Holford

a study in architecture, planning and civic design

Gordon E. Cherry and
Leith Penny

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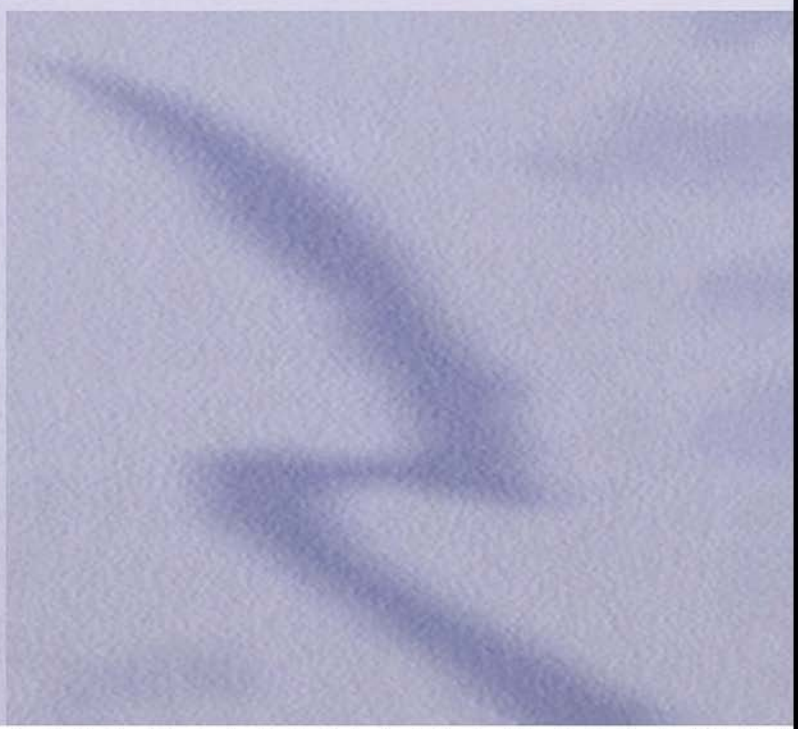

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GORDON E.CHERRY and LEITH PENNY

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Contents

Preface

In the growing body of literature which documents the careers of major figures in British town planning, there remain a number of striking omissions.[1] Few, however, have been more notable in their absence from the historical record than William Holford: after all, his obituary in *The Times* described him, not without reason, as 'the most influential figure in town planning throughout the period during which town and country planning in Britain became transformed from a minor official regulatory activity into a major activity of central and local government departments'. Many of the issues with which Holford was involved post-war will perhaps seem familiar enough, but in particular his work in the Ministry of Town and Country Planning during the war has until now remained unrecorded. The four volumes in the Official Histories of Environmental Planning, for example, give him but two brief mentions.[2,3] It was in fact known that he was head of Research in the Ministry and leader of a brilliant team assembled to lay the basis for post-war planning. But not only has virtually nothing been written officially about Holford and his work, there is little if any systematic record about the wartime period itself when new techniques for post-war planning were forged.

In this research vacuum a grant in 1982 from the Leverhulme Trust to prepare a biography of Holford and his contribution to British planning was the spur that was needed. The authors' gratitude is given pride of place in the Acknowledgements. We were fortunate to have access to the Holford papers collected since Holford's death by his partner Richard Gray, who had himself written some private commentaries. These papers were deposited in the University of Liverpool and provided an invaluable record particularly for the period before the war. The research demanded personal contact with a large number of people who had known and worked with Holford; again, to those listed in our Acknowledgements we are greatly indebted. Above all we would wish to record the outstanding help given by Professors Myles Wright and Gordon Stephenson.

In this, the resulting book, we have tried to address our subject at a number of different levels. In the first place it is a biography of a remarkable person: William Graham Holford, Baron Holford of Kemp Town, 1907–75. Holford was a complex man: charming yet reserved, warmly generous yet with a touch of cold calculation. Seeming not to care for ceremony or the trappings of authority, he none the less savoured the fruits of social esteem; as a public figure with first a Knighthood and then a Life Peerage he yet lived out a very private life. In a personal portrait of some intimacy layers of uncertainty as to how we should regard him are stripped away so that his massive professional work over forty years might be better understood and placed in context.

Secondly, it is an evaluation of a major twentieth-century figure: architect, planner and advocate of civic design. Again there are paradoxes to unravel. Both as an architect and as a town planner he reached the very heights of esteem in both his professions, yet the things for which he stood, and the matters on which he based his reputation, have made no lasting impression on his disciplinary fields. Even his professed art of civic design has crumbled if the post-war record of Britain is anything to go by.

Thirdly, the story that is told is a commentary on changes in mid-century architecture and planning. An intimate biography is interwoven with a professional record to chart and account for the extraordinary developments which took place before, but particularly during and after World War II, with regard to the disciplines of the built environment. The high hopes of creating cities of a new order which might be socially desirable, economically efficient and aesthetically attractive dominate our mid-century period. The history of town planning in its many dimensions—but particularly here we focus on civic design, the conscious manipulation of urban space, layout and the architecture of component buildings—is subject necessarily to constant revision and evaluation. The opportunity to study Holford in depth contributes importantly to our present understanding of this historical record.

The book unfolds in six parts. The first two deal with Holford's early years. Born in 1907 he spent his childhood and school days in South Africa before joining an architect's office in Johannesburg. He came to Liverpool to study at the School of Architecture after which he was awarded a Rome Scholarship. Some years in Italy were followed by a return to a Senior Lectureship at the Liverpool School. Rather surprisingly he was appointed to the Lever Chair in Town Planning in 1936. Responsibility for the design and layout of the Team Valley Trading Estate followed, together with, at the outbreak of war, the construction of an Ordnance factory and hostels for munitions workers.

The third part deals with Holford's role in the creation of the new machinery for planning in wartime Britain. Important light here is shed for the first time on the story behind technical developments with regard to central area rebuilding and residential layouts, both of which left enduring marks on the face of post-war Britain.

The fourth and fifth parts consider Holford's experiences, post-war up to his death in 1975, of the system he had helped to create. These include his plans for the City of London, Cambridge and Corby, his involvement in the long-running affairs of St. Paul's and Piccadilly Circus, the work connected with his many public appointments, and his private architectural practice.

Last, with a brief summary of the chronological record, there is a final evaluation and appreciation of Holford and his work.

This biography is therefore no narrow professional record. Holford's life is set against a twentieth-century canvas, not just of architecture and planning, but also of social, economic, political and institutional dimensions. We feel something of the personal challenge experienced by Holford in his exposure during the early 1930s to the intellectual radicalism and the restlessness of that decade, as he grappled with Corbusian principles, the Modern Movement and new forms of social architecture. We see Europe too in political ferment, with both Fascist and Communist prescriptions for urban planning. In the wartime years the Holford story throws much light on how central government took on board new responsibilities for physical reconstruction and how the relationships between Departments, established civil servants and newcomers from a

variety of disciplines finally worked themselves out in new forms of institutional arrangements. And then after the war we chart the demise of many of the wartime hopes against a background of professional uncertainty, an increasingly apathetic or hostile community response and fundamental changes in socio-political attitudes.

A final point: Holford had a number of important overseas involvements, particularly in South Africa and Australia. Our research has focused on his work in Britain. There are clearly further monographs required to record his wider contributions. Hopefully these will be undertaken one day but we feel able to arrive at the conclusions we have made both about the man and his professional contributions to the times in which he lived without major excursions to Durban or Canberra. This is a book about Holford in Britain; had we gone wider we do not think our assessment would have been very different.

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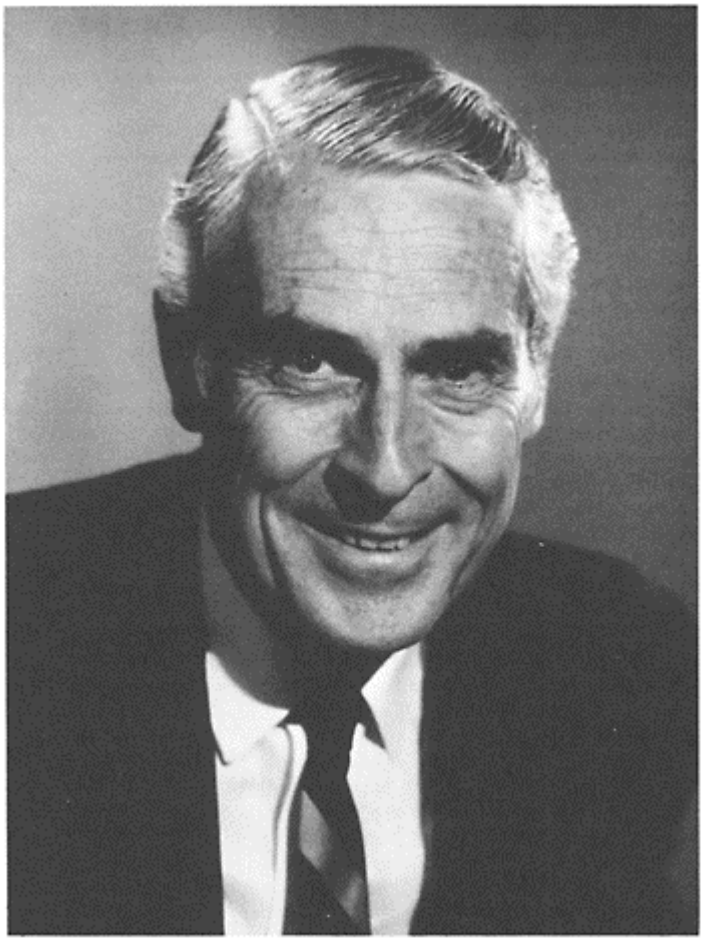
ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout the text, initials have been explained on their first appearance, with subsequent reminders in a very few instances which may be unfamiliar. The following are the main abbreviations used:

AJ	Architects' Journal
APRR	Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction
CIAM	Congrés Internationale d'Architecture Moderne
CEGB	Central Electricity Generating Board
HBC	Historic Buildings Council
ILA	Institute of Landscape Architects
JRIBA	Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects
JTPI/JRTPI	Journal of the (Royal) Town Planning Institute
JSI	Journal of the Surveyors Institute
LCC	London County Council
MSRS	Modern Architectural Research Group
MIAR	Movimento Italiano per L'Architettura Razionale
MOH	Ministry of Health
PEP	Political and Economic Planning
PRO	Public Records Office
RFAC	Royal Fine Art Commission
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects
RTPI/TPI	(Royal) Town Planning Institute
TCPA	Town and Country Planning Association
TPR	Town Planning Review
UCL	University College London
UGC	University Grants Committee
ULA	University of Liverpool Archives



William Holford

Chapter One
Prologue

William Graham Holford was born on the 22nd March, 1907, in a semi-detached suburban house on the northern escarpment overlooking the city of Johannesburg.[1] He was the second son born to his parents George and Kathleen, and the first to survive infancy. Both of Holford's parents came from the small, predominantly English-speaking world of the eastern Cape Province: both had impeccably respectable connections going back to the settlers of 1820. His mother's family, the Palmers, descended through a line of naval officers and Anglican clergymen who had moved in the convivial social atmosphere of Port Elizabeth, a place of rest and recreation for the British in India in the days before the Suez canal was opened: while his paternal grandfather had been a Manchester exciseman, from whose wife three generations inherited a distinctive long upper lip. These Manchester Holfords were devout Wesleyans; and the exciseman had a son, William, who in 1855 sailed for South Africa as a Methodist missionary.[2] For the next 25 years he worked at the Mission Press at Mount Coke, preached in English and 'Kaffir'[3] and raised, with his Cape-born wife, a family.

Holford's father, the eldest of the Reverend William's sons, was taken to England at the age of twelve to complete his education at a private school in Birmingham. He served an engineering apprenticeship in Leeds, and from there moved to the even deeper Victorian gloom of Manchester; but in 1884 he returned to South Africa and a career as a railway and mining engineer. When the Boer War broke out he joined the Colonial Division and, as a subaltern in 2nd Brabant's Horse, was wounded in action. He returned to the Rand in 1900 and married Kathleen Palmer at Port Elizabeth the following year.

George Holford was a man of substance in whom were combined many of the qualities of the Methodist man of affairs: independence of mind, emotional reticence, practical experience won in a hard school, and a profound moral sensibility. He was in addition sensitive and clever, and although no celebrity was both popular and respected. When he was offered the position of general manager with Apex Mines it seemed as though his career was to be crowned with success and assured security. Apex was a part of East Rand Proprietary Mines, one of the most successful mining companies ever floated: but George Holford was no 'company man', nor did Kathleen like living in the East Rand. In 1912, with two sons to educate, he resigned his post over the ethics of a prospectus which the company was to issue. Whether his motives were primarily personal or moral we do not know, but his family were later to have reason for regretting this abandonment of security in favour of independence.

George Holfbrd.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

If George Holford was very much the Methodist in some things, other facets of his personality were less obviously in that mould. Though retaining the social and moral values of his upbringing throughout his life, he had read Darwin and Huxley and had lapsed into a scientific agnosticism. He was also a keen self-taught amateur draughtsman and water-colourist, and he enjoyed the far-from-provincial social life of Johannesburg. Yet although a certain flair and polish added a gloss to his more fundamental qualities, George was outshone in the social graces by his wife. When they met she had just returned from Lausanne where, with her sister, she had spent the war years acquiring a cosmopolitan 'finish'. Her vitality, dominating character and social gifts were a great asset to George, and the Holford family became a tight-knit adult society in which the division was not so much between parents and children as between Kathleen and a male court consisting of her husband and two sons. The similarities between the mannerisms and deportment of the mother and her eldest son were very striking. If it was from his father that Holford derived his seriousness, his moral integrity and his practical intelligence, it was his mother who gave him his social brilliance and ambition. The exquisite, rather formal consideration which was later to give birth to the maxim that 'no-

one ever gets through a door behind Holford' was learned from the deference which the family paid Kathleen.

Holford and his mother Kathleen.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

The physical endowments which William inherited were out of the ordinary. His eyesight was abnormally good: in later life he would use the Bates method of exercise to maintain it.[4] He noticed everything and retained it in a remarkable memory, apparently classified and available for instant recall. At the command of this mind was a resilient physique and a constitution indifferent to hunger, cold or fatigue. Without this equipment Holford could not have achieved what he did, but equally, this capacity for unflagging work meant that he recognized no physical reasons for limiting or selecting the demands he placed upon himself. He was not immune to illness, and after his departure for England suffered terribly from asthma.

When George Holford gave up his job with Apex Mines, the family returned to the Johannesburg suburb of Berea, where William had been born. Their circumstances were now reduced, but life was still comfortable. Their new home was a modest single-storey house with an iron roof and a front verandah. The plot was narrow, but there was a small public park at the bottom of the road, and a back gate that opened onto the Kopje, a small grassy hill from which one could see all Dormfontein. That there was no longer a strict English nanny to supervise them can have been no hardship to the boys and there would

have been, as in all middle-class white households, one or more black servants to do the chores. There was money enough to have them well-educated; William and his younger brother Neil were sent to Park Town School, a good preparatory school with a headmaster who had taught at Harrow. When it moved from Park Town to Mountain View, on a crag looking towards Pretoria at the far end of the ridge from Berea, the boys became boarders. Many years later Neil Holford told Richard Gray that the most valuable thing they learned at Park Town was to enjoy standing on a platform and performing without embarrassment. An advantage of which they were less conscious was the social confidence which such an education imparted. Both brothers were to go through life without a thought of social inferiority, but nor, it might be added, did they become socially arrogant.

William was an enthusiastic correspondent. A typical letter to his mother, written at PTS at the age of twelve, runs thus:

Dear Mother,

I am sorry I have not written before but I have not been able to procure a stamp. I came second this week, Grieveson came first, Cohen third, Buckle fourth and Pullingen last which was very unusual. Neil came first…and Netherson came fourth for a wonder so he scored off him this week. There is a First Eleven Match against King Edwards this afternoon and I am going to be linesman. I am very busy setting Homework and hanging up pictures and various other jobs, and can only get time to write between times. I am singing a song called the Big Bamboo at the Prizegiving. It is a ripping tune and the whole school sing the Chorus.

I must end now, love to Dad,

Yr loving son Billy.

As Richard Gray remarked, 'To anyone who corresponded with Holford in later life this letter is of fascinating interest. The familiar formula is already established: the transparent introductory apology, the noting of the state of play, the preoccupation with more important affairs, the casual announcement of an important forthcoming public appearance, and the omission of any mention of personal feelings'.[5]

The Holfords had many cousins on both sides with whom they were in constant contact. Being themselves in Johannesburg they lived always at the centre of a busy family world. In the holidays there would often be not two but four boys in the house, the sons of Kathleen's younger sister Nellie. The family's favourite recreation was the theatre. London productions came frequently to Johannesburg and the Holfords never missed an important one. This was their main indulgence: otherwise their social life revolved around the tennis club, the houses of friends and relations and, in George Holford's case, his numerous professional associations and clubs.[6]

At the age of thirteen Holford left Park Town for 'Bishop's'—the Diocesan College School, a thousand miles away at Rondebosch near Cape Town. Johannesburg, though wealthy, had been a grid-iron mining town, and the trees in its park-like outer suburbs had then only just been planted. Cape Town was a different world. Rondebosch was one of a string of small satellite towns along the lush sub-tropical valley on the landward side of Table Mountain. The school stood in wooded grounds bought by its founder, the first

Bishop of Cape Town, Robert Gray.[7] The buildings, a mixture of heavy Gothic and colonial styles, looked across the valley to the lower slopes and cliffs of Table Mountain, and to what would one day become the site of the modern University of Cape Town. The regime was a spartan one. During the Great War, when the younger masters were away, discipline had got out of hand, and order was now being restored. School House, of which Holford was a member, was in the care of Colonel the Venerable Archdeacon Bull. Known to the boys as 'Oxo', he was an old-fashioned muscular Christian with a very traditional attitude to discipline, who is said to have worn riding boots and spurs under his cassock in chapel. His mother kept house for him and played Gilbert and Sullivan on the piano for the boys on Sunday evenings.

The influence of religion within the school was strong. Sewell, the founder of Radley, had been an Oxford friend of Bishop Gray, and the South African foundation was largely modelled on the first of the new High Church public schools in England.[8] Under Canon Birt, principal in Holford's time and a former assistant master at Radley, Bishop's continued to follow the example of a strict, almost monastic ethos allied with high Anglican observance. Holford took his daily dose of Anglicanism seriously but it remained, even in his family circle, a private affair. As he confided to his diary some years later, religious ritual appealed deeply to him—but to what part of him he could not or did not say.

As in other such institutions, sport was also a dominating influence. Holford was a passable games-player but in the winter of his first year he contracted diphtheria and was seriously ill. As a result, he was forbidden to take strenuous exercise for a year, and was thereafter regarded as a 'non-athlete'.[9] He would nevertheless list rugby football as an enthusiasm in his *Who's Who* entries well into middle age, and played tennis past his sixtieth birthday. More important to him as a schoolboy, however, were drawing and acting. There were no drawing classes at Bishop's, but Holford had presumably learned from his father, and some of his early work survives in South Africa. The earliest are pen and ink studies of architectural subjects, influenced perhaps by the work of Charles E.Peers, who at about this time was publishing black-and-white drawings of Cape Town. Holford was also Honorary Secretary of the Debating Society in 1924, but it would seem that his star shone brightest on the stage. On 1st November, 1922 there was a Commemoration Concert, in which 'A bright scene from Shakespeare's *Henry V* given by W.G.Holford, A.Devenish and J.M.Robb added a dash of colour to the programme which was concluded by a Musical Monologue by Holford'.[10] A month later he was playing Mark Anthony in an entertainment put on by the Chapel choir. His greatest triumph, however, was in the 1924 summer production of The Rivals. The school magazine reviewed his performance thus:

> If we turn to the male characters we think it is time to say that the outstanding production was that of W.G.Holford in the part of Captain Absolute. To be gay, debonair, dashing and audible when one's heart feels like a sinking ship, to laugh naturally for some five minutes when one is not really amused, to look completely at home on the stage while trying to remember one's next line—to do all this and make it look quite easy is the art of a real actor, and we can say nothing more of Holford's performance than that he succeeded in doing all this.[11]

His success was apparently greater on stage than off. One contemporary remembers that he had quite a sharp tongue, and did not suffer fools gladly.

> Perhaps inevitably, therefore, he was not popular because of these two things. Nor, I think, was he unpopular, but he tended to be left alone, and seemed to want this.[12]

Neither was his academic record particularly distinguished. He matriculated in December 1923 with middling grades: 'B' in History and English, 'C' in Latin and French, and 'D' in mathematics.[13] He was, it seems, jogging along comfortably enough, neither especially stimulated nor oppressed by the atmosphere of the school. It was not until his last year that this more than usually impressionable boy was fired by a strong personal influence.

When Canon Birt had come to Bishop's in 1919 he brought with him the idea of a Post-Matriculation Class, and invited his brother-in-law Hubert Kidd to join the staff and take charge of it. Kidd, who later became the first lay Principal, was a classicist and modern historian. Though shy, he was an approachable and enthusiastic educator. He ran history and discussion groups for the boys, which served to disseminate something of his own discrimination and culture. Kidd took a personal interest in Holford which would continue after the boy's departure, when he was to give him the unusually generous leaving present of a book of etchings by D.Y.Cameron.[14] Under the influence of adult interest rather than the exercise of adult authority, Holford did much better than before, and he gained seven passes with credit in the Oxford and Cambridge Schools' Certificate exams before he finally left. He was not a typical product of the school, any more than he had been a typical pupil; yet in later life he attended Old Boys' Dinners in London, something which those who themselves enjoy such occasions will be best placed to understand. Though he evidently had some affection for the school he did not carry any definite sense of purpose into late adolescence. He had the idea of being an artist, but his father's reaction to this proposal was as one might expect; and so began a series of 'false starts', the first of several episodes of indecision in Holford's life.

Like many young men who have no clear idea of what they want to do, Holford took a job in a bank. He had not been there for very long before Sam Thompson, a prominent Johannesburg accountant and long-standing friend and advisor of the family, offered (or was asked to offer) Holford a job in his office. Holford was a difficult person to employ in any routine capacity, and his duties with Thompson's firm could not have been less exciting. He went round with a qualified man auditing the accounts of client firms, spending days reading out columns of figures. He did not survive this ordeal for very long, and he left under a cloud. The exact circumstances of his departure are obscure. In later life Holford would improve on or invent episodes from his past and this, according to his partner Richard Gray, was a story that, unimproved, was not to his credit. In conversation he would dramatize the incident, and at different times he would give different versions of it; but in general, the suggestion was that he had arranged a stock exchange sweepstake among the office staff, which backfired and led to his sacking. Whatever the truth of the matter, this early and unhappy relationship between Holford and finance is worth noting. In later life he would perform back-of-the-envelope calculations readily enough, especially if prospects were bleak, but he ignored book keeping as far as possible and would only look systematically at office accounts when

forced to do so by his partners. More than this: though he would need money for the sort of life he led, he would be actively averse to the idea of making it. Few things discomfited him more than to send in a bill. It was as though the entire money-making operation had been tainted in his own mind.

Work apart, life was pleasant enough. He continued to live with his parents, taking part in their social life, dancing, visiting the theatre, playing tennis. He took up watercolours and had one or two accepted for the South African Academy's summer exhibition. His sketching companion, he used to say, was the brother of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Lang. Unemployed, he set himself to learn shorthand by taking down passages from Sir Joshua Reynold's *Discourses*, read out to him by his father. Later references to this experience indicate clearly that it was something the adult Holford looked back upon with a keen pleasure. These sessions perhaps gave his father an opportunity of assessing his son's capabilities; at any rate:

> It was decided that if I could not be an artist I should be an architect.[15]

He was placed in the offices of Cowin, Powers and Ellis of Johannesburg. Here, he later claimed, he worked on the Corinthian portico of the Great Hall of Witwatersrand University, but his part in this work must have been a humble one. He did nonetheless form a favourable impression of architecture as a career, as well as some knowledge of technique and office atmosphere, and when the prospectus of the Liverpool School of Architecture came into his hands he was receptive to its blandishments.

The prospectus had precisely the effect that its author, Professor Charles Reilly, had intended. Profusely illustrated with the more glamorous examples of student work, it set out in alluring terms the path to a creative and exciting career in architecture. This single document decided the young Holford upon his course of action. It also carried sufficient weight to secure his father's approval, and late in September of 1925 Holford sailed for England aboard the steamer 'Ulysses'. His first sight of the Old World, which was for him new, was a thick and dirty Liverpool fog.

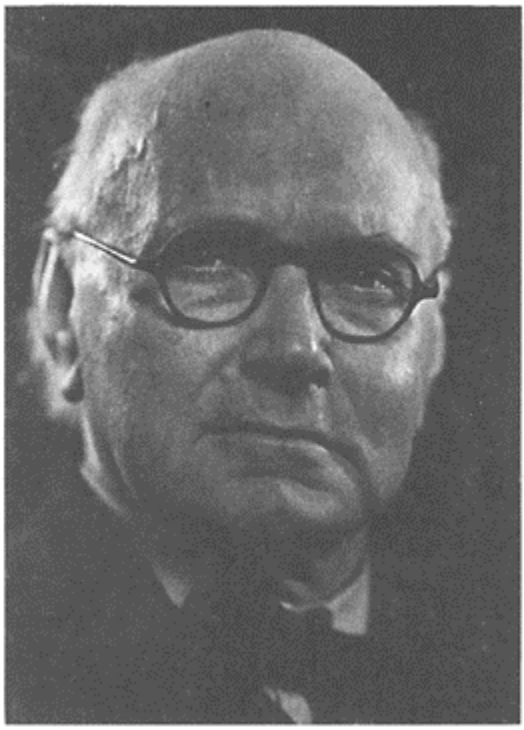
Chapter Two
Liverpool

The city in which Holford arrived at the end of September 1925 was, as today, a place in but scarcely of the old county of Lancashire. It was a self-contained community with its own distinctive dialect, politics and trade, yet it had the cosmopolitanism of a great port, albeit one in gradual decline. By the mid-1920s it was recovering somewhat from the post-war depression, and was still a dynamic town with a certain sooty (and often squalid) glamour. Though the smoke and sprawling slums of Victorian industrialization had all but engulfed the classical architecture of the early nineteenth century, the great liners had not yet ceased to use the docks, and the city was still expanding in both population and area. Culturally, Liverpool accommodated a lively local elite. Socially it exhibited as pronounced a contrast between wealth and poverty as could be found anywhere in the country, as well as some of the most striking efforts of private philanthropy and public intervention to alleviate poverty's effects. For one with a mind susceptible to the influences of its environment, it was a stimulating place in which to embark upon the study of architecture.

The University shared the city's qualities of vitality and squalour. The buildings, which straddled a railway cutting at the top of Brownlow Hill, had few man-made or natural amenities. The pseudonymous Bruce Truscot (in actuality Liverpool's Professor of Spanish, E.Allison Peers) later wrote of the 'sepulchral' gloom of this and the other civic universities. The initial impression created by the adjacent slums and railway was not much alleviated by the 'hideously cheerful' redbrick gothic of the main building

> suggestive of something between a super council-school and a holiday home for children. Within, harsh and ugly blue or yellow tiles lined walls and passages which led up interminable staircases to corridor upon corridor out of which opened lecture-rooms, all of precisely similar pattern[1].

Yet in defiance of these outward signs, Liverpool University was an institution the reputation and influence of which extended far beyond the locality which had brought it into being. Roxby had held the chair of geography since 1917. Carr-Saunders was professor of social science, with Caradog Jones among his staff. Abercrombie headed the Department of Civic Design, and in charge of the School of Architecture was the father of modern architectural education in Britain, C.H.Reilly.[2]



Charles Reilly.

Source: University of Liverpool.

Men such as these had a stature and an influence upon their students which had no parallel in the older universities. Pioneers in subjects still new to academia, they had the freedom to impress their marks upon their chosen fields. The oligarchical structure of the university and its absence of traditions enabled them, especially if successful in attracting large numbers of students or critical acclaim, to cultivate their departments' (and their own) individuality. The system of tuition was such that they were much more closely involved with their students than their counterparts at Oxford or Cambridge, and they were in general more inclined to exert active influence upon their charges.[3] Reilly in particular had strongly-held views on the duties of professors towards their students. His attitude had been formed by his own experiences as a Cambridge undergraduate neglected, shamefully in his view, by his academic mentors; and it was given force by his personal energy and enthusiasm for what he called 'the mistress art' of architecture.[4] Though it had been his predecessor F.M.Simpson who had inaugurated Britain's first bachelor's degree in Architecture in 1901–2, Reilly was the man who established the School's reputation, and Holford was not exaggerating when he later wrote that from 1904 to 1934 the Liverpool School was, for all practi cal purposes, Reilly.[5] It was

unlikely that any especially able student would be able to survive five years of architectural education there without being marked in some way by this man's influence.

'Reilly's Cowshed'.

Source: University of Liverpool.

The School over which Reilly presided, like the University itself, concealed its better qualities within an unprepossessing fabric. In 1919, an estrangement between the University and its benefactor William Lever had resulted in the School's removal from the dignified eighteenth-century Bluecoat Buildings to a disused hospital for the treatment of venereal diseases in Ashton Street. These rather ramshackle premises were popularly known as 'Reilly's Cowshed'.[6] Though the type of education which was practised within the 'Cowshed' could trace its own ancestry back to Renaissance Florence, it constituted the first attempt at a truly systematic architectural training in a British university. Traditionally, aspiring architects had learned their craft under articles to a qualified practitioner, picking up such other instruction as might be available in the evenings and at weekends. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the need for a more formal training had begun to be canvassed, and a number of schools came into being on an *ad-hoc* basis. Though the deficiencies of the established system were manifest by the turn of the century there was still, however, a widespread preference for pupilage as against formal academic training, on the grounds that the latter did not confer experience in the application of technical skills or creative ability to practical problems. As Barrington Kaye later observed, the Beaux Arts system

> overcame this criticism, by co-ordinating training and making the studio the centre of activity, so that lectures and classes related to specific problems in the designs on which the student was working.[7]

The method won many admirers, and its exponents made particular play of the presumed relationship between the inherent logic of the training and the outward logic of the resulting work. Though they expressed themselves in a stylized and formal visual language, Beaux Arts architects were proud of the functional qualities of their buildings' plans.

Although it was the relatively systematic quality of this kind of training in comparison with what had gone before which had secured recognition for formal education from the architectural profession, it was not the quality which Holford or his contemporaries were later to remember as the distinguishing characteristic of the Liverpool School. As they were too young to remember the old dispensation, the new had no significance for them. Rather, they were to recall long hours spent mastering the classical orders and other elements of the basic stylistic vocabulary, and more significantly, the inspirational qualities of the place. In the hands of an enthusiast like Reilly, the Beaux Arts method cultivated something more than mere competence in the student.

The tradition embodied a philosophy of design which, upon the basis of ideas about proportionality in geometrical relationships, aspired to an ideal beauty. The pursuit of this ideal was strongly reflected in certain aspects of the method, described thus by Richard Gray:

> Designers were asked to start with the conception in their heads and their 'idea' of the building described in the programme. Both irregularities of site and problems of cost which restrict buildings in real life were to be ignored. The 'idea' was produced in the imagination and the imagination drew on previous experience not of life but of exercises of this kind. Beginners learned by attempting, and persisting in, such exercises of progressive difficulty.[8]

Reilly would not have concerned himself overmuch with the philosophical basis of the method as a vehicle for the achievement of an idealized, academic conception of beauty; but its use as a means of stimulating the imagination appealed to him greatly. He took up the Beaux Arts practice of setting subjects in which the students were given a limited time, usually six hours, in which to produce sketch designs. These were then used in a procedure which gave him full scope to play the role of the *patron* in his *atelier* and which he described in his autobiography.

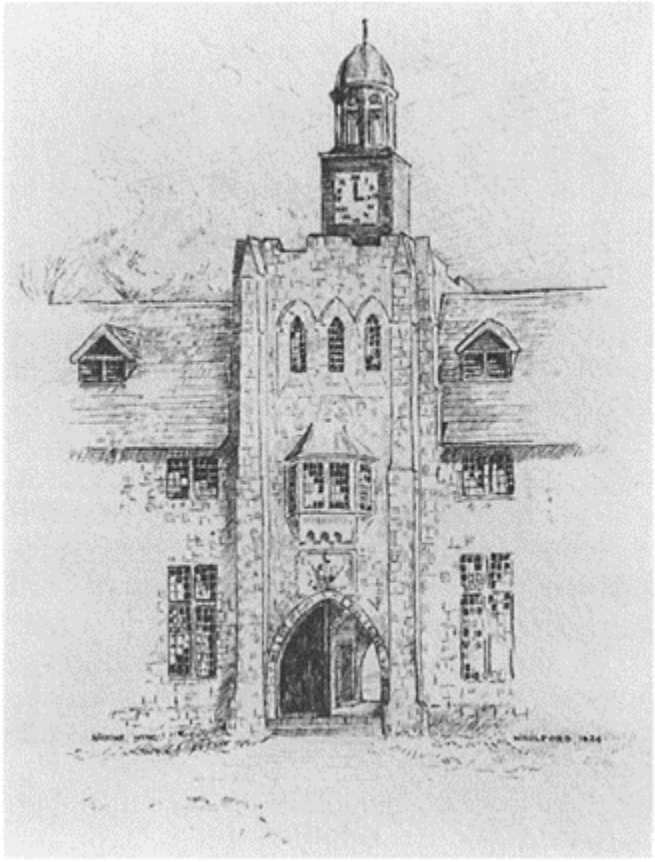
> Every Tuesday morning the sketch designs of the previous Monday from each year were hung up and, after a jury of teachers, including myself, had assessed them, I generally gave the criticism. Indeed, I made a point of giving it to the early years. They are the important ones on which to make an impression. It is with them that the imagination most easily catches fire. The designs themselves must, of course, be of an imaginative kind. The hard geometrical work, architecture in the solid, goes on all the week. Mondays were for architecture in the clouds. I believe that is laughed at today, but it produced results. Palaces for Kubla Khan are in my opinion a necessary part of architectural education.[9]

The reference to Kubla Khan was no mere hyperbole. The subjects set could reach dizzying heights of theatricality: a State Bed for a Musical Comedy Queen, the carving into the cliffs of Dover of a monument to the sinking of all the world's navies, or 'a catafalque for Sir Edwin Lutyens when wholly converted to Roman Catholicism and laid to rest under the dome of his own cathedral'.[10] These *esquisses* cultivated an architecture of ideas, an imaginative art for virtuoso performance, and a vehicle for self-expression.

Because the classicism of the Liverpool School has been so often emphasized, it is worth stressing the freedom of the atmosphere in which the young Holford moved. Certainly, Reilly had since his student days been an admirer of classical architecture. When he had taken over the School the students had been set to work preparing measured drawings of such buildings as the city's St. George's Hall: these had been published in large folios and later in *The Builder,* to widespread critical approval. The School was closely identified with the revival of classicism which occurred before the Great War. However, Reilly was no doctrinnaire, and although in Holford's time the elements of classical architecture were still being taught (if not always learned) with enthusiasm, Reilly was also interested in new movements in art and architecture. By the mid-1920s the work which was being produced in Liverpool was increasingly eclectic.[11] Certain standards were still expected of Rome Prize entries, but this apart, there was little pressure upon the young Holford to conform to any particular stylistic norm.

It is also worth noting that there was little inducement offered to Holford or his Liverpool contemporaries to adopt any programmatic conception of architecture. The new architectural movements which were developing in Europe, and which were soon to be so influential in Britain, were characterized by propagandist fervour, collectivist sympathies, a prediliction for manifestoes and a seeking after social and ethical rectitude which was at the same time stylistic and an ostensible rejection of style. In many respects a Liverpool training represented the antithesis of these new movements (of which more later); it was a self-conscious training in styles, and a cultivation of individuality.

The combination of method and controlled madness which prevailed in the School was ideally suited to Holford's temperament. He was for the first time freed from the constraints of home and school, and from the small world of English-speaking South Africa. He was freed, too, from the drudgery of learning that which he had no desire to know. The inherent method of architectural training and the abundance of models inviting his emulation gave direction to his energies, and for the first time he began to emerge as a singular talent. As he had responded to Kidd's influence, so he flourished under the more specific and vigorous encouragement offered by Reilly. His ability as a schoolboy artist had been obvious but by no means exceptional, but he now emerged as a very accomplished draughtsman. He prospered academically also, but the quality in which he stood out, in a year of able students, was that of personality.[12] Though different people recall different aspects of the young Holford, all agree that he possessed great charm, consideration for others, and a lively wit. He seldom if ever made mistakes, either socially or at work, but seemed always to be in control of himself, his subject material and the situation. He was also cultured, literate and sociable, spreading his friendships fairly widely. He was in short a very adult young man who, to all outward appearances, had nothing to fear from the characteristic crises of his age-group.



A sketch of part of the Diocesan College, drawn by Holford in 1924. The move to Liverpool resulted in a dramatic improvement in the quality of his draughtsmanship.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

The first two years of Holford's student life, about which he wrote copious letters to his parents, were apparently happy.[13] In Johannesburg, George Holford worried that his son, in attempting too much, was not getting a solid grounding in building construction. In Liverpool, however, the mood of postwar frivolity had not yet dispersed, and students in general were little inclined to be serious. For Holford, immersed in the prevailing atmosphere of middleclass youth, even a General Strike could be 'ripping'. Although the University was not officially closed during the strike, public transport was paralysed and many students and staff could not travel in to work. Many more joined the various voluntary organizations which were set up to provide essential services and to keep goods moving. In later life Holford told of how he was recruited by the father of a fellow

student to serve as a locomotive fireman at the Edge Hill marshalling yards. Quite how this episode ended is unclear: there are several versions, one of which concludes with the train breaking down and the amateur crew returning in ignominy by another train. Another ends with his being talked out of further blacklegging by a fellow student.[14] However ambivalent he may have been about it in later life, however, his account to his parents of his short spell on the footplate was unreservedly enthusiastic.

His letters spoke of a hectic social life, of new friends, meetings with relations, financial problems and the theatre. He had two groups of friends in Devon who provided him with a holiday base in England where he could walk, sketch, shoot rabbits and relax. He made several walking tours in England and visited numerous country houses. Though not affluent, he was sufficiently well-off to visit Switzerland, Italy and France in the vacations. It was the theatre, however, which most dominated his free time. He was a very active member of the University's Dramatic Society, in 1927 becoming its Secretary, and he frequently and enthusiastically visited Liverpool's repertory theatre. He later recorded in a biographical note that he appeared in small parts with professional companies at the Empire and Shakespeare Theatres in Liverpool, and on tour with Sir Frank Benson's company. This dramatic activity consolidated a life-long love of the theatre, and heightened the ability which Holford had shown as a schoolboy actor. As we shall see later, it was a talent which was to spill over into his professional life, benefiting his career enormously but sometimes prompting mixed feelings in those around him.

At the beginning of 1927 Hubert Kidd came to England, and paid a visit to Liverpool during which he invited Holford to join him on a short Italian tour. The invitation was accepted, and over the course of seventeen days they visited Lake Maggiore, Milan, Rome, Naples, Pompeii, Capri, Siena, Florence and Venice. Perhaps they attempted too much, or perhaps the absence of another architect with which to share his impressions dampened Holford's enthusiasm. In any event, his letters did not suggest any of the love which he was later to feel for Italy. Time was everywhere too short and the fastidious young man found the Italians 'dirty'. It was in many respects a false start.

Holford returned to England just before Easter. A few days after the beginning of the new term, Reilly received a cable from Johannesburg. Holford's father, at the age of sixty, had died. Reilly broke the news to Holford in his room at the School of Architecture, but could tell him nothing of the circumstances surrounding it. Holford was entirely unprepared for this blow, and there were at least two agonizing weeks to wait before any more detailed news could reach England. The news, when it came, could not have been worse. George Holford had made no provision for his bereaved family; the house would have to be sold, and there was no money for his sons' University education. Neil Holford, having narrowly missed winning a scholarship, would have to forego his place at Christ's College Cambridge. It would have been natural for William to entertain the thought of giving up his own studies and returning to South Africa. In Johannesburg, however, friends were mustering help for the family, with offers of accommodation and financial aid. It soon became clear that it would be possible for Neil to raise enough money to study at the Royal School of Mines in London, and William was able to continue his course at Liverpool.

His father's death nonetheless came as a profound shock to Holford. He had been a dutiful son brought up in a close-knit family, and though much else had changed in his first two years at Liverpool, his relationship with his parents had remained frozen in time,

fixed at the date when he had sailed for England. He had not undergone that gradual adjustment in his relationship with his father which might have made George's sudden death easier to bear, and to be trapped in England, with no ready means of communication and no way of being with his family, must have been torture to him. Such effects as this trauma produced were not obvious, but in at least two respects his father's death had a lasting impact upon Holford's personality. It knocked away the main prop upon which his life had so far rested, and marked the transition to emotional self-sufficiency. Already a controlled young man, his natural charm disguised a reserve that was henceforth all but impenetrable. His inscrutability could be unsettling; one very distinguished architect would later remember Holford in his thirties as enormously amusing, but with a cleverness and a coolness which made others keep their emotional distance. 'He had a steely brain and small writing, which I found rather alarming'. Another, his partner and obituarist, Myles Wright, would write that 'never was a man less spontaneous in expression or action'.[15]

This was essentially a matter of amplifying a trait already present; so too was the seriousness which his father's death imparted to Holford's life. It is easily possible to make overmuch of such a deduction, but it must certainly be allowed that throughout his life he took the opportunities that his talents opened up to him, rather than setting a course and creating opportunities for himself. Without discipline and a personal sense of values, his was a career which could easily have lapsed into dilettanteism. Perhaps his father and his education together secured him against this, but his career up to the time he came to Liverpool was chequered enough to leave a faint suggestion of doubt. Any such doubt was banished by the events of 1927. Memory of his father's advice, the responsibility which he now felt towards his family and his sense of obligation towards those who had rallied round with help all reinforced his determination to succeed. His fundamental seriousness was two-fold. His talents were to be directed towards ends in the worth of which he sincerely believed, and used for the benefit of others. But they were also to be directed towards the achievement of worldly success. He would almost always be able to pass off serious things with a joke and to preserve his sense of fun, and he was not conventionally or obviously ambitious. Yet no-one who drove themselves as hard as he did could have been other than in deadly earnest. The rest of Holford's career was to be one of unremitting toil.

