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**‘Country of Elastic Borders,’ Country of  
Elastic Memories: The Function of Nostalgia  
in Metro-Land (1915–1932)**

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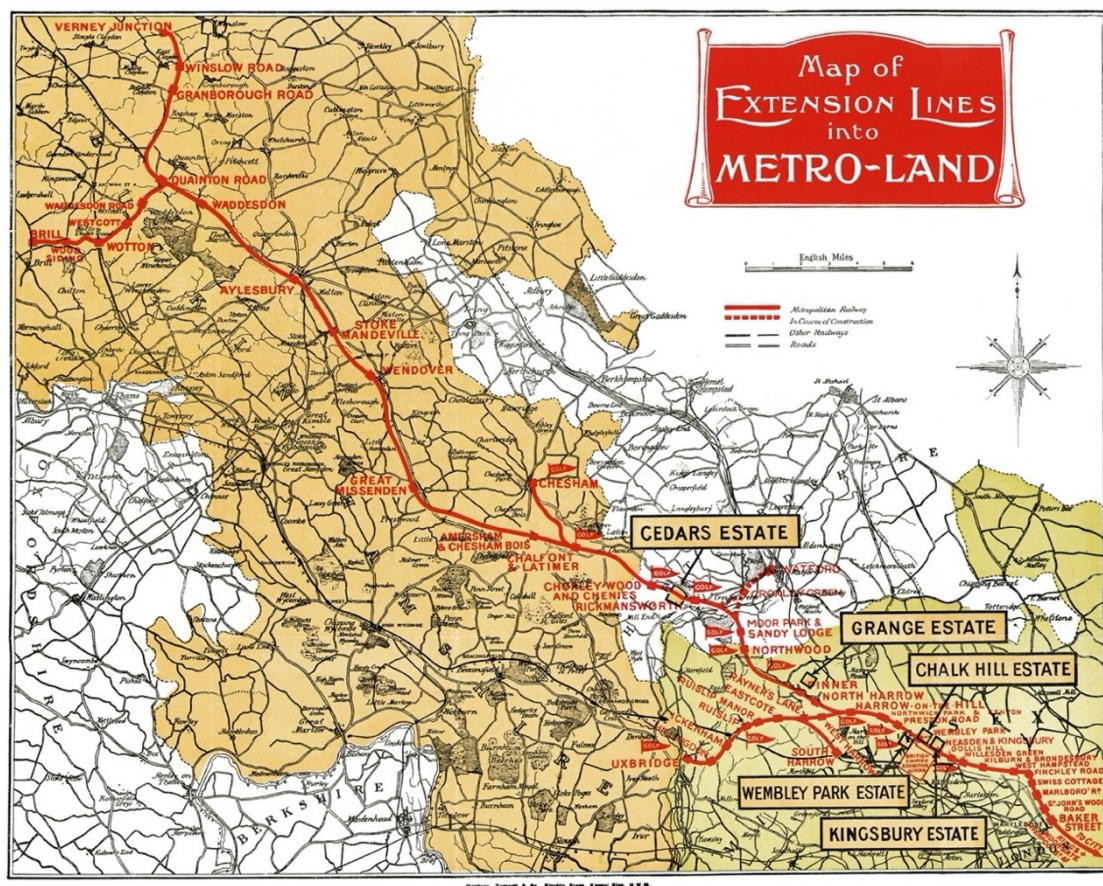
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# ‘Country of Elastic Borders,’ Country of Elastic Memories:

## The Function of Nostalgia in *Metro-Land* (1915–1932).



**Figure 1:** Metropolitan Railway, *Map of Extension Lines into Metro-Land*, (Metropolitan Railway, 1924, Wikimedia Commons, <<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Metro-land-map.jpg>> [accessed 2 March 2026].

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I dedicate this dissertation to all the copywriters who worked at the Metropolitan Railway, and whose work I've analysed in detail for months, without ever being able to know their names. A century after creating *Metro-Land*, perhaps without ever realising it would, they've shaped the lives of the million or so Metro-Landers like me.

## Abbreviations

The Met – The Metropolitan Railway Company

MRCE – The Metropolitan Railway Company Estates Ltd.

GWR – Great Western Railway

LTM – London Transport Museum

AM – Amersham Museum

*Metro-Land* – refers to the publication.

Metro-Land – refers to the imagined landscape.

## Introduction

“Metro-Land is a *country with elastic borders*, which each visitor can draw for himself, as Stevenson drew his map of *Treasure Island*.” – *Metro-Land* (1927).<sup>1</sup>

London is also a city of elastic borders. Its last change, in 1965, expanded the city by 283 square miles, when the Greater London Council absorbed Middlesex, ending the county’s thousand-year history in a single swipe. Its disappearance leaves a strange feeling for those of us living in the ex-county today. Our letters are addressed to Middlesex, but our postcodes are in London. We take the Underground to work every day, but we see trees outside the window. There’s a fuzziness in these suburbs, like we’re between two elsewheres; between the city we rely on, and the English countryside outside it. What created this limbo I, and many others, find ourselves in? What made a county vanish?

The answer is *Metro-Land*. Published annually from 1915-1932, *Metro-Land* was a guidebook about the countryside in Middlesex, Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire, served by the Metropolitan Railway Company (the Met). An 1887 legal loophole allowed the Met to develop the surplus land next to their tracks, meaning they could profit directly from its suburban development. After facing financial troubles in 1911, the Met started to exploit this loophole, eventually through a dedicated subsidiary company called the Metropolitan Railway Country Estates Limited (MRCE). *Metro-Land* was therefore as much a sales publication as it was a guidebook, aiming to reshape how middle-class Londoners saw this countryside, in the hope that readers might move out of inner London, and start commuting from the countryside. It did this

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<sup>1</sup> Metropolitan Railway, *Metro-Land* (Knapp, Drewett & Sons Ltd, 1927), AM, p. 27.

through constructing a self-titled imagined rural landscape, an ever-expanding 'country of elastic borders', found in the places just beyond inner London which 'at any given time, were capable of suburban development, and able to produce significant increases in revenue' for the Met.<sup>2</sup>

Although the Met's history has been written about extensively, understanding *Metro-Land* as a cultural text has been overlooked. Historians have pointed to the guidebooks' 'breathtaking hypocrisy', whilst others have noted its shady advertising techniques or its deceptively 'seductive' look.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, reading it is a puzzling experience. Every page, for example, mourns a lost English countryside through idyllic photography and flowery verse, despite selling the very suburban homes destroying it. This dissertation tries to answer why *Metro-Land* looked like this. Why did the Met choose thatched cottages, ancient churches, and open countryside to sell something as modern as suburbia? More broadly, how could a period of 'intense modernity' also be so drawn to rural nostalgia?<sup>4</sup>

The answer, this dissertation argues, is that nostalgia made suburbia appealing to an inter-war middle class who valued 'modernity within limits'.<sup>5</sup> The First World War made unchecked modernity feel unsettling, meaning if the Met were to successfully sell suburbia, they had to 'accommodate the past in the new forms of the present', otherwise they risked alienating middle-class consumers.<sup>6</sup> The need to operate within this 'conservative modernity', I argue, produced a specific 'reflective nostalgia' in *Metro-Land* which performed two functions. Firstly, by 'cherishing the fragmented

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<sup>2</sup> Alan Jackson, *London's Metroland* (Capital History, 2006), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Alan Jackson, *Metroland*, p. 4; Christian Wolmar, *Subterranean Railway: How the London Underground Was Built and How It Changed the City Forever* (Atlantic Books, 2012), p. 241.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Mandler, 'Against "Englishness": English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850–1940', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 7 (1997), pp. 155–75 (p. 170), doi:10.2307/3679274.

<sup>5</sup> John R. Gold and George Revill, *Representing the Environment* (Routledge, 2004), p. 202.

<sup>6</sup> Alison Light, *Forever England* (Routledge, 2013), p. 10-11, doi:10.4324/9780203713518.

memories' of rural Englishness, nostalgia mediated the modernity of a suburban landscape to an audience cautious of it.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, as this imagined landscape defined itself as between London and the countryside, it therefore had no identity of its own. *Metro-Land's* nostalgia therefore also functioned to give new developments an identity, making life in its imagined landscape feel grounded. Ultimately, these 'elastic memories' functioned to define *Metro-Land's* 'elastic borders', making the imagined landscape feel real, and crucially, purchasable.

### Literature Review

One key debate within the historiography of the English inter-war suburb centres on the relationship between modernity and rural nostalgia. On the one hand, historians, such as Martin Wiener, argue that an elite-driven 'Englishness', characterised as nostalgic and anti-modern, diffused into the inter-war suburbs, stifling British modernism and contributing to economic decline.<sup>8</sup> This narrative has been challenged by Peter Mandler, who argues that inter-war 'Englishness' must be characterised as 'post-urban', meaning suburbs were nothing like village life, as they spread the modern city into the countryside.<sup>9</sup> He rightly concludes that any scholarship about inter-war 'interest in the countryside' must also reflect the 'intense modernity of this period'.<sup>10</sup>

Whilst Mandler is right to stress how inter-war interest in the countryside was not anti-modern, he is wrong to say it was 'in fact, not very nostalgic.'<sup>11</sup> Mandler defines 'true' rural nostalgia as a desire to return to pre-industrial society. This leads him to argue that English interest in the countryside was never nostalgic because, unlike in Europe,

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<sup>7</sup> Svetlana Boym, 'Restorative & Reflective Nostalgia', in *The Future of Nostalgia* (Basic Books, 2001), p. 104.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980*, (Cambridge University Press, 2004); Michael Bunce, *The Countryside Ideal: Anglo-American Images of Landscape* (Routledge, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Peter Mandler, 'Against "Englishness"', p. 171.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

England's peasantry had been 'effaced long ago', leaving no social foundation to restore the past.<sup>12</sup> However, nostalgia is not simply a desire to recover the past, and in fact, using a different framework reveals a more complex relationship between 'Englishness', inter-war interest in the countryside and modernity.

