done so many bad things, but the big hope is that we're more retentive than is often assumed. We have memory, we have tradition if you like. So they're trying to look at traditional land use practices, and with science. And the other thing I wanted to mention briefly, because I'm getting older and... I like to say what really matters to me now. And the great hope as well as the great problem of course is human beings. Human beings are actually really extraordinary. If you stand back as a historian, and you can do this in all sorts of disciplines of course, doesn't have to be from history. But the human capacity and ingenuity and inventiveness is quite amazing, what we have now is a human potential and capacity, far beyond that's ever existed in history before, not because there is more of us, but because there's more of the people who had a chance, a privilege of education. More people who have the chance for sort of a day like we're having today, just to take time out of work and sit and talk. But also of course because it's not just people like me running the world any more, thank goodness. Or, we have a bit of way to go. But it's not just older white males. So there is this resource of suddenly, we have got, bringing to the possibility for change, all the diversity and richness of our culture. We're not trying to return to a preindustrial life, which was still a, obviously a patriarchy in another form, we've got women, we've got LGBTI people,

the diversity of our modern world, and artists who look at this stuff. Writers who are looking at it.  And so that's my source of hope.

49:18 >> ROSIE COOPER : Thank you.

49:20  >> JAMES BOYCE : That we don't really know fully what we're capable of. But we're gonna have to be capable of a lot. And we are, potentially.

49:29 >> ROSIE COOPER: Thank you.  A good note to end on. And I think we have got time for a couple of questions. Looks like you have a question. And I think we've got another one over here. So we also got one over there. But we've also got a roving mike over there. And so can I just go to... you first of all.

50:01 >> Thank you very much. It's really a question for both of you. I'm taking elements of what you've said particularly the last point you made James looking at the Great Fen Project. So this is interesting in the context of a charity, The Wildlife Trust that actually bought the land in order to try new ways -- first of all to try to wet the land --  and to try new ways to create crops and grow things.

50:42 >> JAMES BOYCE : Yes.

50:43 >> And restore obviously the land to its original status. But what I find interesting is that they had to buy the land. So it's going from private ownership to another form. It's not private because the Trust is a charity. So to another kind of ownership. And I'm sort of looking at the idea of the land and ownership. And what we own and don't own.



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And also thinking about place like Wysing Arts Centre, which again owns a lot of land, and is a charity.  And so you know, how is there... a solution... is that the best possible solution, that charities start buying land and sharing the land and looking at new ways of using the land in a more ecological way.

51:44 >> Thank you. Can I suggest, because we've just got not that long before we must begin the next panel, can I suggest passing that question to Elsa. Because that really reminds me of some of the conversations we've had.

51:57 >> ELSA NOTERMAN : I think that's a great question, how to get outside of the ownership model of property that we're embedded in. And there are experiments in that, such as the community land trust model which preserves collective land ownership over the long term, usually at least in the States for a 99 year lease. So I think there is also limited equity cooperatives, that are forming, to recognise holding down costs for cooperative, cooperatives are not just something that are horrors of the wealthy. And there are different models of recognizing collective landownership that do exist in the law. And then there's also squatted takeovers of land and experiments that are happening as well. That don't rely on ownership of land. I think the problem there is that there's a precarity there, that they might be displaced. However groups that I work with in the States are aware of the precariousness of property in general, whether they're a renter or they're a homeowner, you know, foreclosure and eviction are real. So for them taking over homes isn't any more precarious as those forms as well. So I think there are multiple models both in terms of the legal structure, but also thinking outside of the legal structure as well.



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53:19 >> ROSIE COOPER : We just had another question from yourself.  And we'll just bring the mic over to you.

53:30  >> Okay, thank you. Thank you.  I just wanted to say a little bit about timeliness and then about access. With timeliness, firstly, it was wonderful for me to be working out in Wicken Fen with some children, some teenagers that don't normally access that space. The quote that you gave about children not having seen the river in Cambridge came from a project that I've been working on in Arbury, and then I was doing some work with some children there. It was the week that the Policing Crime Bill had just gone through and we looked out to the sedge, and having read your book I was able to say, 'and this is what the Fen Tigers were fighting for' and to have that spark and be able to then relate it to other activist movements, social justice and environmental justice movements that have come out of the Fens which I think, again having read your book, is literally something that is in the water of Fenland but that is so lost now, and I think that's really pertinent to try and find and connect to that, that fight, and the thought that things can change, that land can change. We're so precious about what we hold on to and relating that back to public space and open space. Actually how it's still so very exclusive, and we see that so much in Cambridge, and I say that there's high walls and high art, and it keeps people out of the whole of the city. There is a common land in the area... the ward that I live in, in Abby, which is the most deprived ward. And COVID changed it slightly. In that you'd see residents using that space much more, because it didn't feel so encroached on by gown, as the river use changed. And then just how Helen and I were recently doing some work with children exploring what public space meant. And young children, talking about, well it might be public space, but I know – a young Traveller saying to me 'I know it's not open to me. I know I can't go there.' Or