After Reilly had broken the news of George's death, Holford had retreated to Devonshire, where he could find solitude and the support of older friends. On his return to Liverpool he was still mourning his father deeply, but this withdrawal from the world did not last very long. Within a matter of months he was again participating energetically in student theatre and journalism. His recovery was much hastened by the benign influence of two people who, in different ways, were to be the most intimate friends he would ever have. The first such friendship was that of the older man, the patron and mentor. On the face of it Reilly seemed scarcely the man to step into Kidd's shoes. Spontaneous, transparent, self-dramatizing and mildly bohemian, he made a peculiar object of the fastidious Holford's admiration. Yet Holford often sought out in others those very qualities which he lacked himself. For his part, Reilly had already marked Holford out as a student of considerable promise and a kindred spirit in his vitality and in his artistic enthusiasms. Always inclined to a familial view of the School in general, the particular circumstances led him to take a paternal interest in Holford in particular.

Holford later wrote that as the new continental influences in architecture made themselves felt, he and his contemporaries became disillusioned with Reilly and his system of education.[16] In fact, his modernism was in essence the same as Reilly's and such disillusionment as he ever suffered was shortlived and never deeply felt. The affection between the two persisted, and they corresponded until the older man's death in 1948. While his contemporaries were to undertake pilgrimages to the studios of Le Corbusier or Gropius, Holford never looked up to anyone as a teacher again.

The second of these special friendships was that between himself and Gordon Stephenson. The two had been friendly from their first term at the School, and before Holford's initial Italian tour they had already agreed upon a further visit over the summer to do measured drawings. In the event, northern France proved to be nearer and cheaper, but thereafter each recognized in the other that particular closeness which is among the most exclusive of human relationships. Over the next ten years they were to be travelling companions, academic rivals and colleagues, and professional partners. Stephenson was to speak for both of them when, in the year after Holford's death, he wrote that 'I never had nor shall ever have another friend for whom I had such deep affection'.[17]

Stephenson's background, like Holford's, was something out of the ordinary in the context of the School of Architecture. He came from what he called a'bye-law background', a terraced house in a working-class district of Liverpool, though from a comfortable and secure home. He had worked his way up through a succession of local schools finishing with the Liverpool Institute, which had produced Maxwell Fry before him. He was taller than

Gordon Stephenson.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

Holford, spoke with a rather gruff voice, and had a temperament which, while sensitive enough, was markedly more direct and forceful. He was broadminded and with views increasingly tending towards the left. 'He was', wrote Richard Gray, 'a better architectural draughtsman than Holford, but less of an artist'.[18]

Their visit to France in 1927 left a deeper impression upon the untravelled Stephenson than upon Holford himself. At the latter's suggestion they visited Versailles and Fontainbleau, where they fed their erasers to the carp. At the Petit Trianon they measured up the Temple d'Amour. For Stephenson, the trip was a revelation. As Rome was to be for Holford, Paris became for him. There were also new insights to be gained into his friend's personality.

> We stayed in the student quarter, in an eighteenth century hotel in the rue Jacob, for a month of constant delight and discovery: we walked, talked and lived on next to nothing beyond breakfast and dinner at the ancient hotel.
>
> My previous experience away from home was in two short trips to London. I was an innocent abroad. Bill, on the other hand, was the master of every situation. It was almost as if he'd memorized Baedeker. I gradually learned that although he knew more than any person I had yet known, he could act his way through the gaps in this knowledge. I was to see him do this on a fair number of occasions later in life.[19]

Despite his self-confidence, Holford was like any thoughtful young man afflicted by personal, spiritual and social doubts. We know from a diary which he kept between 1927 and 1931 that in his University years he swung between agnosticism and high church Anglicanism, which at one point he described with one of his occasional flashes of priggishness as the only form of service 'for an independent right-thinking Briton'.[20] Early in 1928 he turned to spiritualism, reaching Claude and Bradley and attending meetings (though not, apparently, seances). These experiences

> Swept away my doubts like a breath of air does fog…I believe in it thoroughly and feel very ashamed that I did not recognize as truths all the great things spiritualism has poured out to me…
>
> …I know that everything is *future,* that life is a building up of character and personality and that nothing matters much in comparison with that—certainly not death.[21]

In 1936 he would still be saying bedside prayers, but whether the certainty that came with his discovery of spiritualism lasted into later life is uncertain. He would suggest to enquiring journalists in the post-war years that he had drifted away from conventional religion altogether and had come to rest in the Humanist camp. But religion was to him a subtle and very private matter.

Socially, Holford was working towards self-improvement. Outwardly he was popular, having a well-developed sense of fun and a taste for elaborate jokes. He attended the Lord Mayor's reception of the University at the Town Hall in 1928 in make up and false moustache. Yet he maintained an equable gentility, and had the knack of being successful without provoking antagonisms. This came naturally, the only conscious artifice to which he resorted being the then-common one of shedding the accent and idioms of speech which might single him out from his English middle-class contemporaries. Inwardly he was striving with rather more effort to overcome his social prejudices. A visit to Oxford in March of 1928 provoked an interesting reaction: he was quite overawed not only by the age and beauty of the town but also by his sense of exclusion from the privileges and tradition of collegiate life. The contrast with Liverpool was painfully obvious, but he managed to make a virtue of necessity in acknowledging that Oxford's strongest appeal was to one of his weakest points. He thought that had he studied there he would have become 'violently conservative':

> Well I mustn't. I'm a snob at heart and I mustn't.[22]

Holford kept up his guard against snobbery throughout his life, but he savoured the social recognition that came with success too richly to turn his back on the glittering prizes.

One other theme figures strongly in his diary entries during the period around his coming-of-age. The stay in the rue Jacob came at a time when family and financial obligations had closed in upon him. Before him stretched three more years of training. His brief taste of freedom in company with his friend sharpened his sense of claustrophobia and his appetite for escape and new experience. Through 1927 and 1928 his diary refers again and again to a strong need to escape from 'this congested land' and

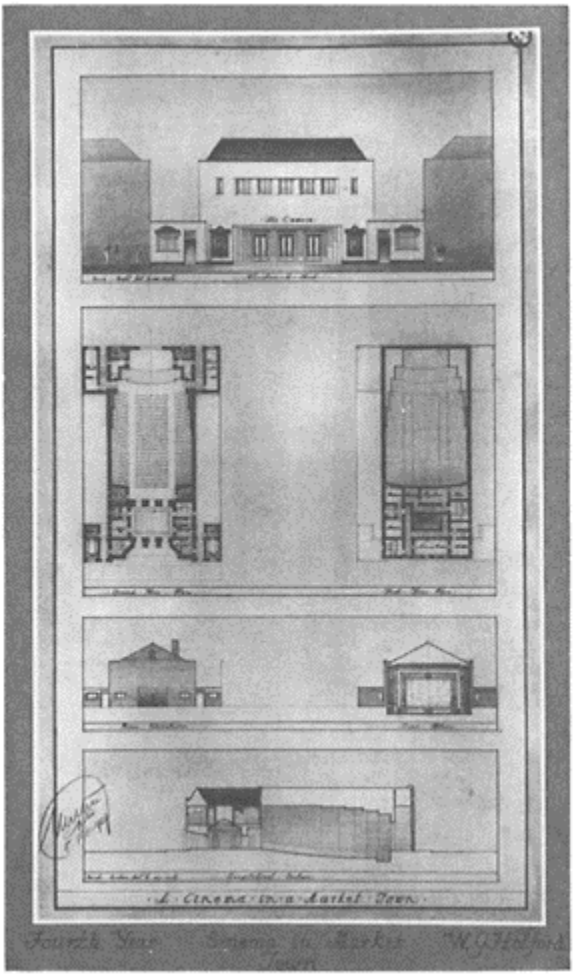
> a constant desire unsociable but urgent to get out into the middle of a wide open space to have the whole of heaven above and around one instead of blank walls.[23]

It was possible for Holford to slake his thirst for escape in frequent visits to the West Country and the Lakes, where he filled notebooks with observations on flora, fauna and landscape. Solitary walks and starlit swims in Cumbria were a balm to the soul, but the new experiences which he longed for were found not at a distance from civilization but in its heartlands. In September 1928 Holford, Stephenson and two other Liverpool students, Laurence Wright and Edward Guilham, spent the month in Italy, travelling from Venice to Florence, Siena, Orvieto and Rome. As two pairs rather than a quartet, they sketched, walked and painted, and for the first time Holford made systematic use of a camera to record what he had seen. He was no longer the detached observer having the sights pointed out to him by his former schoolmaster. Eating every evening in the streets, he savoured for the first time the genius of the place. The way in which the monuments of the past infected the modern life around them with a particular theatricality appealed to him: what had before seemed faintly squalid now stirred his deepest aesthetic sensibilities. He took back with him to Liverpool a full sketch book, a few watercolours, his photographs, and an abiding love of Italy.

Traditionally, such trips abroad had been much more than a means of broadening the aesthetic and cultural sympathies of the young architect; they were conceived as an integral part of any properly rounded professional training, and in the 1920s bright young students were still doing as their elders had done, being despatched with scholarships to study Greek temples or the Tuscan vernacular, and publishing the results in the journals on their return. The architectural tour was part and parcel of a practice which was both aesthetically and socially conservative; part antiquarianism, part fine art, and pursued by and for gentlemen. In essence, the architectural profession was still in 1927 what it had been thirty years before, and most students of any ability still considered salaried employment with a public authority to be a poor second-best.[24] Holford's generation were, however, less than wholly admiring of Lutyens, Scott, Baker or Blomfield. Architectural students had always been inclined to see themselves in the vanguard of changes in taste, and the Edwardian notion of successful practice based on country houses, banks and city offices was already tottering before the Depression finally knocked it off its feet. Not only did the work of the old guard seem boring, but it was also increasingly irrelevant. The buildings which excited the young were those characteristic of the age; the department store, the skyscraper, the factory and the power station. They were not inclined to be deferential towards their elders, and were ready for change.

In Liverpool, Reilly's liberalism and his knowledge of international developments (gained in part through a consulting editorship with the *Architects Journal*) gave his students some of the leeway and the awareness necessary to tap new sources of inspiration. Frederick Etchell's translation of Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture* appeared in 1927 and articles on the modernism of the Bauhaus began to appear in the journals at about the same time, but in the early stages this radical movement to reject established forms in favour of new architectural ideologies had an uphill struggle. Domestic examples of any quality were thin on the ground before 1930, and there were as yet no figures nor any group of sufficient stature and accomplishment in Britain to form the focus of a movement. For most of Reilly's students the major international stimuli were Ragner Ostberg in Sweden, Dudok in Holland, and the decorated 'modernistic' style subsequently labelled as 'Art Deco', which had been inaugurated at the Paris Exhibition of 1925 and subsequently flourished in New York.[25]

The surviving examples of the work which Holford did in his later years at Liverpool exhibit the rather aimless freedom which was typical of the time. Gone are the classical or Georgian details which encrusted the work of earlier generations of students. Large, blandly neutral masses are sparingly punctuated with steel-framed windows and a light application of 'modernistic' ornament. The competition-winning street decorations which Stephenson and Holford designed for the centenary of the Liverpool-Manchester railway indicate the Art Deco influence clearly. The most notable aspect of the work of the young Liverpool architects of this period, however, is that the liberation from tradition manifested itself only in elevation. The plans and most of the presentation were still Beaux Arts.



Fourth year design for a cinema in a market town, by Holford, 1929.

Source: University of Liverpool.

It was a requirement of the course that the final term of the fourth year, and the following vacation, be spent in approved practical work. With his American contacts, Reilly was able each year to send a number of his students to work under the very exacting conditions of a New York office. Holford and Stephenson were among the last group of six to leave for America before the Wall Street Crash of 1929. Unlike his fellows, Holford was not tied to the necessity of remaining in New York to earn his fare and living expenses: he had been awarded the travelling scholarship of the American Society of Arts and Sciences, and intended to tour the country undertaking research on some recent development in American architecture which might be of value in Britain. A rude shock awaited him. On arrival he found that the Secretary of the Society had

absconded with the funds, and his travel award was worthless. He had no option but to follow the example of his colleagues and take a job with one of the large New York firms. For a time he found employment in the 42nd Street offices of Voorhees, Gmelin and Walker, living with five other Liverpool students in a rented house at Seagate on the tip of Coney Island. The work was depressingly mundane and routine; Holford spent all his time erasing details from enormous drawings prepared by others.

He was rescued from this drudgery by Neil Holford's godfather, Sam Thompson, the second of his benefactors of this name. Thompson had come from Johannesburg to New York some years before and made his fortune. The exact nature of the help which he gave William is uncertain and he may have found a local source of finance to replace the original scholarship, but it is more likely that he provided the money himself. In any event, Holford now had the time and the funds necessary to make a study of the skyscrapers of New York and then to travel to Washington, Chicago, California and Texas.

Many of the photographs which he took on his travels survive, as do diary entries recording his impressions. It was a strange journey, his experiences in New York perhaps casting a shadow over its early stages. In Chicago his mood was dark: he reacted strongly to the atmosphere of hectic brashness, the crowds and the isolation of the individual within them, and to the contrasts between opulence and slumdom. In Washington he was so enthralled by his first flight in an aeroplane that he omitted to mention in his diary the view of L'Enfant's layout, one of the most grandiose conceptions in civic design that the world had to offer. In New York, his imagination was caught by the skyscrapers of that city, and many of his best photographs were taken from the tops of tall buildings showing details of the uppermost storeys of others. He seems not to have bothered with the horizontal architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, but instead paid close attention to the Art Deco detailing of smart shop-fronts. In California he felt more at home. The climate and the rather harsh and ramshackle newness of the growing cities were reminiscent of South Africa. In the last week of August he passed through Santa Barbara *en route* for Texas, and here he found an unusual blend of familiar traditions in the Beaux Arts public buildings, and in the white-walled and pantiled style derived from the Spanish colonization. In the latter there were echoes of the familiar and friendly Cape Dutch farmhouses.[26]

It was a pleasing end to a journey that had been one of more than architectural discovery. The six young Englishmen in the house at Seagate had made the most of the social opportunities available to them. In Liverpool Holford's affections had remained unattached, but the frankness and independence of American women made a strong impression upon Stephenson and himself, for whom they 'came to typify romance, in the real sense'.

> No de Bergerac heroics, nor the simple village maiden type of adventure, but love for passion's sake and for experience because it is necessary human vital and therefore good. There is less convention and more taking of risks there; less immorality and more unmorality.[27]

This, at least, was the idea which Holford got into his head. The reality was perhaps rather different: he was delighted by 'a young girl in a pirate costume' but something was lacking. He recorded his experience in the third person for his diary.

> She was not full blooded enough, she had no passionate desires, hardly any wilfulness even. Then one day her mother asked her and Bill to dinner and a show and that finished it. Her mother was a ghastly travesty of the girl Ruth. Bill who had a vivid imagination in these respects could not see the two together without remarking on their similarities. It was too much for him.[28]

There were other girls, with at least one of which he believed himself to have fallen in love 'literally at second sight' on the sea journey back to England. His experience of American women, however, had been in the nature of a preliminary reconnaissance: it would be more than two years before he explored further.

The return to Liverpool was a prelude to the grande finale of a student career in the School of Architecture, the preparation of an entry for the Rome Prize. It would be difficult to over-emphasize the importance of the Rome Scholarship in the life of the School under Reilly. Originally established in 1913, it gave the winner £250 a year and a place at the British School at Rome. As such it was the richest and most prestigious award available to an architectural student, and the winning of it was generally considered to be the first step on the path to fame.[29] Reilly gloried in the excitement of the chase and the status which success brought to the School, and the business of assisting the final year students in their preparations was something in which the whole School had traditionally participated.

It was manifestly not an occasion for innovation or experiment. The membership of the Rome School's Faculty of Architecture was a *Who's Who* of the architectural establishment, and it was most improbable that any Rome entrant would openly espouse the doctrines of Le Corbusier or the Bauhaus while this formidable panel of distinguished gentlemen stood between him and the coveted prize.[30] Holford was not naturally inclined to be either partisan or combative. Though critical in his outlook and intellectually inquisitive, the ease and understanding which characterized his dealings with older people militated against rebelliousness. He was, it is true, concerned not to be thought illiberal and had no wish to be left out of any important new development; and under Stephenson's influence he came by the end of his time at Liverpool to count himself an ally of modernism. But he had not in any significant sense been exposed to the influence of the authentic article. Even if he had been inclined towards architectural radicalism he would have kept it in check until the Rome competition had been lost or won.

The preliminary stages of the competition and the working up of the designs took up much of the early part of 1930. The procedure was complex. The first stage of selection was the preliminary examination of portfolios by the Faculty of Architecture. Successful candidates then went forward to an interview, which was held in London in February 1930. These interviews were not so much competitive as an exercise in screening. From the point of view of the British School at Rome, there were obvious difficulties involved in keeping a community of young artistic people, living in exotic surroundings, from indulging themselves in one way or another at the expense of their studies. The architects

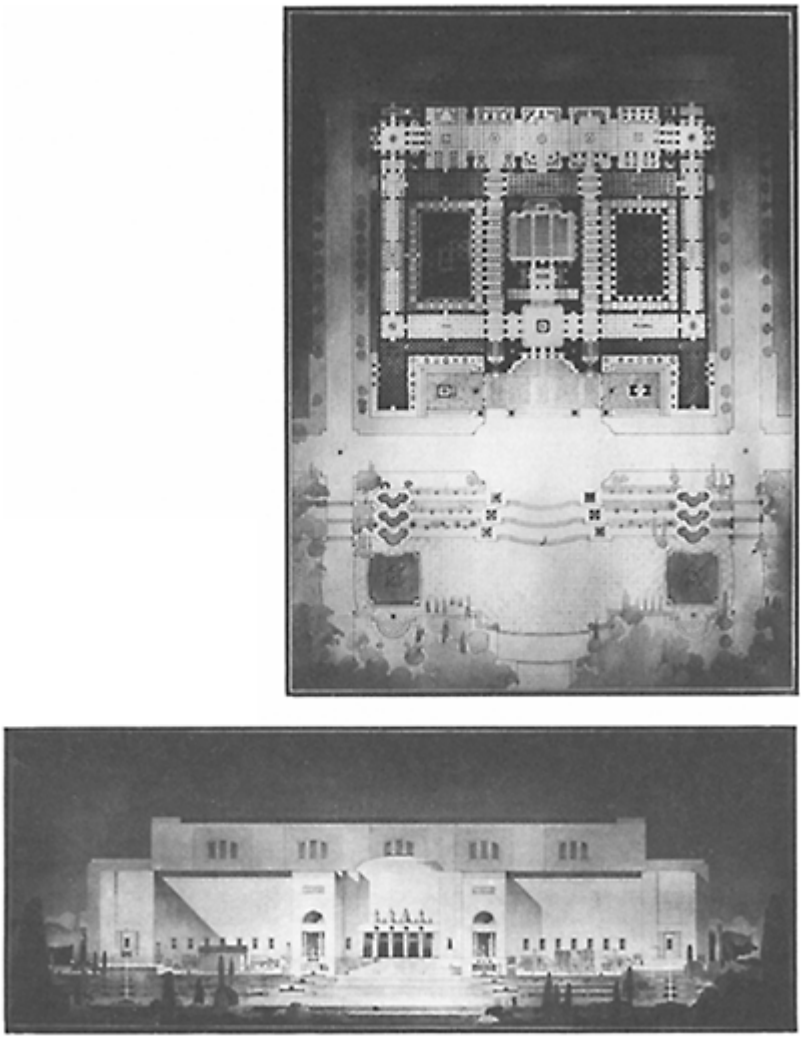
were not exempt from this tendency, for an earlier Rome Scholar had made his mark on the School by running off with its Secretary, and the winner of the 1929 competition had begun to exhibit modernistic leanings which were to lead eventually to an abortive intervention by Luytens in an effort to bring him back to the classifical fold. In 1930, however, all the candidates at interview were able to satisfy the Faculty of their fitness to hold the Scholarship.

The subject set for the final stage of the competition was 'A Museum of Archaeology in an important Mediterranean City'. This was to be done *en loge*, which was to say that the sketch design would be executed under controlled conditions and the final entry worked up on that basis.

> The *en loge* lasted for two days during which we were incarcerated in the RIBA building and slept there overnight. We were walked out in a crocodile for meals and could only go the the lavatory one at a time.[31]

Holford and Stephenson returned to Liverpool and worked up their sketch designs in Reilly's Cowshed in the following ten weeks. There was no obvious favourite: Holford was hopeful, but so too was Stephenson who, despite his admiration for his friend, thought himself the more likely winner. There were other strong contenders, among them Robert Matthew, Hubert Bennett and Laurence Wright, famed in Liverpool for the brilliance of his sketching and rendered perspectives and admitted to the final stage of the competition on the basis of his performance the previous year. In the event it was 'Kate', the pseudonymous William Holford, who was awarded the Rome Prize.[32]

His winning design was a nicely-conceived arrangement of spaces in symmetrical, typically Beaux-Arts plan. Ornamental terraces and an outer stair led up to a four-columned entrance topped with antique sculptures. The paved space in front of the building was partially enclosed by projecting walls and dotted with exhibits: the museum would be functioning before the visitor had entered the front door. Within, a shallow-domed entrance hall led directly through to a central lecture theatre, to either side of which were disposed two paved and planted inner cloisters, open to the sky. Around these were wrapped work and exhibition rooms, and to the rear was a high-roofed hall containing complete classical columns and other large exhibits, running the whole breadth of the building. The visitor would find the approach and the entrance formal and dignified, dignity being sustained through into the lecture theatre; but further exploration would lead him through the intimacy of one of the cloisters to an encounter with the climax of the composition, the great exhibition hall. Outwardly, the building would have presented a long stone front, the horizontal emphasis sustained by the absence of windows above ground level and the suppression of the entrance hall dome. The pantiled roofs which help to enliven the apparent severity of the elevation would not in practice be visible to the approaching viewer, who would instead see the front walls as a substantial but discreet setting for the statuary and classical masonry displayed outside.



Holford's winning Rome Prize entry, 1930.
source: University of Liverpool.

The building's interior surprises, the cloisters and the exhibition hall, would be disguised: with the ground falling away to the front and sight-lines cleverly obscured, the height of the hall projecting upwards at the rear would not be apparent, and its discovery when entering through the building would produce a fine theatrical effect.

It is a satisfying design to study. Its thoroughness, the careful and somewhat idiosyncratic detailing and the lack of pomposity which sometimes attended Rome Prize entries are all characteristic of its author. It also shows clearly how strong had been the effects of Holford's second visit to Italy. With the competition and a first class degree behind him the way was now clear for his return to the source of its inspiration. The consequences of his success, however, were not to be those which he could, in 1930, altogether have anticipated. In choosing Rome he had, unwittingly, tied his own fortunes to those of an institution and a mode of thought which, in architectural terms, had already began to wane.

Chapter Three
Italy

THE GREAT BAROQUE MASQUERADE

The Europe into which Holford travelled in 1930 was, it seemed, a continent in which the constituent elements of society were rapidly polarizing. The German elections of that year had resulted in the emergence of both Nazi and Communist parties as major political forces, and in France too the struggles between right and left were gaining in intensity. Mussolini had consolidated his power in Italy, while the Soviet Union was two years into the first of its Five Year Plans. The old order had been put to the test in 1929 and found wanting; and to Holford and Stephenson, as they corresponded over the coming three years, the muddle-headedness and decaying bourgeois gentilities of England came more and more to resemble doomed relics of an earlier age.[1]

The intensity of the stimulus which was felt by young minds at that time has no modern parallel. Sexually repressed, loosed upon Europe in the first flush of early manhood at a time when neither Fascism nor Communism had lost the gloss of novelty, it is small wonder that they reacted strongly to events around them. They were capable of cynicism, but it was towards the known, the established and the old that it was directed. They believed, in a way which people in their mid-twenties no longer do, that they and their kind could remake the world in their own image.

There was, in the minds of a number of young architects, a kind of congruence between the state of Europe and the state of their art. On the one side were ranged the forces of the *Ancien Regime*, the Weimar Republic and Britain's National Government. Theirs were the politics of negotiation and compromise, attempting to save capitalism by patching and mending. Their architectural equivalents were the Royal Academicians and the Architectural Faculty of the British School at Rome, the Edwardian individualists who in building the banks, the offices and the colonial capitals of the old order gave its values built form. In opposition to these there appeared the harbingers of radical change, variously manifested in the persons of Stalin, Mussolini, Hitler and Mosley. The new methods were those of propaganda, social disci-pline and decisive action. Science and technical expertise might be directly harnessed by a powerful state to regenerate society, and in such a process young architects possessed of the new techniques and attitudes might expect to play an important role. Their Corbusian texts were couched in language that was didactic, iconoclastic and often milennial, and had the added charm of elevating the architect to positively heroic status.[2] It was the ambition of some thus influenced to

follow the German architect Ernst May to the Soviet Union, where the prospect of working shoulder to shoulder with proletarians in the development of that country's new industrial cities promised a realization of both political and aesthetic convictions. Until the results of the design competition for the Palace of the Soviets became known in 1932, it does not seem to have occurred to them that the architecture of the new social order might be other than their own.[3]

In Liverpool, Holford had to a large extent been sheltered from both the political and architectural turmoils of Europe; and Rome, described by Le Corbusier as 'the young architect's damnation', was not the best place in which to set right this omission. Politically quiescent under Fascist rule, the dream of a revival for the ancient glories of an imperial past led the cultural establishment to favour an evolution of classical architectural forms, rather than any more radical international alternatives. There was, it is true, a native modern movement centred around a group of architects in Como and Milan. In 1931 it formed a national organization, the *Movimento Italiano per L'Architettura Razionale* (MIAR), in an attempt to bring the ideas of the *Congrés Internationale d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) to Italy and accommodate them to the cultural doctrines of Fascism. Its Rome exhibition of that year provoked a strongly adverse reaction from the more conservative National Syndicate of Architects, and pre-war Italian modernism was thereafter doomed to compromise and eventual suppression.[4] Holford certainly saw little in the way of modern architecture while in Italy. It is worth noting, however, that we have no evidence of his ever having gone in search of it. We do not know whether he was even aware of the struggles which were being played out between MIAR and the National Syndicate of Architects: if so, he did not concern himself with them. His main contact with the new architecture and with the politics of Europe was made through his correspondence with Stephenson, who had obtained a Chadwick Fellowship to study sanitary science in Paris. This he contrived to do by studying at the Paris University Institut d'Urbanisme and, for a time, by working in the office of Le Corbusier. During the coming three years Holford's expressed sympathies would follow in a moderated form those of his more radical friend; and it was through this medium, and at a distance, that he would keep in touch with the *avant-garde.* When he first set off for the Continent, however, the state of Europe and of its architecture were not among the things uppermost in his mind.

Holford arrived in Paris late in September 1930. More sophisticated, confident and cosmopolitan than most, he was not so affected by the prospect of adventures ahead as might be expected. Nonetheless it was exhilarating to be in Europe and free of the disciplines of Liverpool, and he was aware that there were important realms of experience which he had yet to explore. When he and Stephenson had stayed in the rue Jacob three years before they had observed the proprieties. Now he wanted to see more, and he took the opportunity to initiate himself into Parisian low-life. This he seems to have done with the same light touch and controlled objectivity which he applied to other fields of knowledge: his account of his investigations, in a letter to Stephenson, conveys a vivid impression of his first tentative dip into the fleshpots.

> Every place I went into seemed to be a brothel. I went to four, quite authentic ones, and drank a little wine in each and came out again. One was startling. An unpretentious front and the usual cabaret doorkeeper. I

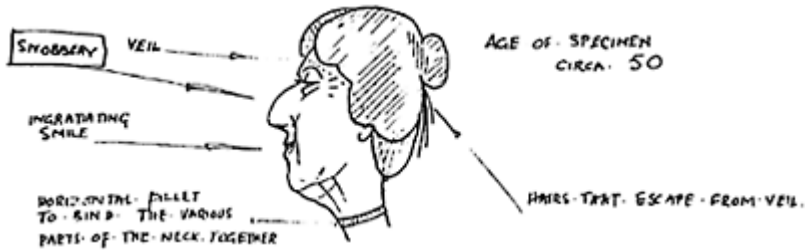
> was ushered into a room and before I knew where I was half a dozen strapping wenches came and flapped their tits in my face. It appeared that I was to choose one to—well, drink with anyway. So I made the best of a bad job and we sat down—or rather I did, while she spread herself over me like bloater paste over a sandwich; and I became about the most embarrassed person the world has ever known. Then I suddenly remembered the famous slogan 'Be nonchalant! Light a MURAD!' So I fished out a gasper and we chatted. She told me her various adventures and the strange places she had been to and then hinted that it was time we got down to business. So I murmured 'Pas ce soir, cherie' and reached for my hat. Contrary to expectation there were no demonstrations when I made a cowardly exit-only polite exclamations of regret and hopes that I would come again.[5]

Holford did not take up the offer. Two days later, after a rendezvous with old Liverpool friends and a visit to the Folies Bergere, he took the train for the south. He was moving now into a very different ambience. The hills of Tuscany and Umbria were, he thought, at their best, 'all the shadows cast by vines and houses in pale violet like a water-colour drawing'. He left the train at Bologna, 'a dignified spacious sort of town all arcaded and rather wealthy and grand and full-bosomed'. Making a leisurely advance on Rome, he steeped himself in the atmosphere of the places through which he passed. In Perugia he wrote, photographed and sketched; in Assisi he attended the feast of St. Francis in the crammed church where, throughout the three-hour service, there were animated discussions, laughter and cheering. He finally arrived in Rome around the 8th October.

The British School at Rome was an impressive place, a Lutyens variation on the theme of the upper west front of St. Paul's Cathedral. It commanded the Valle Giulia, an extension of Rome's grandest park. But if Holford was impressed, he concealed the fact from Stephenson. First reactions were haughtily dismissive. He was particularly struck by the numbers of ageing spinsters resident at the School, a phenomenon which drew from him during his early months there a continuous flow of contempt. The School was a genteel institution: there were balls, 'bun-worries and conversaziones and salons'. Holford thirsted for something more vital, less 'sexless'; more, in fact, like Paris. Instead there were the spinsters and the archaeologists, and

Dinner at the British School at Rome, photographed by Holford. Marjorie Brooks is the fourth seated on the left, looking towards the camera.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.



A cartoon by Holford expressing his feelings about the spinsters who frequented the British School at Rome, from a letter to Gordon Stephenson 16th October, 1930.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

> there is nothing to choose between a male and a female archaeologist except that the female ones look like men and grow beards and the male ones grow bosoms and look like women-both waddle–both cultivate dry and precise conversation—both sniff.[6]

In company thus perceived, Holford affected the superiority of a meat-eater among herbivores, but his growing respect for the new Director, I.A. Richmond, showed through the youthful arrogance.[7] This 'fat cherub of a person' had originally come to the School on a Fellowship from Oxford and in October of 1930 he was only twenty-eight years old. Richmond was the only person at the School to whom the newly-arrived Holford deferred. His remarks on his fellow-students Kavanagh the sculptor, Gibbs the engraver and Wride the architect, were genial but faintly superior in tone. There was also the 1930 Rome scholar in painting, Marjorie Brooks,

> a tall blonde fashionable person who would be pretty but is too thin. She paints in a most amusing way—rather in the Rex Whistler style and has a humorous outlook on life, though rather precious.[8]

Holford was attracted, 'but she is nearly 6 foot, so that's that'. The difference in height (which Holford exaggerated) did not prevent them from striking up a friendship which was to lead to many artistic collaborations, both serious and not-so-serious, over the coming year.

Holford spent his first months in Rome taking his bearings socially, culturally and geographically. He took Italian lessons, attended the School's life classes, read Dante and D'Annunzio with great enthusiasm and walked

> for miles and miles round the city risking death at every corner. New York was a quiet little suburb compared with Rome now in the season, either in the morning or the late afternoon; and the noise of taxi horns is like a chorus of nancy boys in purgatory.[9]

He toyed with an entry for the RIBA's Owen Jones competition, and considered whether or not he should attempt a set of small-scale town planning maps of the city; but before either project could come to fruition it seems that the Director took the new student in hand. Richmond had just published his book on the walls of imperial Rome, and the knowledge gained from this research enabled him to direct Holford's attention to the tomb of the baker Eurysacis which stood near the Porta Maggiore. Thus eased away from more ambitious schemes, Holford went (or was set) to work upon measured drawings and a conjectural restoration of the monument. He embarked on the task with good grace, despite his professed antipathy for things archaeological: the Sepulcrum Eurysacis was 'fresh and unusual and quite modern in appearance though built B.C.–and really very amusing'. But conditions were not ideal: equipment left on the site was vandalized, and much of the tomb was below ground level, and served as the local public privy.

> As I work little boys come and lean their bottoms over the parapet and I have to run for dear life. I penetrated the other day to the inner chamber of the tomb and there were two dead cats there: so I have to wear a mask permanently.[10]

Such conditions may have been responsible for the 'kind of ague' to which Holford succumbed in December. Prescribed rest and a diet of hot water, he wrote in a gloomy vein of the tragic qualities of the Italians, and of Rome itself.

> …Modern Rome is a thousand times more dead than ancient Rome. The ruins are altogether too powerful. They are the attraction and the destruction, the lure and the disadvantage of the city—and everywhere the priests swarm and scuttle like a swarm of beetles over a carcass…[11]

Rome's 'deadness' had become an *idée fixe* with him: he insisted upon it in conversation with his diminutive Italian teacher, making her even more than usually furious, and returned to it again and again in his letters to Stephenson. At root, he had not yet adjusted to his new circumstances: he missed badly the company and stimulus of 'congenial souls' who shared his own preoccupations, and so turned in upon himself.

The sombre mood lifted a little with the School's Christmas celebrations. With Brooks, he took responsibility for the conversion of the common room into a theatre: he executed the overall scheme in brown madder, purple, apple green and silver, she the murals caricaturing staff and students. There was a large dinner which ended with glasses being flung into the fire, a play, an Aunt Sally, dancing, roulette, a mock bullfight and a tournament on donkeyback. Holford and Brooks 'gave an acrobatic turn in tights which was very rude'. The atmosphere thus lightened, Holford escaped Rome for the south where, in a more receptive frame of mind, he experienced something of a revelation.

> I hadn't realized what Baroque architecture was till I had another look at the churches at Naples. There was one that simply writhed and writhed from the door at the west end along walls, ceiling and floor and got more and more het up until it ended in a sort of orgasm over the altar. Excuse the metaphor but really it's the only one that gives any idea of this amazing interior. The place began to have an extraordinary fascination for me and I'm sure if I had stayed in it for a day I should have burst into song or gone mad.[12]

He travelled to Caserta and to the Tiberius Villa on Capri, where the pilgrimage chapel appeared to him as the built expression of the kind of dramatic ideas behind the Liverpool *esquisses.* In four days he saw enough to send him back to the Library with the germ of an idea. It had occurred to him that many of the things which pleased him best in Rome, including the Piazza del Popolo, the Spanish Steps, Bernini's colonnade to St. Peter's, the big fountains, the Piazza S.Ignazio and the layouts of some of the finest villas-'in fact almost anything that has a big idea in a planning way'–were of the Baroque period.[13] Except for these outstanding examples, the Baroque in Rome was not much considered, and outside Rome hardly at all; and so he conceived the idea of tracking down some of the larger examples that were

Holford's perspective of the Piazza del Popolo, 1932. The original hangs in the London office of the British School at Rome.

built in southern Italy in the aftermath of the earthquakes and volcanic eruptions which had afflicted the region in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Though it had a horrible fascination for him, it was not the detail of the style which he proposed to study: rather, it was the big effect achieved by Baroque planning in which he was most interested. The more he studied the more intrigued he became. He attended lectures in 'Urbanismo' at the University, and found himself looking at the piazzas of Rome in the light of a new understanding, spending a week on a perspective of the Piazza del Popolo and discovering 'all sorts of subtleties I never noticed before'.[14]

There is little doubt that this lover of the theatre was thoroughly enchanted by the most theatrical of all architectural styles. Holford's heart and his mind, however, were pulling him in opposite directions. The very theatricality which so appealed to him was the characteristic which damned the Baroque if it was viewed from the perspective of architectural modernism. Its grand conceptions were wholly visual, and scarcely ever communal or social. Glorification of the individual or the institution, and spectacle for the common herd, were all that its major works afforded.

In coming to terms with such issues within the framework of historical criticism, Holford was also giving scope to his own radical sympathies in relation to contemporary architecture. He was well aware that the criticisms which he was inclined to make of the Baroque—of its facadism, of the service of individual rather than communal ends, and of the absence of any broader social frame of reference into which individual buildings or schemes might be integrated—were also applicable to the twentieth-century practice of architecture in Britain. Consideration of the parallels between the two led Holford to the conclusion

> …which I had already half suspected—that I'm not much of an architect. If an architect is a person who works for another hack, and insinuates himself into a paying practice, forms *useful* connections, marries the senior partner's daughter, keeps a good conservative style of building which will flatter his client's pride, pass the council, and not give any real pleasure to anybody; who becomes bald and reminiscent at 40, and underpays his assistants then I'm bloody glad I'm not one…The right sort of architect must be sociological and socialist as well, these days, whatever the text books say.[15]

Holford was turning to bite, insofar as he was emotionally capable, the architectural hand which had fed him. In condemning the Baroque, he condemned quite consciously all that he thought of as represented by Reilly and his deputy and future successor Lionel Budden. His position was not reserved for private correspondence: at the end of the year he wrote an essay which stated plainly the conclusions to which his investigations in Rome and southern Italy had led him. *The Great Baroque Masquerade* was submitted for the RIBA essay competition in 1932.[16]

The essay was a finely-written piece recording, more or less as they had occurred, Holford's reactions to his encounter with the Baroque. It began with a description of first impressions and investigations in Rome, and the discovery that the character of the existing city was dominated by a style which architectural history dismissed as 'a regrettable and hopeless decadence from the "pure" Renaissance'. To understand the

essence of the style, however, he looked to the South, where the influence of the early Renaissance had not penetrated and the Baroque flourished 'on virgin soil and in an atmosphere of its own'. The second part of the essay described a dozen or so of which architectural history dismissed as 'a regrettable and hopeless decadence these southern towns, playing with considerable effect upon the analogy between the Baroque and a theatrical performance. It interpreted both the physical forms and the social circumstances of their construction as a kind of masque, with the aristocracy and the church as performers, the architects as their set designers and the populace as audience. Finally, Holford turned critic and summed up his impressions. He admired the enlargement of scale which the Baroque brought to Renaissance Italy in the scope of its engineering and its 'tendency to embellish parts of the city rather than solitary buildings'. In terms of ways and means, and external forms, he commended it to the consideration of the twentieth century: but insofar as its forms and techniques were directed towards the artificial ends imposed by the system of aristocratic patronage, he thought it a dead style. He drew an explicit connection between the Baroque and the contemporary field.

> There is even a lingering remnant of the Baroque spirit; money still speaks loudest, private patronage is still the only avenue for the majority of work, selfglorification flourishes like a weed, and ornament is still considered as the hallmark not only of styles but of style itself; the old cry 'Facade!' still echoes in our streets.[17]

Finally, there was a passage which, he told Stephenson, would probably put the essay *hors de combat* so far as the RIBA was concerned.

> The scale has now become so big that the common good is no longer well served by individual enterprise alone. There must be a certain amount of co-operation and the establishment of a common basis of opinion. Co-operation is a hollowsounding word, but there must be a consolidation of effort in order to lay the necessary simple foundation on which more complex structures may later be raised. The undertaking is formidable, but it has the virtue of simplicity, the attainment of which in architecture must be its present aim.
>
> Now that he has 'laid his ghost', our critic's mind is made up. He for one would like to clear the site for action as soon as possible and help to disencumber it of various complications: amongst others those gaily posturing remnants of the Great Baroque Masquerade.[18]

Holford had chosen to stand publicly with modernism in attacking 'refinements', the historical scholarship of traditional education, facadism, and individualism in architectural practice, and in his correspondence with Stephenson at this time he presented himself as something of a rebel. The thought that Holford was liberating himself from the shackles of his own educational background, and subverting architectural historicism by turning it back upon itself, has certain attractions. Yet in actuality he was not seriously antagonizing anyone.

Holford's critique of Baroque architecture was temperate and even sympathetic, and therefore inoffensive even to the style's few admirers. Nor could it be considered dangerously radical to use the Baroque as a stick with which to beat the back of bourgeois architecture. The essay was polished, erudite, and free of provocative modernist jargon. Stylistically, it was considerably better and more lively than the general standard which might be expected of a Rome scholar. It was sufficiently 'advanced' to appeal to the radicals, yet its modernism was couched in terms sufficiently general to avoid giving offence. From the point of view of the establishment it was perhaps a little too risqué to win a RIBA prize, but it was not rude. In 1932 it received special commendation in the essay competition, but more importantly from Holford's point of view, the essay impressed Edward ('Bobby') Carter, the young RIBA Librarian and editor of the Journal, in which it appeared at the

Marjorie Brook's design for a lunette
at the British School at Rome.
Marjorie is seated on the extreme left,
Holford sixth from the left.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

beginning of 1933. Finding favour with Carter was something the implications of which may not have been immediately apparent, but as a key figure in the Institute he was well placed to help young architects to positions and influence, and within the next five years Holford was to benefit from his goodwill. In the meantime, as a judiciously balanced and elegant piece of work which drew attention to its author, 'The Great Baroque Masquerade' was a portent of things to come.