### Defining Nostalgia

Assuming 'true' nostalgia is a desire to restore the past leads one to overlook its more ambivalent form, which I argue is what characterises *Metro-Land*. Svetlana Boym has defined nostalgia into two types, 'restorative' and 'reflective.' 'Reflective' nostalgia responds to 'defamiliarization' and 'dwells in the *-algia*' of nostalgia, its 'longing and loss.' It is 'ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary' because, unlike its 'restorative' counterpart, it never wants to 'conquer and spatialise time.'<sup>13</sup> Mandler assumes nostalgia must be 'restorative', yet this cannot account for *Metro-Land's* contradictory relationship to England's countryside, which as Chapter 1 will show, is 'reflective'.

This is where Alison Light's concept of 'conservative modernity' becomes useful, as it helps explain how nostalgia can function *within*, rather than against, the 'intense modernity' of the interwar period Mandler rightly identifies.<sup>14</sup> Light argues that the socio-economic conditions after the First World War produced an inwardlooking cultural mood in England, largely based in the new suburbs, which was 'conservative in effect, and yet modern in form'.<sup>15</sup> Although Mandler cites Light to challenge previous 'simple-minded diagnoses of nostalgia', he misreads her argument.<sup>16</sup> If Light is right that this mood was 'Janus-faced' as it 'accommodated the past in the new forms of the present', then suburban modernity and rural nostalgia cannot be oppositional, but

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>13</sup> Svetlana Boym, 'Reflective Nostalgia', pp. 49-50.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Mandler, 'Against "Englishness"', p. 170.

<sup>15</sup> Alison Light, *Forever England*, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Mandler, 'Against "Englishness"', fn. 39, p. 171.

instead, must be understood together.<sup>17</sup> This coexistence is crucial if we are to understand *Metro-Land's* relationship to modernity.

### Underground Modernities

Previous scholarship has explored *Metro-Land's* relationship to modernity, arguing it reflects inter-war anxieties about modern London.<sup>18</sup> Andrew Thacker, for example, identifies how *Metro-Land's* negative descriptions of London reveal the 'spatial phobias' of the city, and these constructed Metro-Land as an attractive 'escape'.<sup>19</sup> David Ashford extends this by arguing the suburb itself created 'spatial phobias', because in being 'everywhere and nowhere' simultaneously, they were a 'non-place'. Ashford accurately sees *Metro-Land* as a 'mediator' that made the 'non-place' of the modern suburb understandable and desirable.<sup>20</sup>

However, as 'critical literary geographers', their aim is to reveal the 'psychopathology' of modern London through literature.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, they explain elite hostility to *Metro-Land* but overlook its appeal to 'ordinary people'. As a result, both see Frank Pick's avant-garde design as how the London Underground 'attempted to overcome the phobias of the modern world'.<sup>22</sup> *Metro-Land*, by contrast, is not seen as trying to do the same, and is instead a '*non-functional* mish-mash of Tudor and Art Nouveau' offering an 'unappealing spectacle of modernity without Modernism'.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Alison Light, *Forever England*, p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Thacker, 'London', in *Modernism, Space and the City: Outsiders and Affect in Paris, Vienna, Berlin, and London* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019); David Ashford, 'Making a Home in Modernity', in *London Underground: A Cultural Geography* (Liverpool University Press, 2013); Michael T. Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground* (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Thacker, 'London', p. 179.

<sup>20</sup> David Ashford, 'Making a Home in Modernity', in *London Underground: A Cultural Geography* (Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 9-12.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Thacker, 'Introduction: Geographical Emotions and the Modernist City', in *Modernism, Space and the City: Outsiders and Affect in Paris, Vienna, Berlin, and London*, ed. by Andrew Thacker (Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 2-4; David Ashford, 'The Book of the Machine', in *London Underground: A Cultural Geography* (Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 2-3.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Saler, *Medieval Modernism*, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> David Ashford, 'Making a Home', p 12.

This 'mish-mash' is instead, I argue, reflective nostalgia operating *within* 'conservative modernity'. Frank Pick's Modernist project risked alienating people with a 'traumatised relationship to modernity', something the Met could not afford to do.<sup>24</sup> As we shall see, *Metro-Land's* reflective nostalgia gave 'agency to both producers and consumers,' allowing people 'to dwell in the past, while looking forward to the future'.<sup>25</sup> Seeing *Metro-Land's* 'modernity without Modernism' as a commercial response to conservative modernity helps us move beyond elite critiques of suburbia, and into understanding why companies felt it was necessary to make suburban life feel continuous with the past.

### Metro-Histories

If literary geographers help explain *Metro-Land's* cultural anxieties but overlook its commercial functions, historians of the Met have the opposite problem. In their concern with establishing the chronology, institutional development and commercial success of the Met, these histories have overlooked the cultural work of *Metro-Land*.<sup>26</sup> As a result, the guidebooks are used as evidence for dates, house prices or changes in the Met's marketing strategy. Though some of this research discusses nostalgia, it does not interrogate its function. For example, Alan Jackson establishes the chronology of *Metro-Land*, but in doing so, dismisses nostalgia as simply 'pretty talk'.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Oliver Green and Christian Wolmar have argued that even though *Metro-Land's* nostalgia must have seemed contrived, it was still 'a brilliantly successful

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<sup>24</sup> Alison Light, *Forever England*, p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> Deborah Ryan, *Ideal Homes, 1918-39: Domestic Design and Suburban Modernism* (Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 168, <<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.bris.idm.oclc.org/lib/bristol/detail.action?docID=5352693>> [accessed 19 February 2026].

<sup>26</sup> Dennis Edwards and Ron Pigram, *The Golden Years of the Metropolitan Railway and the Metro-Land Dream* (Bloomsbury Books, 1983); Mike Horne, *The Metropolitan Line, An Illustrated History Underground* (Capital Transport, 2003); Alan Jackson, *London's Metropolitan Railway* (David & Charles, 1986).

<sup>27</sup> Alan Jackson, *Metroland*, p. 7.

marketing ploy.<sup>28</sup> This research is indispensable, but it ultimately leaves a question unanswered, why did *Metro-Land*'s nostalgia have this specific look.

### Railway Advertising

Research into interwar British railway advertising has begun to show how the industry mobilised 'middlebrow' culture *within* 'conservative modernity' to construct the meaning of travel for consumers.<sup>29</sup> Alexander Medcalf for example argues that British railway companies used nostalgia to construct an imagined 'corporate countryside', which engaged middle-class anxieties about the loss of rural England. He views railways as the 'chief purveyors of a romanticised country idyll' in the inter-war period. Although Medcalf briefly identifies *Metro-Land* as an example of a 'corporate countryside', he limits his analysis to the GWR, and calls for further research into the 'intricate promotional cultures which arose at each railway', which this dissertation sets out to do.<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, what's at stake here is understanding how the Met used nostalgia to negotiate the 'intense modernity' of the inter-war period to middle-class consumers.<sup>31</sup>

## Methodology

The Met produced sixteen annuals of *Metro-Land* between 1915 and 1932, and they were their primary advertising medium for MRCE developments.<sup>32</sup> This dissertation

<sup>28</sup> Oliver Green, *Metro-Land: 1932* (Oldcastle Books, 1987), p. ii; Christian Wolmar, *Subterranean Railway: How the London Underground Was Built and How It Changed the City Forever* (Atlantic Books, 2012), p. 244.

<sup>29</sup> Hiroki Shin and Colin Divall, 'Cultures of Speed and Conservative Modernity', in *Trains, Culture, and Mobility: Riding the Rails*, ed. by Benjamin Fraser and Steven Spalding (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2011), pp. 18-19; Henry Atmore, 'Nostalgia, Monumentality and the Great Western Railway', (unpublished thesis, Kobe City University of Foreign Studies, 2010), pp. 55-57 <<https://kobe-cufs.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/436>> [accessed 2 February 2026]; Alexander Medcalf, 'Rethinking Edwardian Advertising: The Case of Britain's Railways', in *Edwardian Culture* (Routledge, 2017), p. 79.

<sup>30</sup> Alexander Medcalf, *Railway Photographic Advertising in Britain, 1900-1939* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2018), pp. 82-83.

<sup>31</sup> Mandler, *Against Englishness*, p. 170.