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another 9 year old that we're talking to and saying, 'it might be public, but you might not be able to go there because of your race because of your gender, because you haven't got enough money'. So we have common spaces but we still have -- you were talking about, you know, talking about communities and being connected. And there are so many barriers to using land, that isn't necessarily about ownership too. Sorry, that was long. Thank you. [Laughter]

56:12 >> ROSIE COOPER : Just in the last few minutes, does anybody else have a question they would like to ask our panelist, I think we have one more hand up. Okay. Great, do we have any questions from the chat? Okay. Great. Go ahead. Would you mind just waiting for the mic. Would you mind waiting for the mic. Just because we're live streaming and they won't be able to hear you

56:43 >> I was struck by the Silicon Fen. I hadn't come across that phrase. And learning about how Silicon Valley, a relatively small area in California, has decimated that San Francisco area really. That would be a major concern for me. How is that life science industry, which is global, coming into our area is massive. And it's all in the innovation, blah, blah, blah all sounds great, but it's all in the hands of the wrong people, you know, it's not public. That public private enterprise has completely swung in terms of ownership and control. So I'm grateful for having, I didn't know there was a Silicon Fen phrase, but I think we need to be really – how we work with that to limit their encroachment: if you go through Waterbeach now, the development that's gone in the last 5 years, as I drive down the A10, it's like what the hell is that about. And suddenly it's just everywhere. So yeah that's really good, we need to look at that.

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57:43 >> Ex-military.

57:44 >> It's Ex-military, Yep. So.

57:49 >> ROSIE COOPER : Do you have any sort of final reflections. I mean I think absolutely both of you have really summed up how, you know, these questions remain total urgent here, right from where we are. Any sort of final words that you would like to close with or questions for us generally take with us along the day.

58:12 >> ELSA NOTERMAN : I guess just one thing reflecting on Hillary's point and I'd love to talk to you more about your work with children. Something that I have been thinking about with my own young toddler is how to explain access to land and where you can't access. Because there is this assumption that we're born with an innate understanding of ownership and property. But actually very young children go where they want. And they encounter things that tell them, or send them messages that they're not welcome. But they don't start off from that place. How do you describe what a wall is to a 2 year old, that you can't go on this other side – that you can be on this grass, but you can't be on that grass. And so just, I think children, like, trying to think back about when we didn't have all these messages about where we can and cannot go, maybe is an imaginative moment, where we can think creatively, at least for me, that's been a moment of thinking, oh, yeah, I don't want to be reinforcing these boundaries, or these, exclusions, but how can we think back on that before we were given all these messages very explicitly and the violence that comes with that.

59:41 >> ROSIE COOPER : Thank you, James, any last words from you, and there will be loads of moments for us all to connect over lunch.

59:51 >> JAMES BOYCE : I'd probably just finish with agreeing with what you were saying Helen. I mean the Great Fen Project got 8 million pounds I think to buy those couple of farms that are linking the two reserves. Now that's no model is it... I mean it's very necessary for them, because on those farms they can model new ways of farming, they can experiment, they can do some different things, I mean there's even a possibility of bringing in European Bison. Even I said jokingly what about rice. And I thought that was a joke. But apparently even rice is a possibility. There's all sorts of possibility, but obviously that's not a model. But what we do have and what you have in England I think in particular the idea, because commons have taken different forms all over the world, you know they're by definition local. But what you have in England is a tradition of the commons that actually did not depend on land ownership. That was precisely quite separate from the question -- all of England, at least since the Norman invasion, has been owned by somebody. You know there was not such a thing in England as unowned land for many many centuries. But commons existed with that it was – and so you've actually got in England a tradition that can be drawn on, that is really radically different from how we currently understand private ownership. And I think that provides the potential for doing some exciting things and starting to open up thinking and policy thinking, in a way that is not dependent on a really impossible scheme of buying up areas that can be managed sustainably with some sort of boundary around them.

01:01:31 >> ROSIE COOPER : Great, thank you so much. That was a really wonderful way to begin the day. And I would like to now hand over to my colleagues for the next



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session. And just a reminder there will be a little bit of a switch over now, if you wanted go grab a snack or a glass of water or something like that.  We're going to take about 10 minutes.  So feel free to get refreshed and then we'll come back together shortly.



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