Work on the Baroque had lifted Holford out of the archaeological gloom in which his first months in Rome had been spent. He still felt out of place at the school, and feared that he might be wasting his time there, but he was more than capable of keeping himself occupied. He collaborated again with 'the Brooks woman' on frescoes, had a 'good

bolshevistic soak' reading copies of *Vu* sent from Paris, and more conventionally, a mixed bag of Munthe, Joyce, Boccacio, Shaw and Hemingway. The last two had his particular approval. He borrowed a copy of Howard's *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* from Stephenson, worked at a translation of a recent German text on town planning and tried to persuade the School library to order the French modernist journal, *Plans.*

Holford was not able to keep up his theatre-going at the level of his Liverpool days, but at the beginning of December 1931

> I went to see a small company of English players in E.M.Delafield's To See Ourselves', conversational psychological draining stuff, quite lost in a vast half empty booming auditorium with an audience half of whom were Italians and half people who came to show off their wraps. I was sitting in the gallery and saw a man come in after the play started, and lean forward very attentively. I recognized him as Mussolini, though he retired immediately the act was over to the back of the box. However I bumped the corridor *[sic]* as he was hurrying off and he grinned and said 'How is your gallant English pound?' He looked as fit as a fiddle. They need him now because he is the only man that stands between Italy and immediate collapse. They have gone so far along the fascist road that they must go on now altogether. I wonder if they will last out'.[19]

Holford's political reading had given him a critical perspective on Mussolini's Italy, but he had not become doctrinaire. A month before his visit to the theatre he had written that

> The situation here is very curious. It is like Communism in a mirror. They have a good deal against communism but there is only a difference in principle between the system here and in Russia. A yank of the levers might turn the whole thing back to front. The state is gradually getting control of everything …It is no doubt doing the country good in a general way; the dreadful thing is that the people as a whole are not *aware*, there isn't any participation. They do things because they are told to and, like some women in love, they get the biggest thrill out of submission to a stronger will than theirs. So when the crash comes and the autocrat is removed they won't have it in them to take over the machinery for their own use and live natural open lives.[20]

It was Holford's hope that in another year or so he would be able to leave Italy to work in Germany or Russia. The attraction of the former was strictly architectural: Hitler had not yet achieved the Chancellorship, and the exodus of the Modern Movement's alumini was not yet under way. The appeal of the Soviet Union, however, was of a different order. For Holford, as for so many of his generation, a romantic notion of Soviet society provided a focus for a whole range of personal and social idealisms, a new Jerusalem in which it could be supposed the individual was liberated from the constraining hypocracies and injustices of life in England. There was little in the way of conscious class feeling in this attitude, and the terms in which Holford considered socialism were in many respects akin to those in which he thought about women: in both cases he was inclined to be poetical

rather than either practical or theoretical.[21] This subjectivism was not merely unconscious: he was prepared actively to justify it.

> It seems to me now that there could be illusions which one ought not only to let alone, but even to *defend* against disillusionment. We go merrily pricking the bubbles in the course of what we call education. Things and people I believed in years ago I only have sympathy for now-which is a poor thing. There remain the big illusions–love, friends, work, the big ideal of the socialist state. They go further than I can see, and because they are bigger than myself, there is something in me that makes me follow. But my ever-curious intelligence soon uncovers a danger, like a hole in a tooth. *If* I go on probing for proofs and experiences will I end up by pricking another bubble? Will it be the old myth of the Garden of Eden over again? I don't know. The old serpent intellect replies, 'you will never know unless you find out for yourself. And the outcome of it all is that I refuse to try and answer riddles, and so I say 'Let it all come! I'll hang on to what I have until I can't hang on any longer'.[22]

It would appear that so far as an idealized Soviet Union which served as the model for the 'big ideal of the socialist state' was concerned, Holford managed to hang on until the later part of the 1930s. His ambition to work there was to remain unfulfilled: but at the beginning of 1932 he had what turned out to be the critical encounter with another of his 'big illusions', love. In America, Holford had had his share of brief encounters but all of them had been inconclusive. From Rome, he had written to Stephenson that

> I am in no position to give any sort of advice about this weaker sex we hear so much about. I know next to nothing about them. I'm sure that the best thing is to keep one's illusions as long as possible and when they eventually bustforget.[23]

Underlying his worries about disillusionment and a tendency to over-intellectualize was that fundmental emotional reserve which inhibited genuine intimacy of any kind. Though he valued open-heartedness in others above most things, Holford was throughout his life unwilling to expose his own soul to the scrutiny of another. His feelings are, one suspects, almost perfectly expressed in a poem which he apparently wrote in November 1931.

The Confession

She whispered—‘tell me!
I feel that I should understand so well’
And looking back I saw that strange adventure
Unfold itself, just as it once befell me
And yet I could not tell.

She whispered ‘Come now’
But her urgent invitation made me dumb
I could not tell her of my strange adventure
When all the time I knew that she was somehow
Waiting for it to come

She smiled so kindly
That I wondered what was passing in her mind
Perhaps she too had known that strange adventure,
Had known the fate of those who follow blindly
And then are left behind.

She smiled so sadly
That all the resolution that I had
Began to melt; and thus my strange adventure
Flowed into words which poured themselves out madly
And part of me was glad.

* * *

When it was over
And the tide of self control returning slow
It seemed no more a very strange adventure
I knew that I could nevermore recover
Even its afterglow.

I felt alone now
As if I had been mercilessly thrown,
Into a world where there is no adventure

A world with nothing left to call my own now
Where every memory is turned to stone.[24]

Given the date, it is probable that ‘She’ who was thus disturbing Holford was Marjorie Brooks.

MARJORIE AND AFTER

Some three years older than Holford, Marjorie Brooks had been born above her parents’ ironmongery shop at 137 Turnpike Lane, North London, on 7th July, 1904. Educated at a local school to the age of fifteen, she had progressed to the Central School of Arts and Crafts, and from there to the Royal Academy School. Her elder sister Kath was herself a painter and Royal Academy graduate and, according to Richard Gray, discovered in her sister a talent superior to her own. It became one of her prime objects in life to shepherd Marjorie to success. Some shepherding was probably necessary.

> She was quite unaccustomed to fending for herself. She had a diary for 1928 in which there are daily entries for the beginning of the year, becoming spasmodic and gradually petering out. The entries record equally frankly her enthusiasms, the difficulties she made for herself, and her health which was consistently unreliable. She was beautiful as well as helpless and perpetually in difficulties. She was shy but friendly and trusting. Young men invariably came to her rescue.[25]

Marjorie’s painting reflected a personality which was, beneath the ‘rather precious’ manner, direct and conventional. Influenced by Sickert and Whistler, she was no innovator, but when she worked quickly, without overpainting the feeling for the subject, light and colour was astonishingly good.[26] She fared well in competitions. In 1928 she won the Edward Scott studentship and was thus able to make a European tour which included Paris, Madrid and a stay at the British School at Rome. In 1930 she won the Rome Prize in painting, and arrived in Rome two days ahead of Holford.

Marjorie Brooks.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

He singled her out early on as one of the ‘least lethal’ of the women at the British School but his references to her in his correspondence and in his diary were far from tender: he noted coolly how Frascati ‘went to her wrists’ and how excitement and rich food tended to make her sick. Of her own impressions, beyond a general disinclination to regard small men romantically, there is no written evidence. Yet they plainly enjoyed each other’s company. During their first terms in Rome they collaborated almost constantly, and were part of a small social circle of British students which, it may be noted, excluded archaeologists. Holford’s letters over the first six months of his time in Rome made frequent reference to her. Then early in 1932, Stephenson received the following.

> Did you ever meet Brooks? I don’t think you did…after maintaining continuously friendly relations with her for over a year and merely

> admiring her paintings, I suddenly knew one day that I wanted her. So I told myself not to be a bloody fool and went on, I thought, as usual. But there was evidently some tension somewhere because one day we looked at each other simultaneously, when we were talking about a picture. And then I knew—the masks were off. The queer thing is we were both glad.
>
> This went on a week or two and then I asked her to come away with me and she said she would. Then soon afterwards the opportunity for going away arrived, and I decided to go away alone. I can't explain in words why I know that I was right, but I think you may see it. When I go back we will see how things are. I miss her very much, but I am one for getting ideas of facts into his head instead of the facts themselves, so I will bide a bit yet.[27]

The waiting made no difference. At the beginning of May they escaped 'with a pair of pyjamas and masses of oil paint' to the hills outside Rome: and later trips, made with the aid of a gold ring and assumed names, followed. They made, both physically and otherwise, a strikingly contrasted couple. She was impulsive and extrovert, given to expressing herself strongly upon any matter, and had something of the spoiled child about her. But she was warm, sympathetic and open-hearted. It must, in many respects, have been an attraction of opposites.

Holford was now 'so happy it's almost ridiculous'. There were, however, some distracting irritants, including a certain amount of scandalmongering at the School and some gentle pressure from friends. He who had expressed such scorn for the conventions was not pleased when a woman friend told him that 'it was all very well for the man but damned uncomfortable for the girl', and Marjorie's reaction to questions or pointed remarks about marriage was to feel like 'a fly stuck on paper'. Holford explained affairs thus:

> We are married in all ways but one and I have avoided that so far, in fact both of us have, in order not to subside into thoughtless and sugary domestic bliss. But I don't think there is any danger of that and one day when there are no interfering people about we may get signed on.[28]

Though the formal basis of the relationship may have been uncertain for a time, all the evidence suggests that having once thought the matter over, Holford's feelings towards her were unequivocal, and remained so for the rest of his life.

The possibility of marriage had emerged, for Holford, at an important and appropriate stage of his development. Over the preceding year, the thoughts and feelings expressed in his letters, and more particularly in his diary entries, had grown markedly in depth and subtlety. In part, this was a matter of style: but in addition, the absorption of new ideas and experience was rounding off a personality which had broken free of its familial moorings only five years before. By the end of 1931 Holford's powers were reaching their maturity, but these powers were as yet uncommitted to any definite objective. His emotional and intellectual sensibilities were turned outwards, almost indiscriminately, to people, politics, art, and indeed to any stimulating phenomena that presented themselves. His appreciation of Italian art and architecture was becoming increasingly profound, in an

emotional as well as in a scholarly sense. His diaries record reactions which were direct and deeply felt; Botticelli's painting, it seems, could touch him in a way in which few people could. After seeing *Adoration of the Magi* he wanted

> to rush out and do something plain and ordinary and tedious to conserve, or embalm, the feeling he gave me; and not let it be dissipated or criticized away.[29]

Architecturally, he was soaking up impressions, and informed comment was flowing easily from his pen. He appeared to relish the business of criticism; from Vicenza he wrote a long letter to Stephenson in which he had considerable fun at Palladio's expense before admitting that despite a dozen failures, 'the old bird was in a fair way to becoming an architect'.[30] His confidence in his own standards of taste and judgement was by now secure. His modernist sympathies gave a particular slant to his opinions, but he was not above enjoyment of the 'amusing'. Despite his fine eye for detail, however, the appreciation of individual buildings was by now secondary to Holford's main concern, which had its origins in a transformation akin to that exhibited by the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century architecture he had been studying.

The factors which directed him towards the consideration of the design of towns as a whole were several. The enlargement of scale involved in the Baroque, which no student of Reilly's would have been able to ignore, was the most immediately obvious. In Liverpool he had attended Abercrombie's The influence of Stephenson, who by 1932 was increasingly preoccupied with questions of planning, has already been noted. Holford's interest in the overall design of towns cannot be explained, however, only as a consequence of these influences. As a young man, he was no enthusiast for planning in any of its more functional senses. As with Reilly, the less planning involved architectural design, the less interest it held for him. In general terms the desirability of town planning was something which might need to be justified to others, but for his own purposes it was a precondition rather than a conclusion of thought: in this he differed from the earlier generation for which the need for planning had to be discovered rather than learned. Why, then, should he feel lectures and, more recently, had given Le Corbusier a sympathetic reading. inclined to follow this particular avenue of enquiry rather than any other?

The nearest thing to an answer which his own letters provide is that the sight of a multitude of 'old favourites, so many times rendered with care in compositions and even competitions', located in their actual urban settings, made a great impact upon him.[31] His strong, initially aesthetic reaction led him to consider the settings themselves as architectural products. Just as the functions of the individual building should influence its plan (and, in terms of the architectural modernism which he espoused, its elevations), so the architectural qualities of public places could not be divorced from the wider urban functions which they existed to serve. So Holford arrived at a concern with what he called 'urbanism', the totality of civic life as it bore upon the building of towns. This evolution of thought, in which the interest in the town as a whole arose from an interest in certain of its parts, is important to any understanding of the kind of planner which he eventually became. While his breadth of intellect enabled him to perceive without difficulty the qualitative distinctions between architecture and planning, in his own mind

the link between them was never broken. Throughout his life it was planning in its guise of civic design which commanded his greatest enthusiasm. In one other respect the ancestry of Holford's urbanism is equally interesting. The manner in which he worked his way up to an involvement in town planning, not in itself particularly remarkable, is noteworthy in this instance because it was so typical of the way in which his mind worked. Where others would deduce 'downwards' from the general to the particular (and in this respect Abercrombie comes to mind), Holford grasped the parts before putting them together as a whole.[32] The process was disguised by the un-natural speed with which it occurred, but in his architectural and planning work, as indeed in his thinking in general, he integrated 'upwards'.

SCHOLARSHIP AND PROPAGANDA

During his second year in Rome Holford continued to work upon individual buildings: a project for 'A Travellers' Club in Rome' was shown at the British School's 1932 exhibition. He also attempted, unsuccessfully, to obtain leave of absence in order to collaborate with Stephenson in the design competition for the new RIBA building in Portland Place.[33] Most of his energies and time were taken up, however, with town planning studies at Brescia and, more especially, Verona. With Richmond (who had now resigned his Directorship of the British School because of ill health) he worked on an attempt to relate the modern layout of Verona to the Roman street plan. Richmond's archaeological scholarship and Holford's measuring and draughtsmanship produced an article (written up by the former) which was eventually published in 1935.[34] More exciting from Holford's point of view was the opportunity to use the knowledge thus acquired in a collaborative venture with two Italian architects, Petrucci and Sussini. As this was his first experience of a town planning project, it is not surprising that idealism figured strongly in his contribution.

> There is a competition for the new 'Piano Regolatore' or Fascist five year survey, and I have been studying the whole thing from the bottom... As you know the whole question goes deep down to the fundamental alternatives of complete rebuilding against gradual patching up. With the present regime in power the first and right course is never even considered, so that my projects will be in the nature of an ideal plan rather than a present practical project.[35]

All that remains of Holford's work with or for Petrucci and Sussini are a few measured drawings. More substantial evidence, however, is available in relation to the projects which dominated the remainder of his time in Italy, his extensive study of piazzas.

His interest in the subject arose naturally from his earlier work, but concentrated study seems to have begun in June of 1932, and to have continued through the autumn to a conclusion early the following year.

> I am trying to get together a lot of facts about Piazzas in Italy and their relation to the town plans. There is nothing to be had from books on the

> subject− except in a few cases in Rome—and yet there is nothing so interesting in all the various types of town there are here. You see into the heart of the place at once.[36]

As in his earlier article, Holford took the cart of architectural and historical scholarship and put in harness the horse of current debate. There was, however, an important difference between the two essays. The connection between the Baroque and contemporary practice had been achieved by arguing a resemblance in methods. In the piazza, however, Holford was dealing with a present and material problem.

> Politics, religion, business and agriculture, fashion, sport, music, and the theatre; there are few manifestations of the life of an Italian community that are not staged or framed by its piazza. It is the pool into which life flows…
>
> The tendency in Italy during the last fifty years has been towards the decentralization of towns from one main centre performing general functions, to several centres performing each one function… The piazza is therefore left, shorn of many of its functions and not always adequate for those that remain to it. In size, position, in the manner of their approaches, through obstructions, unsuitable surrounds, poor drainage, inadequate light, or lack of shade, numbers of them have become mere relics, unfit for present-day requirements and in danger of losing their antique virtues.[37]

To consider the future of the piazza, Holford argued, was to confront the problems of Italian town planning in microcosm. The main issue to be settled was that of striking a balance between the diverse interests which were competing for influence in the process of town development. It was, however, to an historical and architectural history of the piazza rather than an analysis of interest or issues that he first turned.

Holford's survey revealed the evolution of piazzas in terms of a succession of conventionally-conceived styles, from Gothic through Renaissance to Baroque, with particular emphasis upon the nature and extent of conscious design involved in their creation. In each stylistic epoch, he located the detailed elements of design in the context of an overall spatial and plastic conception, and particular examples in the context of their period, in such a way that one never seemed to exclude the other in his or the reader's consideration. As a condensed and comprehensive architectural history, its twenty pages were something of a *tour-de-force.*

Holford proceeded from this to an elucidation of the competing values which were struggling for dominance in the evolution of the piazza, most particularly in the conflict between the defenders of the antique and picturesque and the proponents of modernization. His discussion of these, while not unconvincing, was brief, and in pleasantly rounded generalities made a bridge between historical research and the statement of contemporary principle. Thus it duplicated in essence his earlier treatment of the Baroque. In outlining what he called the values of 'urbanism', however, he stated a philosophy of design as it touched upon the balancing of old and new, which was intended to be read as his own.

> When a bowl is old and beautiful it is put away on a shelf to be looked at, but not used, lest it should be broken. When it is old but not beautiful, we use it till it breaks, or if it is not even useful we throw it away. Only the eccentric or the aesthetic buys rare bowls for daily use; the ordinary man buys new ones of a design that pleases him at the time, and he expects them to stand the daily wear and tear. In the course of time, if these bowls survive, the connoisseurs of the succeeding age come to value them because of their history, and indirectly because of their efficiency, in that they were fashioned according to the ideas of good design at the time, and represent the life and work of that previous generation. They have stood the test; they are genuine.
>
> The aesthetic and practical advantages of a piazza are in much the same relation. They are bound together in the designer's mind, and only separated by the critics of a later age. The true urbanist knows this, for he realises that the efficiency of his town plan is more important to his own age than its aesthetic purpose. If practical advantages are put first, the aesthetic will grow with them and after them; but given a governing aesthetic, a closed canon of taste drawn from no other source than tradition, the normal practical advantages can never afterwards ensue.[38]

How much relation this conclusion bore to that which preceded it must be open to question. Though Reilly approved of it, there are signs of strain in the essay, which appears to embrace too much within too brief a span: it seeks to demonstrate the link between the author's historical researches and his modernist principles, and is only partially successful. The scholarship and the propaganda sit uneasily together. While 'The Great Baroque Masquerade' was a fine literary effort, 'The Piazza' deals with more practical matters and as such, despite the excellence of its historical content, is not so satisfactory.

Holford himself was less than happy with it. Nonetheless, he put in once again for the RIBA essay prize. His entry was never considered, as he had failed to submit a title and synopsis within the prescribed time. He had been granted a third year in Rome (at Richmond's insistence) on the understanding that he would produce a textbook on the Italian piazza. Nothing came of that either. In truth, by the end of 1932 the relevance of continued work on the piazza was becoming doubtful. In November Stephenson wrote from Liverpool where, two months before, he had begun work as a lecturer and studio instructor in the School of Architecture. The radicalism which had been maturing on the Left Bank now found a focus, and Stephenson had an intriguing proposal to make concerning the vacant Chair in Architecture at Manchester.

> If we could only get control of a school, Bill, we could move heaven and earth and do our bit to alter the face and outlook of this country. Have you read about the job going in Manchester?…What about it, Bill? Are you going to apply? …I have great ideas now that we might eventually capture a school and give it a really international outlook and output of value…,[39]

Holford did think about it, and his reply is worth quoting at length as one of the most frank and comprehensive statements we have of his views on the state of architecture in the 1930s, and his future place in it.

> I thought a long time about that Manchester business, and I've been thinking about Russia and South Africa and about the architectural revolution in England. I even wrote to Manchester for particulars, but I know now, before they have been sent me, that I shouldn't apply. The great thing about Manchester is that it is a fairly big school in a big town, and it might be the starting point of a crusade. But if I'm not prepared for it, it would be worse than dangerous to make a hash of it. And I'm not prepared-not quite. I'll tell you why later on. But there's another reason-I've got a plan, gradually shaping in my mind, for what we can do some day in England. We are up against institutionalism, deadening competition, and a wrong social outlook on architecture–finally against capitalism.*I don't believe that as artists, we can do any good at all at the present time.* I want to go to London or to Paris and London for a year–maybe two, and do *anything*, provided I meet people of all kinds–architects, social scientists, journalists especially.
>
> And *then* form a group, quite a few to begin with, and get hold of a school. (I have a sort of feeling that it ought to be a London one but I'm not certain about that.) And this school must be the fruit of the group system and part of it–not only a meeting ground for examiners and examined. And it must be as you say, big and open and international…And *then* the attack could be launched hot and strong. We should have some ground to stand on then, and I'll swear it wouldn't take long to add to it. We couldn't help growing. The individual patronage system is really gone at the roots, only the sterile branches still encumber the air. What is the RIBA except a mutually distrustful collection of men forming a so-called 'professional' body to protect and ensure individual competition carried on under Marquis of Dogberry rules. The amount of waste must be colossal. When we form our group or groups on a proper social foundation we shall be open to all the talent, the scientists and the experts that now serve to bolster up what people still call 'the architects'. We shall get engineers, surveyors, steel and concrete experts, urbanists—more than enough to fill the holes in our equipment—if only we get the fundamental thing started, the right foundation flatly laid down between architects (not as individuals but as a group) and the new social order.[40]

There followed a very candid passage of self-examination, in which Holford tried to clarify the differences between his friend and himself in their attitudes towards politics and action. Perhaps excusing his own qualified radicalism, he wrote:

> I still care too much what people say; and I still dislike them too much: the cold sort of dislike that accomplishes nothing like proper hate does. If you love, you also hate; the one creates and the other breaks down. And

> there are so many people yet that I just frigidly dislike and it doesn't do any good at all. Either hate them and batter them, or be patient with them. It is then, when I have been utterly unable to make any contact with people and yet don't really hate them, that I have to take refuge in writing things down. It's no good pretending one doesn't feel as one does. Better to put it on paper and go to bed.[41]

This lack of emotional involvement weighed on him: shortly afterwards he would write:

> I get all worked up reading Lenin, or about Lenin or publications by the friends of the Soviet, URSS publications etc., kidding myself I'm a WORKER. Conversely, when I read ultra capitalist stuff, newspapers that make me vomit, platitudes of Dictators, or luxury nonsense, then I want to bust things up, start a clean fresh order of life, *do* something. The thing that worries me is that it is all in the head—not in the bones. I was bred as bourgeois as anybody and when my head and my sympathies move very far along the communistic line I become nothing more than a 'bourgeois intellectual'. And that may mean a lot or it may mean nothing. The change to a real live communist cannot come about only through the head, and there people like Bernard Shaw utterly fail. I don't mean he isn't useful. He gingers people up, particularly the jolly old bourgeoisie, but his great mission never gets beyond the itching powder stage. He is Britain's Great Irritant—useful but uninspiring.
>
> …Conviction! that's all it is. The old Christians used to pray for conviction, and now I suppose the only thing to do is to work for it. Just occasionally I feel holes in the armour.[42]

Despite Holford's misgivings about his own status as a man of the Left and his preparedness for active involvement in the struggle for a new architecture, he was intensely interested in Stephenson's various projects of which there were now several. The Liverpool School was anticipating changes with Reilly's impending retirement, and Stephenson was on the lookout for opportunities to advance the cause. In the meantime other openings had presented themselves: a competition for the design of modern houses at Gidea Park; and another for the replanning of the area on the left bank of the River Scheldt opposite Antwerp.[43] The two friends met in Paris in January 1933, and talked matters over. Holford's enthusiasm was quickened. It was agreed that he, Stephenson and Alex Adam, a Hungarian friend of Stephenson's who had also worked for Le Corbusier, should gather in Kirby in March or April to work on an entry for the Antwerp competition. Holford had in any case intended to write up his Italian researches in England. He now offered his resignation to the British School: it was accepted as at the end of March, but scholarship money was provided to carry him through until the end of June.[44] In London, the Honorary General Secretary of the School thought that this would enable him to complete the writing-up of his research on the piazza. In Rome, perhaps, the expectation of further work being produced was more sanguine. Hardie, the new Director, was aware that he was 'already married, or about to be, to Miss Brooks'.[45] Holford could probably rely on Hardie's support whether new work was expected or not:

he left behind him a glowing reputation, and in time became himself a member of the School's Faculty of Architecture.

There was, in addition to the Antwerp scheme, a further possibility in Holford's mind. Stephenson's account of the state of affairs in the Liverpool School had had its effect. Early in the year they had learned that Reilly's resignation was to take effect in the summer, and the issue of the succession and the future of the school therefore took on an immediacy previously lacking. The principal question was whether or not Reilly would be followed in the chair by his right-hand man, Lionel Budden. Neither of them had much of an opinion of Budden, who they considered to be something of a pedant, lacking flair or real enthusiasm for the new architecture. In early February they were exchanging conspiratorial letters:

> One wants to shout all over the University, 'Look Out!' Can you possibly find out from Prof what is likely to happen, because Budden once established I don't see how anyone is going to dislodge him *[sic]*. The effort must be made *now*; and I can't see anybody to fill the gap.[46]

Coming from Holford, who had just had a letter from Budden offering him an MA on the strength of his two essays, this was perhaps less than gracious. However, he refrained from putting himself forward as the alternative.

> I'm, game, Steph. but I know it would be useless. I haven't even built a single building…. On the surface of course the brutal fact remains that one of the biggest architectural schools in England is literally wobbling on the brink and we *ought* to try to push it in the right direction. Is it possible to wait till we have finished our Antwerp experiment? I believe in that, and somehow I think it would give us solidarity. But I suppose it would be too late.[47]

Thought of a Chair was at this stage fanciful. Reilly was inclined to favour Budden's candidacy, but at the same time he was aware of the direction in which the architectural current was running, and not even loyalty to his closest colleague would have made him support Budden if he considered that the School would suffer in consequence. Holford had written a curious letter to Reilly in December, stating in four pages a toned-down version of the thoughts on architecture and 'the new social conditions that are bound to come' which had appeared in his letters to Stephenson.

> It seems pretty clearly that there will have to be a change in the practice as well as the style of Architecture and although it may be pure sentiment on my part, I cannot help hoping that the Liverpool School will lead the way… ,[48]

That Holford should have written such a letter at such a time, and kept a copy for the rest of his life, is a point of some interest. One supposes that among other things it was intended as a reminder of his imminent return, jobless, to England; but it also had the appearance of a gentle suggestion that Reilly rally to the cause.

It is doubtful that Reilly needed any such promptings. Stephenson first got wind of what was in Reilly's mind at a staff meeting in early February at which

> Prof comes out with some talk of getting Holford back by hook or by crook for next year and new school. Says you're a second Ruskin and Bradshaw. I told him not to insult Bradshaw, but perhaps he meant the railway one.[49]

Five days later, Reilly's intentions were confirmed. On the 20th February he wrote to Holford to say that although Budden's appointment was a foregone conclusion,

> There remains Budden's present job. Everybody feels that he must be could do this better than anyone else. He feels as I do about this and would have strengthened on his weaker side, just as I have been on mine by him. Now you written this letter himself if his appointment were confirmed. What I want to say is this. Would you, before accepting any other position, be prepared to consider a Grade 1 lectureship in the School such as he has had, and which might in a little time be added to by the title he holds (Associate Professor), or some other title like 'Honorary Dean'?[50]

At a time of depression, with jobs scarce, the offer of a first appointment at £500 a year was a handsome one. Because of Holford's youth and inexperience, it was also likely to be controversial.

> Of course not a word of this must be breathed to anyone, not even to Stephenson. I do not think it would be wise for the staff here to hear about it just yet. I am hoping that one of the senior members will be appointed soon to the Manchester Chair. Changes must come in institutions of this kind but we must act very carefully when new and untried courses are being taken.[51]

Budden or no Budden, any doubts which Holford had entertained about his 'rather foolish aristocratic gesture throwing away £100 for the sake of getting back to England' were now dispelled.[52] Brooks had now returned to England, and the British School had reverted in his eyes to the gossipy and superficially irritating place which it had been at the beginning. In a final burst of travelling he had visited the towns of northern Italy, surveying and taking photographs, and had paid a last visit to Lecce in the South. He left Italy for Liverpool, via the competition site at Antwerp, on the 8th March, 1933. The British School's Faculty of Architecture reported:

> Mr. W.G.Holford, Rome Scholar, 1930, completed the three years' tenure of his scholarship in 1933…
>
> Mr. Holford's work has necessitated, in addition to much travelling, a great deal of consultation, reading and research, and the numerous drawings he has prepared to illustrate his thesis on the 'Piazza of Italy' are

> evidence not only of great Industry but also of ability and imagination. The Faculty have warmly congratulated Mr. Holford on the admirable results of his work. Indeed they remember no instance in which the Scholarship has been put to better use.[53]

Viewed in retrospect, and despite his grumblings about his fellow students, Holford's years in Rome were perhaps his happiest and most carefree. They were formative, but in many important senses (and especially in an architectural sense) their significance for his later life and work were to remain latent for a number of years. So far as the immediate future was concerned, his formal research in Italy seemed less important than the fact that he had stayed in touch with modern architecture. By 1933 there were clear indications that the climate of opinion in England was changing. In the same month that Holford returned to Merseyside the Modern Architectural Research Group (MARS), which was to be the main standard-bearer for the modern movement during the decade, was formed. The same year saw the arrival of Eugen Kaufmann and Eric Mendelsohn in England, and the formation of the two major modernist architectural practices of the period, Tecton and Connell Ward & Lucas.

Modernism's marshalling of its own forces had far-reaching effects. There appeared to be a new, alternative orthodoxy in the making, already possessed of its own aristocracy. Holford, fresh from the stronghold of the academicians, was not well-placed to make an impact in this milieu. His Roman laurels could still bring him prestige in Liverpool, but in modernist circles they were beginning to be considered unfashionable.[54] He lacked many of the qualities of the true modernist: he was not, for example, a passionate devotee of distinctively 'modern' materials. His 'propaganda', as he called it, had attacked tradition on broadly social grounds, rather than asserting any definite alternative based on functionalist ideology: bourgeois architecture's business practices, rather than its buildings, were what aroused real disgust in him. Moreover, the new movement was London-based, Maxwell Fry alone among its luminaries having Liverpool connections. Nonetheless, Holford was an avowed sympathizer; indeed, he had been offered a job, which he hoped would be an influential one, on that understanding. If there were points on which he felt himself at odds with the dogmatic elements of the new architecture, he had kept them to himself.

In this new climate of opinion, and in his new circumstances, there was little opportunity for Holford to re-interpret the impressions and design values which he had absorbed in Italy. Still less was there any chance of him doing so to his own credit. It would be twenty years before the instincts formed by his Italian experiences—a love of detail, a fondness for idiosyncracy, a highly-developed aesthetic appreciation of the manipulation of space, which extended even to an unfashionable sympathy with the picturesquewould begin to find significant expression. In the meantime, he appeared in Liverpool in 1933 under the colours of the Modern Movement.

In one important respect, however, his time in Italy had radical and immediate consequences. On the 29th August, 1933, the Liverpool Post contained the following:

Marriage of Two Artists

Both Associated with Liverpool

From a Special Correspondent

London, Monday-One of London's women registrars officiated at an interesting wedding in the Town Hall of St. Marylebone this morning. Miss Haldane has long been acting as 'registrar' at Holborn, but Mrs. E.M.Paul is the deputy-registrar at Marylebone and officiated in the absence of the registrar, who is on holiday.

Two brilliant young artists were the bride and bridegroom—Mr. William Graham Holford (aged 26), son of the late Mr. W.G.Holford and of Mrs. Holford, of Johannesburg, and Miss Marjorie Brooks (29), younger daughter of Mr. and Mrs.J.B.Brooks of Eagle Cottage, High Street, Hornsey, North London. Both had won Rome scholarships awarded by the British School in Rome, and it was while they were studying in Italy that the two artists met.

The bride wore a dress in white silk crepe, with puff sleeves and a deep yoke effect tied in a knot in front. Her hat was also white, with a drooping white ostrich feather tip falling over the brim at one side, and she carried a shower bouquet of tea roses and asparagus fern.

Mr. Holford, who arrived in a car just in front of his bride, had a white carnation in his grey lounge suit, and carried a white straw boater. Mr. Colin Oakes acted as best man.

A small family luncheon party was afterwards held at Eagle Cottage, Hornsey, and later Mr. Holford and his bride left for a honeymoon in the West Country. On her return the bride will execute her commission to paint two walls in the new part of Liverpool University, and a second wedding reception will be held for their many friends.

Chapter Four
Liverpool Again

GETTING STARTED

The Holford who returned to Merseyside in 1933 was a much developed version of the young man who had departed less than three years before. The advance in his intellectual and emotional maturity was out of all proportion to the time which he had spent in Rome. During that intervening period he had acquired the experience of original scholarship, some sympathy for the politics of the left and for the new architecture, and the makings of a reputation. His manifest ability was no longer the undifferentiated talent of the bright student, which finds his expression in responding to whatever stimulus it receives, or to whatever programme is set for it. His public stance was now that of one espoused to certain values in architecture, derived from solid study and reflection, which he would soon be in a position to promulgate.

The position which he occupied was an interesting one, straddling as it did the opposing camps which dominated the professional debates of the time. We have already suggested that there were certain anomalies in Holford's attitude towards architecture. He had preached modernism while practising antiquarianism, and his criticisms of the Baroque did not conceal his enthusiasm for it. Although an admirer of Le Corbusier, he was grounded in the Beaux Arts tradition; and despite his recent writings, he had yet to give any practical demonstration that he had shaken off that influence.[1] While he allied himself with the moderns, he did not participate in their rhetoric. He did not even pretend to espouse the radical functionalism which could be found among some of the more extreme English converts, nor did he invoke the central totems of modernism in his speech or writing.

While the Modern Movement proposed itself as a 'negation of style', the technological images upon which it drew were powerful visual emblems and were among its marked stylistic characteristics. They were ideologically important also. The presentation of design as scientific method; the emphasis upon the technical characteristics of the new building rather than upon its properties in use; and the deliberate association of architectural imagery with that of other technologies—all these are aspects of a new architectural ideology so characteristic of the time that we now regard them as among the identifying marks of the early International Style.

Holford was not above such enthusiasm for new techniques or materials, but neither did he make a fetish of technology. He was at the same time less and more serious than

many of his contemporaries, his own brand of modernism being socially rather than stylistically based, related to method rather than form. He was of the utmost seriousness in his attitude towards the profit-oriented, individualistic, established forms of professional practice, which represented for him the antithesis of all that was worthwhile in architecture as a creative social art. This antipathy had its origins in a deeply-felt personal aversion, but it was also capable of expression as rational objection; and in becoming a critic of established practice Holford became an advocate of alternatives to it. In particular, he supported all kinds of co-operative group practice, between architects themselves and between architects and those of other disciplines. In due course he turned himself into something of an authority on group work. In this, his opinions were in accordance with much modernist thinking. So too were his views on the need to make architecture more relevant, across a broader range, to the needs of the new society which, it was confidently expected, would soon emerge.

In the mouth of a radical, the concern with a socially relevant architecture might extend as far as the fostering of communal solidarity through provision for collective life: flats might be preferred to houses, and communal creches, laundries and canteens preferred to self-servicing households.[2] Holford did not share this degree of social determinism, but he undoubtedly wished to make architecture more responsive to social needs by means of research, co-operation with economists and sociologists, and a recasting of architectural values. His ‘urbanism’ was both a means to achieve this end, and an extension of its area of application to the urban scale. In all these respects (and also, it should be noted, in his internationalism) Holford could feel comfortable among modernists. However, he might on almost the same terms have made himself at home in the British town planning movement. Ultimately, architects are judged by their designs rather than their words, and in the spring of 1933 Holford had not produced a single design (let alone a finished building) in the new style.

The Antwerp project, therefore, was significant. It would provide the opportunity to work, for the first time, on a genuinely ‘modern’ project in company with others who had experience of working in Le Corbusier’s *atelier.* The competition was an important one, and Stephenson expected great things at this ‘vital point in all our theoretical plans. The commencement of *real* action’.[3] With Alex Adam, who had previous experience of such competitions,

> we’d make an extraordinarily powerful combination as we are all three in the very mood to bring out all we know. Anyway it would be extraordinarily valuable as an essay in team work which we aim at as we move irresistibly leftwards.[4]

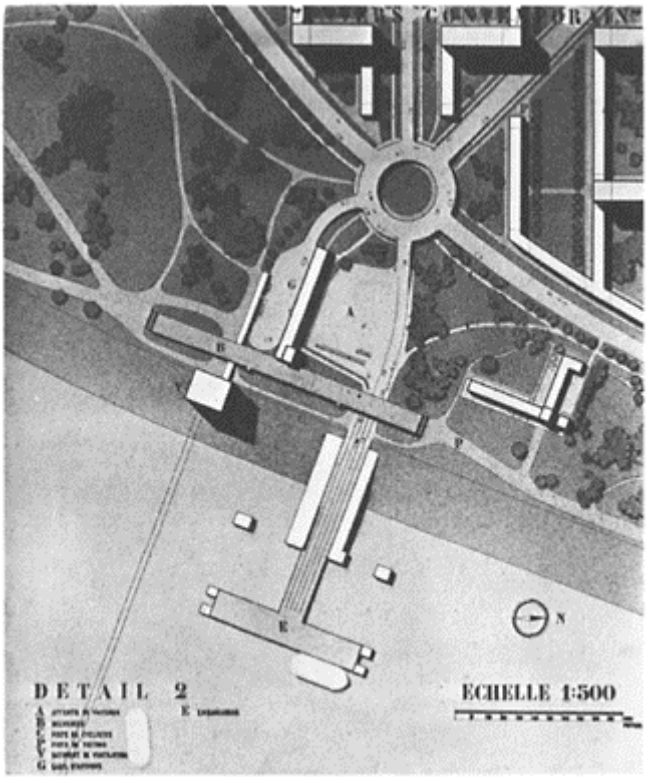
In three months, he thought, they could produce the winning scheme.

In the event, rather more than the three young architects originally intended gathered at the home of Stephenson’s parents in West Kirby. Holford, Stephenson and Adam were joined by Marjorie, the Czech architect François Sammer (who had also worked with Le Corbusier), and Sammer’s future wife, the American sculptor Agnes Larsen.

> Somehow we all slept, ate and worked in the same house or my [Stephenson’s] cousin’s, which was nearby. Occasionally, Charles Reilly

> would turn up with his silver knobbed walking stick and broad-brimmed black hat, *pour épater les bourgeois* in the little street of mock tudor semi-detached houses.[5]

From April until June they worked on the scheme. Their stated intention was to combine the environmental benefits of a garden city with the social advantages of a 'superdense' Corbusian *ville radieuse*, eliminating the corresponding disadvantages of each.[6] The idea of such a balance between rural environment and urban opportunity was by no means original, but it lent



A.Adam, W.G.Holford, F.Sammer and G.Stephenson. Detail from their entry for the Antwerp competition, 1933.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

itself to a wide variety of forms. The basis upon which the group arrived at their particular version of it was not explicit. The report which accompanied their drawings was short: produced, one assumes, in great haste, it contained only the barest statistics and the baldest statements of principles and description of the project. It was not expected

in a competition of this nature that any detailed survey would precede the proposals, and none did.[7]

What they did produce was later described by Reilly as a scheme in the 'new grand manner'. Individual slab blocks were regularly disposed, with particular attention to orientation, in a park-like setting. They looked Corbusian, but the densities were very much lower than those which Le Corbusier himself was proposing at that time.[8] The layout was strongly axial. Built, it would have resembled a Soviet new town, with serried ranks of accommodation blocks receding into the distance along the sides of long straight roads. In addition to the predominating residential development, there was to be an extension to the city's existing business centre, linked to the original by two tunnels, the entrances of which were treated monumentally. To the north was a university and museum quarter, and on the river banks a promenade with public buildings, restaurants, cafes, and places of entertainment. In the last week before submission, the group worked under great pressure to complete the design, with only two hours' sleep a night. In an almost trance-like condition, Holford and Stephenson took the large and unwieldy drawings, mounted on masonite, to Antwerp. Reflecting on their efforts in later life, they were to conclude that their scheme, like that of Le Corbusier (who had also entered the competition)

> would have been dismissed by the jury in thirty seconds as unworthy of consideration.[9]

At the conclusion of the Antwerp work, Sammer left for Moscow to work with Nikolai Colli, another member of Le Corbusier's circle who had worked on the design for the Centrosoyus building and was to supervise its construction. Sammer's later career would include wartime service as a captain in the British Army in India and post-war planning in the Czechoslovakian town of Pilsen. Adam stayed a little longer before returning to Paris, and worked with Holford and Stephenson on an entry in the competition for the De La Warr Pavilion at Bexhill-on-Sea. Again they were unsuccessful, the winning entry being that of Eric Mendelsohn and Serge Chermayeff, whose design would later come to be regarded as among the key buildings in the International Style in England. Stephenson and Holford were more fortunate in a competition organized by the owners of the Gidea Park Estate in Essex, which had since the early years of the century provided a showcase for modern housing design.[10] Holford's involvement in the preparation of their entries, for each of the five cost categories, appears to have been minimal. Nonetheless, it was the partnership of Holford and Stephenson which was awarded a prize for their design, in the cheapest of the categories. When the house was constructed in the early part of the following year it became the first completed building to which Holford's name attaches.