<sup>32</sup> The 1917 and 1918 editions weren't published due to WW1, Alan Jackson, *London's Metro-Land*, p. 35.

draws on the 1920, 1921, 1923, 1927 and 1930 editions, accessed in person at the London Transport Museum (LTM) and Amersham Museum (AM), as well as the republished 1924 and 1932 editions.<sup>33</sup> Although not every edition has been consulted, copywriting and stock photographs were reused year on year, meaning I still had broad scope. However, it did skew research towards the inter-war period. I have counteracted this by consulting Alan Jackson's *London's Metro-Land*, which details changes and other Met sales publications from 1915 to 1932.<sup>34</sup>

During this period, British railway companies began adopting 'customer-centred' approaches to advertising, meaning publications were often anticipated by the public.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, *Metro-Land* enticed consumers with its high-quality coloured plates and fold-out maps, as well as its low price (1-2 pence or a third of the price of *The Times* in 1915).<sup>36</sup> Despite this, historians using adverts have limited themselves to semiotic analysis, leading them to overlook the broader cultural and social contexts in which they were produced.<sup>37</sup> This dissertation therefore embeds analysis of *Metro-Land* within the cultural context of 'conservative modernity'.

Furthermore, *Metro-Land* was one piece in the Met's broader promotional ecosystem, which included posters, newspaper advertisements, and pamphlets. Comparing it with these materials, as well as sources not produced by the Met, such as OS maps and

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<sup>33</sup> AM had no archival references for the copies of *Metro-Land* I accessed. Metropolitan Railway, *Metro-Land* (Hunbury, Tomsett & Co, 1920), AM; Metropolitan Railway, *Metro-Land* (Hunbury, Tomsett & Co, 1921), LTM, Ref. 1994/1335; Metropolitan Railway, *Metro-Land* (Hanbury, Tomsett & Company, 1923) LTM, ref. 1994/1328; *Metro-Land*, 1927, AM; Metropolitan Railway, *Metro-Land* (Crypt House Press Ltd, 1930), AM; Oliver Green, *Metro-Land: 1924*; Oliver Green, *Metro-Land: 1932*.

<sup>34</sup> Alan Jackson, *Metroland*, pp. 30-122.

<sup>35</sup> Medcalf, 'Rethinking Edwardian Advertising', p. 79; Medcalf, *Railway Photographic Advertising*, p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> Alan Jackson, *Metroland*, p. 34.

<sup>37</sup> Stefan Schwarzkopf, 'The Subsiding Sizzle of Advertising History: Methodological and Theoretical Challenges in the Post Advertising Age', *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, 3.4 (2011), pp. 528-48 (p. 541), 10.1108/17557501111183653.

local newspapers, is essential to understanding the function of nostalgia in *Metro-Land*, as it embeds analysis within wider cultural contexts.

Importantly, my approach does not use other sources to expose *Metro-Land* as a deception as others have.<sup>38</sup> The fact that between 1921-1928 season ticket sales at stations such as Wembley Park rose by 700%, and the population of Metro-Land's suburbs grew by 50%, suggests the Met had accurately gauged middle-class Londoners.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, advertising only works when it manipulates and intensifies *real* anxieties or desires. *Metro-Land* did exactly this, so exposing it as a deception ultimately misses the point, as the feelings it played on are of value to the cultural historian.

However, this approach carries two archival silences. First, the lack of internal Met communications means it is unclear whether *Metro-Land's* nostalgia was a deliberate strategy, a reflection of 'conservative modernity', or both. Nevertheless, since the focus here is on the cultural work the guidebooks perform, namely what anxieties about modernity nostalgia is managing, this matters less than it appears, as this is legible in the texts themselves regardless of corporate intent. Second, there is a silence surrounding responses to Metro-Land, making it difficult to discern the guidebooks' audience beyond reasonable assumptions. However, the scale of inter-war suburban growth strongly suggests that *Metro-Land* resonated with its target audience. Even so, this dissertation can only examine how *Metro-Land* used nostalgia to shape readers' perceptions of suburban life, rather than how readers actually perceived it.

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<sup>38</sup> Oliver Green, *Metro-Land 1924*, p. xvii; Alan Jackson, *Semi-Detached London: Suburban Development, Life and Transport, 1900-39* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 201-211.

<sup>39</sup> Oliver Green, *Metro-Land: British Empire Exhibition Number* (Oldcastle Books, Limited, 2015), pp. xix-xx.

## Structure

Finally, this dissertation uses a three-part structure to analyse *Metro-Land's* main contradictions, since this is where nostalgia and modernity pull against each other without resolution, and where the commercial function of nostalgia is most visible.

**Chapter 1: 'The Rural Arcadia'** — This chapter explores the contradiction of *Metro-Land* constructing an 'unspoiled' countryside to sell the very thing that destroyed it. Through analysing this 'corporate countryside', it argues the guidebooks' nostalgia is 'reflective' and shows how this operated within 'conservative modernity'.

**Chapter 2: 'Realm of Rest'** — This chapter explores the contradiction of the Met's framing of the suburb as an escape from London, despite its total dependence on the city. It argues the Met constructed a 'double-base' through nostalgia to make commuting appealing, which in turn, reveals Metro-Land as a 'non-place' wedged between country and city.

**Chapter 3: 'Historical Sketch(ing)'** — This chapter builds on the last by analysing the contradiction of writing histories for 'non-places'. It argues, using Pierre Nora's concept of sites of memory, *Metro-Land* used reflective nostalgia to anchor suburban estates to England's national memory. It concludes the dissertation by that arguing the function of nostalgia was ultimately to make an imagined landscape feel purchasable.

## Chapter 1: 'The Rural Arcadia'

'No mere description, however faithful, can impart the charm of the beautiful, but still little known, country on the 'Metro' so fully, as a personal visit to Metro-Land; *the rural Arcadia*.' — *Metro Land* (1920).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1920, AM, p. 9.

At first glance, by promoting itself as a 'rural Arcadia', *Metro-Land* seems to 'speak with breathtaking hypocrisy', as it was destroying the very countryside it was selling.<sup>41</sup> However, this first chapter argues that this hypocrisy is created by reflective nostalgia, as the Met sold itself through both the attraction of rural England and the conveniences of modern suburban life. This corporate countryside also reveals the 'Janus-Face' of conservative modernity as *Metro-Land's* rural nostalgia attempted to make modern suburban development feel continuous with traditional country life.

The appeal of *Metro-Land's* 'rural Arcadia' was rooted in inter-war anxieties about the destruction of the English countryside. Between 1901 and 1937, the population of London's suburbs grew by 2.5 million, which caused concern.<sup>42</sup> Clough Williams-Ellis famously likened London to an octopus, warning that if left unchecked, its 'tentacles' would devour England's countryside.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, writers like H.V. Morton, J.B. Priestley, and George Orwell lamented the loss of the countryside and tried to recapture a sense of belonging there. In response to this expansion and perceived 'crisis of landscape', the Campaign to Protect Rural England was set up in 1926.<sup>44</sup> *Metro-Land* then emerged at a time when the countryside was being physically transformed yet culturally idealised.

Furthermore, the London Underground's physical environment made *Metro-Land's* 'rural Arcadia' appealing to its target audience. As David Ashford argues, advertising could create 'virtual spaces' for Tube passengers, allowing them to escape into 'internal landscapes' of their own imagination.<sup>45</sup> In a 'post-urban' England where eighty

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<sup>41</sup> Alan Jackson, *Metro-Land*, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> Chirstian Wolmar, *Subterranean Railway*, p. 244.

<sup>43</sup> Clough Williams-Ellis, *England and the Octopus*, (G. Bles, 1928).

<sup>44</sup> Medcalf, *Railway Photographic*, p. 83; David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (Reaktion Books, 1998), pp. 25-27, <<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bristol/detail.action?docID=368673>> [accessed 2 February 2026].

<sup>45</sup> David Ashford, 'Book of Machine', p. 6.

percent of people now lived in cities, a 'rural Arcadia' was perhaps most attractive to the middle-class Londoner yet to leave the 'stygian gloom' of the Underground's tunnels.<sup>46</sup> It was this imaginative potential that *Metro-Land's* 'corporate eye' was designed to exploit, inviting its target audience into a fantasy of timeless English country life, just 'beyond the City's haze'.<sup>47</sup>

*Metro-Land's* promotional language was carefully crafted to speak to these anxieties. Upon its release in 1915, local London newspapers promoted *Metro-Land* as a 'profusely illustrated' guide to a 'country yet unspoiled', a phrase widely repeated across newspaper advertisements, suggesting a coordinated promotional strategy by the Met.<sup>48</sup> The repetition and insistence on an 'unspoiled' landscape echoes that feeling of a 'crisis of landscape', as its 'un' prefix implies elsewhere has been 'spoiled'. Moreover, the fact that it is 'yet unspoiled' stresses how, from the outset, the guidebooks created a sense of urgency to push readers to buy homes before it was too late.

The guidebooks' four-colour prints made *Metro-Land* feel like an 'unspoiled' countryside by omitting any visual signs of modernity. For example, this print of Rickmansworth is typical of the Met's 'yet unspoiled' Arcadia (Fig. 2). There are no signs of modern infrastructure, most notably the railway that suburban life here depended on. Instead, the photo shows only a pastoral landscape, composed of a dirt

<sup>46</sup> Andrew Thacker, 'London', p. 179.

<sup>47</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1920, AM, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Anon, 'Metro-Land', *Harrow Observer*, 6 August 1915, p. 6, <https://www.thesocialhistoryarchive.com/imageviewer?issue=BL%2F0000957%2F19150529&page=5&article=069&stringtohighlight=yet+unspoiled+and+metro+land> [accessed 28 January 2026]; Anon, 'Metro-Land', *Marylebone Mercury*, 29 May 1915, p. 5, <https://www.thesocialhistoryarchive.com/imageviewer?issue=BL%2F0000957%2F19150529&page=5&article=069&stringtohighlight=yet+unspoiled+and+metro+land> [accessed 28 January 2026]; Anon, 'Metro-Land', *Hampstead News*, 27 May 1915, p. 7, <https://www.thesocialhistoryarchive.com/imageviewer?issue=BL%2F0004647%2F19150527&page=7&article=150&stringtohighlight=yet+unspoiled+and+metro+land> [accessed 28 January 2026].

path and still water surrounded by dense woodland. The composition and colours of this photo echo 18<sup>th</sup>-century 'Arcadian' landscape painting, a visual tradition already appropriated and popularised by Underground posters since the 1890s.<sup>49</sup> *Metro-Land* therefore used an established visual language, associated with an English pastoral idyll, to construct this 'unspoiled' landscape. The Met's 'corporate eye', instead of just 'profusely illustrat[ing],' enhances the stillness of this photo, particularly of the water, which suspends Rickmansworth in time, making it feel untouched and therefore worth a visit.<sup>50</sup> Like a mirror, it invites the reader to project themselves into it, transforming a promotional photograph into the 'internal landscape' of their own imagining.<sup>51</sup> The fact that every edition featured multiple prints like this suggests the Met understood their power; the 'rural Arcadia' had to be seen to be believed.

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<sup>49</sup> Elaine Mehalakes, 'Underground to Arcadia: London Transport Posters 1908–1914', *Art in Print*, 4.5 (2015), pp. 28–31 (p. 28), <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26350610>> [Accessed 19 March 2026].

<sup>50</sup> Elspeth Brown, *The Corporate Eye: Photography and the Rationalization of American Commercial Culture, 1884 - 1929* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> David Ashford, 'Book of Machine', p. 6.



**Figure 2:** 'At Rickmansworth', *Metro-Land*, 1920, AM, pp. 43-44.

Crucially, photography gave these images a persuasive force that illustrations could not. Photography carries a 'lure of realism', meaning viewers assume a photograph is an objective record of place, rather than a representation.<sup>52</sup> The view is therefore presented as Rickmansworth itself, reinforced by the caption 'At Rickmansworth', which anchors the image's idealism to a nameable place, and this strengthens the impression that this is the 'real' Rickmansworth, rather than how the Met wanted you to see it. The material the photo was printed on must have deepened this 'realism' further. In the 1920s, producing a 7 by 4-inch, double-page four-colour print on glossy paper was a costly undertaking, giving the photograph authority that made its nostalgic gaze feel more authoritative. Moreover, the Met's payment for this expensive paper

<sup>52</sup> Penny Tinkler, *Using Photographs in Social and Historical Research* (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2014), p. 24, <<https://methods.sagepub.com/book/mono/using-photographs-in-social-and-historical-research/toc>> [accessed 19 January 2026].

underscores their recognition of photography's persuasive power in advertising. These photographs construction of *Metro-Land's* 'rural Arcadia' depended on selecting what felt timeless and pastoral in these locations, and erasing what felt modern. Medcalf, writing of the GWR's 'corporate countryside', has characterised this as 'selective nostalgia'.<sup>53</sup>

However, comparing the business strategies of the GWR and the Met shows why *Metro-Land's* nostalgia must be characterised as 'reflective'. The GWR, whose primary agenda was to sell travel and holidays, used selective nostalgia to present a countryside 'untroubled by the anxieties of modern living'. However, as their business depended on tourism, they avoided depicting modernity entirely, as this would make their rural destinations unattractive.<sup>54</sup> In comparison, the Met's unique parliamentary exemption allowed it to establish the MRCE, letting them profit from the destruction of the very landscape they romanticised. This meant that their advertising could not obscure modernity entirely. *Metro-Land* was created to sell suburbia, not holidays, so emphasising the conveniences of modern suburban life was crucial.

*Metro-Land's* depiction of the country home reveals this difference. Since the early 18th century, the country home had been one of Britain's most enduring architectural expressions of rustic country living.<sup>55</sup> The Met's marketing for *Metro-Land* leaned heavily into this tradition.<sup>56</sup> Whether the covers were illustrated (Fig. 3) or

<sup>53</sup> Raymond Williams, 'Between Country and City', in *Reading Landscape: Country, City, Capital*, ed. by Simon Pugh, Cultural Politics (Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 7, cited in Alexander Medcalf, *Railway Photographic*, p. 101.

<sup>54</sup> Alexander Medcalf, *Railway Photographic*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>55</sup> Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Scolar, 1989), p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1920, AM, cover; *Metro-Land*, 1921, AM, cover; Metropolitan Railway Company, 'Country Homes in Metro-Land', *Railway News*, 9 October 1915, p. 589, <<https://www.thesocialhistoryarchive.com/image-viewer?issue=BL%2F0004370%2F19151009&page=39&article=195&stringtohighlight=country+homes+in+metroland>> [accessed 7 January 2026]; Metropolitan Railway Company, 'Live in Metro-Land', *Railway News*, 6 January 1917, p. xxv, <<https://www.thesocialhistoryarchive.com/image-viewer?issue=BL%2F0004370%2F19170106&page=25&article=568&stringtohighlight=country+homes+in+metroland>>

photographed (Fig. 4), these houses look rustic, surrounded by lush gardens and are placed in open 'unspoiled' countryside without neighbours. Like the four-colour illustrations inside the guidebooks, there are no signs of modern infrastructure. The 'corporate eye' in these covers then, through nostalgic imagery of the country home, also draws viewers into an 'internal landscape' of a 'yet unspoiled' countryside.<sup>57</sup>

However, the section 'country homes in Metro-Land', reveals a tension within this rural idyll. Every edition of *Metro-Land* contained this:

'However beautiful and healthy a country-side may be, it is unfitted for the erection of dwelling-houses until a certain amount of preparatory work has



**Figure 3:** *Metro-Land* 1921, LTM Ref. 1994/1335



**Figure 4:** Metropolitan Railway, *Metro-Land* (Knapp, Drewett & Sons Ltd, 1928), LTM, Ref. 2006/7006.

[accessed 4 February 2026].

<sup>57</sup> David Ashford, 'Book of Machine', p. 6.

been accomplished on the land. An approved scheme, for instance, has to be laid down; water, gas and electric light laid on, etc.’<sup>58</sup>

The tone here stands in stark contrast to the nostalgic cover illustrations and pastoral imagery elsewhere in the guidebooks. Language like ‘unfitted for the erection’ and ‘has to be’ implies inevitability, a sense that suburban life requires the countryside to be destroyed. Moreover, adverts stress how modernity was key to *Metro-Land’s* country home. Adverts for Cosmos Domestic Appliances feature regularly, with all the electrical things which ‘represent the method of heating and cooking in the modern home’. In contrast to the Tudorbethan covers, Cosmos adverts had a distinct Modernist style, which exposes how the desirability of the country home was also premised on the conveniences of modern technology.<sup>59</sup> MRCE adverts are similarly devoid of nostalgia and emphasise the convenience of a ‘modernly planned home’ with ‘electricity, gas, and excellent water supply’.<sup>60</sup> Taken together, these sources reveal how *Metro-Land’s* ‘country home’ was never truly rustic, and was more in tune with the ‘intense modernity’ of the inter-war period.<sup>61</sup>

Previous scholarship has tended to dismiss this nostalgia merely as ‘pretty talk’, or dismiss it entirely, and sees it as a mask over the modern lifestyles that middle-class Londoners actually wanted.<sup>62</sup> However, this overlooks the ‘conservative modernity’ of the inter-war period. The anxiety about the loss of the countryside was genuine, and the desire for modern suburban convenience was equally genuine, and *Metro-Land’s* writers and readers felt both simultaneously. They were perhaps contradictory, but they

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<sup>58</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1920, AM, p. 53; *Metro-Land*, 1923, LTM, ref. 1994/1328, p. 53; Oliver Green, *Metro-Land: 1924*, p. 81; *Metro-Land*, 1927, AM, p. 87; *Metro-Land*, 1930, AM, p. 87.

<sup>59</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1920, p. 78; *Metro-Land*, 1923, p. 93.