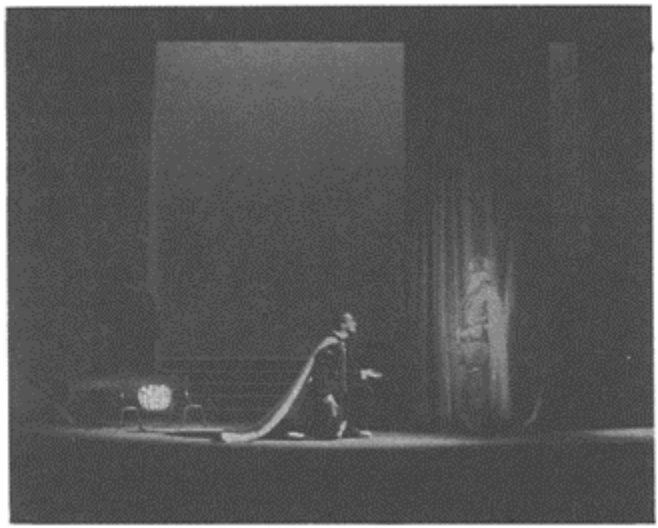
The competition was not a particularly prestigious one: the premium was only £10, and the Liverpool entry was only one among twenty-four selected by the assessors.[11] Success, however, meant the opportunity to act as supervising architects in the construction of the design, and at a time when commissions for any modern work were hard to come by, this was reward enough. To take advantage of an opportunity in Essex from a base in Liverpool, however, was logistically awkward. In the event, supervision was provided by F.R.S.Yorke, prominent in the Modern Movement as much for the didactic functionalism of his writing on architecture as for his buildings. The resulting

semi-detached houses, box-like with their flat roofs, white concrete walls and metal windows, were built for under £400 each and were illustrated in Yorke's book on *The Modern House in England* in 1934. The book was to be influential, and to have their names appear in it in association with that of its author would do the reputations of the young Liverpool architects no harm at all.

These later competition designs were prepared at 80 Bedford Street, Liverpool, to which the 'commune' had moved after the completion of the Antwerp project and Holford's taking-up of his new appointment. The Holfords had taken the tenancy of this large house, conveniently close to the School of Architecture. With them there lived Stephenson and Alex Adam, a painter friend of Marjorie's, and Reilly's former housekeeper. There must have been a certain pleasure in thus establishing a cosmopolitan *vie collective* in the heart of provincial Liverpool. Holford and Stephenson taught and earned money in the School of Architecture while running an informallyconstituted practice from the appropriately-nicknamed '80 Beds', and students from the School helped with the work from time to time. Perhaps it was too much to expect that both of the Holfords would for long remain content with this start to married life. For all its cosmopolitanism and liveliness, '80 Beds' was not the West Bank; and before long Stephenson, forceful in and dedicated to the various political and architectural causes which he adopted, came to reassess his position. He

left 80 Bedford Street when the original *ménage* was destined to fail. The end came as a result of a Reilly project. He was still a director of the Liverpool Playhouse, a position later to be taken by Bill. He persuaded Armstrong, the producer that Bill, Marjorie and I should jointly design the sets for the production of the year, Hamlet. Although I had designed sets for University Dramatic Society productions in which Bill had been an actor and director, I would have been a rough and unnecessary third wheel. So I slipped away from 80 Bedford Street to concentrate on teaching and doing my own things. The simple and noble sets designed by Bill and Marjorie were the best I ever saw in the Playhouse.[12] The Holfords would continue for most of their lives to inhabit large houses filled with friends and colleagues. In the future, however, it would be the Holfords who would set the tone, and Holford himself would not again share his unobtrusive pre-eminence with any of the architects or planners who lived under his roof.

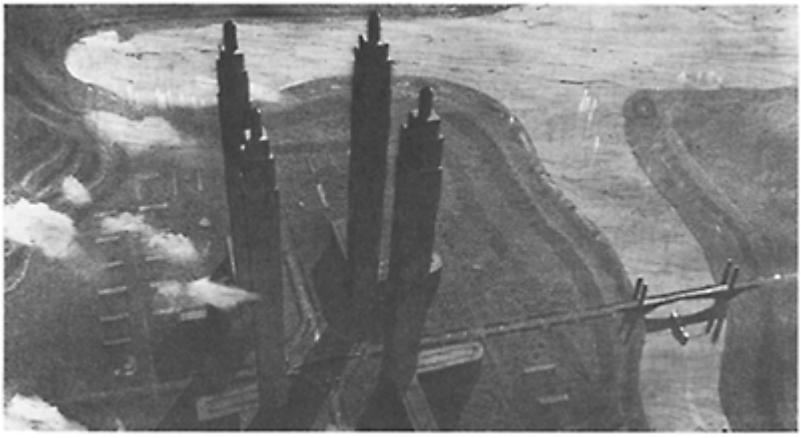
The appointment of an inexperienced twenty-six-year-old to a Senior Lecturership in the School of Architecture proved controversial, and was a bitter disappointment to the lecturer next in seniority to Budden, E.R.F. Cole. Stephenson was practically alone among the staff in supporting the appointment. The situation was one of considerable delicacy: much of the administrative work which Budden had previously done for Reilly now devolved to Holford and it was not open to him to lie low until the fuss had died away. So far as teaching was concerned, Holford's record as a Rome Scholar and Reilly protegé defined his duties for him. He took over the lectures on the history of architecture which Reilly had given, reinforcing the previous emphasis on the Italian Renaissance with his own superior scholarship.[13] He also supervised the six-hour sketch designs which had figured so strongly in his own student career. The results of one such exercise, including a magnificent sketch by Holford himself, appeared in the *Architectural Review* in 1935.[14]



The Liverpool Playhouse production of ‘Macbeth’, 1935, with sets designed by William and Marjorie Holford.

Source: Holford Associates, Liverpool.

The atmosphere of the School was different now from that of the mid-1920s. Though its graduates had continued to win Rome Prizes its eminence was increasingly eclipsed by that of the more fashionable Architectural Association School in London, and it seems that the quality of its new students was more mixed than formerly.[15] The School had been an extension of Reilly’s personality. In the vacuum created by his retirement, the task facing Budden was to redefine its role in such a way as to secure its position in a rapidly changing field, and in the years immediately following Reilly’s



Holford's *esquisse* 'New Cities of Light', an example of the six-hour sketch designs at which he excelled. He produced this one as part of a studio exercise, which he set his own students in 1935, for the design of a film setting for H.G.Wells's 'The Shape of Things to Come'. The original drawing measured 4 ft by 4 ft 6 in.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

retirement new emphases emerged in the public image for the Liverpool School.

It is difficult to tell how deeply the changes went. Certainly the School was very far indeed from becoming an English Bauhaus, and it is probable that the appearance of change was greater than the reality. Nonetheless, in the period between 1933 and 1936 the development of group and research work, and of the social study of architecture, became part of its reputation.[16] The new system involved students working in small groups, with the intention of developing a technique of collaboration and, in the words of Walter Gropius,

> the attributes of leadership by virtue of which there can be unity in the work as a whole, in spite of the multiplicity of collaborators. The object of the architect today was to become a comprehensive organiser who, starting from the social conceptions of life, valid for the entire community, had to gather under one head all the scientific, technical, economic and artistic problems of building and, with artists, specialists and workers, to weld them into a whole.[17]

Stephenson was as much if not more of an advocate for the application of the group system in the School as was Holford. It was the latter, however, who by giving papers, making contacts and by his gift for cultivating influential friends, was most prominent in representing the School to the world.

By the end of 1934 Holford was, like Stephenson and Cole, a member of the Modern Architectural Research (MARS) group. Formed early in 1933 as a British affiliate of the *Congrès Internationale d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM), the group organized exhibitions and attempted to disseminate its ideas by contact with existing institutions such as the RIBA and the schools of architecture. It also sustained a stream of comment on topical issues and to a lesser extent undertook its own research. It was the nexus of the International Style in England and, self-consciously, its authoritative voice. Although Holford attended few (if any) meetings and remained on its fringes, he already knew such leading members as F.R.S.Yorke, Maxwell Fry, Amyas Connell, Serge Chermayeff, and within a short time the new Director of the Housing Centre, Eugen Kaufmann. By 1935 he was, in terms of the younger generation of architects, well-connected.

With speaking engagements, review-writing and commitments to both the School and to his own practice, Holford was becoming a very busy man. Nonetheless, in April 1935 it was announced that he had applied for, and obtained, the RIBA J.Henry Florence Bursary. This valuable award of £350 had the object of enabling its holder to spend not less than six months in 'the study of the Greek and Hellenistic architecture of the Mediterranean basin with a view to making available for architects, from an architectural standpoint, the results of the more recent archaeological researches'. He was not able to take such a length of time off from his Liverpool duties without a break; he was in Greece in April 1936, when he and Marjorie walked and cycled across Crete, but another visit planned for the summer of 1939 was prevented by the outbreak of war, and many of his notes and photographs were damaged or destroyed in the Liverpool Blitz of May 1941. He did not ultimately submit the first instalment of his report until 1950, and there seems not to have been a second.[18] He did, however, present the first fruits of his researches in a series of three lectures which he gave at University College Bangor in 1937, on 'The Creation of Greek Architecture'. Two typescripts survive: the first lecture, borrowing heavily from Hope Bagenal, was over-ripe with undigested classical learning; while the last stretched the characteristic connection between an historical style and modern architecture more audaciously than ever, Holford arguing that the latter was the twentieth-century expression of the values of classical Greece.

These were not among his finer efforts and it was only when he later came to read Rex Martienssen's doctoral thesis, published as *The Idea of Space in Greek Architecture,* that he extracted full value out of his Greek experiences.

> I was fascinated, as so many other architects have been, by the force and clarity of the Greek idea of space, by the enduring quality of the classical sites which, once studied, remain in the mind's eye, and by the extraordinary inevitability and rightness with which natural and man-made features were combined, the abstract or symbolic idea pursued without abandoning practical considerations of use and shelter, and an intimate human scale retained.
>
> Like every student not long escaped from schools and academies, I tended to be an iconoclast. During two years in Rome I had already thrown stones at late Roman and Baroque achievements and turned to pursue the primitive, the archaic, the functional and the undecorated in architecture.
>
> So I was unwilling to believe that there were any eternal architectural verities. Greece and Martienssen persuaded me that there were: that styles are changeable but style immortal; that laws are academic and made to be amended, but that the pursuit of a law—by which I mean order and unity in the design of a house, or a temple group, or a town—is the mainspring of architecture.[19]

So, at any rate, he was to tell an audience of structural engineers in 1967. In the mid-1930s he was perhaps less concerned with the discovery of timeless values than with adjusting himself to his new position, which was very different from that which he had occupied in Rome. With the publication of the Baroque essay, and in addressing bodies

such as the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, he had to consider not only the approval of the modernists but also the opprobrium of traditionalists. It was characteristic of him that he should straddle the two camps, speaking the language of both.

Also typical was his extreme sensitivity to criticism. In 1935 he wrote that he had often been 'pilloried' for 'daring to mention modern architecture in the same breath as historical work'.[20] In fact, Holford had come off rather lightly in comparison with others participating in the sometimes very heated architectural debates which were then current. There had been a brief flash of public controversy in 1933 when *Country Life* published a leader critical of the arguments contained in *The Great Baroque Masquerade* (and in the process paid him a backhanded compliment).[21] It was not until 1936, however, that Holford engaged in a real and practical fight over architectural principles, and in the process produced the first building that was wholly his own work.

In the preceding few years a struggle had been in progress, mainly in London and the Home Counties, between modern architects attempting to build houses in the new style and the local authorities which sought to prevent them from doing so. Holford's opponent was a small rural district in East Sussex. The design, a pair of semi-detached houses for Majorie Holford's mother, was disapproved on the grounds that they would be 'injurious to the amenities of the neighbourhood'. Holford appealed to the Ministry of Health but the Town Planning Institute, which was often involved in such cases, asked if he would meet with the officers and members of the council in an attempt to negotiate a solution.

> I found the most amiable set of lunatics I have ever set eyes on. The Chairman is a retired army man, 'charming fellow, keeps birds, and writes to the Times, you know'. They think they are waging a crusade for the good old Sussex tradition by demanding latticed windows, pitched roofs, old tiles, and a certain kind of brickwork! They are backed up by an old architect of about 80 who is the local arbiter of fashion and to whom everything is referred. We argued for a long time but I saw it was hopeless; and now I have to appeal again.[22]

In 1937 Holford succeeded in getting the houses built, at Icklesham. They were flat-roofed, in brick, and with metal window frames. Identifiably modernist, accordingly abused by the local press, more comfortable within than many other such houses built at the time, their contribution to the evolution of the modern house was significant only within the borders of the Battle Rural District Council. In later life Holford would tell a story, possibly apocryphal, of how a member of the council objected to the flat roof on the grounds that 'there might be goings-on up there'.

THE LEVER CHAIR

Thus far, the Holford we have described had displayed active interests in both the practical and contemporary, and in the historical and academic aspects of his discipline, his hand being strongest in the latter suits. In 1935 there began a sequence of events which was to explode the already broad boundaries of his competence, bringing them

ultimately to embrace a wider range of activity than that encompassed by any other figure in the fields of art, architecture, planning or design in twentieth-century Britain.

Since 1909 the Liverpool School of Architecture had contained a Department of Civic Design, the first such institution in the world. Since 1915 its professor had been Patrick Abercrombie, who by the mid-1930s was among the half-dozen leading figures active in an expanding field. He had already served a term as President of the Town Planning Institute, and was the most prolific planner of his (or indeed of any) generation. He was an important spokesman for a number of professional and public causes, and had been instrumental in the formation of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England. By 1935 he was by far the most accomplished member of the Liverpool School.

Town planning was a subject about which Holford knew little more than he had gleaned in his Italian studies, the Antwerp project and attendance at Abercrombie's lectures some years before. He had no experience whatever of its practical application in Britain or anywhere else. This put him in much the same position as that of the first professor of Civic Design.[23] Stanley Adshead's appointment, however, had been in 1909, before Abercrombie and his second-in-command, Wesley Dougill, had stitched together a corpus of knowledge which, until the latter part of the 1930s, constituted the academic backbone of British town planning. When in 1935 Abercrombie moved from Liverpool to University College London, it was not to be expected that the vacated Lever chair would again be filled by a novice.

The appointment of Abercrombie's successor was first considered in the spring of 1935 by a committee whose members included Budden, Garmon Jones (the University Librarian) and Holford himself. According to one of the many letters with which Reilly peppered Holford at the time, Abercrombie favoured the appointment of Clifford Holliday, an experienced architectplanner and Liverpool graduate who later occupied the Chair in Town and Regional Planning at Manchester. Reilly and Holford, however, were discussing a different scheme. Walter Gropius, the former Director of the Bauhaus now resident in Britain, was being simultaneously lionized by the architectural press and starved of commissions. There seemed a good chance that he could be persuaded to apply for a part-time associate professorship. Dougill would get a second and complementary associate professorship, continuing to run the department and edit the *Town Planning Review* as he had done under Abercrombie.[24] Holford had already considered applying himself, but had then told Reilly that he did not wish to have his name put forward. He apparently favoured a Gropius–Dougill appointment, and indeed Reilly's letters leave open the possibility that the idea of getting Gropius may have been Holford's own.

By August the prospects of a Gropius application were diminishing. Reilly, writing to Marjorie Holford, explained that Gropius was preoccupied with a large project (never built) for flats at Windsor. Reilly now suggested that if the University failed to get Gropius, Holford might consider Maxwell Fry for the appointment.[25] Fry, a rising star from the Liverpool School with a partnership in the major planning consultancy of Adams, Thompson and Fry, would have been a strong candidate. Then, in November, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts wrote to Holford to tell him that the Selection Committee had invited applications from six potential candidates, including himself. Fry declined, leaving five: Dougill, John Dower, Holliday, W.Harding Thompson and Holford. Supported by references from Evelyn Shaw, Howard Robertson, Darcy Braddell and Gropius, Holford got the job.[26]

It is not true, as Holford sometimes claimed, that *The Times* criticized the appointment in a third leader; but if his senior lectureship in architecture at the age of twenty-five caused a fuss, this was as nothing compared to the reaction in town planning circles when an unknown twenty-eight-year-old was given the Lever Chair. There was a threat of serious embarrassment when voices within the Town Planning Institute called for the making of a protest, and the withdrawal of the exemption from the examinations of the Town Planning Joint Examination Board which the department's students had previously enjoyed.[27] According to Reilly it was Dougill who, as a member of the Town Planning Institute Council, was able to smooth matters over.

Holford's appointment poses two questions: why did he himself seek it, and why did he obtain it? To the first question, Myles Wright has provided three answers. The first is that, at a time when jobs of any sort were scarce, the chance to 'get on' was too good to be missed. Secondly, it may be that despite his modernist sympathies, Holford lacked the conviction that makes for credible radicalism, and a chair in Civic Design provided a dignified position on the sidelines of the conflict between moderns and traditionalists. Finally, Wright believes that 'despite his brilliance as a draughtsman, it is very possible that Holford was not deeply interested in the total process of architecture'.[28] Of these three conjectures only the last is questionable, because it seems to imply that in some sense Holford 'opted out' of architecture in 1936. To the contrary, he still wanted an architectural career; but we must note that he did not want it so badly that he passed over the chance of the Lever Chair for its sake, as Maxwell Fry may well have done. Holford's ambitions were, it seems, of a general and a personal, but not of a specific nature. He was generally ambitious in his desire to be useful and helpful, and personally ambitious in his desire for individual eminence; but his enthusiasm in his pursuit of these objectives was diffuse. Neither his nature nor his convictions turned him towards any single goal, and he lacked the dedication to a cause that turns ambition into heroism. Abercrombie was to become a hero of town planning in this sense: Holford came to the Lever Chair in a different spirit.

In answering the second question, about the reasons why the appointment was made, we should recall that when the Department of Civic Design first came into existence, it had been very much an offspring of, and ornament to, the School of Architecture. Its purposes had been to further Reilly's ambition that the influence of architecture in general, and of Liverpool-trained architects in particular, might be more strongly felt in the new field of town planning; and to obtain for the School the services of Stanley Adshead, one of the leading architectural perspectivists of his day.[29] Under Abercrombie, however, the prestige of the Lever Chair had risen enormously, and by the time of Reilly's retirement the work of the Department of Civic Design no longer reflected entirely the interests of the School of Architecture. In 1909 'Civic Design', as taught in Liverpool, had projected the precepts and values of neo-classical architecture onto a metropolitan screen, but by 1935 the transition from architecture to planning was far less direct. Abercrombie had actively assisted in the development of a style of planning which, concerned as it was with zoning regulation, administration, social and geographical survey and regional planning, extended well beyond the boundaries of 'architecture writ large'.

Reilly made his feelings about this extension of interest (and about Abercrombie's personal success) transparently clear in a letter of congratulation which he wrote before

breakfast at his Brighton hotel on the morning he heard the news of Holford's appointment.

> …The world needs positive solutions, not just negative limitations. The Abercrombie stuff is no longer enough, in fact in giving a false sense of security does actual harm…. He and his school would never commit themselves to anything but generalities. You have got to be the real designer who provides specific ideas like Le Corbusier and Gropius and in his earlier days Adshead. When he had the Chair the Department of Civic Design was a real thing greatly contributing to the strength and lustre of the School. Now it will be so again and that is a great happiness to me. In a few years everything will be different and, even if the School proper never wins a Rome or other prize again, folk will be looking to your Department of it for information and teaching. The Town Planning Review will become a great and vital organ. At last you will have your journal too, and ready made. It is splendid! As long as you put forward real solid ideas and do not sink into a petty fogging town planner all will be well too with yourself. If you do [the] job properly, and not run away from it all the time as the last holder of the Chair did, folk will not forget you as an architect any more than they have Corbusier. Like him you must remain that always first and foremost. Then as Mr. Reith says everything will be added unto you.[30]

Reilly's perceptions were doubly clouded; by jealousy of Abercrombie, and by his lack of interest in forms of town planning other than the three-dimensional. Beneath the extremity of his overstatement, however, was some substance.

By the mid-1930s, disappointment at the achievements of more than two decades of statutory planning was widespread among the opinion-formers of the new profession. When translated into the limited practice permitted by statute, planning had incorporated the caution and compromises of a bureaucratic function. Standardized, regulatory and tactical, its physical results had too often been 'a dull form of decentralization', the spread of semi-detached suburbia over wide tracts of agricultural land.[31]

Although in retrospect it appears that the reasons for this increased standardization were located primarily in the institutional and legal context within which planning was practised, it was widely felt by architects that the fault lay with the training of those who did the job. Nor were they alone in this feeling. Thomas Adams, who was not an architect but had been the first President of the Town Planning Institute, wrote in 1935 that

> if we are to get co-ordinated design of the rebuilding of towns, we must have more emphasis on architectural phases and more collaboration from trained architects in the whole field of town planning.[32]

There were, in the larger cities, some few openings for the exercise of architectural skills in town planning. Slum clearance and redevelopment provided opportunities for civic design on a large scale, and in Liverpool the Director of Housing, Lancelot Keay, employed students and graduates from the School of Architecture with results that were

admired at the time. However, the 1932 Town and Country Planning Act provided little scope—if any—for the designer's skills. The need to invigorate town planning with an infusion of new architectural blood was widely felt. In 1935, the Architectural Association in London opened its School of Planning and Research for National Development with eleven graduate students, all architects. In Liverpool, it is inconceivable that the committee responsible for appointing the new Lever Professor could have been unaware of these developments. It was the promise of a more 'positive' and 'imaginative' approach to town planning, rather than any special knowledge or technical expertise in what was still after all an experimental discipline, which Holford's appointment held out to the Department of Civic Design.

The promise was not, so far as Liverpool was concerned, to be wholly fulfilled. Had Holford bent all his efforts to that end, it is possible that he might have had some major impact on the Department before the outbreak of the Second World War: but instead of focusing his energies he continued to increase his number of commitments. So far as modern town planning was concerned, he was to learn rather more than he taught in the following three years.

He did not begin with any great enthusiasm for the immediate task in hand, the training of the local authority officers from Merseyside and the surrounding area who were registered for the part-time Certificate in Civic Design.

> I started off my lectures on the Evolution of Cities with a crowd of 75. By the end of term it will be down to 8. I find that part of it interesting. But the external students from all the local offices (except Liverpool) are as ignorant and unimaginative a crew as you could find anywhere. You can just see them administering the letter of the law, while they wear out the seats of their pants and let their brains coagulate. What freak of change introduced 'town planning' to them as a career, I don't know; but they should have been tax collectors.[33]

The external students provided the Department's bread-and-butter work. Holford neither knew much nor cared much for the mechanics of the preparation and administration of schemes under the 1932 Act. He confined his lecturing contribution to an historical course which was later given under the more general title of *The Outlines of Town Planning*, but which in content was still a history of urban morphology, drawing upon his own Mediterranean researches, Abercrombie's historical city profiles published in the *Town Planning Review*, and upon notes of Marcel Poete's lectures at the *Institut d'Urbanisme* in Paris, borrowed from Stephenson.[34] The teaching of more practical matters he left to Dougill, W.A.Eden and the Department's specialist part-time staff. His main interest was not with the training of officials but in the fulfilling of the wider remit with which the Lever Professor was charged. The original letter which had invited his application had put it thus:

> The Professor will…be expected to give attention to the development of the subject, through his own research work and through participation in the direction of the *Town Planning Review*. We also attach considerable

> weight to the work of educating public opinion on the social importance of the practice of Town Planning.[35]

The idea of a School of Architecture based on co-operative research had been an inspiring one in Rome: translated into the field of town planning, it persisted in Liverpool. In 1937 he wrote to Stephenson a letter which is of great interest, offering as it does an intimation of the purposes for which, five years later, Holford was to use the machinery of central government.

> What is needed is a sort of Planning Research Station with a small and effective group of workers who are *paid* a subsistence wage instead of having to pay academic fees. Goodness knows, the products of such a research station would be economically self-supporting even in the narrowest sense. The whole country needs information on certain planning problems desperately. It needs surveys—of density, open spaces, location of industry, municipal housing—it needs imaginative plans, for the reconstruction of industrial deserts like the Potteries, for Satellite towns, for national parks, for the watersheds and their sewerage—it needs research into the methods by which these plans can be put into effect.
>
> A Research Station of this kind needs enough money to attract post-graduate students at the age when most of them are adventurous in their minds (and incidentally and probably getting married). It would be the first place in England where architects, engineers and economists would get a real training in planning; and where the theory of planning would have a chance of being related to practice. This is a dream. We must talk it over in detail. At the moment it is a fifty-fifty chance whether we should be better off inside the University or not.[36]

Clearly, although Holford never ceased to be an architect, by 1937 he was (like many others) in the process of turning himself into something else besides. He continued to feel strongly that the absence of any competence in design was a great weakness among nearly all town planners. Adshead, Abercrombie and Unwin he exempted, but as he confided in a letter to Stephenson,

> Harding Thompson, Allen, Pepler, Alwyn Lloyd, none of these can rise further than Welwyn Garden City in ideals and *none of them could even equal it in execution.*[37]

But far from reverting to ‘architecture writ large’, he argued that

> to emphasise the architectural side of planning is to *go backwards.* What is needed is a tie-up of our accumulated architectural experience (which so few of our planners seem to have) and the social economic needs of today.[38]

We shall assess Holford's post-war actions in terms of his own *dicta* in later chapters. For the moment, he was sincere in his wish to fulfil the 'dream' of a Planning Research Station. Within the University, the best hope was to create Research Fellowships which would enable graduates, especially those who had been in practice, to return and undertake applied research, but there was insufficient support within his own department or in the University to enable him to achieve this before war came.[39]

Holford's own unfamiliarity with the field hardly strengthened his hand. In 1937, writing again to Stephenson, he confessed that

> There have been times during the past term when I have been miserably conscious of my own inexperience, and devoutly wished that I was not in a position where I was expected to make pronouncements all the time. I have put up a bluff often enough–a sort of professional self-defence, I expect–but it isn't very satisfactory. Sometimes I have a kind of panic, when I wonder if everybody in a responsible position carries on like this.[40]

In person he could, when the need arose, 'carry on like that' to brilliant effect. Although not published (out of respect, it is said, for Dougill's feelings) his inaugural lecture, delivered in his customary elegant and quite rapid style, was received well enough. Read at leisure, the manuscript shows signs of knowledge hastily acquired, a cobbling-together of Geddes and Abercrombie, and a glossy but insubstantial review of current trends under the broad thematic heading of *Rus in Urbe*.[41] In one important respect, however, he was able to meet in full the public obligations of the Lever Professor in a manner which brought him his first acquaintanceships with the practical operation of the British planning system, and began an involvement in the planning of Liverpool which was to continue sporadically for thirty years.

In 1934 the University's Social Science Department had published *The Social Survey of Merseyside*, a major venture with which had been associated special studies of housing, poverty, immigration, public health, passenger transport and other subjects.[42] Under Abercrombie the Department of Civic Design had established working links with that of Social Science, and it was natural that it should in time make its own contribution to the expanding body of information on regional conditions which was being assembled. Within weeks of taking up his appointment Holford had become involved in such a project, a comprehensive review of the operation of the 1932 Town and Country Planning Act on Merseyside. The idea had presumably been agreed upon before his appointment, and the detailed knowledge upon which it relied was not Holford's but that of the lecturer William Eden. It was, however, an important opportunity for Holford to establish his presence both in his new department and before a wider Merseyside audience. He worked jointly with Eden in the drafting of the report which appeared in 1937 under the title *The Future of Merseyside*.[43]

The report constituted the first independent attempt to examine and report upon the steps taken by the region's local authorities to implement the 1932 Act, and to convey an impression of the combined effect of their town planning schemes upon Merseyside as a whole. Its description of the schemes adopted by them casts a revealing light on planning and local government practice in the Thirties. Though their criticisms were couched in terms of the time that now seem unusually gentle, Holford and Eden were prepared to

identify incapacity, incompetence and impropriety, and their findings must have made uncomfortable reading in many municipal offices. The state of affairs which they described was administratively and substantively chaotic. Pressures for working-class rehousing and for speculative housing development were causing Liverpool to spread itself over an ever-increasing area, the administration of which was dispersed among a multiplicity of different authorities. The resulting administrative and financial confusion not only limited the power to plan but actually undermined the will to do so. In such circumstances, Holford and Eden remarked that

> it seems impossible to escape the conclusion that, if ever a beginning is to be made in the proper planning of Merseyside, the planning must be undertaken by a single body having authority over the whole region.[44]

Their favoured solution was a Merseyside County Council covering an area extending slightly further southwards, and slightly less far eastwards and northwards, than that of the modern Metropolitan County. The outbreak of war was to render the report redundant in the political sense, while in practical terms it was to be overtaken by changes in the source of local government finance. Holford did not at the time consider it one of his more pleasurable commitments; but it was the medium whereby he gained an understanding of how the pre-war statutory planning system functioned, and his first opportunity to develop a thoroughly considered view on how that system might.be reformed. It was not, however, the only nor the greatest stimulus to thought for the future.

A BROADER CONTEXT

Holford's ideas about the planning of cities did not develop in a vacuum, any more than had his ideas about architecture. Both were influenced in fundamental ways by the social and political climate of his time. From the earliest days of the town planning movement in Britain reformers had been influenced by, and had played upon, wider fears about the biological and cultural effects of urbanization. In the 1930s there was serious concern at the decline in the birth rate, which fuelled demands for improved health education, housing and welfare services. New facilities such as the community health centre at Peckham were elevated to the status of political and architectural symbols of a new urban order. There was a growing concern, too, with physical fitness, which was expressed in the passing of the Physical Training and Recreation Act in 1937; while the influential movement for rural preservation was underwritten by the feeling that the urban threat to country life was in some way synonymous with a threat to the nation's basic moral, cultural and, indeed, eugenic values.

Events in Europe gave these ideas an added urgency, and the same concerns can be found in an amplified and distorted form in Nazi Germany's

Holford photographed during his visit to Germany in 1937.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

emphasis upon physical training, and the extensive use of rural imagery in its racial propaganda. Holford was better acquainted with the German effort to improve the Aryan stock than most. He made a brief visit there in the summer of 1937 and returned with an illustrated report on the sports centres at Berlin, Nuremberg and six other cities.[45] The aftertaste of this experience is detectable in the text of his inaugural lecture, given a few months after his return.

> I submit that the general health, both physical and moral, to which intelligent urban life and the proper use of the country contribute so largely, is in the long run our best defence. Therefore, if we wish to

> survive at all, we dare not consider this question as other than a national emergency.[46]

Describing the results of the report on National Service, which had found that only three men out of every nine of military age were properly fit and healthy, he added:

> … it is significant that this condition should rise when our upland population has dwindled to nothing and the general rural population is the smallest it has ever been. Nor is it denied that for the urban worker contact with the land in some form is of immense psychological value. Behind it all, in the realm of the emotions, there is an even more significant spiritual danger, the lack of vitality and zest for living among people whose proportion of sound peasant stock has fallen too low.[47]

This lapse into the language of Nazi eugenics was in Holford's mouth more silly than sinister, for he had no more sympathy for German fascism than he had for Italian. There was, too, an element of opportunism in the presentation of his own discipline as vital to national survival. Nonetheless, the terms of the argument are significant. The sense of cultural and biological crisis which had impelled Britain towards major urban reforms in the previous century could still be invoked in 1937.

The spectacle of Holford playing the prophet of doom is atypical. He was not normally prone to intellectual panic, and we find him far more characteristically himself in relation to another (and ultimately more important) current in contemporary thought. The growing interest in planning in the generic sense, as an activity which might inform all aspects of national development, was like the 'Health and Culture' movement an international phenomenon. The fascist states and the Soviet Union provided the clearest examples, but America and France also looked to planning as a means of coping with the effects of the Depression. In Britain there was more talk than action; but it was influential talk, which Marwick has described as establishing the basis of the social and political ideology which carried Britain safely through the 1940s and into the post-war era.[48] Like many such movements, it originated among intellectuals and on the fringes of orthodox politics. The Depression had shaken confidence in the established economic and social order, and a readiness to examine means of replacing it with some new economic mechanism was shared by the Left, Mosely's fascists, Liberals, and some young Tories. The main intellectual centres of this new interest in planning were the universities (especially the London School of Economics) and those organizations for the promotion of debate and research which were born or developed during the decade. Perhaps the most influential and certainly the longest-lived of these was Political and Economic Planning (PEP), which was founded in March 1931 and established an alliance between like-minded academics, scientists, civil servants and businessmen. PEP's object, expressed in a 1934 broadsheet, was to bring to bear on government the influence of 'those on whose service technical civilization depends—the administrators, the managers, scientists, teachers and technicians'.[49] The message appeared to be that social and economic issues might henceforth be regarded not so much as matters of conflicting interest and principle but as problems amenable to rational scientific solution. By such means might the country be saved from the evils of fascism, or communism, or sheer inaction.

Holford was, as we have already seen, uncomfortable about any categorical political commitment. After his return from Italy in 1933 he had read Lenin, Marx and Laski, and had for a time joined the Liverpool Fabian Society and the University Labour Club. But he had been an attender of meetings rather than an organizer, and was probably happier working for the Workers' Educational Association, which he did until the outbreak of war. His connection with partisan politics did not last beyond the middle of the decade. The position which PEP represented was, however, a different matter. The hegemony of the expert, unlike the dictatorship of the proletariat, was an aim with which someone like Holford could fully identify. In academic and professional circles he was brought into constant contact with the intellectual movement towards a new science and politics of national planning, and it was not long before he was drawn into the current.

We do not know the date and the circumstances of his joining PEP: it may have happened through the agency of Julian Huxley, with whom Holford became friendly at some time around 1936. He remained active in it throughout the war, subsequently becoming its Chairman. It was his natural home, politically as well as intellectually. Henceforth he was to ride that supra-partisan wave that resulted, after the war, in the emergence of the modern welfare state.

Chapter Five
Architecture writ Large

During the years following his return from Rome it had never been in Holford's mind that he would withdraw from active architectural practice. His predecessor had sustained a prodigious output of outside work during his tenure of the Lever Chair, and Holford not only wanted such employment: he needed it to support him in the dignity of his new professorship. Yet, as we have seen, he had little experience to build upon. The houses at Icklesham and Gidea Park, set designs for the Liverpool Playhouse and some architectural oddjobbery around Merseyside could scarcely be expected to lead to the magnitude of opportunity which arose in the summer of 1936.

TEAM VALLEY

Holford's big chance had its origins in a chain of events which had begun some two years earlier, when P.M.Stewart was appointed Commissioner for the Special Areas of England and Wales. In the mid-1930s the British economy had begun to rise out of the 1929–32 Depression, but the new growth industries were concentrated in the Midlands and the South-East. In the industrial heartlands of the nineteenth-century economy the unemployment rate remained high, exceeding 40 per cent in some towns such as Gateshead and Jarrow. These were the 'Special Areas', and when Stewart's first report as Commissioner was debated in the House of Commons in July 1935 there were severe criticisms of the Government's inaction, from its own supporters as well as from the Opposition. Two days after the debate, *The Times* printed a letter from a Mr. Sadler Foster which set out the case for the provision of what have since become known as advance factories. Located in areas of high unemployment, they were to be provided with the services and facilities already available at the large privately-owned trading estates of Slough and Trafford Park in Manchester.[1] *The Times* took up the issue and, with a strong current of opinion running, the Government granted a request from Stewart that he be empowered to establish trading estates in the Special Areas.

The first product of this decision was the creation of North Eastern Trading Estates (NETE), a limited company backed by Government sponsorship which was incorporated on the 18th May, 1936. Its directors were drawn from the North-East's more distinguished and enlightened businessmen and landowners: the chairman was K.C.Appleyard, a Durham JP with interests in engineering who was later to have a varied

career as a senior civil servant during the Second World War. The General Manager was M.D. Methven, whose curriculum vitae charted a course which had taken him from Caius College, Cambridge to a career in women's cosmetics.[2] The third major figure connected with the new concern and the one who would subsequently be of most importance to Holford was Hugh Beaver, partner in the firm of Sir Alexander Gibb. Beaver, acting for Gibb, was to be Chief Engineer in the major development contemplated by NETE. He was a man of powerful personality, wide interests and wider contacts: Holford would come to admire him and to benefit from the connection.

It was Appleyard, however, who first approached Holford to discuss the design of a large trading estate which NETE proposed to develop on a site at Team Valley, Gateshead. Holford recorded the meeting, held at the Mayfair Hotel in London on the 26th August, 1936, in a notebook. Appleyard

> Intended to lay out estate in attractive way. Engineers already surveying site; & proposed to lay out two main roads dividing site into 4 equal rectangles. Guide plan wanted immediately, also design for *type* of factory. Subsequent consultation with local and estate architects to ensure plans in accordance with general scheme.
>
> Chairman hinted that he would like a young man, not an acknowledged expert, to take the job on. Experience rather than money. Never been done in England before.
>
> Would hear my views before getting in touch with other applicants.
>
> Said I would visit site as soon as possible and think over proposition; only objection was the shortness of time.[3]

Three days later Holford was at Team Valley with Methven and Beaver, discussing not his appointment but the siting of the main roads. Confronted with the site itself, he began immediately to make suggestions: could not an architectural feature be made of the rail crossings over the main estate roads? Would not a central traffic crossing constitute a problem for heavy lorries? Could special provision be made for all-purpose service conduits? By the end of that first site meeting, before terms had even been agreed with Appleyard, most of the principles upon which the Team Valley Estate was to be planned were already agreed.[4]

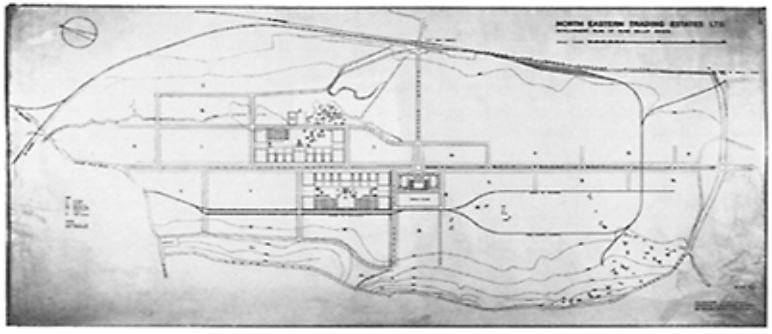
It was in many senses a unique architectural opportunity. The site was in close proximity to, and clearly visible from, both the main east coast railway and the Great North Road. The directors of NETE, conscious of the publicity which this novel undertaking might be made to attract, were determined to create a showpiece. Such a job on such a scale, with clients so receptive to their architect's ideas, is rare at any time. In 1936 it was by a considerable margin the most substantial commission yet undertaken by any member of the MARS group.

Appleyard had been right in saying that such an architectural exercise had not previously been attempted in England. There were, however, a number of partial precedents upon which Holford could draw in preparing the Team Valley Plan. He knew of the large privately-developed Trading Estate at Slough, the industrial estates at Letchworth and Welwyn, and the municipal trading estates developed (under the influence of Garden City ideas) as part of suburban expansion schemes at Speke and

Wythenshawe.[5] Holford familiarized himself with these planned estates, their standards of provision, their layout and the character of the industries for which they catered. Taking them as examples of best practice, he proceeded to extend dramatically the boundaries of what was considered possible in industrial architecture by the way in which he set about the Team Valley commission.

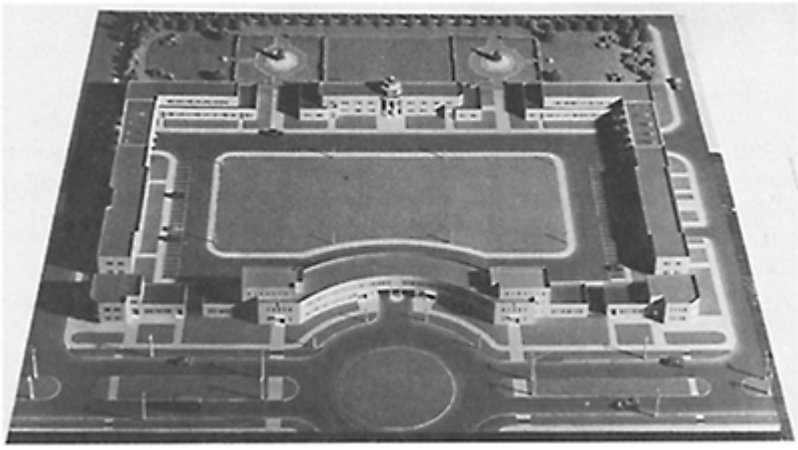
The arrangement which he made with Appleyard gave Holford responsibility for drawing up, in consultation with Beaver and the directors, a general development plan and scheme of architectural control for the entire estate. In addition he was to prepare 'type plans' for factory units, to be worked up by local architects. The plans of all buildings to be erected were subject to Holford's approval. He himself was to design the central administration block, and to determine such incidental detail as the design of lighting and street furniture. No architect had subjected a British industrial estate to such strict discipline before, and probably none has done so since.[6] Given the opportunity, Holford made the most of it. The principle had been in the minds of the directors before he became involved, but the comprehensiveness with which it was adopted was of his own making. He got his way over matters as diverse as the railway viaduct and the design of lettering, the variety of facing brick to be used, and the type of window construction. It would appear from his diary that no suggestion was pushed to the point that it became a bone of contention; his success was due to his own persuasiveness, the willingness of the directors to be persuaded, and the support which he obtained from Beaver.

It was a large job to undertake in the short time available, and it prompted the recruitment of the first of Holford's professional assistants, David Spreull, a young graduate of the Liverpool School. Spreull had already worked with Stephenson on an abortive commission for a concrete-framed house in Oxford, and had done some freelance perspective work for such Merseyside notables as Eden, Verlarde and Miller, using 80 Bedford Street as his working base. On 14th September he started work with Holford. Time did not allow much opportunity for experiment: they tried various novel lighting arrangements for the main estate road, including illuminated panels mounted on overhead gantries and angled wall-mounted beams directed onto the road



Team Valley: the development plan for the first phase of building.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

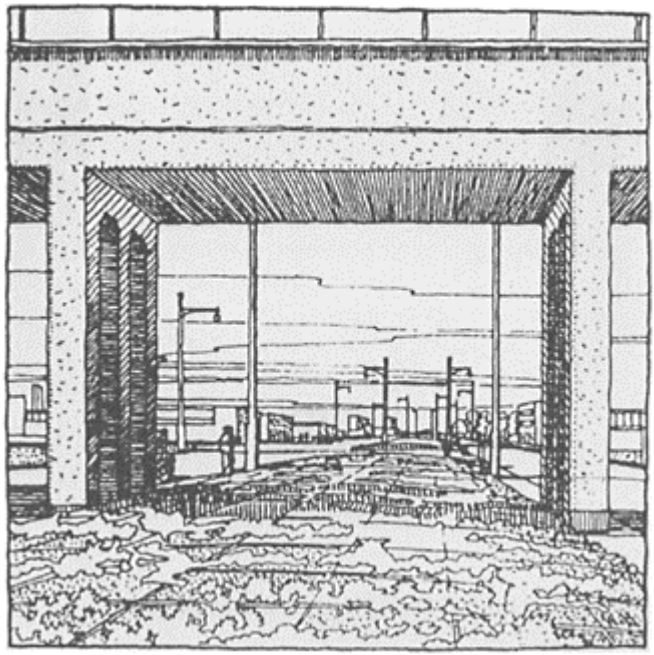


Model showing Holford's original proposals for the central area of Team Valley.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

surface. Nothing came of these: the furnishings eventually provided were conventional even if occasionally idiosyncratic in their detailing. Of more purpose was the considerable work which went into defining the level or quantity of provision required for a given function, whether parking, washing, canteen facilities or office space.[7] The plan took shape remarkably quickly, and by the end of the year was sufficiently advanced for a wooden model to be prepared for exhibition at the British Industries Fair at Castle Bromwich.

The concept was, in plan, a strong one. The flat and marshy site, across which meandered the River Team, was filled with the spoil from pit heaps, and had imposed upon it a wide straight avenue running its whole length. For part of this run the river was led in a cutting down the central reservation, making the largest river rectification scheme carried out in England at that time. A wire screen above the cutting provided a climbing-frame for foliage plants as well as a safety barrier. A cross-axial road ended at a roundabout which marked the centre of the estate and the location of the central administration blocks. All lesser service roads were laid out with their junctions staggered to avoid a multiplicity of roundabouts or crossroads, and a full-gauge railway encircled the whole estate, connecting it to exchange sidings on the adjacent main line. The plan, as a plan, was a complete success: the layout of Team Valley is today largely as it was on Holford's drawing board in 1936. It has lost some of the original elements: the railway and viaduct have gone, as have the lavish facilities for recreation and social activity. The communal canteens, at least one of which was a building of considerable character, are now derelict. Nothing, however, has had to be added: Team Valley was more than sufficient for its purpose.



A sketch by Holford showing ‘a gnat’s eye view of the new Team Valley’. The plant-covered lattice in the foreground encloses the canalized river Team, and the view is framed by the concrete railway viaduct (now demolished).

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

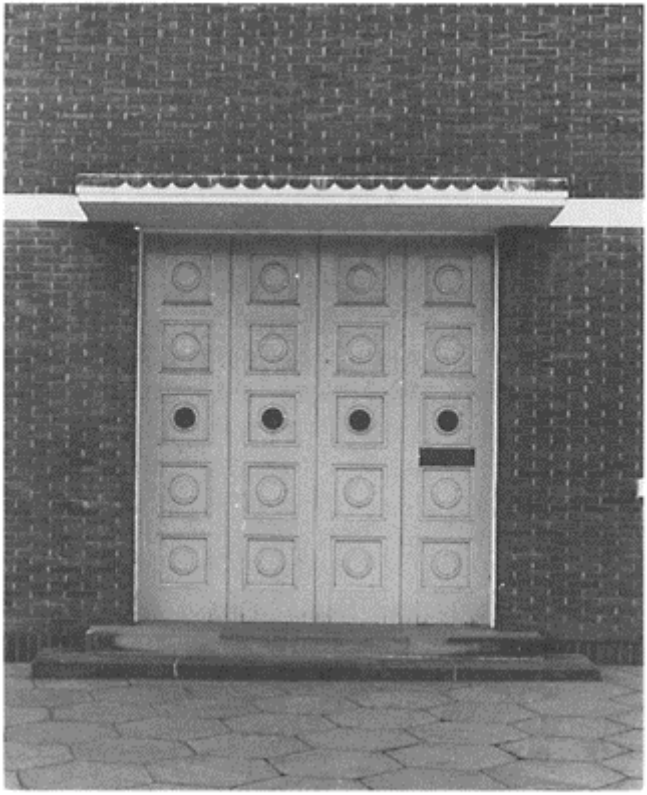
Site preparation had begun before Holford’s appointment, and by 1938 companies were trading on the estate, the very first of which was Messrs Havmore Pies. Ten years later some 8,450 people were to be employed at Team Valley.[8] Holford’s involvement stopped short of supervision of site work, a local firm acting as executive architects in the construction of his designs for the administration block.[9] However, he maintained his association with NETE for more than ten years, and so was able to exercise control over the successive stages of the estate’s initial development. There can be no doubt that what emerged was, as an architectural whole, his personal creation.

Factories under construction at Team Valley, with the central administration buildings in the background.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

Critics have tended to describe the result as much in terms of what it is not as of what it is, so elusive is its character.[10] The buildings which Holford himself dcsigned might best be described as functional, but they lack the distinguishing characteristics of any recognizable style including that of functionalism itself. There are individual buildings which are self-evident manifestations of that provincial modernism which left most English towns with their legacy of brick-built cinemas and factories, but these were not designed by him. His own designs for the central buildings and for advance factories are plain. The flat roofs and clerestory windows, won against objections of cost at Holford's insistence, are derived from Swiss, German and American examples; but the elements are organized with no obvious visual references to their ancestry.[11] Holford had noted in connection with arrangements for the formal opening that 'no symbolism yet exists'.[12] There was no attempt to invent any. Nothing was made of those elements in the buildings which other architects might have used to express their industrial or technological character: even the ventilator outlets were minimized, their usual 18-inch diameter being reduced to 12 inches. Instead there was applied detail, sparingly used. The variety of different but obviously related door panels, the almost gothic detailing of concrete bridge walls, the frilly lead flashings on the awnings of the central block's doors and the uniform lettering and colour schemes which Holford imposed upon the factory occupants (the evidence of which has now vanished)—all these point to a very close attention to incidental detail on the part of the supervising architect. Indeed, so unassuming are the individual buildings, and so completely do they ignore the then-current Dutch, 'Jazz' and

Scandinavian idioms, that the detail is a necessary reminder that the elevations were architect-designed. Holford knew of Ernst May's work in Frankfurt, with its meticulously planned and utterly anonymous houses: it is as though he had attempted to duplicate that planned anonymity, and had then sought to personalize it with sparse but totally un-Germanic ornament.



Holfordian detail from the central administration buildings at Team Valley.

Source: Leith Penny.

It is the Estate as a whole, however, which makes an impression, but here again there is initial puzzlement about what the architect was striving to achieve. There is, in those parts developed under Holford's control, unity; but it is unity which seems to lack an aim. One finds oneself wondering whether something fundamental is not missing: could this really be the image which those close architectural controls were meant to achieve? There are not as many trees as Holford intended, and the long, low red buildings sit back from

the roads with their horizontal lines unrelieved by any green irregularities. Searching for possible parallels, one thinks of a *ville radieuse* in which the blocks are only one storey high, or of the open, 'loose fit' grid of Milton Keynes.[13] The axial layout owes something to Holford's Beaux Arts training, while the details pick up any number of different stylistic themes. If the overall conception is influenced by any single source, however, it can only be western America. This was the only place where Holford had seen long, low, floodlit buildings, well back from wide and well-lit roads, on a scale sufficiently large for it to register with him as a distinct visual image. The only traceable perspective of the estate done by Holford himself emphasizes horizontal perspective, open-ness and large skies. It may be an echo of California.

Ultimately the game of tracing parallels and precursors must end. Like all architecture Team Valley has its influences, but explanation rests finally upon what we know of the designer himself. Nothing seems so apposite as Gordon Stephenson's observation that Holford's mind worked by the accumulation of detail, the inductive process of synthesis. Team Valley is the product of the programme, expressive simply of itself and of a controlling intelligence. It stands apart from style or fashion, a testament to self-effacement and suggestive, perhaps, of a curious absence of creative vision on the part of its designer. To this possibility we will return in a later chapter.

At the time of writing, the original intention is still visible at Team Valley, but the future of this remarkable architectural undertaking is uncertain. A large part of the site is now included in an Enterprise Zone; so one experiment in planning is succeeded by another. There are other places in the North-East where something can still be seen of Holford's work, although not on the same scale or of the same completeness. Maintaining his connection with NETE until the mid-1950s, he served as consulting architect in the development of estates at Aycliffe, Ashington, Annfield, Hartlepool, East Gateshead, West Auckland, the North Tees site at Stockton, Dragonville at Durham, East Middlesbrough and the Bede estate at Jarrow. He continued to set high standards. Hypothetical layouts and plans of actual estates submitted for his approval show continued efforts to achieve planting, recreation space, social facilities and the architectural effects obtainable from formal entrances and uniformity of detail. He left the North-East with a legacy of exceptionally well-appointed and laid-out industrial buildings.

The significance of this achievement in broader terms is limited. Team Valley was something of a hothouse plant, a pioneering exercise in industrial design which was not, in Britain at least, of subsequent influence. There was however a distant echo. After the War David Spreull was to go to Jamaica, and the large industrial estate which he laid out at Kingston became in effect a second Team Valley.[14] More immediately, Holford had gained experience of a large, rapidly-constructed project. He had impressed a number of important people, and when war broke out he found himself in a seller's market. Appleyard, now in the War Office, offered him a commission with a construction unit in France, but it was Beaver who had the most interesting proposition to make. With Appleyard's blessing, Holford accepted it.[15]

THE ARCHITECTURE OF WAR

When in 1936 Britain's rearmament programme got under way, one of the main priorities had been to expand and disperse arms production. There were at that time only three Royal Ordnance factories, two of which (Woolwich Arsenal and Waltham Abbey) were especially vulnerable to air attack. As the need for armaments grew ever-greater, the pressure of work upon the Ministry of Supply staff at Woolwich forced them to look to agents for assistance in the building programme which was ultimately to provide the country with forty-four factories.[16] Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners were engaged to act as agents for three filling factories at Swynnerton in Staffordshire, Risley in Cheshire, and Kirkby, near Liverpool. The contracts had a combined value of £20 million, and the firm was to be entirely responsible for construction in accordance with the requirements to the Chief Engineer at Woolwich. The last of these three factories to be begun was that at Kirkby on Merseyside.

Beaver's offer to Holford was that he supervise the construction of this very large project and liaise with the civil and other engineers who would be involved. The task would not be one providing any great creative opportunities, but it would enable Holford to remain near his wife and the Department of Civic Design, and would give him the chance to take direct charge of a large operation with an organization of his own making. Several hundred building types were involved. Holford would collect the standard drawings which were being prepared in London, add to or amend them as necessary, and assemble this enormous and very complicated jigsaw on the Kirkby site.

On New Year's Eve 1939 Holford left Liverpool by night train with Spreull and R.T. ('Terry') Kennedy, who some two years earlier had moved from Essex to a job in the City Architect's office and a house in Bedford Street, next door to Number 80. The Holfords had befriended the Kennedys soon after their arrival, but in 1939 neither man knew much about the other's professional abilities. On arrival in London, Holford and Kennedy found a room in Ebury Street where, they thought, they could live for the week it would take them to gather together the drawings they would need. However, as Kennedy would later recall,

> A visit to Gibb and Partners' drawing office quickly disabused us of such a notion. The office was piled high with drawings, none of which seemed to be in complete sets, for at least three and possibly more Ordnance Factories, piles from which—somehow—the drawings, such as were expected to be applicable with or without amendment for Kirkby, were to be extracted. I was dismayed at what looked like chaos and confusion but not so Holford; maybe he guessed what might be in store for us.[17]

Holford set up an office in Queen Anne's Gate, and word quickly got around that he was taking on a large job. He was by now well-known, and without having to advertise he assembled in three months a staff of over 100 architects and clerks of works on the Kirkby site. The initial work in London was gruelling. Typewritten information from the Woolwich Arsenal Schedules had to be transformed into plan, elevation, section and machinery layout. Spreull later recalled spending 12 hours and often more a day at his drawing board while a big organization took shape around him.[18] It was Kennedy who

took on the role of Holford's right-hand man and the two of them lived at Ebury Street for three months, working until late at night and snatching meals in cafes or the St. Ermin's Hotel. By bedtime Kennedy had

> had quite enough but Bill would sit up in bed till the early hours dealing with his correspondence, maintaining contact with the University and the host of organizations and societies to which he belonged. It was an exhibition of physical and mental stamina that astonished me. I had not previously seen anybody work so hard and so unremittingly. Throughout all my subsequent years with him I never ceased to wonder at his phenomenal capacity for work and the so very little time he had for rest and relaxation.[19]

Gradually they mastered the elusively coded drawings and achieved an understanding of the purpose which each building was to serve, and work moved to the unheated wooden huts of a cold and muddy site. The scale of operations and the pressure for rapid completion exceeded even those of Team Valley, and neither Holford nor his staff had previous experience of supervising such an undertaking. Nonetheless construction proceeded so rapidly that by the end of the year the factory, although not quite complete, was in production, and architectural staff were being released to join the services or to do other war work.

Holford was by now caught up in the reconstruction work of Lord Reith's Ministry of Works (described in the next chapter), and when Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners asked him to take charge of a second major project he was at first reluctant to accept. He was still considering the matter when in February 1941 he mentionedit to Terry Kennedy, now tidying up the records of the Kirkby contract and uncertain of his future. Kennedy argued that Holford should accept the offer. He, Kennedy, could take charge of the site office, and Holford could look after contract affairs in London, visiting the site only when he could manage to do so. Kirkby had shown that a job headed by Holford would attract staff of quality in sufficient numbers. Perhaps for the sake of his friend, Holford agreed to accept.[20]

The Ministry of Supply's initial contract was for a single hostel for munitions workers near the Ordnance factory at Swynnerton, but Holford eventually got more than he bargained for. His successful management of the Kirkby project had given Gibb and Partners and the Ministry of Supply sufficient confidence to delegate not only supervision but planning and detailed design. With a rapid expansion of the programme and the employment of nearly 200 staff, Holford became the head of an organization respon-sible for the building of eight hostels at Swynnerton and sixteen at Risley, near Warrington. Again Kennedy was his second-in-command, with Spreull, Stephenson, Yorke and Myles Wright all involved. With staff of this quality close personal supervision was not necessary; Holford established an organization, produced rough sketch plans showing possible theoretical arrangements of buildings, and let his colleagues get on with it.[21]

The hostels programme was a source of great interest to the architectural profession in general, as it was the first instance of wartime construction in which architects had been given the same degree of control over a major project as they might have exercised in peace-time. Previous hostels built by the Ministry of Supply at Glascoed, Chorley and

elsewhere had attracted criticisms from, amongst others, the House of Commons Select Committee on National Expenditure. These criticisms continued during the period in which the Swynnerton and Risley hostels were being built. Moreover the country was caught up in a fever of enthusiasm for physical and social reconstruction (discussed more fully in the next chapter), and any demonstration of what could be achieved in terms of large-scale 'social architecture' was bound to be greeted with interest.[22] Despite shortages of materials and time, therefore, Holford's organization worked in an atmosphere which was an active stimulant to exceptional architectual efforts.

It had originally been thought that the hostels would cater for a mixed population, but it very soon became clear that the overwhelming majority of the new munitions workforce would be female. The architects argued that the social needs of a hostel of 1,000–1,500 women would be greater than those of a mixed community, and it was accepted by the Ministry that considerable emphasis should be given to the provision of social and recreational facilities, as well as to the creation of a pleasant environment.[23] Each of the hostels was therefore planned to incorporate, in addition to the basic provisions for dormitories, ablutions, canteens and ARP, a full range of functions that made them in effect small satellite villages, sited some two or three miles from the centre of employment. Each had as its centre a large group of buildings which included the administrative offices, carefully planned canteens, an assembly hall and lounges. The halls were lavishly equipped by wartime standards: each small group of hostels possessed at least one really large theatre and cinema hall, with stage equipment and projection room. The architects hoped that, with these facilities, the hostels might serve as holiday camps for disadvantaged town-dwellers after the war.

The freedom available to the architects in achieving all this was limited. The urgency of the work required that decisions regarding planning be made quickly. The restricted availability of sites, ARP stipulations, the use of prefabricated systems for the bedroom huts in the earlier hostels and the need to minimize expenditure on roads and services all served to limit the available options. Holford discussed some idealized building and layout types with his colleagues, and these became the basic approaches, adapted to meet local con-ditions, in planning each of the different sites. Materials, too, were restricted. It was expected that there would be considerable variation in what could be supplied, and that transport services would deteriorate; so the site architects were encouraged to make as much use as possible of materials and constructional techniques which could be sustained from stocks and skills available in the locality. At Swynnerton they were lucky enough to find that there was a local contractor specializing in the building of steel-framed barns, but their delight diminished when they found that their structural calculations could not account for the fact that the buildings, when erected, actually remained standing.

The finishes had to be of the cheapest and roughest kind: joinery was reduced to a minimum and plaster used very sparingly. Yet when the results were illustrated in the *Architectural Review* they managed to look very good. Externally, camouflage helped the buildings to blend into the landscape, Had the illustrations been in colour, they would have looked better still. while inside, a limited range of co-ordinated colours provided a series of contrasts, emphasizing differences in function and atmosphere in different parts of the hostel within a visually coherent scheme. The landscaping was well done: trees and

ponds were retained, diminishing the institutional and barrack-like appearance of the hostels not only at ground level but also as viewed from the air.

Inside the buildings there was some heroic extemporization. With no decent light fittings available for the assembly halls, architectural staff devised their own, made of parchment and wire. Well-designed posters from London Transport, Shell-Mex and the Post Office were mounted in standard frames to brighten up the social centres. Perhaps most memorable of all the creative flourishes were the murals, the story of which provides an incidental example of Holford's great tact and personal charm. It was Tony Cox, the former spokesman of the radical students at the Architectural Association School, who initiated the enthusiasm by asking if he could in his spare time paint a mural in the entrance hall of one of the hostels. The result was deemed a great success, and imitators followed suit until the architect in charge of the Swynnerton drawing office, Johannes Schreiner, himself took a hand. Schreiner was something of a minor architectural celebrity: a highly-strung German emigrant, he had before the war been in charge of the drawing office of the modernist Eric Mendelsohn. Terry Kennedy later recalled the following events thus:

> Schreiner told us that he wished to paint a street scene and he went ahead. On seeing the mural after the second weekend of painting I saw there were going to be difficulties. The mural was a night scene of a street of brothels, unmistakably so, full of leer-eyed girls, drunks, and with a horned, red devil rising out of a street manhole, all very well painted but about as unsuitable a subject for a young girls' hostel as could be imagined. My dilemma was how to tell Schreiner that it could not remain. Holford when he saw the mural agreed with me; fortunately few others had seen it. Holford then had a word with Schreiner who without protest, demur or any display of ill feelings straight away obliterated all the work he had so painstakingly done.[24]

Schreiner was one of a number of refugee architects who benefited from Holford's help: he had come to the hostels job direct from one of the internment camps where so many refugees from Hitler found themselves at the start of the war. On at least one occasion the by-products of this help amounted to more than mere embarrassment for Holford himself. When he, Yorke and another of the hostels architects were declared surplus to the requirements of the local Volunteer Defence Force, Holford suspected that assistance to 'enemy aliens' was among the reasons. Eventually, feeling himself to be the victim of a whispering campaign on the part of the local constabulary, he wrote in strong terms to the West Lancashire General Staff to protest.[25] He did not stop helping emigré architects, and a number of them, including Eugene Rosenberg and Howard Mason, were to remain close professional and personal friends thereafter.

In general, the hostels programme took up considerably more of Holford's time than he would have wished. Many Government departments were involved in aspects of the work, most specially the Ministries of Supply, Labour and Works, and in the absence of a settled programme the work proceeded in fits and starts. In a note on the project's organization written in 1942, Holford complained that

> the number of sites was varied from week to week; that they were varied all at once, then a few at a time, then one at a time, then only in part; that the priority of sites and of buildings within sites was constantly changed; that land was acquired and not used; that sites half constituted were suspended and then proceeded with or suspended and then cancelled; that large items such as Sick Bays were included, excluded, and changed in detail not one but many times…[26]

In these circumstances the achievement was considerable. Holford's organization produced what may be the most sophisticated and architecturally successful essay in housing constructed under wartime conditions.[27] The bubble of optimism which had led the *Architects Journal* to herald them as an experiment in new forms of social architecture soon burst: though there was a highly successful Royal visit, the Ministries of Labour and Supply had overestimated the likely demand, and the expected girls did not materialize. The hostels, however, did not stand empty for long. Some were taken over by the Royal Navy, while at Swynnerton, unexpected occupants arrived almost literally out of the blue one afternoon in the latter part of 1942. Kennedy was just leaving a completed hostel when a cavalcade of large cars pulled up and disgorged a troupe of American Air Force officers. Their colonel told him that they had driven up from London and had heard, at Birmingham, a vague story of hostels being built near Swynnerton. They had the job of finding

Duncan Hall, Stone: dormitory blocks.

Source: Sarah Holmes.

British Telecom Training College, Stone. The concrete water tower is a later addition.

Source: Sarah Holmes.

accommodation for several thousand men, the first wave of the US Air Force to arrive in a beleagured England, within twenty-four hours. The colonel's reaction on being shown brand-new hostels complete with administrative,

Cotes Hall, Millmeece: the main block, showing the curved roof of the theatre.

Source: Leith Penny.

social and ancillary facilities and ready for occupation is best left to the imagination.[28]

At the end of the war there was no attempt to convert the hostels to the holiday use originally envisaged, but several of them continued to serve useful functions. Five still remain at Swynnerton in various stages of repair and with varying degrees of alteration. The most complete example is the Duncan Hall annexe of what is now the British Telecom Technical College (BTTC) at Stone, where the administration buildings and dormitory blocks arranged around a Village green' are almost entirely unaltered. Even the bicycle racks are original. The main BTTC building is a good example of one of the larger administrative and social centres, and its original facilities are still in use. Other hostels nearby now serve as a women's open prison and as a somewhat seedy industrial estate; but perhaps the most atmospheric of all is the semi-derelict Cotes Hall north of Millmeece. Its post-war role has been to receive the periodic waves of refugees who have arrived in England, from Uganda and most recently from Vietnam. Odd items left behind by these transient occupants still litter the rooms, which have seen no substantial alteration since their completion in 1942. From the distinctly sculptural brick fire-tower it is possible to look over the site as a whole and to imagine it as it once was, before returning to ground level and the sound of doors banging hollowly in the wind.

Though the disbandment of Holford's hostels organization was not completed until early in 1943, his own part in it effectively ended in the autumn of the previous year. In September 1942 his staff received a letter from the Planning Department at the Ministry of Works & Planning, telling them that from the end of the month he would be withdrawing from regular involvement in the contract to concentrate all his energies upon the still larger and far more significant responsibilities which now demanded his attention in Whitehall.[29] Of his own feelings regarding the experience we have no direct evidence other than his conventional expression of regret. It had not been a project in which he was intimately involved in the architectural as opposed to the managerial sense, but he seems to have taken pride in its success as an example of very fully-developed team-work of the sort which he had advocated before the war. It was to be the largest piece of executive architecture which he would ever undertake and, recalling the conditions under which it was produced, one wonders if it was not also the best.

Chapter Six
Reconstruction

REITH'S REGIME

In the middle of 1940, the atmosphere of British public life changed radically. On the 25th May the British Expeditionary Force, under threat of entrapment and without adequate air support, began its retreat to the French coast. In the following ten days over 300,000 British and Free French servicemen were evacuated from Dunkirk. The initial reaction was mixed. There was confusion, some panic and, on the Left especially, a sense that the established political order was about to topple. Widespread anger was directed against the 'Guilty Men' who had governed Britain and appeased Germany in the 1930s and although the government did not fall, it was thereafter unable to contain the pressures for change which had built up over the preceding decade.

After Dunkirk, the need for total mobilization of the nation was felt as never before. Throughout the 1930s 'middle opinion' had been increasingly aware of the need for a transformation of democratic society to meet the challenges of fascism and communism. In a Britain which was now without European allies, and in which the quality of civilian morale was open to question, the dangers of conceding to Germany the ideological as well as the military initiative gave the established arguments new force.[1] Pressure for a clear statement of War Aims resulted, on 23rd August, in the establishment of a War Aims Committee of the Cabinet charged with the tasks of reviewing the prospects for a durable post-war international settlement, and of considering

> means of perpetuating the national unity achieved in this country during the war through a social and economic structure designed to secure equality of opportunity, and service among all classes of the community.[2]

From this point onwards Britain possessed a formal machinery for the consideration of reconstruction problems, the creation of which opened a door into Whitehall through which there came large numbers of new men and new ideas.

The heavy bombing of British cities began in September, and placed rebuilding high upon the list of reconstruction priorites. The government department with responsibility for town planning under the existing powers was the Ministry of Health; but it was Lord Reith, the Minister of Works & Buildings, who with his boundless ambition, talent for

publicity and the support of Ernest Bevin was able to obtain a restricted brief for physical reconstruction.

It was a fortunate juncture at which to take up such a responsibility, for the Report of the Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population (the Barlow Report) had been published at the beginning of the year. Originally appointed in 1937 as part of the official response to acute decline in the regions of traditional heavy industry, the Commission had taken exhaustive evidence and its findings were a comprehensive condemnation of the existing situation, and of the policies which were supposed to deal with it.[3] It recommended the creation of a national authority to serve the threefold objective of redevelopment in congested towns, the decentralization of industry and population from them, and the promotion of a balanced distribution of industry between regions.[4] The Report provided a weapon ready-made for Reith's empty hand, and he moved quickly to make the most of his opportunity.

His first step was to circulate what was, in effect, his personal manifesto for reconstruction, a draft memorandum which envisaged the creation of a new Government department with planning powers more sweeping than anything the Barlow Commissioners had dared to suggest. More immediately, he proposed to initiate a research programme of his own, to work out in detail the kinds of information required, and policies to be pursued, by such a department.[5] He lacked the staff or organization to carry out such a programme, so he set about finding them.

Holford was high on Reith's shopping list, his praises being sung by Hugh Beaver, who was appointed to a senior position within the Ministry at this time, and by Reilly, with whom Reith dined in November.[6] The Ministry of Health, too, believed Holford to be 'a sound representative of the more modern trend'.[7] This recommendation came too late to have any bearing, for Holford was given a very rigorous interview by the Minister in late November or early December, and was offered a job before the end of the year. It was not until February 1941, however, that Reith obtained Cabinet approval for the recruitment of a small staff to advise him upon his responsibilities for physical reconstruction, and Holford's appointment was announced in the Liverpool papers.[8]

The organization which Holford joined was a curious entity: in, but not of the Ministry of Works, the Reconstruction Group worked directly to Reith through H.L.G.Vincent, a distinguished career civil servant who between 1928 and 1936 had been Private Secretary to successive Prime Ministers. At the outbreak of war he had been Principal Assistant Secretary to the Committee on Imperial Defence and had thereafter been seconded to the Ministry of Food.[9] He came to Reith, one assumes, on the recommendation of Lord Woolton. Under the difficult circumstances in which the Group had to operate, his ability and his familiarity with the methods and personalities of Whitehall were more important than his lack of any previous knowledge of town planning, and he became the principal guiding intelligence behind Reith's early initiatives.

Vincent's initial staff was small, and was drawn from diverse backgrounds. H.C.Bradshaw, who had been Britain's first Rome Scholar in architecture, came from the Royal Fine Art Commission to be Vincent's assistant. S.W.C. Phillips, an administrator from Liverpool University, was brought in to act as secretary to an advisory committee of senior officials. E.S.Hill, a Ministry of Health administrator, was given responsibility for safeguarding future plans in the face of immediate wartime pressures, and for meeting imminent legislative needs. John Dower was given charge of a small team working on the

future planning system: their first task was to produce proposals for the treatment of 'reconstruction areas' created by bombing. Holford's responsibility was to begin the assembly of basic information for national and regional planning, largely through contacts with other government departments and by gaining the co-operation of independent research groups in the regions.[10] As he had just been asked to undertake the Ministry of Supply's hostels programme and had begun to expand his organization in the Midlands and Lancashire, Holford could only undertake these tasks by working seven days a week, travelling overnight in crowded wartime trains between Lancashire and London to give himself first one, and then two days at Lambeth Bridge House.

The first year of work was for the Reconstruction Group a frustrating one. Reith and Vincent were seeking to introduce an immediate strengthening of the planning system and the stimulation of planning work among local authorities. For this, they believed that the immediate creation of a new central planning authority was essential. They also believed that the Reconstruction Group should form the nucleus of such an authority, but Reith lacked the powers, and the Group lacked the capacity to take up that mantle. As Vincent wrote to Reith on the 4th April,

> We need an early decision on our functions. Then we can frame our organization accordingly. Meantime, in trying to go beyond our recognized purposes, we are working under strain.[11]

During 1941 Vincent engaged in a protracted struggle to obtain more staff. Some expansion did occur: very soon after Holford's appointment Thomas Sharp arrived to share an office initially with Holford and Dower, and then with Gordon Stephenson who, at Holford's suggestion, was brought in to work on post-war planning technique. Sharp, talented but mercurial, was one of the most experienced and knowledgeable planners in the country, and felt some resentment at working under the relatively inexperienced Holford.[12] Stephenson had no practical planning experience, but with four years of postgraduate training in Paris and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology behind him he was perhaps the best-educated planner of his generation for the work which now presented itself. The services of George Pepler, senior planner in the Ministry of Health, were available from February onwards for the supervision of the Group's work as it affected local planning: presumably the intention was that he should both assist and restrain.

The immediate stumbling-block to further appointments was the Treasury. Vincent pressed for more money, but met strong resistance to any suggestion that the Ministry of Works might be setting itself up as an aspirant central planning authority in advance of the fact.[13] Behind the Treasury's reluctance lay continuing uncertainty as to the division of functions, which was not confined to Whitehall. Some city corporations, among them Coventry and Sheffield, had come to Reith for advice, while others such as Bristol had gone to the Ministry of Health. The Reconstruction Group view was that local authorities should be encouraged to prepare non-statutory post-war plans which might be compatible with the new guidelines being evolved under Vincent, rather than expend time on statutory plans under the existing legislation which would become redundant as soon as the new system emerged.[14] The Ministry of Health, however, held strongly that as it was itself the central planning authority, it retained its responsibility for ensuring that local

authorities would be ready with reconstruction plans at the end of the war.[15] While Reith was responsible for considering the shape of future law and administration, it was argued, he had no mandate to interfere in the preparation of actual plans.[16]

The issues dragged on through 1941. According to the official historian, it was clear to all concerned that some new authority would have to be established; but equally, 'it was generally felt by ministers that the final form of such a body could not be decided in a hurry'.[17] Part of the problem lay in the fear (fed by Reith's demands for ever-wider terms of reference) that a confrontation of the issues involved in physical planning would also tend to bring the broader and more controversial issues of national economic planning to the forefront: reluctance to see this happen created 'delay, hesitation and timidity in government decisions which seemed sometimes incomprehensible to the critics'.[18] More fundamentally, no sensible decision could be reached upon the powers of a new central planning authority until some solution had been found to the problems of compensation and betterment. These were not only legal and technical questions of the utmost complexity: they were also the most delicate and potentially explosive of political issues. To raise them would be to raise the entire question of rights in private property, and the possibility of land nationalization. Ministers and civil servants alike approached these matters with extreme caution, awaiting the report of the Uthwatt Committee, which Reith had appointed at the start of the year to consider the compensation and betterment issue.

Holford's year with Reith consisted in the main of meetings, followed by more meetings. The knowledge gained and contacts made would later be useful, but in the meantime there was frustration. Sharp, who had entered the Ministry with great hopes, was within a few weeks badly ill, and believed that the 'utter frustration at the absolute uncertainty and lack of any progress in the initiatory work of the small section to promote physical planning work' was a major contributory factor.[19] When Sharp returned to work he was given the joint secretaryship to the Scott Committee on Land Utilization in Rural Areas, and was subsequently preoccupied with his own highly individual projects. Dower, another individualist, tended increasingly to become absorbed in his own work on National Parks. Sharp later believed that the slow initial growth of the Reconstruction Group was largely due to Holford's other commitments, which left him neither the time nor the drive to develop its work.[20] In fact, until the position became clearer and the resources were made available, there were few technical initiatives that could usefully be undertaken on a large scale. Those that did emerge were of either a highly general or of a highly specialized nature. During 1941 members of the Group had undertaken the collection of information for a national survey of land resources and uses, established a mapping base, canvassed opinion from interested bodies on planning standards for zoning, open space and the replanning of reconstruction areas, and had formed opinions about the other things they would have liked to do had they been able.[21] In what was an important year in the history of British town planning Holford was left awaiting the outcome of high-level political and administrative discussions, and of expert committees, his influence diluted beyond identification by either his biographers or himself in the general wash of Whitehall.

The year ended badly. Marjorie had become pregnant, but the embryo was misplaced and had to be aborted at four months. Ill with bronchial pneumonia, she was told that she would not conceive again. At the beginning of the new year Holford wrote to friends in the Caribbean of their lives as lived 'in the doldrums'.

We are at the stage where one seriously considers making a clean break and offering oneself, however belatedly, to the RAF in whatever capacity they choose. I have had two jobs since the war began—one on wartime construction, with a first-rate team of architects, engineers and surveyors; and the other in the embryonic organization which should have become some time ago a Central Planning Authority, but hasn't yet matured. Construction, following a decision taken 3 months ago and not yet amended by recent events, has been ruthlessly cut down; and for all we know may just as ruthlessly and even more expensively be boosted up again in the near future. Meanwhile, however, half a million pounds worth of work on which we were engaged in November was suspended in mid-air during December, and I am told to cut down staff, and assemble it again later if need be. With a staff such as I now have (over 200, and dispersed on 20 different sites) this is not so easy. But even if more of our work were suspended we should come to an end in May. And a team of men, many of whom have been working together for over two years will then have to disintegrate by ones and twos. Hence the first doldrum…

The second doldrum is the situation of the 'disgruntled vulture' [Reith] with whom we both had sessions just a year ago. To use a naval metaphor he *still* does not know whether he's cabin boy or admiral and is so concerned about that single question that in the meantime he is not bothering to learn how to run the ship, nor any single part of it. You were perfectly right to chose a real job to the pillow fight we have been carrying on this last year. At the back of it all is the failure of the Government to make any definite pronouncement on the importance or otherwise of preliminary planning. Possibly, when the PM returns from the USA some decision may be arrived at. If there is no chance of improvement within the next month or two, most of us concerned will be signing off. We can go no further without regional and local authority contact: at present we have no authority to talk to them and most of them are setting up cock-eyed Council Committees or Advisory Committees unrelated to their neighbours or to the region, and without any central directives-even R. [Reith again] appreciates the gist of them; and given a good mandate I should feel inclined to go wholeheartedly along. But I am not sanguine.

I have learnt a few things in the interim: the main job of a central planning authority is land-use–i.e. planning rather than development. Some central body is urgently required to co-ordinate the policies of all Government departments in so far as they affect the use of land, and to relate them to agriculture, private development, public utilities and the needs of open space. It is a strange thing that no-one in this country marks even the war developments on a map so as to get a picture of what is happening.

The longer and more difficult job is the positive one of relating planning and development. Presumably some National Development Council must come into being, on which the chief of the CPA would sit.

> But any Development Commission whether for industry, housing, agriculture, forestry or national parks must be able to tell the CPA at the formulative stage what it aims at doing, as well as receive its approval at a later stage when plans for land development have been exactly defined.
>
> …The job of defining the standards of accommodation, open space, traffic etc. is probably the hardest of the lot because (1) there is no government supported consumer research; (2) there is no government statistical bureau save the RG [Registrar General] and (3) scientific or social advisers are only apparently required by the war departments.
>
> So there is plenty to do. We have begun on mapping, land utilization, reconstruction of war damage areas (with the WD Commission) and the formulation of standards to replace the old T & CP Act of 1932-but the real planning cannot begin until we have regional representatives with their planning officers, and are able to talk to the local authorities.[22]

Relief, however, was at hand. On the 11th February, 1942 Reith announced to the House of Lords a decision taken by the War Cabinet two days earlier.[23] The existing statutory duties in regard to town and country planning were to be transferred from the Ministry of Health to the Ministry of Works and Buildings, which would thereby become the Ministry of Works and Planning.[24] The pillow-fight, it seemed, was over.

PORTAL'S REGIME

With the fall of Singapore, the unimpeded passage through the Channel of three German warships, and a general decline in morale, the weekly intelligence report for the 23rd February spoke of 'the blackest week since Dunkirk'.[25] There was a demand for new leadership to restore confidence in the direction of the war, and Churchill contemplated major changes in the Government. Reith and the Minister in charge of the Reconstruction Secretariat, Arthur Greenwood, were about to embark on another round of argument about their respective powers when, on the evening of the 21st, Reith received notice of his dismissal from the Government.[26] Greenwood lost his own post shortly afterwards. The new Ministers—Lord Portal at Works, and Sir William Jowitt as Paymaster-General with responsibility for Reconstruction—lacked the standing of their predecessors. Indeed, Portal was thought by some civil servants to have had instructions to keep a brake on post-war planning work, and as public interest in reconstruction continued to grow, there was certainly little outward sign of activity.[27] Within Whitehall, however, wheels continued to turn.

The Cabinet's decision regarding the transformation of the Ministry of Works had not after all solved the problems involved in the creation of a central authority. The transfer of functions relating to existing legislation met some immediate needs, but at this stage there was still a diversity of views regarding the kind of planning in which a post-war government might engage, and no settled idea of the powers it might possess. The question of how it should be constituted, and indeed of whether it could be fully constituted at all in advance of this knowledge, was therefore a vexed one, and Portal's main task was to attempt a settlement of it.

The issues which were under consideration are of considerable significance for the kind of planning system which eventually emerged in Britain after the war, and also set the context for much of the work upon which Holford was to be engaged over the next four years. The fundamental question which was begged by any talk of a central authority was the relationship which town and country planning was to have with whatever arrangements might emerge for national planning in the broader sense. In the limited and self-contained form of town planning which had been carried out by the Ministry of Health before the war, the issue was not especially problematical: statutory planning had at that time amounted to little more than a series of local bye-laws illustrated by maps. It had no capacity to set programmes and, except in the laying-out of roads, was powerless to initiate development. Post-war reconstruction, however, could be expected to involve something of a far more wide-ranging nature, with the state an active participant in the comprehensive planning of entire communities. Such an interventionary style of planning would affect a far greater number of departmental interests in government, and involve a far higher level of expenditure. During the 1930s, moreover, the term 'planning' had acquired new connotations, which had influenced the framing of the Barlow Report. The physical planning of individual settlements was seen increasingly as an activity intimately connected with other and more general types of planning, which might include the regulation of the national distribution of population and production, and the co-ordination of the various activities of government which had an influence upon urban or regional development. There were many (Holford among them) who believed in the need for a co-ordinating 'overlord' body to undertake the control of national development in these ways, but whatever the outcome, the form which town and country planning administration might take after the war would clearly be dependent upon the wider arrangements which might be made in these respects.

As discussion on these matters dragged on into the summer of 1942, frustration was felt not only among those outside government but also among the technical staff of the new Ministry. Holford continued to flirt with other prospective employers: he made further overtures to the Admiralty and the RAF,[28] and asked the Permanent Secretary's permission to have his name put forward for the post of Adviser to the Comptroller of Development and Welfare in the West Indies. The reply was to the effect that

> although of course no promises could be made, I was expected to be available to the Department for some urgent work that it was hoped would materialize in the near future; and certainly before the end of the War.[29]

In the prevailing climate of uncertainty, he was evidently unconvinced, and somewhat coy letters continued to be exchanged with interested parties. One such, written at the end of the year, states clearly the frustrations of an architect-planner in Whitehall.

> With us the difficulties at the moment are largely administrative, and the main planning agents are (a) the big local authorities, (b) the transport companies, and (c) the large industrial concerns. Government holds, in this tightly-packed and ancient island, an uneasy balance between public and private interest, but has not solved the difficulty of promoting development itself-in which I include good architecture, public works,

> national parks and reservations, even a first-class road system. Most of our good ideas and creative energies go onto paper, into endless committee meetings, and through long stages of administrative adjustment—to end in compromise. I feel that more could be done in places where the need is greater and more immediate, where 'development' and 'planning' are (as now in the USA and its [the?] colonies) more often the same thing.[30]

Despite these reservations, Holford's dissatisfaction was no longer a matter of sheer inaction. The creation of the new Ministry had made practical forward movement possible: the local authorities could now be dealt with directly, and present advice tailored to future plans. In June, when the formal transfer of planning powers to the Ministry of Works was made, it was agreed that Holford's appointment should be put on a full-time footing.

The task which confronted him—in effect, the drafting of an agenda for governmental planning research—was considerable; but ideas upon which he could draw were not lacking. In the intellectual and architectural movements of the 1930s by which Holford had been influenced, research had figured as a central theme. More generally, there was a widespread belief that research would have the power to transform everyday life. Military research would help to win the war; economic research would contribute towards improved production, trade and employment; and social research would provide the foundations for a better polity. When these ingredients were mixed in the intellectual pressure-cooker of impending and then actual war, the result could take on a flavour that was little short of millenial.[31]

This optimism regarding the beneficial and practical potential of scientific rationality was reflected in the work of the small planning staff within the Ministry of Works. Confronted with difficulties in defining standards of provision, or criteria for judging the best use of land, or preferred settlement size or form, Holford and his colleagues looked to research as the means of resolving issues which otherwise provided rich material for conflict, both within and outside the ranks of the planning movement.