<sup>60</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1930, pp. 135-141.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Mandler, ‘Against “Englishness”’, p. 170.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171; Alan Jackson, *Metro-Land*, p. 4-7.

coexisted, and therefore the 'breathtaking hypocrisy' of selling a 'rural Arcadia' while demolishing it is rooted in, I argue, this 'Janus-Face' of conservative modernity.<sup>63</sup>

A page in the 1923 edition makes this coexistence particularly visible, when a photograph of a thatched cottage sits opposite an advert for an estate (Fig. 5). The thatched cottage on the left deploys the same timeless visual language of the 'unspoiled' countryside, but the Tudorbethan semi on the right is overtly suburban, or 'spoiled'. Even so, its Tudorbethan timber framing echoes the cottage opposite, presenting itself as the attainable and modern version of that rural ideal. As Deborah Ryan notes, Tudorbethan allowed 'its inhabitants to dwell in the past' and look

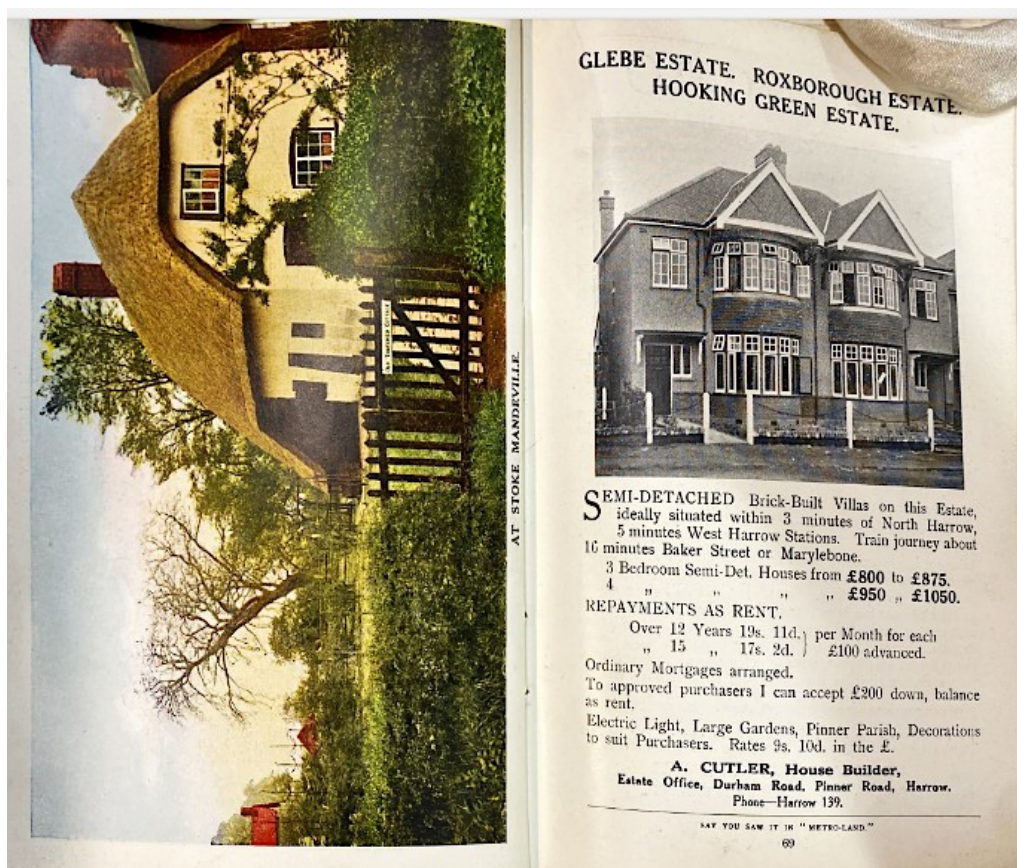


Figure 5: *Metro-Land*, 1923, LTM, ref. 1994/1328, p. 69.

<sup>63</sup> Alison Light, *Forever England*, p. 10.

‘forwards to the future’<sup>64</sup> This page is therefore explicitly ‘Janus-faced’, as it made no attempt to hide the differences between them.

It is this coexistence of past and present which distinguishes *Metro-Land*’s nostalgia as ‘reflective’ rather than ‘selective’. Where the GWR could erase modernity from view, the Met’s need to sell suburbia meant it had to navigate a desire for ‘modernity within limits.’<sup>65</sup> As Boym notes:

‘[Reflective] nostalgists are aware of the gap between identity and resemblance; the home is in ruins or, on the contrary, has been just renovated and gentrified beyond recognition. This defamiliarization and sense of distance drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present and future’.<sup>66</sup>

*Metro-Land*’s ‘rural Arcadia’ was a result of this ‘defamiliarization’, and in being reflective, it never sought to hide suburbia’s destruction of the countryside. In fact, the Met thought a ‘rural Arcadia’ would be attractive precisely because the countryside was perceived to be under threat, hence ‘yet unspoiled’. Nostalgia therefore functioned to ease the anxieties of modern suburban development by making Metro-Land feel like it was part of a timeless English countryside; and of course, to increase the Met’s profits. *Metro-Land*’s nostalgia therefore responds to this ‘Janus-faced’ desire for both past and present. However, for the Met’s middle-class target audience, who likely worked a white-collar job in London, a ‘rural Arcadia’ alone was not enough. *Metro-Land* also had to sell itself in relation to the city where its target audience made their living, and it is this that the next chapter shall examine.

<sup>64</sup> Deborah Ryan, *Ideal Homes*, p. 168.

<sup>65</sup> John R. Gold and George Revill, *Representing the Environment* (Routledge, 2004), p. 202.

<sup>66</sup> Svetlana Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, p. 50.

## Chapter 2: ‘Realm of Rest’

‘Dear *Realm of Rest* from London’s weary ways,  
Brightly you beam beyond the City’s haze,  
My Metro-Land’ – George R. Sims, *Metro-Land* (1920).<sup>67</sup>

If Chapter 1 showed how *Metro-Land*’s nostalgia suggested to readers that suburban development was continuous with a timeless English countryside, this chapter argues that to get readers into their ‘unspoiled’ countryside, the Met had to make London feel like somewhere worth escaping from. Drawing on Raymond Williams, I argue *Metro-Land* reframed suburban life as an attractive ‘double-base’ between country and city.<sup>68</sup> As Sims’ poem suggests, *Metro-Land* marketed itself as a ‘realm of rest’, an idea dependent on a binary between an exhausting, modern city and a restorative, eternal ‘rural Arcadia’. Yet in defining itself through two elsewheres neither of which it is, this chapter concludes that *Metro-Land*’s ‘elastic borders’ ultimately produced a ‘non-place’; a landscape reliant on transit, found in the gap between city and country.

Firstly, the Met marketed itself as the conduit between the country and city long before *Metro-Land*. This is because, as Raymond Williams argues, capitalism produced the division between country and city ‘in its modern forms’, making them appear ‘opposite and separate’, when in fact, they are ‘indissolubly linked’ within the same economic system.<sup>69</sup> The Met, as the infrastructure through which London’s labour market extended into the countryside, therefore had a commercial incentive to reproduce this binary.

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<sup>67</sup> George R. Sims, *Metro-Land*, 1923, p. 10.

<sup>68</sup> Raymond Williams, ‘Between Country and City’, in *Reading Landscape: Country, City, Capital*, ed. by Simon Pugh, Cultural Politics (Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 7-10.

<sup>69</sup> Raymond Williams, ‘Between Country and City’, p. 7; Raymond Williams and Tristram Hunt, *The Country and the City*, Vintage Classics (Vintage, 1973).

Indeed, the cover for the 1913 Met timetable (Fig. 6), produced two years before the first edition of *Metro-Land*, already shows a binary between city and country. In the first illustration of Harrow, the bright colours and clear blue sky evoke the same 'pure air and rural surroundings' mentioned in the 1923 edition.<sup>70</sup> In contrast, the illustration of London below shows the same train emerging from the gloom of an



**Figure 6:** Metropolitan Railway, *Metropolitan Railways Timetables and Guide* (Waterlow & Sons, 31 March 1913) LTM ref. 1994/1345.

Underground tunnel. The cover constructs two separate landscapes served by the Met, revealing how it presented itself as a conduit between two opposite landscapes, rather than a necessary mediator of labour in a capitalist economy. As *Metro-Land* was also produced in the same economic system, it also had to construct the city and country as opposites.

<sup>70</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1923, p. 3.

From 1924, *Metro-Land* established this binary through a section called 'How to Get Around London', which made commuting to London feel worth it. Copywriters made London attractive by saying the Met provides easy access to London's 'principal thoroughfares', mostly its 'historical buildings and museums'.<sup>71</sup> The photographs used to illustrate London in this section were often 'at least a decade out of date', meaning they omit signs of inter-war modernity. For example, the photos of London in the 1924 edition still show horse-drawn buses, even though these were discontinued in 1910. This creates a 'strangely archaic feel' to *Metro-Land's* London, a city frozen at the height of its pre-war imperial confidence.<sup>72</sup> This feature starting in the *British Empire Exhibition Number* is no coincidence, as this outdated London sits coherently alongside that celebration of a declining empire. Just as Chapter 1 showed how *Metro-Land's* four-colour prints constructed the countryside as 'yet unspoiled' by hiding modernity, these images constructed London in the same way.

In contrast, London's appeal was also constructed through modern and cosmopolitan luxury. *Metro-Land* consistently included a 'List of Theatres' from the West End Theatre Managers. It listed forty theatres, with their addresses and nearest stations, implying the Met was how to access the spectacles of the city.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, the Met's office at Baker Street included modern luxury apartments, the Chiltern Court, which were sometimes promoted in the guidebooks, but more often in newspapers.<sup>74</sup> These adverts are not nostalgic, as they focus on 'up-to-the-minute' technology such as gas,

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<sup>71</sup> Oliver Green *Metro-Land: 1924*, pp. 27-28; *Metro-Land*, 1927, p. 11; Oliver Green, *Metro-Land: 1932*, p. 11.

<sup>72</sup> Oliver Green, *Metro-Land 1924*, p. xvi.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79; *Metro-Land*, 1920, p. 68; *Metro-Land*, 1923, p. 85; *Metro-Land*, 1927, p. 76.