A faith such as this carried with it an unavoidable burden of intellectual arrogance. Memoranda circulated in the Ministry throughout the period indicate again and again an attitude of superiority towards external critics such as the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), whose positions were perceived as either partisan, or based upon inadequate information. Underlying the research work undertaken during the war was the hope that the standards and criteria which might ultimately be enforced would be grounded not upon any political mandate or resolution of conflicting interests, but upon an evaluation of needs which could command general support as the best and most scientifically objective available. All this might seem to imply an expectation that facts, once gathered, would speak for themselves; but nearly all of those involved had already anticipated their message. By 1942 the question posed in most of the leader columns of the national press, and in the minds of those actively involved in planning, was not whether the Barlow Report and Uthwatt's Interim Report ought to be implemented, but when and to what extent the Government would do so.

It was against this background that Holford had, in March 1942, prepared the first of two discussion papers outlining the basis upon which a National Survey might be

undertaken. Given the fluidity of the situation, it was a difficult time at which to make such recommendations. He felt sure, on the basis of Government commitments already made, that 'whatever changes the war may bring we shall not return to conditions of life and work as they were in 1939'.[32] There would be some form of central land-use planning and it might also be assumed that there would be some sort of response to the recommendations of the Barlow Commissioners regarding the control of industrial location, and to the awaited final report of the Uthwatt Committee. However, vast areas of uncertainty remained, and as Vincent put it in a note to the Permanent Secretary, Geoffrey Whiskard, 'Our main problem is to decide what national planning will do, and how'.[33]

Given that his proposed National Survey would tend to define the terms of the planning task as it emerged, Holford took it upon himself to raise the sights of the Ministry which had hitherto, he argued, been 'tending to aim too low'.[34]

> It may be contended …hat planning becomes ineffectual when it strives to be all-embracing. Nevertheless, it is the planners–or the planning element—in local as well as central government to whom the work of co-ordination on a basis of land use will fall. And at the survey stage *the field should be as wide as possible.* It will be soon enough to put up fences and define boundaries when the administrative stage is reached.[35]

In particular, he proposed an immediate start upon the basis of industrial policy. The Ministry had, as a priority, to work out how the post-war relationship between the control of the industrial economy and the control of industrial location would operate, so that consequential advice could be given to local authorities as they prepared their post-war plans.[36] Information would also be needed on trends within industry itself: planners in the regions would want to know what allowances should be made for the effect of technological development or changes in the pattern of trade in future provision for industry. Among other matters upon which advice was sought were the likely availability of finance, the standards which might be expected, and the technical criteria which might be enforced as local authorities drew up their reconstruction plans. The formulation of central advice regarding replanning within the individual region was the other major priority identified by Holford as demanding immediate attention.

The means whereby these investigations were to be put in hand were constrained by an acute shortage of sufficiently skilled people. Those who were any good were already at work elsewhere; the Ministry was not able to offer enough money to attract them, and in any case its uncertain future made it difficult to offer firm prospects to prospective employees.[37] Under such circumstances the best that could be hoped for was a small team of experts in the relevant fields who could draw together the already existing information upon which future decisions might be made. Holford's initial list of requirements included expertise in statistics, industrial and transport economics, public administration, natural resources and technology—all these in addition to the existing specialisms identified with Stephenson (planning technique and 'social economics'), E.Christie Willatts (mapping), Sharp (civic design) and Dower (National Parks and recreation).[38] A team thus composed would operate principally by extracting relevant information from official sources, by stimulating relevant research activity among independent agencies in

the regions, and by commissioning special studies where necessary. 'It is not so much a case of promoting new research as of assembling existing information in a form which the planners can use'.[39]

Holford's proposals were circulated among a small body of senior Ministry figures including the Permanent Secretary Geoffrey Whiskard, the Deputy Secretary Lawrence Neal, Vincent, Pepler, and the Parliamentary Secretary with responsibility for planning, Henry Strauss. Though the reception which they received was generally sympathetic, Whiskard and Neal had doubts regarding the practicability of further recruitment in advance of a decision on the future status of the Ministry. Nonetheless Holford was allowed to go ahead with the production of a second draft, which appeared in May 1942. This outlined in greater detail the specific tasks to which research staff might be deployed, and sustained the pressure for an expansion of the Ministry's research establishment. The areas of work which Holford foresaw as requiring attention came under four headings, the first of which was the provision of technical advice to local authorities on the preparation of their own surveys. Second was the formulation of such advice regarding future government intentions, in relation to such things as local authority finance and organization, transport policy and the offering of industrial incentives, as might be called for as individual localities prepared their forward plans; and also the assembly of information regarding longer-term economic, technological and demographic trends which would not otherwise be available to local planning authorities. Thirdly, and in Holford's view of the most immediate importance among the studies to be undertaken, were comprehensive surveys which would work out on a region-by-region basis the implications of the kinds of policies recommended by the Barlow and Scott reports, and which would also provide preliminary guidance for the eventual reorganization of local planning administration. Under existing circumstances there could be, he argued, little practical distinction between survey and administration: both local and central government were 'feeling their way', and

> what is obviously important is the establishment of a two-way contact *before* planning becomes operative. Joint investigation on a regional basis is not only a first step towards town planning, but also a means of setting up a new form of relationship between central and local authorities.[40]

Finally, there were a range of matters which because of their general or national significance could only be examined centrally, most notable of which were the industrial policy/physical planning relationship, and the technical and policy options available within it; the general objectives and techniques involved in the redevelopment of urban areas; the delimitation of National Park boundaries; and the determination of priorities in the post-war public works programme.[41]

Holford's two papers had, with Vincent's support, aimed high indeed; they argued that the Ministry of Works and Planning, despite the prevailing uncertainty, should take the initiative in the preparation of a comprehensive plan for national development.[42] That Reith should have asked for as much does not, knowing Reith, surprise us. That a small group of civil servants in a minor department of state should seriously discuss the possibility of creating an integrated approach to local government organization, industrial location, public works and settlement policy-all these being matters beyond their

effective control at the time—is a phenomenon which speaks perhaps more eloquently than any of Reith's speeches of the atmosphere of 1942.

Events would later reveal Holford's proposals for a National Survey and Plan as wildly optimistic: the normal processes of politics could not be so easily subverted by reasoned research. The planners of 1942, however, had not the experience of innovations tried and found lacking which informs the consciousness of their modern equivalents. Failures of the market rather than failures of state intervention were the lessons to be learned from the 1930s. It was not so much that they were naive as that they considerably over-estimated the strength of the tide with which they were swimming.

The publication of the Uthwatt and Scott Reports in September tended to support rather than otherwise the view of forward planning put forward by Holford,[43] but their assumption that some new form of central planning authority would be required did nothing to assist the progress of work in the existing Ministry, which was in the position of being at the same time responsible for post-war planning and, because it was under notice to quit that responsibility, unable to recruit the staff to do the job. In November, however, the Cabinet finally agreed to the establishment of a new Ministry of Town and Country Planning, and the recruitment of additional staff could proceed. In February 1943 Vincent became Principal Assistant Secretary, and Holford Chief of Research, in charge of a much-expanded Research Division within the new department.

The Portal regime had not, so far as Holford was concerned, resulted in any major constructive work, but it had been the seed-bed for many of the ideas which in the coming three years would be worked out through the medium of the new organization. Vincent and he could not claim to have been the authors of any of the particular proposals which constituted the substantive aims towards which the Ministry had worked: those had derived mainly from the work of the Barlow Commission. Theirs, however, was the prime responsibility for the practical testing, in a government setting, of ideas which had long been the subject of free and often facile discussion in the planning movement.

Although the research effort dominated Holford's time in the Ministry of Works and Planning, there had of course been other work to do. With Pepler, who was Chief Technical Officer in the Plans Division, he was the senior figure on the technical side and was consulted as a matter of course upon a wide range of matters—among them the commissioning of Abercrombie for the preparation of the Greater London Plan. His advice was well received: as well as an exceptional capacity, much remarked upon, to identify the essence of a problem or a person's motives, he had the knack of dealing with the patricians who occupied the upper levels of Whitehall. His personal prestige rose. 'Outside' commitments multiplied: in October of 1942 the British Council sent him on an uncomfortable and hazardous flight to neutral Sweden for a series of lectures, meetings and the study of Scandinavian housing design. In December he was invited to become a member of the Royal Fine Art Commission. He was also attempting to sustain his private practice in Liverpool –

> a sad story. The only point in maintaining it is that I have quite a lot of work but cannot draw any salary for it on top of what I am getting from the Ministry. But as I am only temporary here, I must keep the 'firm' going for after the war.[44]

He was under financial as well as physical strain, and continued to explore avenues of escape to more congenial work, at least until December 1942; but with the creation of the new department this appears to have changed. In the same month as he took up his post in the new Ministry he moved house from Rutland Gate to 13, Little Chester Street, and settled in ‘for the duration’.

Chapter Seven
The Ministry of Townand Country Planning

THE NEW MINISTRY

The circumstances under which the new Ministry was born were very different from those which had produced the original reconstruction machinery in 1940. The entry into the war of the Soviet Union and of the United States in 1941, and Allied victories towards the end of 1942, had reduced somewhat the prevailing sense of crisis and made it easier for politicians to anticipate the return to normal party politics. The over-riding need for national unity, so keenly felt in the year of Dunkirk, was still a real force; but it bore down upon underlying political differences with a diminishing weight. When the House of Commons debated Sir William Beveridge's report on Social Insurance, large cracks were revealed in the coalition, and a speech by Churchill on postwar reconstruction broadcast the following month did not conceal the Prime Minister's reluctance to accede to any further stimulation of public expectations.[1] Nonetheless, reconstruction issues could not be suppressed: pigeons despatched by Reith and Greenwood, in the persons of Scott, Uthwatt and Beveridge, had now come home to roost. There were in any case those among Conservative ministers who retained their appetite for such schemes. Those who did not found that initiatives which they had previously countenanced now possessed a political momentum of their own.

The most pressing issue facing the Ministry was the question, posed by Uthwatt's Interim Report, of what steps should be taken to prevent post-war reconstruction from being prejudiced by unrestrained development. A Bill intended to secure the immediate position had been prepared under Reith but had foundered in the discussions over the form of the proposed central planning authority.[2] The new Minister of Town and Country Planning, W.S. Morrison, was able to bring a fresh draft forward in March 1943, and the Act came into force in July.[3] In effect, it strengthened the Interim Development Control previously exercised under the 1932 Act and applied it over the entire country. Its introduction of territorially comprehensive control over development was a coup of striking significance to those who recalled the procedural complexities which were characteristic of British planning before the war.[4] To many contemporaries however, it remained a disappointment, for it contained no indication of the basis upon which a post-war planning system might operate. News of this was awaited with ever-increasing

impatience. As F.J.Osborn remarked at the Town and Country Planning Summer School in the month after the 1943 Act had come into force:

> It is just as if we had by assiduous publicity gathered an audience in a vast theatre and kept it waiting for hours for a curtain that won't go up. There is a muffled sound of fiddles being tuned but the performance doesn't begin. Rather to my surprise the audience hasn't yet drifted away. It sits on in the dark, and shuffles its feet with impatience. The delay has produced a curious mood; a growing conviction that when the play does at last start it will probably be a rotten play. But having paid our money, we may as well wait and see the first act.[5]

Behind the curtain, in the Caledonian Club in St James' Square, a cast was still being assembled. The bases of the new Ministry's organization and staff were inherited from the Ministry of Works: Whiskard and Neal retained their former positions, and Phillips became for a time Morrison's Principal Private Secretary. The Under-Secretary in charge of the Legislation Division was E.S.Hill, an important figure in a Ministry which had largely to make as well as administer its own law. Also at the rank of Under-Secretary was G.L. Pepler, formerly of the Ministry of Health and now in charge of the new Ministry's Plans Division. His was the job of supervising the day-to-day work of local authority administration, and of controlling the Inspectorate and the Ministry's ten Regional Planning Officers. In addition to these responsibilities Pepler also had a general brief in 'the shaping and co-ordination of policy, the consideration of the numerous general topics which must be kept continually under review'.[6] As surviving files from the Ministry clearly show, Pepler was a central figure in discussion of policy: but in practice the most significant exchanges tended to occur across rather than within divisional boundaries. Staffed mainly by career administrators and by technical officers with Civil Service backgrounds, the Legislation and Plans Divisions were rich in experience and wisdom; they were not, however, obvious melting-pots for the many new ideas which were coming into circulation. This role was played by the third major arm of the Ministry, the Research and Techniques Division.

Under the new regime, Vincent retained the administrative and Holford the technical responsibilities which had been theirs under Portal, but they now had a much expanded staff under them. They recruited extensively from outside Whitehall. To reinforce Sharp and Stephenson in their work upon what was loosely described as 'Planning Technique', they bought in staff from other Ministries, from Holford's hostels team and elsewhere. H.Myles Wright, a former editor of the *Architects' Journal*, became the head of a new Information Section, and new categories of research officer were created. Stanley Beaver, a geographer specializing in minerals, was responsible for 'Central Research', John Dower for 'Field Research', and a post of Research Statistical Officer was eventually filled by G.H.Daniel. There was also a new group of researchers who were to carry forward Holford's earlier investigations into the need for, and uses of, regional research. Among the senior figures in the Division the formal demarcation of responsibilities turned out to be less important than the organizational chart might suggest.[7] With few exceptions, there was a free interchange of opinions and information at the higher levels, as indeed there was within each individual section. In the expanded organization,

however, exchange between sections at more junior levels diminished as each took on its own distinctive characteristics. It is noteworthy that the architects who dominated the Techniques Section had markedly different perceptions of events within the Ministry from those of the regional research officers. Some of these differences of view were to reverberate long after the war was over, but even the most important of these personal frictions and frustrations was only a small part of the long and tortuous story of regional planning in Britain.

REGIONAL PLANNING: ATTEMPT AND FAILURE

As we have seen, Vincent and Holford had become convinced at an early stage of the need to formulate post-war planning objectives on a regional basis. They were not thinking only in terms of the limited co-operation achieved among planning authorities before the war: influenced by the Barlow Report, they sought to achieve an overall picture of the trend of development within each region, and to relate this to a national development strategy. This national dimension of their thinking was made clear when Holford addressed a meeting of the Town Planning Institute in April 1943.

> I am not thinking in terms of the aggregate of proposals from 61 county councils, 83 councils and 309 non-county boroughs, 512 urban and 475 rural districts, or 11,100 parishes. I am attempting to think rather in terms of 58,000 square miles; of a population of 41 million; of the economic and natural resources of the geographic regions of the country; of 10½ million taxpayers whose taxes are mobilized for public use to the tune of over 30 per cent today, as compared with 6 or 7 per cent in 1914; of 10½ million houses, and the new 4 million that we are to build in the first decade or so after the war; of three-quarters of a million shops; and of a road system that is already over 160,000 miles in total length, and used to be the scene of 16 fatal accidents a day.
>
> To think at all in such terms, while awaiting policy decisions on questions of national economy, may be considered a hopeless task. Town planners, in the years before the war, tended to regard the national problem as theory and the local problem as practice. That kind of practice will probably remain the chief livelihood of our profession and its best school of experience. But it is now quite clear that something more is expected of the physical planner than that he should draw up a scheme under prescribed powers and to meet defined conditions. He is now being told to plan, *or to prepare to plan*, for requirements that are, at best, loosely defined; and with a promise that what he says is essential in the way of powers, will be seriously considered, and presumably introduced for legislation. It is therefore essential that, besides the piecing together of local surveys in joint committee areas, there should be some attempt at an open approach to national questions in a national survey.[8]

Holford was well aware that any overall plan of national development would have to rest upon an analysis of, and a degree of control over, the location of industry: 'generation should precede distribution', he told the Institute. He was equally aware that the assembly of information which might be needed in tackling the relevant issues of regional and industrial economics was an enormous task. The Ministry of Works had possessed neither the resources nor the skills to gather or interpret these data, and Holford had, with Vincent, pressed for the appointment of economic geographers and other specialists who might gather the necessary intelligence on a regional basis.[9] This they finally achieved with the establishment of a separate planning Ministry, and early in 1943 eight posts for regional research officers and assistants were created. The intention was that they should work alongside the already-existing Board of Trade investigators and the Ministry's own Regional Planning Officers, producing their own research and collating that of others. Thus forward planning and the research upon which it might be based would advance hand-in-hand, and the products of regional research would be related at the centre to an emerging national planning strategy.

Such a strategy would clearly require a high degree of co-operation among the many Government departments which had relevant responsibilities. Vincent and Holford were well aware that such co-operation would not easily be achieved. The former had been chairman, and the latter a member of the inter-departmental Advisory Committee on Reconstruction which had been established in 1941 as part of Reith's elaborate consultative and advisory machinery. Vincent later recalled that they had been 'shooed off in their attempts to 'break the departmental blockade' by the Board of Trade and the Ministry of Labour.[10] Minutes of the Committee's deliberations survive among the Holford papers, and show that these were not alone among Government departments in their coolness towards proposals emanating from Vincent's group.[11]

That experience had not been encouraging, but with the creation of the new Ministry the two men were still at pains to 'show the subjects to other Departments and get their concurrence over the large field which planning covers'.[12] Relations with the Board of Trade were of particular importance. The final dispositions of responsibility for industrial location were still uncertain, and Holford was involved in discussions between the two depart-ments regarding the kind of controls and incentives which might eventually be applied. At a meeting with representatives of the Board of Trade in September 1943, a provisional agreement was reached upon the scope of each department's interests. The Board of Trade would maintain its responsibilities for production and financial controls, and the Ministry of Labour those for labour controls and transference. More surprising in view of subsequent events was the expectation that the Minister of Town and Country Planning, or a Commission responsible to him, would exercise responsibility for the 'physical aspects' of location, rehabilitation and redevelopment in industry, and that this would include such matters as the establishment of standards in the building of new factories and the setting of priorities in the relaxation of wartime controls on public works and building.[13] Clearly, Morrison's civil servants expected to secure a far greater degree of control over industrial location than they eventually achieved, and during 1943 they devoted considerable efforts to establishing the basis upon which that control might be exercised.

Their first concern was to determine what powers might best be taken under the range of options presented by the Barlow Commissioners. A number of discussion papers were

circulated from which it appears that there was a strong preference within the Ministry for a system of licensing for industrial development in areas where restraint was to be applied. Arguments were once more advanced for the removal of an important element of public policy from the realm of political debate, by the creation of a Development Court and a semi-autonomous Commission, on the grounds that

> the location of industry is a technical subject and it is very doubtful whether Parliament has sufficient information at its disposal to influence industrial location along the right lines.[14]

But how extensive could the new controls be? Holford noted that the Ministry 'cannot be of itself an Economic General Staff', and Daniel wrote a number of papers which pointed, amongst other things, to the difficulties which might be encountered in attempting to discriminate between different types of industry. The problem, as always, was to establish what might be workable as well as desirable. In this cause 1 Holford himself produced a not-uncreditable attempt to provide a system of industrial classification;[15] but it was decided that the limits of practicability would best be tested by gathering information in sample regions on an experimental basis. When Daniel reported back, it had become apparent that the resources of the Ministry were not sufficient to make proper use of the information which was already available, and it was an open question as to whether or not attempts to develop a 'finely-tuned' system of locational control could be pursued.[16]

Further doubts were raised when Vincent put a memorandum which encapsulated Research Division thinking on 'The Process of National Planning' to a meeting of Whiskard, Neal, Pepler and Hill in December 1943. The contents of this paper are described in Cullingworth's official history: among other matters, it described the extent to which land-use planning involved social and economic considerations which lay within the province of other ministries. Planning, it argued, was 'indivisible', and thus

> A common meeting ground must be provided for all the interests concerned in order that government policy may be integrated into a consistent whole and translated in a comprehensive way into terms of land use. That seems to be the duty of this ministry as visualized by Parliament.[17]

In providing this common ground, regional planning councils would act as the pivotal points at which both departmental policies and the interests of the local authorities should be combined into a single policy. Cullingworth has pointed out that the conception of planning thus advanced was that of a continuous process rather than an act of design, and that it was markedly similar to the view later expressed in the 1965 report of the influential Planning Advisory Group. That later report was to be strongly critical of the rigidity of the post-war development plan system, and was to lead to extensive reforms of it. It might thus be less than far-fetched to describe the Vincent-Holford diarchy within the Research Division as twenty-two years ahead of its time; but it might equally be said that their proposals were unripe for the time at which they were made. Certainly their senior colleagues within the Ministry thought so; at the December meeting it was agreed

that co-ordination of the land-use policies of the principal departments involved should be sought through some sort of steering committee, and that central direction of research was desirable to avoid gaps and duplication of work. However, regional planning boards and the full-bodied formal integration of policy argued for by the Research Division was held to be practically and politically unachievable.

This failure to gain departmental support was itself sufficient to undermine further investigations into the technical and methodological problems, but at the beginning of 1944 a much more categorical blow to the Research Division's interests in national planning was struck. The Cabinet's Reconstruction Committee decided against a ban on industrial development in London. This decision reflected a concern, both inside and outside Whitehall, that by interfering with industrial location physical planners might prejudice Britain's economic recovery after the War. It jeopardized both the general regional policy towards which the Board of Trade and the Ministry of Town and Country Planning were working, and the specific policy of restraint upon development in the South-East of England which, it was expected, would emerge from Abercrombie's Greater London Plan.[18] In the event this danger proved more apparent than real, but shortly afterwards a White Paper on Employment Policy indicated the Government's intention of giving sole responsibility for industrial location policy at the national level, including restraint in the South-East and promotion in what were now to be called 'development areas', to the Board of Trade.[19] Standing arrangements to allow all the departments concerned an influence upon location policy were provided for, but it was clear to Vincent that efforts to work out a joint approach now stood at risk of 'mutilation at every successive Government statement'.[20] In a memorandum to Neal he set out in bald terms the reasons why he considered the division of responsibilities to be so damaging.

> Industry is one form of development. Planning is concerned with it, apart from local siting, as the agency which brings the people, and creates the need for housing and social and public services. Planning should operate through the Board of Trade in relation to industry, and the Board of Trade may have primary responsibility for structural unemployment, but the Board should be contributing to and carrying out a unified policy of land use and development. Any Department which controls where industry goes determines the main lines of national planning—the distribution of population and size of towns.[21]

Vincent attempted to stir up some Ministerial resistance, without success. Subsequent events tended to bear out his judgement of the import of the Cabinet's decision. While the differing demands of national industrial production, inter-regional balance in industrial development and intra-regional settlement policy were such that their resolution into an integrated whole would always be unattainable, it was reasonable to hope that some means might be found of achieving a more reasoned compromise between them. This proved to be more than the British political and governmental system of the time could deliver. Instead, there was a 'tortuous and unconvincing' series of regional consultations between local authorities, government departments and statutory undertakers,[22] which bore no resemblance to the kind of national planning framework which Holford had

outlined to the Town Planning Institute in the spring of 1943. Not only did machinery for the effective integration of policy fail to emerge, but the making of a 'clean break' between responsibility for industrial location and that for the form and distribution of settlements had the effect of giving the conflicts which lay between these two spheres of interest an additional, institutional dimension.

Although the Board of Trade did not altogether destroy the decentralization policy, post-war planners came to regard it as 'the greatest enemy of planning in London'.[23] Faced with the choice of going to South Wales or staying where they were, many industrialists tended to take the latter option, or to seek out loopholes in the system of controls.

As early as 1949 it was clear that Britain's new planning system was not meeting the expectations of those who had participated in the wartime work of the Ministry. Without knowledge of economic movements local authorities could not hope to advance realistic proposals for physical development, and such proposals as they did advance were likely, in the absence of that knowledge, to be rendered meaningless by subsequent economic change.

Is it not conceivable that the regional research staff assembled to formulate the technical basis of a national strategy could have adapted itself to provide this more distinctively regional service from within the Ministry? Holford had been in no position to exercise significant influence upon the fate of the national planning idea; but he was well-placed to direct the redeployment of the staff which had been recruited, on his advice, for a job which had never materialized. Must he then share the blame for the subsequent weakness of British planning at a regional level?

In laying claim to a share in regional planning, geographers in the 1940s subscribed enthusiastically to the prevailing belief in the beneficent powers of research. Indeed, while the advocacy of research among modern architects was almost wholly ideological, British geographers had some reason to feel optimistic, for both theory and technique within their discipline were developing with considerable speed. Innovations which had either been introduced or were under development at the time included efforts to improve population forecasting, to map urban zones of influence, to apply Christaller's analysis of the size, distribution and hierarchy of urban settlements and, less convincingly, to calculate the optimum size of towns and desirable qualities of 'balance' in employment and social composition.[24] The Land Utilization Survey and the introduction of new mapping techniques had many direct applications in town and country planning. Expert studies of such relevant issues as the mobility of industry or the working of mineral reserves were being presented to planners at an ever-increasing rate. The quality of this contribution to the store of available knowledge for planning which was made by geographers and sociologists between, say, 1935 and 1950 has no parallel in the previous or subsequent history of British planning. Sargant Florence, Eva Taylor, Dudley Stamp, Ruth Glass, R.E.Dickinson and A.E.Smailes are among the better-known figures who made the effort to demonstrate the utility of their disciplines to planners. The regional research officers who were appointed in 1943 had some reason to feel that theirs was a contribution which ought to be valued by the Ministry.

The first difficulty with which they had to contend was a general vagueness regarding the job which they were expected to do. As we have already seen, Holford took the view that all things should move forward together. It was not only necessary but desirable that

approaches to local, regional and national planning should evolve jointly, and that the development of policy should advance in association with the development of technique. However, teamwork on this grand scale required either a highly structured method, or a remarkable degree of co-operative endeavour among those involved. Holford's attitude was not that he should establish a complex research mechanism and tell people what to do, but that each member of the team should contribute what he could. However, from the point of view of the regional research officers, newly installed and not having been party to the previous two years' discussions, there was a disconcerting uncertainty about what Holford and Vincent were trying to achieve.[25] Reactions to this situation varied, but in general the new recruits settled into sometimes uneasy harness with the regional planners and began to produce the kind of work they knew best how to do.

The differences between the two types of regional officers were marked. The regional planning officers, answering to Plans Division, were experienced men qualified in engineering, surveying or architecture, who had previously served either in local government or the Ministry of Health. Theirs was the responsibility for guiding the forward planning of the local authorities within their regions and of constituting the link between local and central intentions. Their views commanded respect, and Holford sometimes attended their monthly meetings in London. The regional research officers, on the other hand, were an unknown quantity. A few had had the opportunity to apply their skills in some public or official capacity, but these were the exception. Their inexperience could on occasion prove embarrassing; at interdepartmental meetings research officers would sometimes clash with other members of their own ministry, or fail to represent a departmental view with which they might be either unfamiliar or unsympathetic.[26] Their status and pay were less than those of their planning colleagues, and this was a source of understandable grievance. Most crucially, the attitudes of many architect- or engineer-planners were discouraging. Much planning thought at the time was programmatic rather than analytic. Strongly influenced by decentralist ideas, and especially by the propaganda of the Town and Country Planning Association, the generality of planners was less concerned with identifying problems than with propounding solutions. There was thus a widespread view that the geographer's contribution concluded with the preparation of the survey, and that thereafter the planner would apply his particular skills of design in preparing the plan.[27] Yet what point was there in a meticulous survey if its findings were thereafter to be subordinated to extraneous considerations? Anecdotes illustrative of the planner's attitude that 'geographers are people who know where Tonypandy is' are still current among surviving research officers.

Holford did make certain efforts to improve their status: in 1945 he argued with Hill in an attempt to ensure that they, rather than the regional planning officers, should represent the Ministry on the interdepartmental Regional Boards established by the Board of Trade,[28] and there were instances of his intervening with the Permanent Secretary in attempts to improve the pay and status of the research grades. In time, geographers won fuller acceptance, and their contributions to such things as the siting of the new towns or the appreciation of such specific regional issues as the extraction of gravel in the Thames Valley were valued and acknowledged. Yet under Holford the regional research officers tended to become ever more isolated from the other sections in the Division, remote from their technical and administrative colleagues in Whitehall and inferior in influence to both. A Treasury organization and methods report of 1946 was critical of the failure to

get regional planners and researchers to work as a team, or to secure the co-ordination of the different sections working under Holford's direction. It led, directly or indirectly, to the appointment of 'Regional Controllers' exercising administrative responsibility for the regional offices-a move which Holford supported. Why had he not himself taken more positive steps to achieve the integration of technical and research work?

Various explanations suggest themselves. At the most immediate and personal level, it is known that some among the regional researchers were suspicious of control by an architect-planner. Holford's very infrequent attendance at their meetings, while no more than characteristic of his general disinclination to interfere unnecessarily, can hardly have encouraged them to approach him with problems or suggestions. It was not that Holford desired the exclusion of geographical or economic advice; at this time, quite the reverse was true. What appears to have happened was that resentment and a lack of confidence in Holford on one side, and extreme distaste for any sort of personal friction or confrontation on the other, contributed to an estrangement which the Ministry's establishment files clearly indicate was never formally intended. Ultimately, it was open to Holford to force the reintegration of the regional researchers into the body of the Division, and at one point he did attempt this. However, the suggestion that they be placed under closer administrative control (and hence brought into the mainstream of divisional work) met strong resistance. Some, at least, among the regional researchers appeared to want it both ways; they desired influence but were not prepared to sacrifice independence. That Holford did not press the issue may be judged a symptom of his temperamental weakness upon such points.

Secondly, there were difficulties inherent in the nature of the geographical contribution itself. The regional research officers were an able and creative group who produced a large number of studies relating to specific problems and particular areas.[29] A major element in their work was the 'planning summary', a relatively concise but comprehensive regional survey embracing social, industrial and economic factors, which was intended for use by the Ministry in its assessment of the regional effects which local proposals might have.[30] The sort of work produced for this purpose is illustrated by a book which appeared in 1949 and was largely based upon the 'summaries' its authors, Daysh, O'Dell *et al.*, had written during their time as regional research officers.[31] Study of this work casts light on some of the difficulties which were involved in putting geographical knowledge to a planning use: the surveys were predominantly descriptive, topographically oriented, and gave rise to recommendations which although markedly better-informed and relevant than those of the pre-war planning consultants, were nonetheless apparently arbitrary and intuitive.[32] What the geographer had to offer was not so much a cut-and-dried analysis, nor scientific method, as 'a disciplined process of thought'.[33] His broadly-based knowledge of the diverse forces at work in a given region was potentially valuable, but his findings were neither precise nor quantifiable. If he was not himself in a position to influence events, the utility of his contribution would depend upon the extent to which those who read his work were so placed, and could participate in the understanding which had informed its production. It was by no means evident to the authors of the 'planning summaries' that this was the case. Their reports, it seemed, simply disappeared into limbo—inevitably so as, with all but warrelated development at a standstill and no statutory machinery available, little immediate use that could be made of wide-ranging regional proposals.

Finally, the changes in the planning climate which occurred within Whitehall between 1943 and 1944 led to a tailing off of interest in regional planning among senior Ministry figures. It had become clear that they could not achieve the co-ordination of other departments' development-related activities. The concept of regional planning which they espoused was complex and often imprecise; the data and techniques which it required were either unavailable or costly to assemble; and the strictly material benefits which might flow from it were either unquantified or unquantifiable. Against this was set the scepticism of other departments which believed their own responsibilities, and the prospects for post-war industrial recovery, were threatened by what they perceived as the 'long-haired' enthusiasts of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning.[34] In such circumstances, planners could only negotiate for a 'planning viewpoint', and that from a position of relative weakness.

Disenchanted and increasingly at odds with Whiskard and Neal, Vincent was removed to Washington to look after the American interests of the Ministry of Production. Shortly afterwards, Holford became ill, having run up to the roof of his house in Little Chester Street during an air raid. Already suffering from an asthma attack, he 'knocked his heart up' and was in bed for ten days.[35] On his return his time was increasingly taken up with more pressing (and often more congenial) demands, and with filling the vacuum left by Vincent's departure. To do generalized battle with the Board of Trade over the location of industry, or indeed with the Ministry of Transport over trunk road strategy, would not on the experience of the past three years have been a productive use of scarce time. There were too many problems requiring immediate address and specific matters demanding effective interdepartmental liaison. In the view of Myles Wright, who at that time was liaising between the regional research officers and those in the planning technique section, it was apparent that 'directly we got on to a big geographical, regional, economic problem … we were entirely wasting our time'.[36] Departmental, local authority and other interests would immediately assert themselves, creating the now-familiar effect of mutual cancellation and inaction.

Holford did not, however, wash his hands of the matter. In 1945 he was still working towards 'the eventual setting up of regional planning committees at which … planning policy in the region would be discussed with all Departments concerned in the use and development of land'.[37] Indeed, he was arguing against the view that the Ministry should pull in its horns:

> I realize that all sorts of good reasons can be adduced for not concerning ourselves with the responsibilities of other Departments. And as far as administration is concerned this is obviously right. But neither survey nor actual development can be carried out otherwise; and in this sense planning becomes an interdepartmental activity. Experience … has shown that if planning principles are to be evolved and maintained, the preliminary presentation of the case as it affects the social and economic pattern of the region, its land resources and its basic services, is the indispensable preliminary to executive action…. Surely it is for the Department (and for the Regional Planning Committees if they eventuate), to deal with planning machinery and with methods of coordinating central planning policy and local plans. The question at the

> [Board of Trade's] Regional Board should not be: 'is there any objection by the local planning authority, or the Ministry, to the extension of a very large factory at X?'It should be, 'Having regard to the production needs, to labour and building priorities, to employment, and to the layout and resources of the region, can X be regarded as a suitable centre for the concentration of a particular industry or trade?' If regional survey is of any value at all it should be able to give the answer to part of this question in terms of economic geography.[38]

The regional planning committees did come into being, but never really functioned as the policy-making bodies which Holford hoped for.[39] So long as the Ministry lacked effective powers for regional planning, the best contribution that the regional research officers could make would be that of education and persuasion within the localities where they were based. This is precisely what they did.[40] It was, however, a function which might almost (but not quite) as well have been conducted from the universities, and indeed many of those involved left the Ministry in 1945 or shortly afterwards to continue their work from positions in academia. Insofar as they and their discipline had benefited from the wartime patronage of central government, the credit belongs to that group of advisers who first encouraged Reith towards a regional conception of his task. Dudley Stamp, Montague Barlow and Eva Taylor were among those responsible; so, too, was Holford.

CITY CENTRE PLANNING

Enthusiasm for large schemes of national and regional planning might have been greater within the Ministry had it not encountered severe difficulties in getting more limited forms of planning off the ground. It had been hoped that a new and comprehensive body of planning legislation might be worked out before the end of the war.[41] During 1943 and early 1944, however, it became apparent that there could be no early resolution of the financial, administrative and political problems involved. Among the issues to be decided were the powers and procedures which might be involved in compulsory purchase, the amount of money which might be available for reconstruction, and most crucially, the basis upon which betterment might be levied and compensation paid. The Treasury was worried by the planning Ministry's intentions not only because of the possible cost in compensation payments but also because of the likelihood that planning authorities without the money themselves to engage in a major way in redevelopment would nonetheless restrict private development, and thus create widespread economic blight in post-war Britain's cities.[42] These problems would have been sufficient to contend with in normal times. In the context of a coalition government, attempts to make progress on the compensation-betterment question produced what has been described, in a different context, as the revolving door effect: the more supporters whom political movement in a given direction pulled in at one side of the partisan divide, the more it pushed out at the other.[43]

There was, however, intense pressure upon the Government to enable local authorities to begin land purchase for the reconstruction of blitzed areas. It was obviously desirable

from a planning viewpoint that they should also be empowered to rebuild 'blighted' areas as part of the same exercise. Reith had made a point of encouraging local authorities to 'plan boldly', and many had undertaken or commissioned advisory plans which were positively grandiose. All of them were based on the assumption that substantial financial assistance would be forthcoming for land acquisition and other planning purposes.[44] The response to this pressure was the Town and Country Planning (or 'Blitz and Blight') Act which became law in November 1944. Exchequer grants were to be made available to assist local authorities in acquiring and clearing areas of extensive war damage. They were also enabled to buy obsolete or 'badly laid-out' areas, but in the face of Treasury objections no grants were made available for this latter purpose. It was thus a half-hearted attempt at redevelopment: nonetheless, its passing posed urgent questions for Holford's Techniques Section within the Ministry.

The redevelopment of central areas was a task in which Britain's local authorities were almost entirely without expertise. A few among the more energetic city corporations had taken powers by special Acts of Parliament to enable them to engage in city centre planning. The most ambitious of these had been Newcastle, whose local act of 1926 attracted a series of paler imitations in the inter-war period.[45] The experience, however, was not a happy one, and eventually Newcastle gave up its attempt to apply its exceptional powers to built-up areas.[46] Such 'civic improvements' as were achieved between the wars tended generally to be limited in scope and objectives. Comprehensive city centre planning, involving the large-scale and hugely expensive reorganization of commerce and communications, was in the early 1940s an unpractised art, and with the opportunity of practice denied it, theory was weak. Principles of road design, zoning for use and building height, and controls over external appearance were the principal devices that conventional wisdom had to offer. Planners might agree that it would be a good thing if London could be replanned 'mile by mile', but the 1939 MARS plan did not provide much guidance as to how, administratively, technically or financially, this might be achieved.[47]

Aware of this unpreparedness, Vincent had raised the matter at a meeting of the Advisory Committee on Reconstruction in July 1941. With Holford literally as well as metaphorically at his elbow, he had drawn attention

> to the suggestion that it would be of assistance to local authorities if some form of manual on the technique of redevelopment were prepared. The Committee were in favour of this proposal and agreed that the matter should be put in hand.[48]

The task, it seems, was given to Sharp, who early in 1942 submitted an outline of a text on 'Civic Design: with special reference to the redevelopment of central urban areas'. Two draft chapters survive: summarizing in general terms the conventional and architecturally-inclined wisdom of the time, they were never published or otherwise used within the Ministry.[49] However, with the creation of a separate Ministry, the redevelopment of central areas was revived as a subject for research when Holford included it in the list of matters which were to be dealt with in a series of advisory handbooks or manuals intended for the guidance of local authorities. Stephenson and Kennedy began to make 'somewhat spasmodic' studies of central area land uses, and the

assistance of the Building Research Station was obtained, but other pressures hindered the progress of this work.[50] Only when the advisory plans and reports prepared by local authorities and their consultants began to come to the Ministry, and the 1944 Act was passed, did intensive work begin.

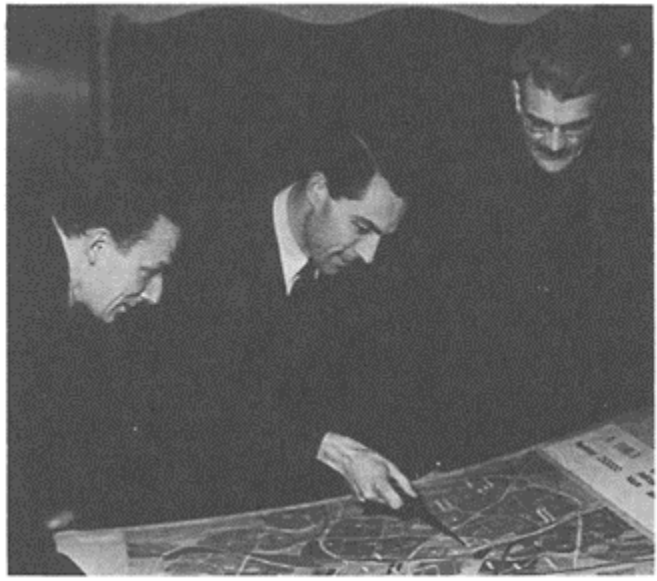
When it came, the Ministry's technical response took a relatively short time to evolve. Preliminary groundwork was done by a committee consisting of former planners and administrators from the Ministry of Health, chaired by G.T.Pound; but it was Dodd, the Chief Regional Planning Officer, who raised the problem of central areas with Pepler in March 1945. Pepler in turn contacted Holford, who himself had recently discussed the matter with the Legislation Division, and the three men-Dodd, Pepler and Holfordmet in April 1945. The result of their discussion was the establishment of a special committee to consider redevelopment standards in central areas, and the production of a 'leaflet' setting these out. Members were to be drawn from both Plans and Research Divisions, and Stephenson's name was put forward as chairman.[51] A first draft of its report was in circulation by October of the same year.[52]

It has often been asserted, and an examination of post-war Development Plans would seem to confirm, that among the concerns of British town and country planning the right use of land occupies a uniquely central position. There was a period of perhaps three decades when this was indeed the case, and if in the years preceding it the focus of interest was not so concisely defined, the generality of local authority planning nonetheless dealt overwhelmingly with plane surfaces. While the laying-out of roads and the application to units of land of various forms of restriction upon development may have passed muster as a technique of suburban planning, it was clearly inadequate for the reconstruction, in three dimensions, of city centres. The intensity at which central space is used creates particular difficulties and requires special treatment. To increase the speed and comfort with which many diverse bodies move about a confined space, while at the same time avoiding radical disruption to the delicate connections between economic and social activities within that space, is an operation of intimidating complexity. It cannot be pretended that Ministry planners in 1944 perceived the full extent of that complexity, any more than their successors can be said to do so today. What is apparent is that they did conceive the city centre as an economic and mechanical system operating in three dimensions and, on the basis of the rather modest proposal agreed upon by Holford, Pepler and Dodd, that they set themselves to enhance that system's performance by means which constituted little less than a technical revolution in urban planning. Diluted or otherwise adapted, the method which they developed was to be the basis of conventional wisdom in city centre planning, both in Britain and elsewhere, for nearly twenty years.

To understand the particular character of the approach which was evolved within the Ministry (and, incidentally, the reasons for its international appeal) one must make reference to the circumstances under which it was expected to be applied. The complexity of the problems with which local authorities were confronted was not matched by any equivalent sophistication on the part of their personnel. The high reputations which would later attach to the planning staffs of certain authorities were in the early 1940s yet unearned; there was only one planning team of any size in public service which had both the opportunity and the capacity for high-powered work, and that was Holford's.[53] There was, therefore, little to be gained from complex methodologies or technical elaboration:

nor, for that matter, was it advisable to put trust in the questionable talents of municipal engineers as civic designers. What was needed was a set of tools, and instructions for their use, which would make it possible to keep the urban machine running within the new range of performance intended for it. Much more than this was hoped for, but in the order of priorities this basic requirement was viewed as the most urgent.

The team which was assembled to work upon the new Manual was mixed in both age and experience. Stephenson had, as we have already noted, an extensive knowledge of the theory and technique of American planning. Pound contributed, as did J.A.Stewart; both had served as urban administrators in India before the war.[54] Among the younger architects employed



The three leading members of the younger generation of planners in the Ministry of Town and Country Planning. From left to right: R.T. Kennedy, Holford, and Gordon Stephenson.

Source: The personal collection of Gordon Stephenson.

in the work were Kennedy, R.E.McCaughan, John Earley and Peter Shepheard. Myles Wright was to draft the final text, but perhaps the most important contribution of all came from W.A.Allen and D.H.Crompton. Allen, a Canadian who was later to become head of the Architectural Association School, had been the first architect to join the scientists of the Building Research Station (BRS). During the 1930s the BRS had become interested in the relationship between natural daylighting and city form, and various attempts had

been made to relate daylighting to building height and population density.[55] The crucial variables in relation to lighting, however, were the form of, and spaces between, buildings; for these, some reasonably precise measure of the extent of 'built-up-ness', which could be applied to either individual buildings or blocks, was needed. Allen made the results of his work upon this problem available to the Ministry in 1944. Crompton had also worked for a time with the BRS, but by 1944 he had joined the Techniques Section, in which he played the role of the 'guru in the corner', who best understood the arcane mysteries of the new techniques.[56] Holford's part in the work of this group was general and supervisory rather than specific, but he was far from being remote from it.

The key instrument of measurement and control which emerged from the collaboration between Allen and the Ministry was the Floor Space Index (FSI). The basic concept was disarmingly simple, a single measure which expressed the relationship between the ground area of a site and the floor area of the buildings erected upon it. In survey, it was derived by calculating the usable floor area of the individual building and dividing the result by the total area of the site, including half the width of the adjoining streets. When each plot of land within the planning area had been thus surveyed, the result was a detailed picture of the intensiveness with which each part of it had been developed. The particular charm of the FSI, however, lay in its power as a medium of control. An index value could be fixed by the local authority for each unit into which the planning area was subdivided. It could decree that no development within an area zoned for office uses should exceed a certain value as measured by the index, and it could also establish a distinction between different maximum values within a given use zone. When an application to develop came to be submitted, the maximum permissible floorspace could be calculated by multiplying the area of the site by the FSI applicable to that zone, and consent could be given on the condition that this area of floorspace should not be exceeded.[57]

It had long been assumed that local authorities could determine, given effective statutory powers, the use to which each part of the city was put. The FSI made it possible to establish in advance the intensity of development, without the necessity of preparing highly detailed building specifications. In addition, the fixing of the amount and distribution of available floorspace appeared to limit the level of human activity which could be accommodated in any given location, and thus it was theoretically possible (on the daring assumption that the relevant forecasts were accurately made) to estimate and provide for future levels of traffic and employment. The Index was also a flexible tool: it allowed a variety of forms of development and a certain freedom to architect and developer. If, for example, a ground area of 10,000 square feet was available, and the FSI was fixed at 2, the developer could either cover the entire building area available within the site at two and three storeys to yield the permitted floor area of 20,000 square feet, or he could achieve the same figure at five or six storeys on a smaller part of the site. In this latter case a portion of the site would thus be available for car parking, open space or some other purpose.

The FSI did not in itself ensure that buildings would be so disposed in relation to one another that each would receive adequate daylight. In the narrow lanes of the City of London before the war, there could be seen complicated arrangements of mirrors erected to direct scant daylight into Stygian office interiors. As it was expected that building heights would increase, the problem of daylighting was evidently a continuing one. Its

solution was provided in the form of the 'permissible height' or daylight indicators. The technique made it possible to test new proposals on plan for the amount of obstruction they would cause to neighbouring buildings, and to establish limits below which daylighting within them should not be allowed to fall.[58] Together, the FSI and daylighting controls offered an unprecedented technical capacity to delimit,in three dimensions, the possibilities of redevelopment.

By September 1945 the Research Division had ready a model demonstrating the effects of the new techniques on building form and layout. This came as something of a revelation to those accustomed to the old forms of control, embodied for example in the London Buildings Acts. A member of the Ministry wrote at the time:

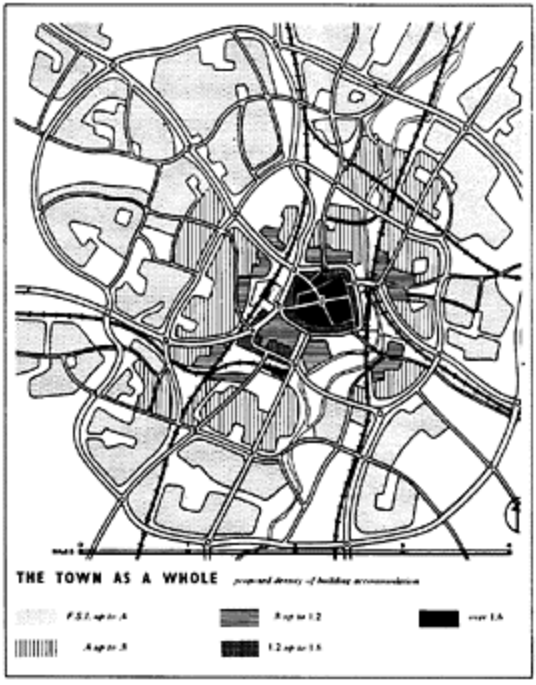
> I think Holford with characteristic modesty possibly underestimates the shock and stimulus which these new suggestions from his division give to many architects. Austen Hall told me yesterday that after seeing the models and discussing them with Mr Crompton, he went off and entirely replanned the large blocks in the city for which he has been commissioned—and after all he is a very well known senior architect.[59]

It was not just the breaking of new technical ground, but the thoroughness of the entire approach, which impressed contemporaries. The Ministry was providing explicit guidelines which indicated the principal matters with which city centre planning should concern itself, and the means of dealing with them. These were published in the *Handbook on the Redevelopment of Central Areas* in 1947, but were available to local authorities at an earlier stage. Many elements in the approach would have been familiar in theory, if not in practice. The segregation of different land uses together with the banishing of those considered unnecessary or inappropriate to a city centre location, was confidently advocated. There was to be, it was hoped, an evening-out of land values and in the intensity of use over the centre as a whole, and within each of its specialized parts. Accessibility was to be improved by the imposition of a hierarchical road system designed to take twice the pre-war volume of traffic, with tightly-drawn ring roads demarcating the centre and through traffic deflected from shopping streets. The result' was expected to be a more open, but still relatively compact, city centre. In comparison with its pre-war equivalent it would be more self-evidently 'articulated', in the sense that the relationships between each of its functioning parts would be rendered physically distinct: because of the more even and efficient use of space, however, it would occupy approximately the same area.

The completeness and business-like way in which this programme was put forward by a government department was entirely novel. No less striking was the systematic and practical manner in which the technical means of achieving it were explained. The 1947 Handbook set out, stage by stage, the method. Firstly local authority planners were to consider the town as a whole, in its historical context, and in terms of what redevelopment should seek to achieve. Secondly they were to conduct local and regional surveys. Thirdly, the main decisions regarding land use, accommodation and road layout were to be made, and on this basis the detailed street network, parking, block layout, open space and design controls were to be worked out. Finally, consideration was to be given to the means by which redevelopment could be guided, and to the formulation of a

programme according to which the plan could be implemented. The Handbook was in effect a ‘cookery book’ of urban planning, setting out the ingredients and the order and manner of preparation which would produce the desired result.[60]

The explicitness with which the Handbook was written is quite exceptional and entirely admirable: its authors were prepared to make unequivocal statements of even their riskiest assumptions regarding future demand for land,



Generalized depiction of a city centre plan from the *Handbook on the Redevelopment of Central Areas*, Ministry of Town and Country Planning 1947.

accommodation or road-space. This was boldness of a high order, for the greater part of the exercise rested upon what were little more than wellconsidered rules of thumb. Traffic in particular was to grow to far greater volumes than that envisaged by the Ministry during the war. Later critics have pointed out that there was little explicit acknowledgement of the social and economic effects of redevelopment.[61] The deficiencies could be enumerated at some length, but the Handbook’s specific defects are less significant than the general transformation which it brought about in the planning of city centres. Planners had long claimed that the community would benefit if they were allowed to apply that comprehensiveness of approach which was their particular attribute.

Until the war, however, this claim to the possession of a uniquely comprehensive approach rested somewhat shakily upon the often-disregarded methodological prerequisite of survey before plan, and upon the general breadth of knowledge and skill possessed by each individual planner. Holford's group gave technical substance to the comprehensive ideal by systematizing the available knowledge into an explicit method. To define comprehensiveness is to limit it, and while the method embraced the city centre in its physical and mechanical entirety there was much else that was excluded. Nonetheless, it was markedly more sophisticated than anything which had preceded it, and it was within the capacities of local authorities to make use of it. That the method was serviceable Holford himself would demonstrate, in the most difficult circumstances possible.

Though well-received both within and outside the professions, the practical effects of this qualitative change in technique and method were slow in coming.[62] Post-war austerity and the system of building licences kept redevelopment in check in all but a few cities, mostly those which were badly bombed. Perhaps this was just as well. There was still an acute shortage of trained planners when redevelopment finally began to gather steam in the mid-1950s. By that time the ideas contained in the Handbook had been adjusted and expanded by further government advice and technical development, but even so, local authorities did not make a particularly good job of it. Had the boom begun ten years earlier the results would probably have been even worse. It is, however, certain that when the time came, such means as local authorities possessed to cope with the pressures of redevelopment were derived directly from the work of Morrison's Ministry. The Central Areas Handbook moved city centre planning from one era into another, and one must look forward to the Buchanan Report of 1963 to find another shift of equivalent magnitude. The legacy of the approach may be seen today in Coventry, Plymouth or Leicester, cities which function, more or less, as Holford and his colleagues had intended. That their decent efficiency does not reach the heights of inspired civic design is a failure not directly attributable to the Ministry, which was not after all responsible for the condition of British architecture. Nonetheless, as Holford and most of the others who were directly involved in the preparation of the Handbook were architects, it is worth asking why more was not done to promote post-war civic design.

This issue first arose in the inter-departmental disputes which followed the redistribution of responsibilities during the war. Early in 1943 the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health, Sir John Wrigley, circulated a draft paper on the respective functions of the Ministries of Works, Health and Planning. Wrigley's view was that the new planning Ministry was concerned with the utilization of land, and 'having no architectural department, should concern itself with the character and surroundings of development, but not its design quality'. It was the Ministry of Works, he argued, which best filled the role of a 'Ministry of Architecture'.[63] Holford not unnaturally took exception to this and drafted his own guidelines, arguing a case for the new Ministry's involvement in design.[64] Consultations with other departments followed, but there was no real agreement. The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Works, Sir Percival Robinson, had not accepted that the new department had any grounds for impinging upon his own department's supposed role as the Government's central authority on architecture.

This failure to reach agreement was embarrassing, and there was some debate about how best to respond to Sir Percival's intransigence. Neither Pepler nor Holford, however, felt it advisable to provoke a confrontation at a time when all three of the Ministries involved had just agreed to collaborate in the preparation of a new Design Manual for housing authorities. Sir Percival, however, saw matters differently and continued to assert his ministry's role as special architectural adviser not only to the Government in general, but even to the Ministry of Town and Country Planning. Neal commented sourly that

> Robinson's tactics are perfectly clear. He has got his foot in and is now trying to get the door wide open.[65]

Neither side could persuade the other, and ultimately it was thought best to let sleeping dogs lie.

Departmental responsibilities apart, it was by no means clear that there was very much that central government could do in a general way to encourage good architecture or civic design. Holford, certainly, was not in favour of attempts to lay down the law in aesthetic matters,[66] and when Abercrombie took Stephenson to task over the Central Areas Handbook's thin treatment of architecture, the candid reply was that

> We are not ready to give guidance. The architectural profession would give a hundred different views, all of which would tend to cramp and straight-jacket design and probably run counter to sane economic, or if you like, organic laws.[67]

The first priority was to sort out the fundamentals of accommodation, circulation and amenity, but while Holford resisted the idea of a design manual which might be the architectural equivalent of the Central Areas Handbook,[68] he believed that the Ministry could take an educative role in propagating principles of civic design. He also argued that all local planning authorities should employ architects on their staffs, but further than this he would not go: the new approach to city centre planning was intended as a framework, and not as a straight-jacket, for designers.

A book intended to instruct local authority planners in some principles of design was eventually published by the Ministry in 1953, with a chapter on city centres written by Holford.[69] In practice, departmental officials gave advice to local authorities on matters of design, independently of the Ministry of Works. The promotional role which Holford hoped the Ministry might fulfil, however, remained muted in the presence of other departments which, with their own architectural staffs, felt equally competent to give guidance.

It is worth emphasizing, in view of recent interest in the issue, that all those involved in the Ministry's work during this period believed that planning authorities should have the right to prevent bad design, but so far as Holford was concerned good architecture was not a policy but a matter of skill and educated judgement. What was required was not more government intervention, but better advice at the local level. The final irony is that men so much committed to civic design as a practical art should have developed, quite unintentionally, a means of restricting its role in post-war planning. Local authorities armed with the Central Areas Handbook were not more but less dependent upon

architectural advice. The consequences were not immediately apparent: architects were in practice employed by the major cities in their redevelopment planning. In the longer term, however, the quantitative, standard-based method pioneered under Holford positively facilitated a routine and bureaucratic mode of planning, more all-embracing and systematic than that which had attracted his criticism in pre-war Liverpool, but equally dreary in its results. So far as his own career as a planner was concerned, Holford had helped to sow the seeds of his own subsequent disillusionment.

DESIGN FOR LIVING

Whatever the difficulties in their work on central area reconstruction, the initiative lay with Holford's Division. They were self-conscious innovators, not so much influenced by as active participants in the wider movements in society which were pressing new functions upon the state. There were, however, other areas of work in which they trespassed upon well-established territory. British town planning had its roots in the design of suburban housing, and housing remained the central concern of the planning movement's most influential pressure groups.[70] A vast literature and a considerable body of opinion and expertise was already in existence, and it was not long before those with an interest in the design of residential areas began to direct their influence towards the Ministry.

F.J.Osborn, Honorary Secretary of the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) was an indefatigable campaigner for the dispersal of population and industry from large cities, the rehousing of the urban population at much-reduced densities, and for the building of satellite new towns. He also had very specific and quite inflexible views on housing design: nothing less than individual family dwellings with generous gardens would do.[71] Though an amateur enthusiast, he was a major public figure in the planning world, a member of Reith's Consultative Panel, and he had been an important influence upon the Barlow Commission and upon Patrick Abercrombie. In 1941 he wrote to Holford, to press upon him the desirability of a 'maximum tolerable' density standard which might be applied to all post-war housing.[72]

It would be difficult to over-emphasize the importance of density standards in the history of British planning. To an outsider, the protracted arguments about the numbers of houses or persons which might be located on an area of ground may appear dry or abstruse, yet to no other issue, over such a length of time, have such strong emotions attached. The evils of the Victorian slum had been manifold, but none of its ills were so readily identifiable and so easily legislated against in new development as the absence of drains and the crowding of too many people into too small an area. Between the wars the control of housing density in new suburban development became the favourite planning device of local authorities,[73] and new council houses were routinely and often rigidly provided, under the guidance of the Ministry of Health, at twelve houses per acre.[74] The technical and administrative charms of the density standard were alluring. It both defined the problem and offered the solution to it. If it was generally agreed that working-class housing at more than 100 people per acre was undesirable, then where this standard was not met it was possible to diagnose a 'problem', perhaps even to identify a 'slum', without having to go to the bother or expense of achieving an understanding of all the

complicated factors which influence the use and satisfaction people derive from their environment. The Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction informed its students that

> the problem of density is studied in order to define maximum density limits; for if it is possible to agree on a definition, we shall obtain a convenient thermometer to indicate the diseased or healthy condition of existing communities.[75]

The solution was equally simple: the controlling authority had only to stipulate a standard for new housing and the actual design and construction could be left to the developing architects and builders. All useful quantified standards operate in this way: they maximize the amount of control exercised by the planner and minimize the amount of work required to achieve it. Yet the convenience of the density standard does not, on its own, explain the grip it had on the imaginations of planners and propagandists for planning.

The setting of standards for population or housing density, or for that matter open space, Floor Space Index or any other principal elements in the composition of a town, have served as means of expressing and giving definition to quite fundamental substantive principles relating to urban form and structure. Their general and abstract nature makes them deceptive instruments for this purpose, but for Osborn and others to whom low-density housing with plenty of private open space meant nothing less than the organic basis for a culturally and physically healthy life, the density standard became the very touchstone of their beliefs. Their opponents had different obsessions, but they were quite ready to argue the density issue, and the clashes between Osborn and the *Architectural Review* enlivened the technical press considerably.

Holford's response to Osborn's certainties was cautious. The opposing schools of thought in the density argument were in essence debating cultural values, and there was nothing scientific about their arithmetic. The concept was a slippery one, meaning different things in different contexts. If it was to be developed as a system of measurement and control, many technical problems had first to be solved. What was density control intended to measure, indicate or achieve? Of the many variables involved, including persons, families, households, dwellings, numbers of rooms, acreage and floorspace, which were most significant? What was the relationship between density standard and type of development, especially as regards the proportion of flats to houses? The planners in the Ministry were sympathetic to Osborn's general case for a maintenance of the broad standards which had been established in new housing between the wars, and for the substantial reduction of densities in existing urban areas; but they were reluctant to be tied to a hard-and-fast standard isolated from the generality of planning considerations.[76] At the time of Osborn's first approach to Holford, Abercrombie had already begun his County of London Plan,[77] and there was nothing to be gained by pre-empting the density studies which would form part of that exercise.[78] Soon after the formation of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, however, the programme of work which Holford had outlined to his staff was disrupted by an urgent request from a Ministry of Health advisory committee under the chairmanship of the Earl

of Dudley. Housing design and density suddenly became the chief priority of the new Techniques Section.[79]

Appointed in 1942, the Dudley Committee had been directed to consider how the two million homes which were expected to be built by local authorities in the decade following the war would be designed, laid out and constructed.[80] In 1943 it approached the Ministry of Town and Country Planning for guidance on site planning and layout. Holford set up a study group, which included himself, to consider the Ministry's response.[81] It quickly got into difficulties over the issue of housing density. Although it had maintained low densities in suburban housing schemes between the wars, the Ministry of Health had, for financial and other reasons, encouraged far higher densities in rehousing projects within urban areas. Net densities regularly reached 200 persons per acre (ppa) or more in such schemes, and in negotiations the study group found strong resistance to any very substantial lowering of these densities. Both the Ministry of Health and the Liverpool Director of Housing and City Architect, L.H.Keay (who was among the Dudley Committee's members) argued for a maximum of 150, or at the very least 136, ppa of housing area. Not for the first time, the planners found themselves accused of utopiamsm.[82]

Despite this opposition Holford's study group was able to use the Dudley Committee as a medium for propounding a wide range of planning principles, and its findings appeared as an addendum to the Committee's report when it was published in 1944. It was also able to arrive at a favourable compromise in its recommendations for net residential densities.[83] Having pressed for a maximum of 100 ppa they only had to concede 120 in exceptional cases in the central areas of large cities.

The study group went on to advise on the preparation of the subsequent Housing Manual, which set out the government's own advice to local authorities on how to go about their post-war housebuilding programmes.[84] In the preparation of this official document the Ministry of Health's bargaining position was stronger than it had been in the case of the Dudley Report, and a compromise less favourable to the case argued by the study group resulted. The 120 ppa was now recommended as the general maximum desirable in central areas, and it was expected that within some schemes a local density as high as 200 might be achieved.[85]

To put these various density levels in perspective, it may be recalled that Abercrombie's County of London Plan envisaged a density range of 200, 136 and 100 ppa within London. The average densities contained in the Manual were not intrinsically unreasonable, and flats at 200 ppa might be balanced by houses at 50 within the same scheme. In any event, the application of these standards to existing urban areas would certainly involve a very large amount of population dispersal from redeveloped areas, the more so if linked with increased provision of open space. Although they were still in Holford's view unsatisfactory, the standards contained within the Manual constituted, he believed, a 'tremendous advance'.

> In fact they mean the reduction of the high density now prevailing in local authority schemes by at least 50 per cent. We were very pleased to achieve agreement with [the] Ministry of Health that where redevelopment took place *without* a comprehensive plan, the maximum

> net residential density permitted on any land unit would be 120, i.e. approximately 30 flats per acre instead of the previous 50 or 60.[86]

None of this was sufficient to satisfy Osborn. He was suspicious of the Ministry, believing it to be

> grudgingly equipped with charming but weak men unable to fight for the necessary powers and supremacy over other departments in the matter of land-use.[87]

He can scarcely have been reassured by the presence until mid-1943 of Sharp, a biting critic of the Garden City ideal. Kept in ignorance of much of the work being undertaken within the Ministry, he scrutinized its actions with a critical and unforgiving eye. The appearance of the Housing Manual provoked a response which combined praise for the Ministries of Health and Works with an attack upon the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, which he held responsible for the unacceptably high density standards which the Manual contained.

Osborn sent a draft review of the Manual to the Ministry in advance of publication–an action which impressed Holford by its decency.[88] The substance of his criticisms, however, did not impress. Although Osborn and the study group aspired to similar standards they did not agree upon their arithmetical or architectural consequences, and while Osborn could afford to be a purist upon matters of principle, the Ministry could not. The influence of Osborn's voice as a propagandist was such, however, that his views could not be safely ignored, and Holford sought to bring him into a more direct liaison with Planning Technique.[89] In February of 1945 Holford proposed the establishment of a new group, under his chairmanship, which would include not only the people who had previously worked on housing design and layout, but also a representative of Plans Division and a number of 'outside people experienced in housing and redevelopment problems, to discuss the method of calculation and practical controls of densities recommended in the Dudley Report'. The intention was not merely to tap outside expertise. There was also the hope

> that in bringing them into these informal discussions we should get rid of external criticism, or at least make the critics aware of our point of view.[90]

Whether or not his attendance at these meetings influenced Osborn we do not know, but by mid–1945 he was feeling that 'The Ministry of Town and Country Planning are plucking up courage a bit'.[91] Holford's second study group did not arrive at a measure of density which could be applied as definitively as the FSI: in 1950 the Ministry would still be studying the relationship between density, land use, building form and development costs.[92] It did, however, clarify terms, and for a short time afterwards the professional grades within the Ministry were to continue their resistance to pressure from the MoH and elsewhere for higher urban densities. Not until the last of Holford's original study group had left did the Ministry's senior technical staff accede to upward revisions in density.[93]

The relationship between Osborn and the Techniques section within the Ministry is an interesting one, for despite the closeness of their respective positions, Holford and his group did not at all identify themselves with the TCPA line. This sense of independence was in many respects illusory, for they too were influenced by the British decentrist tradition, which reached them through the example of accomplished practitioners such as Unwin and Abercrombie. Yet despite the help which the Association's influence gave to their cause, and their willingness to give it technical assistance from time to time, its amateurism and parochialism remained in strong contrast to their own more flexible and 'scientific' conception of planning. So far as the design of residential areas was concerned, there were a number of specific respects in which the Ministry's staff were able to feel themselves in advance of anything Osborn represented. They believed that they better understood the architecture and sociology of housing, and in particular they had drawn upon American experience and literature in developing a line of approach which was to constitute a major element in post-war planning. The significance of this development was not merely in its effect upon housing design. It was one of a family of powerful conceptual instruments which, operated as a whole, brought about a transformation (of a kind which we have to some extent anticipated in our discussion of central areas) in the planner's treatment of entire city regions.

The origins of the American tradition upon which the Ministry's Techniques Section drew were diverse.[94] Just before the war the influence of American 'Decentrist' thinkers (most notably Lewis Mumford, Clarence Stein, Clarence A.Perry and Catherine Bauer) began to exercise a significant influence upon British opinion, and encouraged it towards the acceptance of decentralization, regional planning and the idea of the neighbourhood unit. The Garden City had always assumed that social and moral regeneration went hand-in-hand with environmental improvement, and with social idealism raised to unprecedented heights by the atmosphere of war, the idea that 'community' could be associated with particular physical forms opened up a host of possibilities. The notion that architecture could create co-operative communities *de novo*, or even more remarkably, transpose a community structure from the drawing-board to existing streets of city housing, gained wide currency.

The argument about the relationship between the physical and the social environment is a long and unresolved one, which cannot be addressed here. However, what is striking in the history of the neighbourhood unit is the speed with which it was taken up by the Techniques Section within the Ministry, which thus became the principal instrument of its spread in Britain. In their contribution to the Dudley Report, Holford's first study group stated that

> For the proper social well-being of the large town ... it is necessary to work out some organization of its physical form which will aid in every way the full development of community life and enable a proper measure of social amenities to be provided and arranged to advantage in each residential neighbourhood. The idea of the 'neighbourhood unit' arises out of an acknowledgement of the necessity of doing this and offers the means of doing it.[95]

This was not to claim (as was sometimes done) that a planned environment could actually engender 'community spirit' by the very disposal of its physical parts. Nonetheless it was clearly asserted that appropriate planning was a necessary condition for the full development of community, and it was implied with equal clarity that grouped, locality-based communities were the right sort to have in urban areas. The neighbourhood was adopted as the principal and determining unit within which the constituted elements of residential planning were organized. Theoretical and practical studies (based, as in the case of the Central Area Handbook, on Leicester) produced calculations of desirable neighbourhood population and area, and of the proportion of land to be devoted to different uses. Moreover it was proposed that the social composition of the population within a neighbourhood should be influenced by the provision of such a variety of dwelling types as might cultivate a balance of social classes.[96] Within the Techniques Section a considerable amount of work was done upon a proposed Residential Neighbourhoods Manual.[97]

Even as the neighbourhood idea was being worked upon within the Ministry its sociological pretentions were being questioned.[98] Doubts raised by Ruth Glass and others did not, however, prevent its incorporation into the generality of British town planning as a fundamental ordering principle in the perception of urban form. Such ordering principles have been of central importance to planning thought and practice. If anything distinguishes the history of town planning from that of the generality of public health, or housing reform, it is the planners' collective aspiration to organize the achievement of improvements in disparate environmental standards, whether of housing, open space or transport, within the broader context of a general conception of the public good. This general conception has been defined in many ways: the public good has been that which is unveiled by regional survey, or that which provides the most organically satisfactory basis for family life or racial development, or again, that which heightens the values which are deemed desirable in an urban civilization. The most powerful means by which planners have defined their conception of the public good, however, has been the depiction of a preferred urban form: a complete physical expression of all the biological, cultural, social and economic benefits which city-dwellers might receive through the operation of 'good planning'. Between the First and Second World Wars, the 'established principles' of urban form expressed in the advisory plans of the period were not of any great number, complexity or even consistency. Between the appointment of the Barlow Commission and the end of the war, however, an enormous expansion of the limits to what was practically feasible, coupled with a transformation in planning philosophy and technique, contributed to the emergence of a 'grand synthesis', a comprehensive, normative model of urban form.

The classic statements of this grand synthesis are generally and rightly held to be the London advisory plans prepared by Patrick Abercrombie. Commissioned by Reith, Abercrombie had embarked upon an advisory plan for the area of the London County Council in 1941, and by mid-1942 he was also engaged upon a plan for the Greater London region. The preparation of these plans was a major pre-occupation of the Ministry. Holford was personally involved in the monitoring of work upon the Greater London Plan, which was prepared within the Ministry buildings with assistance from Stephenson and two other members of the Techniques Section, Tom Coote and Peter Shepheard. Abercrombie had, as we have seen, a formative influence upon the Liverpool

graduates, and in the preparation of the Greater London Plan the students were able to influence the master, but there is little to be achieved in trying to establish who influenced whom in this relationship.99 In terms of an overall settlement strategy for London, their interests were practically identical. When the Plan had been informally accepted by the Minister, Holford's staff proceeded to what they thought was the next step in the same exercise. Extensive discussions were already taking place on the form of organization to which responsibility for the development of new towns might be given,[100] and an outline plan for Stevenage, the first of the post-war new towns, was being prepared under Stephenson even before the new Minister, Lewis Silkin, had appointed the Reith Committee. Thus completely did Abercrombie's London Plans express the intentions of the technical staff within the Ministry of Town and Country Planning.

The principal elements in the grand synthesis to which these parties subscribed have been authoritatively described elsewhere.[101] The form of the city was to be delimited at the periphery by a green belt, and marked at the centre by a strong and accessible urban core. The desired low-to-medium population densities would involve a reduction in population, the excess being exported to self-contained satellites of between 25,000 and 60,000 people, located beyond the green belt. The internal structure of the city would be determined by the principles of segregation, grouping and hierarchical organization. The general urban area was to be divided into physically and socially distinct units, while both across the city as a whole and within each of its component units, urban functions were to be separated out from the general fabric and grouped in specialized areas or sub-centres. The organization of these segregated zones and groupings followed a hierarchical structure which applied equally to the delineation of social units, to the provision of community services and to the road network. The whole fitted neatly and with apparent consistency into a total national strategy in which the same principles were applied to regions: the segregation of towns within a hierarchy of settlements was to be maintained, with the 'overspill' generated by excess growth and raised environmental standards being relocated in other lessdeveloped regions. So long as the premises upon which it rested remained tenable, this total settlement strategy represented the best of all worlds, packing a number of different elements and objectives into a single portmanteau.

If the hole at the centre of Abercrombie's London Plans is filled, as was intended, with the complementary prescriptions of the Central Areas Handbook, a remarkable product emerges: the total visualization of urban form at a regional scale. This visualization is distinct from the partial realization of the TCPA ideal at Letchworth and Welwyn, or the utopian and polemical cityplans of Le Corbusier or the MARS group, both in its comprehensiveness and in the extent to which this massive conception appeared to embody a new established wisdom. The changes of the war years had produced a transformation in the scope and purpose of physical planning. New techniques had greatly extended its capacity, and the adoption of a normative settlement strategy which defined the ends of good planning provided a framework within which the expanded repertoire of techniques could be deployed. The significance of this framework can scarcely be overstated. In the absence of many of the analytical devices which might now be taken for granted, it was this commitment to a broad strategy in which both problems and the means of their solution were defined which made comprehensive planning on a metropolitan scale possible. There were, however, major qualifications to the apparent success of this grand synthesis.

While serving under Reith and Portal, Holford had argued that there were major respects in which the legitimate concerns of planning transcended the specifics of land use or design.

> Town and country planners are used to dealing with questions of land for housing, for open spaces, for roads. Now, if we are going to act in terms of the best use of national resources, land must be weighed against production, against the export trade, against employment. The town and country planner cannot do this—not alone. The only possible solution to the problem lies in a wider conception of planning, whereby control of land use remains the essential instrument of town and country planning, and informed collaboration is arranged on all questions of development, *by the economic and physical planners working together in advance.*…
>
> … The new element here is the National—rather than the local—Development Plan; and the urgent necessity [is] for those entrusted with the conservation of the land resources of the country, to open the inter-compartmental doors and work out with their colleagues responsible for other national resources—such as coal, labour or export industries, for instance—the technique and standards of national planning.[102]

It was Holford's view that planning should be a method of anticipation and collaborative decision-making, 'continuous and flexible… forward-looking, intelligent, advisory; always liable to modification in the light of changed circumstances; but because it relates *all* the facts, conducive to economy, and capable of harnessing the big evolutionary ideas'.[103]

Post-war town and country planning was, of course, only an element in a much broader package of reforms which embraced health, education, social policy and employment. Yet while this family of reforms had a certain ideological consistency, it was not integrated in any technical or formal sense: though the content was new, the manner in which policy emerged was as disjointed and unco-ordinated as ever. Planning policy as evolved within the Ministry and as expressed in the London plans remained the responsibility of a single department of state. Statute and administration limited the post-war planner to a practice rooted in the control of land use, without providing any machinery which could adequately define the social or economic objectives which land-use policy might be expected to complement or support. For a time, a broad consensus might support the planner's own conception of his task as embodied in a normative model of settlement form, but in the absence of that support he would be left in a policy vacuum, without any tenable definition of the public good towards which he was supposed to work.

Holford's attempts to create the administrative will and to cultivate the inter-departmental and interdisciplinary co-operation necessary for any integrated national development strategy were to be repeated on future occasions, with as little success. The problems which such efforts have attempted to solve are as much with us today as they were in the 1940s,[104] and the discrepancy between the principle of co-ordination and the practice of institutional autonomy remains the dominant contradiction contained within the discipline of town and country planning in Britain. Curiously, the major innovations

which Holford helped to introduce have had the effect of deepen-ing rather than diminishing this contradiction, for in the years after the war the new technical and normative basis of physical planning strengthened its separate identity as a distinctive skill. This was an important development, at least in professional terms: the history of town planning in Britain has witnessed frequent attempts by the 'parent' institutes of architecture, surveying and engineering to establish special claims to competence in a new and expanding field. Before the Second World War such attempts were frustrated by a balance of competing forces and by appeal to a higher but imprecise ideal of 'comprehensiveness'. After the war, it was increasingly possible to assert the disciplinary independence of town and country planning on the grounds that it possessed a distinctive methodology and body of technical skills. Interest in inter-disciplinary co-operation fell away, and when 'team-work', that rallying-call of the 1930s, again became an issue it was to provoke a major reaction from within a planning profession that resented this challenge to its competence. We shall return to that historical debate, and Holford's surprising part in it, in a later chapter.

HOLFORD'S WAR

By the time that Labour formed its post-war administration, Holford was the head of a consolidated technical department within the Ministry of Town and Country Planning.[105] After the uncertainties of the Coalition, the arrival of Lewis Silkin must have come as an immense relief. In the absence of any definite and specific policy commitment, civil servants had gone almost as far as they could go in developing a post-war planning framework for local authorities; but once the necessary political judgements were made, legislation and advice issued forth in a steady stream.

Holford did not stay to see the new system come into operation. The principles of the 'New Planning' had been substantially worked out in both what they included and what they could not be made to include. What work remained was likely to be increasingly dominated by administration, continuing development and implementation. This was not the sort of thing to attract Holford. As an architect he has been described as good at broad design, massing and siting, and again in matters of detail, but less interested in the process that lay between.[106] The description is also apt in the different context of his attitude towards the work of the Ministry. He could if required master any quantity or complexity of material; it is said that his 'terrible powers of concentration' enabled him to read the whole of the 1947 Town and Country Planning Bill at a single sitting, making notes as he went, and thereafter to offer valued advice to E.S.Hill.[107] Yet detailed management and the 'seeing through' of a practical matter were things which, on all but a few significant occasions, he lacked either the appetite or the time to undertake. Moreover, it had been some four years since he had been able to involve himself in any kind of design.

In another of his periodic bouts of indecision Holford weighed up the opportunities which were available to him, among them a return to Liverpool, the offer of a Chair at University College in succession to Abercrombie, and the reconstitution of his own practice. With his reputation established and his Ministry of Supply experience behind him, the last possibility was almost limitless: he could have taken on almost any number

of assistants and any amount of work that he chose. When the idea was put to him his reaction was consistent with the values of his Rome years.

> Holford was horrified by the idea. Nothing, he said, revolted him more than the thought of 300 draughtsmen 'with green eyeshades' in a vast drawing office, all dependent on him for work! He then added: 'Anyway, what of the 10,000 architects still in the services? Are we going to pinch their bread, when the Min. of Lab. has saved our skins?'[108]

He was less certain of what he would do than of what he would not.

During 1946 his appearances at the Ministry grew less and less frequent, and this loss of interest created problems. Changes were occurring: Whiskard and then Neal had left, to be replaced by Sir Thomas Sheepshanks and Evelyn Sharp. A number of the more highly qualified research staff had drifted away to other jobs, and there was a reassertion of 'normal' administrative values. The creation of a research organization within the Ministry had in itself been a novelty: the existence of large numbers of able but quite inexperienced people in planning technique and regional research who were self-consciously 'ideas men' was not a phenomenon to which all career civil servants, whether of the administrative or technical grades, could reconcile themselves. Men like Whiskard, Vincent or Phillips had provided the research staff with room for intellectual manouevre, but under the new regime attempts were made to reassert administrative control. Relations between the different classes within the Ministry deteriorated. A further impetus to change was provided by the reversion to a more 'normal' form of organization recommended by the Treasury's Organization and Methods Department.[109] During this period it was to Holford that the senior administrators looked for an authoritative expression of the technical viewpoint, but his indecision as to whether or not he would return to the Ministry after the completion of the City of London Plan, and misunderstandings regarding his status in the intervening period, made effective reorganization difficult.

In his absence, responsibility for technical work was divided among a number of heads, and when in mid-1947 it became clear that he would not be returning there was considerable despondency among the Ministry's research staff. Stephenson remained until 1948 as head of Planning Technique, and was succeeded by Kennedy, but the senior figure among the technical officers was now Samuel Beaufoy, a conventional figure from the pre-war Ministry of Health. Little love was lost between Beaufoy and the younger men of the 'new wave'. The organization over which Holford had presided had provided a lively, informal and stimulating environment in which to work. It had, indeed, come close in many respects to realizing the pre-war 'dream' of a Planning Research Station; in a period of disciplinary transformation, it had been the dominant force in the extension of knowledge and technique. Research and technical development did continue, but after 1946 the Ministry ceased to provide the sort of free-ranging planning intelligence service, cutting across administrative divisions, which it had in Holford's time.

It was later held that 'the failures of planning are partly due to Holford's leaving the Ministry of Town and Country Planning before the machinery was operating smoothly'.[110] It is indeed possible that, had he remained, his diplomatic skills, his personal standing and his inclinations might have protected his research and techniques

staff from the administrators, and hence sustained the period of creativity a little longer. Yet the reassertion of administrative control was not the sole, nor even the heaviest, of the 'dead hands' which prevented the realization of the 1947 ideal. Nor can we speculate with confidence about what Holford might have done had he stayed. When the decisive confrontation between professionals and administrators took place in 1954, those who looked to him for backing were puzzled and disappointed to find him acting in the role not of supporter, but of conciliator. If the general course of post-war planning was not affected by his departure, it must be asked whether his personal contribution during the preceding five years had been any more significant.

Even those who admired him most acknowledged that he was not an original thinker or an innovator in his own right. It was Stephenson rather than Holford who was pre-eminent in the introduction of new ideas, whether of neighbourhood planning, pedestrianization or even, some twenty years ahead of their time, conservation areas.[111] Neither was Holford a direct participant in most of the technical work which was done under him. He would descend from time to time to matters of detail, but there is no specific report, and, with the possible exception of New Town development corporations, no particular idea, of which we can say he was the author. Rather he was a setter of agendas and an unraveller of knots. Bringing together new men and ideas, and letting them work, he translated the result into a form acceptable to nonprofessional administrators, ministers and other government departments. He was the most persuasive spokesman for the 'New Planning' in Whitehall, and his performance in this role carried more conviction than had his support for modern architecture. If anything he believed too unquestioningly in the power of research to effect practical and political change, and the work which was done under him was not always well-directed or well-used. Yet Government, local authorities, the universities and even the Ordnance Survey continued for years after his departure to benefit from the research initiated by him and his staff. It was the informal, open way in thich Holford organized his Division within the Ministry which created the circumstances under which this stock of intellectual capital could be accumulated.

After Pepler's retirement Holford was left as the senior technical adviser in the Ministry. As with Pepler, his influence was so all-pervading, so freely given to all people upon all subjects, that it is now almost impossible to isolate his particular contribution to the post-war planning system.[112] We know that he facilitated Dower's work on National Parks,[113] gave significant advice on the New Towns legislation, and was one of the major departmental influences upon the technical aspects of the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act. The commonly-encountered claim that he was in any sense the co-author, with Silkin, of that legislation is, however, excessive.[114] From what he called 'the great White Elephant Paper' of 1944 onwards, he did not get all he wanted, and got much that he did not want. Such was and is the experience of most government advisers. Perhaps the most that can be said is that three individual planners were pre-eminent in influencing the process which resulted in the post-war planning system. Abercrombie left the most enduring stamp upon broad strategy, and Pepler contributed most to procedure. However, it was Holford and his group who altered most fundamentally the technical basis and orientation of planning, and although the older men had preached regionalism for twenty years or more, it was he who came nearest to giving it some practical significance in governmental practice.

Chapter Eight
Making Plans

It has been held that Holford's service in the Ministries of Works and Town and Country Planning constituted the most significant episode of his entire career, yet even by 1945 he had a number of other and very substantial strings to his bow. He was Lever Professor, a member of the Royal Fine Art Commission (RFAC), and by the latter part of that year he was also Chairman of the Ministry's Advisory Committee on Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. From 1946 he was honorary Technical Adviser to the Ministry of Town and Country Planning. He was well-known in civil service and professional circles and many possible careers of great responsibility and influence were open to him. It might be said that his choice from among these opportunities was to take all of them. Yet it is much more likely that he made no decision at all: he merely responded positively to the many demands that were made upon him, and his success generated yet further demands. So the process continued, until the 'shape' of his career was buried beneath drifts of paper.