<sup>74</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1930, pp. 39-40; Anon, 'Chiltern Hall', *Buckinghamshire Examiner*, 31 October 1930. <<https://www.thesocialhistoryarchive.com/image-viewer?issue=BL%2F0002490%2F19301031&page=4&article=035&stringtohighlight=%22chiltern+court%22>> [accessed 3 March 2026].

and they stress how this is the Met's 'contribution to the London of the Future'.<sup>75</sup> Unlike the country homes in the 'rural Arcadia', the Met saw no need to sell Chiltern Court through nostalgia, revealing how conservative modernity's 'Janus-face' operated differently between country and city. Where the countryside was always nostalgic, as a city, London could be made to feel contemporary and exciting.

Yet, to sell its suburban estates, *Metro-Land* had to present London as a modern city too exhausting to live in. The same guide to London which promotes visiting the city's 'historical buildings and museums', emphasises the 'confusion and congestion inseparable from [...] London's streets'.<sup>76</sup> Likewise, a 1923 pamphlet called *Homes in Metro-Land* produced by the Met in 1923 says:

'The strain which the London businessman has to endure, amidst the turmoil and bustle of town, can only be counteracted by the quiet restfulness and comfort of a residence in pure air and rural surroundings.'<sup>77</sup>

As Andrew Thacker argues of *Metro-Land*, negative language (like 'strain', 'endure' and 'turmoil' used here) reflect and construct the 'spatial phobias' of urban modernity. In contrast, language like 'quiet', 'comfort' and 'restfulness' suggest that Metro-Land offered escape and healing.<sup>78</sup> *Metro-Land's* presentation of London was therefore deliberately contradictory, it was a city which offered all the delights of modernity, but at the cost of overwhelming those who lived there, which urged people to move out.

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<sup>75</sup> Anon, 'Chiltern Court has Gas Throughout', *West London Observer*, 25 April 1930, <<https://www.thesocialhistoryarchive.com/image-viewer?issue=BL%2F0000437%2F19300425&page=7&article=112&stringtohighlight=%22chiltern+court%22>> [accessed 5 March 2026].

<sup>76</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1924, p. 27; *Metro-Land*, 1927, p. 11; Oliver Green, *Metro-Land: 1932*, p. 11.

<sup>77</sup> Metropolitan Railway, *Homes in Metro-Land* (Metropolitan Railway Company, 1923) <<https://www.lucey.net/webpage6metroland.htm>> [accessed 3 January 2026].

<sup>78</sup> Andrew Thacker, 'London', pp. 178-179.

The countryside was presented to be the solution to this, and this was often articulated through benefits to health. For example, MRCE adverts in the 1932 edition said Metro-Land's 'air is healthy and invigorating' and that the 'good air of the Chilterns invites health'.<sup>79</sup> The focus on fresh air suggests this environment is healthier than London to consumers aware of 1930s ideas of preventive medicine.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, a 1930 advert titled '*Metro-Land for Health*' produced by the Met opens with the question: 'Have you ever realised the joy of living in the country; the pleasure of rural surroundings and *bracing air*?'<sup>81</sup> This rhetorical question moves the reader living in the city into a health scare, which might have increased their desire to move into 'the most healthy district around London'.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, the largely overground stations of the Met would have only emphasised the 'sense of airy escape' from the 'stygian gloom' of the Underground to Londoners used to that.<sup>83</sup>

*Metro-Land* also constructed the countryside as a space of middle-class leisure, offering a remedy for urban 'unrest' that was tailored to their social aspirations. For example, the Met likely commissioned Clarice Emanuel to write about Metro-Land country walks in the *Bayswater Chronicle*, essentially as adverts to bring in tourist traffic from inner London and prospective residents.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, a 1927 brochure titled *London's Pleasureland* describes each stop along the Met line as a

<sup>79</sup> Oliver Greem, *Metro-Land: 1932*, p. 95, p. 133.

<sup>80</sup> Gold and Revill, *Representing the Environment*, p. 200.

<sup>81</sup> Metropolitan Railway, 'Metro-Land for Health', *Railway Yearbook*, 1930, cited in Alan Jackson, *London's Metro-Land*, p. 89.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Thacker, 'London', p. 179.

<sup>84</sup> Clarice Emanuel, 'Country Walks in Metro-Land', *Bayswater Chronicle*, 21 October 1922, p. 3, <<https://www.thesocialhistoryarchive.com/image-viewer?issue=BL/0004147/19221021&page=0003&article=034&stringtohighlight=metro%20land%20railway%20news>> [accessed 22 February 2026]; Clarice Emanuel, 'Country Walks in Metro-Land', *Bayswater Chronicle*, 6 October 1923, p. 3, <<https://www.thesocialhistoryarchive.com/image-viewer?issue=BL%2F0004147%2F19231006&page=3&article=044&stringtohighlight=metro+land+railway+news>> [accessed 26 March 2026]; Clarice Emanuel, 'Christmas in Metroland', *Bayswater Chronicle*, 23 December 1924, p. 8, <<https://www.thesocialhistoryarchive.com/image-viewer?issue=BL%2F0004147%2F19241227&page=3&article=038&stringtohighlight=christmas+in+metro+land>> [accessed 26 March 2026].

destination for 'pleasure parties', listing the names, proximity to station and prices of caterers at each stop along the railway up to Aylesbury.<sup>85</sup> Its emphasis on 'adequate and excellent' catering facilities at 'moderate expense' constructs the countryside as a place for leisure. Indeed, the booklets' photographs, as well as the photographs in *Metro-Land*, omit agricultural labourers and working farms.<sup>86</sup> The country is place of 'hidden rural beauties' and 'pleasing panoramas', it is therefore a landscape organised entirely around the leisure for those whose 'first livelihood is elsewhere' in London.<sup>87</sup>

The prevalence of golf makes this class dimension to leisure especially explicit. The Met advertised itself as the 'rapid, inexpensive, and luxurious' way to travel to golf clubs.<sup>88</sup> Maps produced by the Met, both in the guidebooks and on the trains, had flags signalling the locations of golf courses along the line, emphasising the importance the Met placed on it (Fig. 1).<sup>89</sup> Every edition of *Metro-Land* also featured a list of the nearest golf courses to each station.<sup>90</sup> Golf in the interwar period was the sport of the aspiring middle-classes, and its prominence in *Metro-Land* reflects how the countryside was constructed as the place of 'enjoyment and consumption', something essential to the 'aristocratic double base' lifestyle.<sup>91</sup>

This 'double base' is most visible in the MRCE adverts inside *Metro-Land* reveal.

Each advert positioned estates around Baker Street, promoting them as being

<sup>85</sup> Metropolitan Railway, *London's Pleasureland*, (Knapp, Drewett & Sons Ltd., 1927), LTM ref. 1984/51/876, p. 5-12.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 1; *Metro-Land*, 1920, pp. 23-24; *Metro-Land*, 1930, pp. 35-38; Williams, 'Between Country and City', p. 8.

<sup>87</sup> *London's Pleasureland*, 1927, LTM ref. 1984/51/876, p. 8; Williams, 'Between Country and City', p. 8.

<sup>88</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1924, p. 95.

<sup>89</sup> Metropolitan Railway, Carriage Panel, 'Map of Metropolitan Railway line extensions into Metro-Land', c. 1920-1930, LTM, ref. 2007/11236 <<https://www.ltmuseum.co.uk/collections/collections-online/ephemera/item/2007-11236>> [accessed 3 December 2026].

<sup>90</sup> Oliver Green, *Metro-Land: 1924*, p. 95; *Metro-Land*, 1920, AM, p. 66; *Metro-Land*, 1923, LTM ref. 1994/1328, p. 76; *Metro-Land*, 1927, AM, p. 77.

<sup>91</sup> Ross McKibbin, 'The Sporting Life', in *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951*, ed. by Ross McKibbin (Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 359-61; Williams, 'Between Country and City', p. 9.

'only 11½ miles' or '15 minutes from Baker Street.' Yet, these ads also stress the easy access to 'beautiful open country', 'golf links' and 'country walks.'<sup>92</sup> As the copy for Chiltern Court notes, Baker Street is 'the gateway to Metro-land—London's nearest countryside.'<sup>93</sup> In this sense, Baker Street was presented as the point at which London's 'unrest' ended, and the 'realm of rest' began. As Raymond Williams argues, suburbia is inhabited by those who 'earn their livelihood in salaried employment in the cities', therefore, it is a more modest version of an 'aristocratic double base' between country and city.<sup>94</sup> Baker Street is a place of transit stuck between work and rest, and thus exposes the artificiality of the binary between country and city constructed by the Met. The guidebooks therefore sell the convenience of being able to access a cosmopolitan city, as well as the ability to unwind from it, a 'double-base' lifestyle.

It was necessary for *Metro-Land* to construct this binary so that its suburban landscape could be attractive. Among England's intelligentsia, suburb was 'already a dirty word', and there was in this period a sense that 'only the dead and half dead were attracted to such places'.<sup>95</sup> Adverts for MRCE developments for example would never refer to themselves as suburban, and called themselves 'Garden Villages' or 'country estates' just 'beyond the suburban area'.<sup>96</sup> *Metro-Land* required this binary between country and city in order to sell the suburb, as the prejudice surrounding suburbia meant it was crucial to make these new developments appear as though they were the countryside, or at the very least, 'a suburb amongst suburbs'.<sup>97</sup> *Metro-Land* therefore had to define its landscapes through two elsewheres neither of which it was.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p

<sup>93</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1923, LTM ref. 1994/1328, p. 22-23; Oliver Green, *Metro-Land: 1932*, p. 137.

<sup>94</sup> Raymond Williams, 'Between Country and City', pp. 7-10

<sup>95</sup> Jackson, 'Selling the Suburb', p. 205.

<sup>96</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1920, p. 54 *Metro-Land*, 1930, pp. 114-119.

<sup>97</sup> Gold and Revill, *Representing the Environment*, p. 201.

This dependence is made clear in a song commissioned by the Met called 'My Little Metro-Land Home', which accompanied the 1920 edition of *Metro-Land*.<sup>98</sup> Its lyrics romanticise the daily commute through gendered language. As David Matless has argued, 'two modes of conservative modernity clashed over the inter-war suburb', one 'exploratory, wide-ranging and masculine', the other 'domestic, little, feminine and feminizing'.<sup>99</sup> We see this feminine mode in the lyrics when London is presented as the masculine space of work, where the speakers' 'day begins' when he catches 'the eight-fifteen train.' *Metro-Land*'s countryside is in contrast constructed as feminine through domesticity, where 'a little wife / the joy of my life' nurses a 'little dot' in their 'trim little bungalow'.<sup>100</sup> The countryside also appears only at the edges of the working day, at 'twilight', when he returns from the city, revealing that the 'realm of rest' ultimately depended on urban labour. This is explicit in the line 'when I get back to heaven / by the five fifty-three', where Metro-Land is as a paradise, but a paradise only formed, to quote Sims' poem, 'when the workday is o'er'.<sup>101</sup>

As Marc Augé argues, non-places are spaces without identity because, in being defined by transit, they cannot hold enough meaning to be regarded as places.<sup>102</sup> Metro-Land, as the song emphasises, is defined entirely by the rhythm of transit between two country and city and therefore resembles this definition. As David Ashford observes, Metro-Land was 'everywhere and nowhere, ineffectually tied to topography and history'.<sup>103</sup> As this chapter has shown, Metro-Land existed only in the gap between city and country, which raises the question Chapter 3 addresses: how did the Met give this non-place an identity?

<sup>98</sup> Herman Drewsi Music Company, *My Little Metroland Home* (1920), London Museum, no. NN24634; Jackson, *Metroland*, pp. 136-142.

<sup>99</sup> Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>100</sup> Herman Drewsi Music Company, 'My Little Metroland Home'.

<sup>101</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1923, p 10.

<sup>102</sup> Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (Verso, 1995).

<sup>103</sup> Ashford, 'Making Home', pp.11-12.

### Chapter 3: ‘Historical Sketch(ing)’

“During the successive epochs of the country’s history Metro-Land has occupied a prominent place. It is rich in antiquities and full of historical associations.” – *Metro-Land* (1920).<sup>104</sup>

Even though *Metro-Land* was coined in 1915, every guidebook presents it as an essential landscape across the ‘epochs’ of English history. Chapters 1 and 2 have shown that, despite its presentation in the guidebooks, *Metro-Land* was selling a modern suburban landscape, defined by two elsewheres neither of which it was. As this ‘non-place’ has no identity, it created a commercial problem the Met had to solve, as you cannot sell a place with no identity. In this final chapter, I argue that *Metro-Land*’s reflective nostalgia tried to solve this problem by constructing a sense of place through fragmented history. The Met clutched at whatever historical associations these empty fields could offer to construct a place’s identity. What emerges from this is a series of ‘elastic memories’ trying to fix ‘elastic borders’, making an imagined, rootless landscape feel real, and crucially, purchasable.

From 1920 onwards, the guidebooks included a section called ‘Historical Sketch of Metro-Land.’ It came before descriptions of each area and adverts for MRCE estates. Therefore, the Met must have felt it was important to give to readers a ‘history’ for its locations straightway. As David Ashford argues, the ‘detachment’ of the suburban non-place created an isolation that the inter-war English intelligentsia viewed as ‘psychopathological.’ Consequently, the Met’s marketing department, he argues, felt ‘compelled to mediate’ these spaces to the public through the specific imagery and

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<sup>104</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1920, p. 49.

texts found in *Metro-Land*.<sup>105</sup> The way they mediated a sense of place was largely through fragmented ancient and pre-industrial history.

The history used in this 'sketch' is therefore highly selective. No mention is made of any people or events past the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>106</sup> In the 1920 edition, Rickmansworth's 'legendary history' stretches from 'when the Casii tribe fought Julius Caesar', to 'Cardinal Wolsey' and ends with 'William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania.'<sup>107</sup> Similarly, the 'sketch' of Wendover goes back to the ancient 'Roman, Danish and British Camps' and ends with it being the place where 'Lady Mary Grey, sister of the unfortunate Lady Jane Grey, was held prisoner.'<sup>108</sup> Though these connections might be true, vast periods of English history are collapsed into a series of fragments, constructing a narrative spanning from ancient Britain, but which ends abruptly at the start of the Industrial Revolution. Rather than offering the actual local history, *Metro-Land*'s nostalgia therefore, 'cherishes the shattered fragments of memory' connecting the imagined landscape to English history.<sup>109</sup>

*Metro-Land*'s reflective nostalgia of also focused on historical sites to make the imagined landscape worth visiting. From 1927, the guidebooks include a 'Key Plan showing Historical Places in Metro-land', a map numbering the historical sites closest to each station, which reshapes the landscape into an itinerary of locations from England's pre-industrial past (Fig.7).<sup>110</sup> The sites included on the map, such as Moor Park Mansion and John Milton's cottage, are in Pierre Nora's terms *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory. The fact this map only appears after 1927 is revealing, as it suggests rapid suburban development had destroyed the landscape's *milieux de*

<sup>105</sup> David Ashford, 'Making Home', p. 12.

<sup>106</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1920, pp. 49-51.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>109</sup> Svetlana Boym, 'Reflective Nostalgia' p. 19.

<sup>110</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1932, p. 30.

*mémoire* (the lived environment where memory once circulated organically).<sup>111</sup> As Nora has argued ‘we speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left’, meaning in the absence of memory, caused by the destruction of *milieux de mémoire*, we need sites of memory, like those listed on this map.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, in contrast to the ‘Key Plan’s’ empty white space, contemporary OS maps of the same area show rows and rows of suburban semis.<sup>113</sup> This captures the loss of *milieux de mémoire* and the need for *lieux*

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<sup>111</sup> Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire’, *Representations*, no. 26 (1989), pp. 7–24, p. 7.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>113</sup> Ordnance Survey, *London Sheet E*, Six-Inch England and Wales (Ordnance Survey, 1920), <<https://maps.nls.uk/view/102352836>> [accessed 4 March 2026]; Ordnance Survey, *Middlesex Sheet X.SE*, Six-Inch England and Wales (Ordnance Survey, 1920) <<https://maps.nls.uk/view/101454862>> [accessed 4 March 2026].

*de mémoire*, because in sites being isolated in the white-space of the map, it reveals how suburban development had largely consumed these sites of memory, leaving scattered remnants of a past. *Metro-Land*, in choosing these sites of memory, attempted to present its 'yet unspoiled' countryside as still having a 'yet unspoiled' past, making it worth visiting to the reader.

This destruction of this countryside's *milieux de mémoire* is also visible in *Metro-Land's* changing treatment of Harrow. In 1921, the guidebook only talks about one Harrow, but by 1924, it says 'there are two Harrows,' the Harrow 'of the plain' and 'Harrow-on-The-Hill'.<sup>114</sup> By 1932 the guidebooks says 'there now many Harrows—North, South, West, etc.,' but there is still only one 'true Harrow, the one on the Hill'.<sup>115</sup> The more Harrow's suburban development created, the more copywriters had to be nostalgic for the 'authentic' Harrow, to anchor new estates identity. Harrow-On-The-Hill is where the medieval church, as well as the famous Harrow School, are located, and every description of Harrow in *Metro-Land* features them. They therefore come to represent the 'true' Harrow, which, as the 1932 edition stresses, is 'secured against the tides of change', ironically brought on by the Met.<sup>116</sup> In this way, the guidebooks attempted to resolve the instability of new MRCE estates through proximity to sites of memory, which importantly stay fixed, even as the landscape surrounding them is transformed.

Maps of Amersham reveal how *Metro-Land's* nostalgic imagined landscape changed a place's identity. An OS Map from 1895, three years after the construction of the Met station, separates the village into 'Amersham' and tellingly 'Newtown'.<sup>117</sup> 'Newtown' was where the new MRCE estates were built, whereas, Amersham was the historic

<sup>114</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1921, p. 13; *Metro-Land*, 1924, p. 42.

<sup>115</sup> Oliver Green, *Metro-Land: 1932*, p. 48.

<sup>116</sup> Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History', p. 7.

<sup>117</sup> Ordnance Survey, *Buckinghamshire XLIII.NW*, Six-Inch England and Wales (Ordnance Survey, 1900) <<https://maps.nls.uk/view/101449975>> [accessed 2 February 2026].

town-centre where sites of memory, such as the Town Hall, are located. A 1930 poster produced by the MRCE, advertising Amersham's Weller Estate, says it is '3 minutes from the station and 40 minutes from town.'<sup>118</sup> Moreover, *Metro-Land* only ever included photographs of Amersham's historic-centre.<sup>119</sup> The Met therefore presented Amersham's identity through its past. Yet, by 1935 OS Maps re-name 'Newtown' into 'Amersham-On-The-Hill', stressing how the 'non-place' had absorbed the identity of the historic settlement.<sup>120</sup> On modern maps, 'Amersham-on-the-Hill' has become 'Amersham', and what was once just 'Amersham' is now 'Old Amersham.'<sup>121</sup> Within a century, 'Newtown' had consumed the identity of the historic village. The Met therefore helped reshape the landscape by pushing Amersham into the past, making it a *lieu de mémoire*.

Crucially, the copywriting for the 'Historical Sketch' section remained unchanged across all the guidebooks. This meant that it never incorporated the new stations built after 1920. This is significant as it suggests it was harder for the Met to find any history for the newer MRCE estates. For example, the 1932 edition says how the 'quiet rustic beauty of old Rayners Lane is now a memory of the past', confessing that suburban development had already consumed the landscape it romanticised. This is *Metro-Land's* reflective nostalgia at its most transparent, as rather than trying to restore the past, it 'dwells in longing and loss', by acknowledging the destruction of Rayners Lane whilst memorialising its past 'rustic beauty'.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>118</sup> MRCE, 'Poster; Weller Estate Amersham', 1933, LTM ref. 2011/7985 <<https://www.ltmuseum.co.uk/collections/collections-online/posters/item/2011-7985>> [accessed 7 March 2026].

<sup>119</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1920, AM, pp. 36-38; *Metro-Land*, 1927, AM, 68-67; *Metro-Land*, 1930, AM, pp. 78-79

<sup>120</sup> Ordnance Survey / War Office, *Sheet 4 - OS London*, One-Inches Fifth Edition (Ordnance Survey / War Office, 1935), <<https://maps.nls.uk/view/244768929>> [accessed 3 February 2026].

<sup>121</sup> Google Maps, Amersham <<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Amersham/data=!4m2!3m1!1s0x48765d5de642892b:0x53bb64d290f3fe8a?sa=X&ved=1t:242&ictx=111>> [accessed 10 March].

<sup>122</sup> Svetlana Boym, *Future Nostalgia*, p. 41.

Yet 'elastic memories' alone cannot make a non-place feel like home, as this required ownership. *Metro-Land* created this sense of ownership through a tone reminiscent of settler colonialism. As David Matless has argued, 'conservative modernity' caused 'imperial culture itself to become domesticated', shifting the focus of empire towards a 'dialogue of domesticities.' This meant that 'suburb and empire' were closely connected, effectively turning the English suburbs into a territory to be settled.<sup>123</sup> This is visible in how *Metro-Land's* fold-out maps, as well as maps on the trains themselves, spatialised the imagined landscape, effectively 'colonising' the countryside by reframing into a space of purchasable sites (Fig. 1).<sup>124</sup> Indeed, the guidebook says Metro-Land is 'a good parcel of English soil in which to build home and strike root', with 'parcel' indicating ownership and 'build home' reminiscent of settler colonialism.<sup>125</sup> In contrast with the historical sketch, this empties the landscape of identity, to move it beyond just a space where you might want to visit, but a landscape you can purchase. *Metro-Land's* copywriting reinforces the colonial register of these maps. For example, the 1927 edition stresses how 'choice fragments of Middlesex and Hertfordshire may be *annexed* at pleasure', a phrase that casts Metro-Land as territory to be conquered.<sup>126</sup> MRCE adverts stressed the price for a '¼ acre freehold', or through owning the 'freehold' land yourself.<sup>127</sup> This focus on ownership is reinforced by the critiques on renting. An advert made by the MRCE for Halden estates titled 'What is your landlady like?' ridicules various stereotypes of Landladies to make the security of

<sup>123</sup> David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, p. 35.

<sup>124</sup> Metropolitan Railway, *Relief Map of the Metropolitan Railway* (c. 1915), LTM ref. 1982/67 <https://www.ltmuseum.co.uk/collections/collections-online/signs/item/1982-67> [accessed 24 March 2026]; Metropolitan Railway, *Map of Metropolitan Railway Line Extensions into Metro-Land* (1926), LTM ref. 2007/11238, <<https://www.ltmuseum.co.uk/collections/collections-online/ephemera/item/2007-11238>> [accessed 24 March 2026].

<sup>125</sup> Oliver Green, *Metro-Land: 1932*, p. 38.

<sup>126</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1927, AM, p. 27.

<sup>127</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1923, LTM ref. 1994/1328, p. 56.

an '£825 freehold (payable in instalments)', more attractive.<sup>128</sup> This emphasis on the freehold reinforces the idea that one's relationship to place is secured through the stability of land ownership, in 'striking root.' The Historical sketch section then served to make you attracted to this countryside, and this colonial register made sure you knew that you could own it.

This points to a deeper social function of the Historical Sketch. As Wolmar suggests, *Metro-Land* helped lay the foundation for England's home-owning democracy, though he does not explain how.<sup>129</sup> One way *Metro-Land* did this was through using the *lieux de mémoire* of England's national past, like Harrow School or Milton's Cottage, to make home ownership feel even more aspirational. Alongside the investment opportunity, through being close to their house, these *lieux de mémoire* gave prestige to the location and was like the way upper classes *inherited* historic land.

The Met then, like other adverts for inter-war suburbia, made every effort to persuade the likely house buyer that a move to the suburb represented a move up the social ladder.<sup>130</sup> As Dennis Edwards notes about Metro-Land's architecture:

'Metro-land homes were a status symbol. From their diamond-panes windows [...], the fortunate owners looked over a fresh faerie-land'.<sup>131</sup>

Just as the design of the houses suggested status, *Metro-Land*'s 'reflective nostalgia' created status through proximity to the 'successive epochs of the country's history'.<sup>132</sup> The guidebooks attempted to reform an aristocratic relationship to place, as the middle-class buyer did not need to inherit a connection to this landscape; rather they

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p 72-72.

<sup>129</sup> Christian Wolmar, *Subterranean Railway*, p. 238.

<sup>130</sup> Gold and Revill, *Representing the Environment*, p. 201.

<sup>131</sup> Denis Edwards and Ron Pigram, *Metro-Memories* (Bloomsbury, 1988), p. 10.

<sup>132</sup> *Metro-Land*, 1920, p. 49

could purchase a freehold 'on-the-hill' which symbolically anchored them to the past, and to the class prestige that comes with it. In this way, *Metro-Land's* obsession with connecting itself to England's past must be seen as reflective nostalgia's commercial function again. These 'elastic memories' gave the 'elastic borders' of the Met's countryside an identity, which made moving there feel aspirational.

## Conclusion

This dissertation has argued that *Metro-Land's* reflective nostalgia performed two functions in an inter-war culture that valued modernity within limits. It mediated suburban modernity through rural Englishness, and it constructed a historical identity for a landscape that, as a non-place between city and country, had none. In doing so, this dissertation has addressed how and why *Metro-Land* was nostalgic, and how this furthered the business objectives of the Met, something previous scholarship has not.

By reframing the Met's nostalgic marketing strategy as a response to the cultural mood of conservative modernity, this research provides an explanation for the 'hypocrisy' of a company selling a rural idyll whilst destroying it. Using Boym's framework of reflective nostalgia, in contrast to previous scholarship on the Met and inter-war rural nostalgia, has allowed this dissertation to move beyond dismissing it as irrelevant or as just talk. The result has revealed how the Met used nostalgia to construct and sell suburbia as simultaneously, timeless yet modern, city yet countryside, and historic yet purchasable. This has answered Alexander Medcalf's call for closer analysis of the intricate promotional cultures of individual railways that arose in the inter-war period, and how the Met used nostalgia to make suburban life feel desirable to a middle-class audience navigating the effects of the First World War.

However, two important limitations should be emphasised. One is that it has been difficult to determine whether this was a deliberate strategy by the Met or whether this reflective nostalgia reflected the culture in which it was produced, or both. Further research could utilise LTM's archive to investigate this further. Second, without sources for reader response, this dissertation had to focus on what *Metro-Land* tried to make readers think and feel. Further research could conduct oral histories or review reader correspondence to understand how *Metro-Land* might have shaped perceptions of suburbia. Though this would be a real challenge, the knowledge it could provide about inter-war modernity, colonialism's relationship to the inter-war suburbia, and residents relationship between the country and city would be valuable.

Ultimately, through its 'elastic memories', *Metro-Land*'s reflective nostalgia functioned to try and make the 'elastic borders' of this imagined landscape feel real, and most importantly, purchasable. The result was inevitably not the 'rural Arcadia' the Met promised, but the suburban sprawl they profited from. In the end, this nostalgia is a valuable mirror to the anxieties and desires of people living in the specific inter-war culture in which these guidebooks were produced. In John Betjeman's words:

'We called you *Metro-Land*.

We laid our schemes, *lured by the lush brochure*;

down byways beckoned, to build at last the cottage of our dreams.

The city clerk turned countryman again, linked to the Metropolis by train.'<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> *Metroland*, (BBC, 26 February 1973) <<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x8lw6ay>> [accessed 1 October 2026].

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