For some of those who sat with him on committees or worked with him in one capacity or another, it was assumed that such talents must be working towards some conscious goal. It was transparently obvious that he was not motivated by profit, nor did he display any outward symptom of personal ambition. Underneath the tact, charm and reserve, it seemed that he must be ploughing some subterranean furrow. This was not so. The search for an underlying purpose in Holford's post-war career, viewed as a whole, is a futile one. The mistake, perhaps, is to attempt to view the career as a unity. What we have to consider is not one career, but one man in many different but related careers, each having its own purposes, and not all of these purposes being complementary.

Of his many roles, it was that of town planner in which Holford was best thought of, and is best remembered. As the foregoing pages have shown, he was one of the few professionals who was in a position directly to influence the recasting of town and country planning which took place between 1939 and 1947. In this respect his subsequent experience has a particular interest. How did one who helped to shape the new system fare within it? This and the following chapters recount his post-war career in Britain from this point of view. In setting the professional's aspirations against the realities of the system in practical operation, we may hope to learn a little more about the strengths and weaknesses of them both.

THE CITY

The City of London, that square mile between the Temple and the Tower, had suffered severely during the Blitz. A third of its buildings had been destroyed. The damage was not evenly distributed: it was most intensive around the Tower of London, St Paul's, the river bank between Blackfriars' and London Bridges, and in the area stretching north of Cheapside to Barbican. In 1944 the City Engineer, F.J.Forty, had produced a reconstruction plan which was greeted on its publication with a barrage of criticism.[1] 'Unimaginative and reactionary' wrote one of the more plain-spoken reviewers.[2] In a letter which Holford helped to draft, the RFAC criticized the plan, and commented that many of the proposed street improvements would make architecturally successful redevelopment difficult: but a more fundamental weakness was the extent to which the Forty plan addressed the problems of City ratepayers and businesses, to the exclusion of such wider considerations as the policies of the London County Council (LCC) or those contained in Abercrombie's County and Greater London Plans. It made conscious allowance for a 50 per cent increase in floorspace, but the Ministry thought that the actual increase might rise to almost 100 per cent if the plan was adopted, representing an enormous intensification of development and a corresponding increase in the already-severe traffic congestion in the area.

W.S.Morrison rejected the report and, as one of his last acts as Minister, directed the City Corporation to appoint planning consultants to prepare a fresh plan.[3] One of the men appointed was Charles Holden. Among the most distinguished senior architects of the day, Holden had the stature and the experience to command respect in the conservative City, but although he was a member of the Town Planning Institute, he had little knowledge of the kind of comprehensive city planning now required by the Minister. This was to be provided by Holford and a small team taken on for the purpose, which was to become the basis of his post-war London practice. Holden's particular role was to secure the architectural setting of St. Paul's Cathedral: it was the Holford team, working from an office at the Tivoli corner of Bank Buildings, which produced the general plan. In March 1946 they submitted their Interim Report, which set out the broad principles which they hoped to see embodied in any final document.[4]

Holford judged the circumstances well. To stand any chance of acceptance his proposals had to meet the requirements of a wide range of conflicting interests: of the City itself, jealous of its independence, and of City interests; of the Ministry and of the dispersal policy outlined in the Abercrombie plans; and of the LCC. In addition the Minister had made it clear that something a little special was required, a practical but modestly visionary plan which would address a number of long-standing deficiencies. The City made two things plain: it wished to retain its role as the commercial hub of the Empire, and it wanted an end to uncertainty. However reconstruction was to occur, it should occur quickly. Holford's response was to apply the new techniques of city centre planning in a manner which steered a course between these different demands.

The Interim Report, when it appeared, proposed firstly and crucially that the total amount of floorspace occupied in the City should remain at roughly its pre-war level, accommodating a day-time population of just under half a million people. The figure was closely related to the proportion of the Greater London population which might continue to work in the City provided its commercial importance remained what it had been in

1939. This fundamental assumption was open to criticism. While Holford was not planning for any significant increase in the concentration of commerce in the city, neither was he envisaging any significant degree of office dispersal. With the exception of Billingsgate, even the wholesale markets were expected to remain *in situ*. It will be recalled that Abercrombie's London Plans had called for a substantial dispersal of population and employment. Holford did not choose to recommend that the City contribute to this metropolitan exodus. He argued that the decentralization of population and industry did not necessarily involve any significant scaling-down of those commercial and financial activities in which the City specialized: indeed, the demand for central accommodation might well increase given the continuing 'pull' of those functions for which the City was truly central.[5] His position was one of compromise. The recommendation that the amount of office accommodation remain stable in the face of rising demand was at least reconcilable with, if not directly complementary to, the dispersal policy for population and industry. The same recommendation was sufficient to allay the worst fears of a City establishment which, after Labour was returned to power in July 1945, was more than ever afraid of the damage central government interference might do to its interests.

Neither were Holford's proposals for the roads network markedly radical. The essential traffic problem of the City was, as it is today, the torrent of vehicles which flowed through it along an east-west axis. In line with the assumption shortly to be restated in the Central Areas Handbook, it was expected that the 1939 traffic volume would double within the twenty-five year life of the plan. The standard remedy for the City, adopted by Forty and by Sir Charles Bressey before him, was to deflect the traffic north and south. This Holford proposed to do, but he also suggested a north-south route skirting the west side of the Guildhall and passing through one of the areas of greatest war damage. It is a thankless task to chart in detail the history of roads proposals put forward in advisory plans: they are hardly ever implemented in the form originally proposed, and Holford's were no exception. When in conditions of secrecy intended to prevent property speculation and premature opposition the Interim Report was submitted to the Corporation, the trimming began. Among the 'exotics' which were pruned were the viaduct which Holford proposed over Charterhouse Street adjoining the Central Market Buildings, a two-level southern corridor route along the line of Upper Thames Street, and a high-level walkway along the riverside from Blackfriars' to London Bridge. Much subsequent discussion concerned itself with various permutations upon Holford's proposals: for our purposes it is sufficient to note that the southern relief road was ultimately built, although only on one level, and that today one quarter of a mile of the nothern route–under a different nomenclature the aborted Route 11–runs to no particular purpose through the commercial part of the Barbican redevelopment.[6] The proposed north-south route did not materialize, nor did a cutting under Cheapside which was to have connected the Guildhall area with a new traffic circus at the Cannon Street-Victoria Street junction; nor again did the new square which Holford proposed for the north end of London Bridge.[7]

Holford's road proposals thus fall into the same category as do those put forward by Abercrombie for London as a whole; though under-estimating the future volume of traffic, they provided for more new roadbuilding than was subsequently achieved. When the interim proposals were published criticism came from both sides. The Editor of *Roads*

and Road Construction professed a lack of confidence that the new junctions and widened streets would be able to carry the proposed volume of traffic.[8] *The Guardian* on the other hand thought that the two-tier roads and junctions which the retention of the wholesale markets made necessary were excessive.[9] There were criticisms too from individual members of the City Corporation, but in general the reception given to the proposals was quite friendly. Reilly wrote a loyally enthusiastic review, beating the Liverpool School drum as usual in the second paragraph, and *The Times* printed a favourable leader.[10] With the speed of reconstruction uppermost in the corporate mind, the Common Council accepted the Interim Report, with reservations relating to some of its roads proposals, on the 17th July 1946, and ten months later Holden and Holford presented their final proposals.[11]

Again there was some criticism: the only Communist member of Finsbury Council denounced the plan's admittedly weak gestures in the direction of housing policy as 'sheer humbug' and 'Tory buck-passing', while at the other end of the political spectrum the Lord Mayor confessed to the press that 'The City of London Plan sent him to sleep'.[12] Once more, however, the generality of reactions was favourable. Would-be developers now had something specific upon which to base their own planning. Holden and Holford had laid down a definite programme with ten-year and thirty-year targets, the former to meet the immediate need to replace bombed capacity.

The relative absence of adverse comment within the City owed much to the political climate in which the report was released. A few months previously a new Bill, which was to become the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947, had been published.[13] Amongst many other things, it provided for the transfer of planning powers from the City Corporation to the LCC, which was to be the sole planning authority for the whole of London. The City went politely up in arms, using all its considerable influence in an attempt to retain control over its own redevelopment. It failed: the Holden-Holford plan, which it now perceived as its own, was required to go to the LCC for approval and incorporation into the London Development Plan. The *City Press* commented bitterly that 'the theorists now in control seem bent on strangling the goose that once laid golden eggs'.[14] Anger against the Government was fuelled by the Corporation's pride in its ancient rights and privileges, but even more fundamental was the conviction that rapid reconstruction, good or bad, was preferable to the delays which would occur under the system of postwar building licences and because of the additional time—three years, it was thought—which it would take the LCC to bring the new plan into operation. In this climate little political attention was given to the question of how much the City plan itself might restrict the opportunities for profitable redevelopment.

The potential for such restriction was considerable. In a large and complicated exercise Holford's team had made use of the new floorspace calculations and had applied maximum 'plot ratios', together with daylighting controls, to the entire City.[15] This was the first public demonstration of the new techniques which were subsequently applied in London and elsewhere, and which entitle the Holden-Holford report to be described as 'the definitive city centre plan in the post-war years'.[16] If the significance of these obscure calculations was at first lost upon the press, there were nonetheless quarters in which this new form of regulation was regarded with deep suspicion. Before the war there had been a number of devices available to the Corporation enabling it to control site coverage and height, but these had been devised with the purposes of securing adequate

daylight, ventilation and access for firefighting. They had not been intended, nor did they serve, as direct controls upon floorspace.[17] Holford's maximum plot ratio of 5:1 (or 5½: 1 around the Bank) promised to constitute a much more rigorous instrument of control. The Auctioneers' and Estate Agents' Institute questioned whether buildings erected within these limits could be made to yield an economic return, and when consents issued under the old controls were revoked, on Holford's advice, the fears entertained by propertied capital appeared to be confirmed. The developers of Plantation House found their new floorspace allowance cut by a substantial 37 per cent.[18]

Once individual property-owners found themselves directly affected by the Plan, they were prepared to pay handsomely to make their opposition to it effective. They mounted their challenge at the public inquiry held in the Guildhall in 1948 into Holford's and the Corporation's proposal that 272 acres out of the City's total of 660 be designated, for the purposes of redevelopment, as liable to compulsory purchase.[19] It was a major set piece: there were over 330 objections, the Ministry laid on its chief inspector for the occasion, and to one of Holford's team 'it seemed at times as though the entire English Bar had been briefed'.[20] The Corporation's case was led by Sir Walter Monckton, and his chief witness was Holford. It was fortunate that he had immersed himself so thoroughly in the City: for twenty hours or more he sat on the platform, some notes beside him, to face cross-examination by nearly forty counsel, plus solicitors and private objectors.[21]

> He was never rattled and never, it seemed, at a loss. Once or twice he asked permission to have a point verified during the luncheon break. It was a tremendous performance, and when, at the end, Sir Walter Monckton paid a warm tribute to him there was a long murmur of agreement from all over the Guildhall.[22]

The result was a victory for Holford and for the Corporation. The Minister approved the Declaratory Order for all but 40 of the acres applied for.[23] Over the next twenty years, some 115 of these were actually acquired and disposed of, on 60 or 120 year leases, to private developers.

These acquisitions apart, it may appear in retrospect as though Holford's efforts went to waste. The City did not get its new road network nor, it might be argued, did the floorspace controls amount to a great deal in an area that subsequently had to bear the weight of the Natwest Tower. Yet by 1982 floorspace in the City was no greater than it had been in 1939, and in the intervening years the plot ratio provided one of the major devices whereby the City was prevented from turning into a miniature New York. The aspect of City planning which attracted most criticism in the years following the inquiry was rather different. During the nine years in which he was its planning consultant, Holford's special relationship with the City produced little in the way of fine building. By 1951 planning permission had been granted in the City for a total of 4.8 million square feet of office floorspace, much of it housed in buildings described by Lord Esher as being of 'quite incredible ugliness'.[24] Holford advised as best he felt able but as we have already seen, he was not given to digging in his heels, and was reluctant to be overly-critical of the work of fellow-architects. The commercial pressures were great, and the City's Planning Officer, Arthur Mealand, was no inspirer of imaginative schemes. The

result was mediocrity. The worst damage, however, was done after Holford resigned his advisory consultancy in 1955, on the grounds that

> The City is entering a new phase of its rebuilding and will almost certainly concentrate on areas of outstanding interest, such as St. Paul's. They receive plenty of advice from the Minister, the LCC, the RFAC, and elsewhere; and a general consultancy will no longer assist in the taking of decisions.[25]

By the mid-1950s there was no major respect in which Holford could, as an individual consultant, make any substantial impact upon the course of redevelopment. It was now up to individual developers and their architects to make the best they could of the general guidelines laid down some ten years before. Even had Holford been one, there was no space in the new planning system to accommodate a second Wren.

What can be claimed for Holford is that he was the central actor in the process whereby effective control, exercised on professional advice, was established over redevelopment in the City. The main principles of the Holden-Holford plan were included, albeit in a much-modified form, into the London County Development Plan of 1951, and subsequently into the Development Plan for Greater London. Though the controls took a buffeting in the late 1950s and 1960s, something was achieved. Redevelopment was restrained within limits that did not overwhelm urban services, and so private profit did not place a crippling burden upon the public purse. Working conditions within buildings improved. The redeveloped City retained a reasonably human scale and variety. Planning conditions, vigorously contested at appeal but upheld by the Minister, maintained in existence the small shops, cafes and pubs which make the City a civilized place in which to work.[26] These things were done with the encouragement and advice of Holford. Insofar as individuals are important in such a story, his contribution was amongst the honourable and the influential in the winning of this partial victory. The real hero of the piece, however, was not an individual at all: it was the system of controls and advice itself which was both the weakness and the strength of post-war planning in the City.

CAMBRIDGE

With the City plan, Holford's status as a consultant planner was assured, and other commissions came his way. During the slow progress of the public inquiry, the *Architects' Journal* noted that he was about to enter another graveyard of reputations. He had been appointed planning consultant to the Cambridgeshire County Council, and was to prepare a plan for Cambridge itself. There were a number of parallels between Cambridge and the City: in both places planning powers had been removed from a smaller unit of administration and vested in a larger one. In both places powerful interests dominated the area to be planned. Both places reeked of history and tradition, and both possessed micro-political systems of distinctive character and utmost complexity. Having had his fill of controversy Holford was at first reluctant to accept this new commission, but he was encouraged to accept by Myles Wright, himself a Cambridge graduate, who

had come out of the Ministry to assist in the preparation of the City Plan. It was as joint consultants that they approached new problems which required all their diplomatic as well as their professional skills.

No town in England is so dominated by its university as is Cambridge. The western side of the central area is bounded by a continuous swathe of college and university buildings, behind which are the River Cam and The Backs. In the past, the University had looked beyond this western girdle for additional land: sports grounds, experimental areas and new buildings were all concentrated to the west of the town's north-south 'spine'. The generality of the town's expansion, conversely, had been eastwards. The central area itself was in what Holford later called a 'state of interesting balance'.[27] Up to 1914 the University had been the dominant force in shaping its development, and had been the main force behind the town's growth. By 1950, however, only 6 per cent of Cambridge's working population made its living from University or College employment: its manufacturing industries and importance as a regional service centre had grown to such an extent that urban Cambridge was one of the fastest-growing areas in southern England.[28] In consequence commercial and traffic pressures upon the historic core were increasing, and the consultants were faced with the problem of how to cope with these pressures without damage to the town's existing assets. They began work in the belief that they had the support of the three authorities involved, the County and City Councils, and the University.

While they were working on the plan, Wright spent much of his working time in the County Planning Office at Cambridge, and Holford paid regular visits, sometimes weekly, sometimes fortnightly, from London. Many years later, the former would recall his mixed feelings of admiration and exasperation at Holford's capacity to 'drop in' on the work and, after a few hours' intense study, to achieve a grasp of it equal and sometimes superior to his own.[29] As joint authors, in fact as well as name, they published their report in 1950. The critical issue upon which their recommendations hinged was that of the future size of Cambridge. Holford and Wright took the view that the town should not expand any further. At its existing size it was small enough to retain most of the advantages of a small town: open space or countryside were nearby, most houses had gardens, and distances from home to work were short. A large growth in population would, they argued, abolish these advantages. Commuting distances and congestion in the central area would increase. In other places a loss of small-town amenities might be offset by the acquisition of big-town facilities, but in Cambridge a range of these was already available. For these reasons the consultants proposed that the population of urban Cambridge should be stabilized at as near its existing level as possible.[30] Cambridge should not become another Oxford.

Such a policy would limit the size of Cambridge's problems in the future, but it would not dispose of them altogether. With ageing buildings, changing retail patterns and the growth of motor traffic, the pressures for redevelopment would still be strong; and even if the town itself did not grow, a major expansion of the University was anticipated. These two forces for change, town development and University development, were in some senses opposed. The majority of colleges hoped to extend their buildings within the centre, and several had both the means and the inclination to displace shops and offices for this purpose. Holford and Wright believed that any substantial reduction of shopping frontages would diminish the commercial prosperity of the centre: although there was

scope for the development of new shopping facilities elsewhere, they did not believe that any radical shift in the centre of retail gravity could be attempted without major expense and at severe risk. They envisaged therefore the continuation of the pre-existing balance between academic and retail demands upon central space, and argued that new developments might cater for both uses under the same roof. The centre should not lose its distinctively academic character in the face of commercial pressures, but neither was there any good reason why students should not live above shops.

If the static population policy did not altogether remove the need for commercial development, still less did it relieve the necessity for improvements to the road network. The plan proposed a number of projects of a sensible and relatively conservative nature. Various arrangements for the management of traffic, a new bus station and improvements to cross-town routes were all advocated. The most controversial proposal, however, was that concerned with traffic travelling through the town along its north-south axis. The consultants had great difficulty in identifying a route which could carry the anticipated growth in this traffic, and yet spare academic and other amenities. The dangers were as much political as environmental, for few institutions as small as Cambridge colleges are so well able to look after themselves. Holford and Wright, however, came to the conclusion that short of tunnelling, college property could not be spared. They proposed a relief road which wound its way from a new roundabout on the Chesterton Road via Jesus Lane, sparing Sidney Sussex and Christ's Fellows' Gardens, but cutting across the Jesus hockey field and bisecting Christ's Pieces. The damage to academic amenities would be the minimum achievable in such a scheme, but damage there would undoubtedly be.

The proposals were accepted by the County and incorporated into its statutory Development Plan, which was presented to a public inquiry at the end of 1952. By this time the balance of political forces had shifted: both the University and the Town appeared as objectors to a plan which, it appeared, was being imposed upon a reluctant Cambridge by the County. The principal objection was to the future functioning of the central area as envisaged in the Holford—Wright and County development plans. It was contended by the University that pressures on the area could be relieved if commercial development was directed to the east of the town centre. If this was done, a spine relief road and commercial redevelopment would no longer be necessary, and the perceived threat to the historic character of the centre would be removed. The argument for eastwards commercial development was one which was contained in the plan itself, but Holford and Wright did not believe that it could be sustained to the extent of giving the University a virtual monopoly of the historic core, which would be the effect of removing its chief competitor for space in that area. To have done so would have involved the development of a major new regional shopping area elsewhere, and it was the judgement of the consultants that the risks of commercial failure, and hence of Cambridge's destruction as a regional centre, were unacceptably high.

The University case was led at the inquiry by Sir Michael Rowe. Holford was deeply shaken by the ferocity with which he was cross-examined. Returning tired and unhappy to London one evening during the inquiry, he told a colleague at University College that a deliberate attempt had been made to destroy his reputation.[31] In the event both Holford and the plan survived the ordeal. On the 1st July 1954 the County Planning Officer, W.L.

Waide, wrote to inform Holford of the Minister's decision. Except for two important matters of detail, the plan had been approved.

The County had not got its new bus station nor an area of housing north of Arbury Road, but otherwise it had obtained all that had been sought.[32] The future role which had been proposed for the town centre, the first five years of the road programme and the new river crossing all had the sanction of the Minister. There was a last-ditch stand by the City Council: at the beginning of the following year it attempted to have the plan quashed in the High Court on a technicality, but its application failed, costs were awarded against it, and the plan became the formal statement of planning policy for the town.[33]

This professional success was not untainted with personal unpleasantness. Some two years after the development plan had been formally adopted it was being rumoured in Cambridge that its approval had been obtained by the exercise of improper influence. Holford's friend and colleague R.T.Kennedy had been brought into the Ministry in 1944 and had remained there to become, on Stephenson's departure, Chief Planning Officer. When, after the adoption of the Cambridge plan, he left to become a partner in Holford's practice it was suggested by a member of the University's staff that the two had been in league together in securing its approval. The allegation was baseless. However, its author made the mistake of repeating it to a member of the County Planning Committee. Holford had to make an appearance in the office of Dame Evelyn Sharp, by now Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, and to obtain a retraction from the person responsible for the allegation, before the matter could be laid to rest. Nor did local difficulties end there. The Holford-Wright plan had made enemies and in the following years they continued to make life difficult. As the quinquennial review of the development plan approached, Holford wrote to the County Planning Officer that:

> The University has a dozen avenues of approach outside the formal processes of the Inquiry, and has no scruple about using them.[34]

His motives, his opinions and his position were repeatedly mis-represented to the press and public by an institution which had for twelve years put forward self-interested proposals for the town of Cambridge as a whole, while failing to produce any development plan to meet its own academic needs. Sorely provoked, Holford retained his composure and when the *Observer* printed an outrageously inaccurate and damaging preview of the quinquennial review inquiry, his reply was a model of restraint and good humour.[35]

Interesting as these skirmishes are, they do no more than highlight some of the more general difficulties into which Holford was drawn. After the approval of the original development plan he had maintained his relationship with the County Council as an honorary adviser upon planning matters, and hence appeared for the County at the first major public inquiry arising from the plan in 1959.[36] The issue was whether the County and City Councils should be allowed to acquire compulsorily the Lion Yard area in the centre of Cambridge to enable its redevelopment by a private company, Edger Investments Ltd. The developers had prepared a provisional model of their proposal, which showed amongst other things a shopping precinct, an underground car park and three ten-storey blocks. Some forty or more objections were registered by the University,

by some of the colleges, by affected property owners and also, as a portent of things to come, by organized preser vation-cum-ameni ty inter es ts.

As on previous such occasions, learned counsel was deployed on both sides, L.G.Scarman QC appearing for the City and County, and F.M.Layfield representing the occupants of property in Petty Cury. The inquiry was expected to last two weeks: in the event, it spanned four.[37] Holford had already seen how a public inquiry could be used to attack planning proposals not on matters of substance but by using the procedure itself. In 1959 the lawyers were allowed to get out of hand: at one point the whole proceedings were stopped for twenty minutes because Holford had asked the County Planning Officer a factual question on floor space indices while in the witness box. At its close, he wrote to the secretariat at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government to protest at how far the spirit of public inquiries had strayed from that originally intended under the 1947 planning legislation. With lawyers in charge, planners on either side were unable to explain fully their own proposals, while the adversarial conduct of discussion positively assisted in the generation of friction and the taking up of entrenched positions.[38] Holford looked to the Minister's inspectors in charge of controversial inquiries to mitigate excessive legalism, and in the peculiarly fraught circumstances of Cambridge, he looked in vain.

Though he suffered severely at the hands of barristers, Holford brought some of his difficulties upon himself. Skilled as a witness though he was, he was not impregnable. In the Lion Yard inquiry the Royal Fine Art Commission, of which it will be recalled that Holford was a member, had been asked for its observations. He had been absent from the meeting at which the Commission had discussed the developer's outline proposals, but had sent in his comments in advance. As a Commissioner he had expressed his clear view that the proposal was 'so stuffed with accommodation for offices and shops that it would be too congested', nor did he like the three ten-storey blocks, which would 'look very heavy in this area'.[39] Evidently taking him at his word, the RFAC Secretary, Godfrey Samuel, communicated Holford's views to the meeting, and in consequence the Commission made its observations to the effect that the proposed redevelopment would be too intensive, that the towers would look awkward, and that the character of the area would be damaged by the scheme. That the Commission should comment on the floorspace contained within a scheme as well as upon its appearance was itself no innovation: in 1953 it had protested at the development of the Bucklersbury House site near St. Paul's Cathedral at a plot ratio of 6:1. In this instance, however, Holford found himself in the position of being called upon to defend the scheme of which he had been so critical in his letter to Samuel. He did not attempt to justify the towers, which he described at the inquiry as looking 'like things sticking out of a suitcase',[40] but he did contend that the general layout, circulation and the amount and type of accommodation provided were 'absolutely suited to the area and capable of resulting in a scheme of high quality'.[41] The purpose behind his evidence was honourable enough: it was to make the case for a certain amount of commercial development within the town centre.

> I cannot accept for a moment the proposal that the University or colleges should do what they like without, so to speak, allowing the city to make its own case for its own development.[42]

However, to fight his corner in the adversarial context of the inquiry he had to disown an important part of the RFAC observations to which he had himself contributed. Under cross-examination he implied that he had had no part in the discussions, and indeed expressed the view that the Commission had no business concerning itself with the 'technicalities' of development.[43] Into such tangles are men of affairs inexorably drawn. Perhaps it served Holford right that the Minister rejected the application and provided the University with one of the very few victories which it gained against Holford in planning inquiries.

Lion Yard was eventually redeveloped, and Cambridge has remained in more or less the state which Holford and Wright prescribed for it in 1950. Some of the recommended road works have been constructed, others quite differently from anything the consultants envisaged, others again not at all. In particular, the eastern spine relief route which had been the cause of so much argument was never constructed. Central Cambridge is more than ever a difficult place to get around in a car, but whereas in 1950 it seemed sensible to make provision for the anticipated increase in traffic, and reasonable to make sacrifices to do so, our scale of values has changed. It is now realized that the demand for roadspace is almost insatiable: the dominant problem is not how to meet it but how to minimize it. Holford and Wright could not possibly have catered for all the traffic growth which has subsequently occurred, for not only have car-ownership rates risen very much higher than they anticipated, but Cambridge has become more important still as a regional service centre, despite the County's success in holding the population of the town itself to below the 100,000 target contained in the original consultants' plan. Nonetheless a relief road of modest proportions might well have been better than none at all, for it might have provided scope for the partial pedestrianization of the historic centre—not, it must be added, a proposal advanced in the Holford-Wright plan.

Despite changing circumstances Holford stood by the general principles of the 1950 plan, and on balance he had the rights of the matter. The longrunning saga of the redevelopment of the Kite has since demonstrated on a very small scale what might have happened had the University succeeded in its case for an entirely new regional shopping centre to the east, academic peace and quiet would have been purchased at the cost of the dislocation of unwilling residents, immense public expense and a disruption of Cambridge's economic, social and political life. The town centre today still manages to function, somehow, as a very congested regional centre, yet it has not lost its character: it remains in that state of 'interesting balance' which Holford and Wright originally sought to perpetuate.

CORBY

Soon after the Cambridge advisory plan had been completed, Holford and Wright obtained a major planning commission of a very different kind. The location was a low plateau to the north-east of Kettering where, since 1934, the firm of Stewarts and Lloyds had been working the Northampton Sands ironstone for the manufacture of steel pipes and tubes. The company had brought with it from Lanarkshire a large proportion of the new workforce, and in the absence of any help from either the local housing authorities or central government, had itself begun to build houses. In five years 2,150 new houses

were built, together with a social club, cinema, churches, schools and shops. The company was not, however, in the business of developing a garden suburb. Under the shadow of the new blast furnaces and coke areas, and surrounded by spoil heaps, the old Northamptonshire village presented a sad picture. Those of its stone houses which had not been converted into shops fell into disrepair. Shacks and sheds sprang up around it, and much land was left derelict. It was not surprising that many of the workers preferred to live at some distance from the place.[44]

The idea of developing Corby as a new town had first been mooted at the end of the War, but neither the urban district council nor the company had supported it. Both were suspicious of intervention by an outside agency, and the company itself did not wish to lose any of the area available for mining. Not until April 1950 did central government take action, by which time the dreary mining town had grown to a population of 15,000. A draft designation order was issued for an area of some 3,550 acres, and provoked immediate opposition. There were the usual objections from agricultural landowners and from the district council. More telling were the contention of the company, backed by the Ministry of Supply, that a large part of the designated area was essential for continued ironstone extraction, and the Ministry of Agriculture's representations that 630 of the designated acres should be maintained in agricultural use. When the order was confirmed only 2,500 acres remained, insufficient for a town with a proposed population of 40,000.

When Holford and Wright were appointed in August 1950, it seemed that they had the task of fitting a quart into a pint pot. Within the area available they had the choice of developing a proper town centre, but with housing at a high density; or of leaving the development of a centre until later and concentrating upon housing alone. They declined the choice, and took advantage of the 'escape clause' which the Minister gave the Development Corporation in his statement accompanying the designation order. In some fifteen months they produced their first draft of the Master Plan. They stressed the unpopularity and costliness of high-density development: higher buildings, a greater paved area and construction on uneven or rehabilitated land would all tend to push rents to a point beyond the means of prospective tenants.[45] They therefore recommended that the Minister be asked to vary the original order to include an additional 202 acres of building land.[46]

The purpose which Corby's designation as a new town had been intended to serve was the provision of improved facilities, housing and social and economic opportunities in relation to an already-existing industry. All new towns built since the War have sought 'balance' in various forms: a balance between population and employment, a balance between different types of industry and different firms within a given type, and a balanced social composition.[47] In Corby, the domination of the town by a single employer and the expectation that this domination would continue for the foreseeable future, rendered any refinement in the search for a balanced community superfluous. The consultants' principal concern was to expand the service sector: the growth of alternative sources of manufacturing employment could wait until later.[48] Holford and Wright therefore had double cause to advocate the rapid development of a new town centre. It was needed to provide both the facilities and the service employment of which Corby stood in need. This emphasis permeated the plan as a whole. Whereas in Stevenage or Harlow strongly focused neighbourhoods had been proposed, the Corby plan placed the emphasis, functionally if not visually, upon the centre.

In other respects the outline plan did not impose a strong form upon Corby: industry, a railway, housing and a valuable area of woodland were already on site, and the consultants interpreted their task as the stitching together of these elements into a coherent whole. It was a pragmatic and reasonable course of action to take, especially in the face of the Development Corporation's unwillingness to accept such radical ideas as the pedestrianization of the main street. The consultants were not inclined to fight to the death upon such points: in the prevailing political and economic climate of the early 1950s, more fundamental issues were at stake.

The years immediately following the war were ones of rationing, building licences and austerity. Furthermore, Corby was a latecomer, the last of its generation of New Towns. By the year of its designation central government departments had experience of controlling the spending of Development Corporations. Things that might have got past the Ministry at Harlow or Stevenage were tightly controlled at Corby: it was, for example, to be twenty years before the landscaping was properly taken in hand. The consultants were genuinely worried, feeling that

> As it is every new announcement about rearmament and shortages of this and that means more of a struggle over the Centre. And the Ministry has already made it clear that even here the making of a case for office or community buildings—as exceptions to the national policy of restriction—will be a hard one to make.[49]

Accordingly they pressed upon the Corporation the need to 'push and keep on pushing … if even half a Centre is to be obtained'.[50] With an inadequate designated area and a shortage of money, Holford felt that 'the carpet could easily be pulled from under our feet'.[51]

Some relief was afforded by the publication of the Minister's variation order in June 1952, but despite pressure , Corby was not permitted to build schools, stores and social facilities in advance of studies demonstrating their economic feasibility.[52] Uncertainty over the variation order had delayed final approval of the Master Plan, construction got under way only slowly, and between the Development Corporation and the district council there was much bad feeling. For a time, the latter effectively refused to cooperate in the implementation of the plan, dragging its feet over the provision of infrastructure and providing shopping and other developments in disregard of the Corporation's longer-term proposals.[53] The fault did not lie with the consultants: nonetheless, it was an unpromising start. Gradually, however, the new town took shape. The first phase of the centre was built as Holford and Wright had proposed under the supervision of the Development Corporation's architect Denis Harper, an old friend of Holford from their student days. Visited on a sunny day it is a cheerful period piece of the 1950s, spoiled by the later addition of flimsy pink awnings to the now pedestrianized Corporation Street. The only buildings designed by Holford's firm, on the north and west side of Market Square, cannot be counted among its finer points.

Corporation Street, Corby, before pedestrianization.

Source: Commission for the New Towns.

With the preparation of the Master Plan and the laying out of the first 500 houses, the original consultants' involvement in the development of Corby effectively ended. Holford was an assessor in the design competition for a new Civic Centre in 1959, but it was John Madin and Partners, authors of the Master Plan for Telford, who prepared the development plan when Corby's target population was increased from 40,000 to 83,000. With the closure of Stewarts & Lloyds the policies behind the Holford and Wright plan passed into history. The job given to them in 1950 had been to serve the expansion of the steel works: the needs of Corby today are very different. Neither had it been, either from the point of view of his own career or from that of the general history of British planning, one of his more important commissions. His main reason for accepting it had been to maintain continuity of employment for the small office established to produce the Cambridge plan in Church Street, Chesterton; and most of the work was done by his assistants and partners. Myles Wright drafted the report (as he had done in Cambridge), and in this instance Holford became enthused only by the open space and landscaping. For the rest, his role was that of figurehead, critic and high-level negotiator.[54]

Holford's involvement with Corby coincided with another episode of personal misfortune. He and Marjorie had been helped over the loss of their baby in 1941 by their temporary adoption of Vivie, the teenage daughter of a former Liverpool colleague, Professor Mayoux. In 1952, however, there was further bad luck of a medical kind.

Holford had accepted a visiting professorship at Harvard, and while they were there Marjorie developed the symptoms of a brain tumour.

She was immobilized by her condition, and was unable to express herself at all. Her evident discomfort, the seriousness of her situation and his inability to establish communication with her left Holford helpless and intensely distressed. Yet it was characteristic of him that he should not succumb to despair or panic, but make himself useful and hold fast to intellect. Spending his days in the hospital, he noted in a diary the particulars of the illness, the proposed surgery and his own reactions. He even included a drawn cross-section of Marjorie's skull showing the location of the malignancy and the action that was being taken to alleviate it.[55] Only by understanding what was happening could he reconcile himself to it, and even *in extremis* his extraordinary analytical facility continued to operate. It is little to be wondered that some people thought him cold.

After surgery Marjorie was well enough to return to England, where she continued her recovery. The incident had badly dented the Holford finances. The most lasting effect was however neither medical nor financial. The episode served to reinforce the already evident lop-sidedness of their relationship. That they were content with each other was not in doubt, but insofar as it is legitimate to look for a balance in marriage, the scales were weighted on Marjorie's side. Extrovert, self-centred and on occasion flirtatious, it was she who was the demanding partner. In the role of invalid, her demands upon her husband increased. He responded with his indulgence and a devotion which, while he was at the peak of his career, did no more harm than to irritate colleagues left suspended in mid-business while he answered her latest summons. Only much later, when his powers were waning, would Holford's ability to bear the load of that devotion be called into doubt. In the early 1950s and indeed for another fifteen years or more, he seemed capable of surmounting any difficulty as his star rose upwards.

THE NATURE OF THE PLAN

The mid-1950s mark an appropriate point at which to take stock of Holford's work in the context of the 'New Planning'. The ten years following the end of the war had been those in which his achievements as a comprehensive planner reached their apogee. In addition to having his proposals received with applause by his professional peers and with a substantial measure of acceptance by his clients, he obtained several commissions from overseas. Between 1948 and 1951 he was planning consultant to the City of Pretoria, and from 1951 he advised various Australian federal departments and agencies upon planning matters, culminating in his appointment as consultant to the National Capital Development Commission. A knighthood for public services in the field of town planning came in 1953, and in that year he became President of the Town Planning Institute. The TPI Presidency was the finale to Holford's performance as a master-planner of British towns. The preceding years had offered ample scope for independent consultants, whose services were much in demand by local authorities struggling to meet the demands placed upon them by the new legislation. From the mid-1950s onwards this flood of work diminished to a trickle. Though Holford would continue to advise, appear at inquiries and prepare plans of a more or less specialized nature, he would not again take the future of an entire British town in his hands.

The plans themselves are the obvious starting-point for any assessment. In the City and at Cambridge and Corby, Holford and his collaborators had displayed (as well they might) a comprehensive command of the new approach and techniques of planning. Yet Holford's plans were unlike those which Abercrombie prepared for Plymouth, Hull or Edinburgh: whereas the latter were notable for the boldness of their substantive proposals, Holford tended rather to evolve his proposals out of the circumstances as they presented themselves to him. It was in the appreciation of the relationship between what might be desirable on paper and what would be feasible in practice that he excelled: despite the technical innovations of the City plan, his reports were distinguished chiefly by their balance and what he called their 'serviceability'. He was frankly critical of planners who allowed themselves to be carried away by their own inspiration.

> There are great virtues in what I may call 'ideal planning'; it is an exercise for philosophers and artists, and we do not take enough of this kind of exercise. But occasionally we introduce it into the middle of a practical scheme of reconstruction without realizing that it is part of the preliminary thinking rather than of the proposals. The effect is to bewilder the laymen, and to make the whole scheme (even those parts of it which should receive immediate support), dependent on a miracle that may never happen.[56]

The plan which set out a complete vision of the future was almost certain to be picked to pieces as committees selected from it those elements which they liked and could afford, and rejected those which they didn't or couldn't. 'This', said Holford, 'is tantamount to preparing a bran tub, not a plan'.

A Holford plan was not an explicit, programmatic statement of a substantive planning philosophy, at least in the same sense that a plan by Abercrombie constituted such a statement. Was it then the case that he brought to the task only his analytical skill, his techniques, the stock remedies of conventional wisdom and his readiness to co-operate with others? On occasion it seemed almost as though he was saying so. Repeatedly in his writings and public pronouncements he refrained from any straightforward statement on substantive matters, and in his Presidential address to the TPI he did not express his support for a single specific element of post-war planning policy. Instead, he encouraged his audience to conduct more research, deepen its understanding and to broaden the 'planning front'.[57]

In the early 1950s, this emphasis on process rather than programme was an appropriate note to strike. The revolution which had occurred in planning's status as a discipline and as a function of government had been one in which perhaps some thirty or forty members of the town planning movement had played any significant part. Its consequence was that rank-and-file officials working in subordinate positions within the engineering departments of local authorities found themselves with responsibilities for exercising unparalleled powers over the development of land. The calibre of these local authority staffs was inadequate for the task in hand, and the last thing they needed was encouragement to dream wonderful dreams.[58] Moreover, the great forward rush of planning had produced a reaction, so much so that a reviewer of the Cambridge plan could refer to 'the high point of anti-planning'.[59] Though it was the betterment levy

which was the particular target of planning's opponents, the entire apparatus was within their field of fire. When Holford came to take up the TPI Presidency the financial provisions of the 1947 legislation had been repealed, planning had ceased to be among the named functions of the responsible Department of State, and the Institute had just had its second petition for a Royal Charter rejected by the Privy Council.[60] As a profession, planners had come up the beach on the wave of reconstruction: now they felt themselves stranded at the high-water mark while the tide of political enthusiasm ebbed. Branded as bumbling bureaucrats, 'nosey parkers' and the agents of a creeping faceless totalitarianism, they were aware of their vulnerability under the Conservative administration returned in the General Election of 1951.

It was in this unfavourable context that Holford encouraged the Institute's members to heighten their awareness of planning's effects on the community, and chose for the 1953–54 session the theme of 'The Planner and the Planned'. Gently, he invited planners to engage in self-criticism. The plan itself might be good enough, but could it be successfully implemented? Had all its possible consequences been considered, and could the public be convinced of its merits?[61] Such probing was the most he allowed himself: the need to improve performance and stimulate an outward-looking attitude had to be balanced against the necessity of maintaining morale in the face of political difficulties and professional disappointments. His Presidential Address to the Institute was characteristic of his Presidency as a whole. While soothing the self-esteem of his audience, he led it to a high promontory from which the surrounding terrain was visible. Suggestions and warnings alike were so delicately expressed that one wonders whether they might not have been missed altogether by the inattentive. His hearers were left both reassured and stimulated—though by what specific points, they might later have found it difficult to say. In this, as in so many other of Holford's speeches and writings, it was the panorama which *was* the point.

Pragmatism and the wide view were all very well, but what, if anything, lay behind the elegant phrases and the 'serviceable' compromises? Holford himself provided the elements of an answer in a number of articles and lectures which he produced between 1949 and 1953. As the new system began to show its colours he was increasingly aware that its supporting background of 'philosophy and ethics'

> could fade, in unfavourable conditions, into a narrow professionalism leading to a purely bureaucratic and self-perpetuating activity, of no real value to society, and in the crudest economic terms simply adding to the cost of living.[62]

He professed a belief in planning as a 'social art', and that the combination of science, design and administration in the creation of new environments was an activity of profound cultural as well as economic and technical significance. It had to be informed not only by knowledge and technique, but by a system of values. To the question of 'Whose values?', Holford's answer would seem to have been that the relevant values were latent in the culture itself: what was needed was the person 'with a broad cultural background, able to understand the point of view of scientist and humanist, and interested in society at all levels'.[63] Of such stuff should planners be made. To the harder question of 'Which values?' Holford's reply was that

> The essence of culture is diversity within unity; its distinction is made up of detailed differences as well as of general solidarity.[64]

One could not hold up culture as a standard to be conformed to: the essence of a cultural background was that refinement which enabled one not only to devise but to vary, or depart from, set standards. 'This is the courageous, active principle of planning; if it dies we are left in that kind of *rigor* which we call bureaucracy'.[65]

> The great advance that town planning will have to make in the coming century will emerge from the struggle between the diversity that goes with culture, and the uniformity that so easily becomes associated with democracy and a planned economy.[66]

When Holford talked thus about the cultural and social purposes of planning it seemed that he cared less about the specificity of the guiding inspiration behind the plan than about the presence or absence of the inspiration itself. One could and should read both Le Corbusier and Lewis Mumford as sources of this inspiration.

> In the one case it is the artist speaking; in the other the social historian. What they are both showing us is not a blue-print, but a principle and a motive'.[67]

The guiding idea should be restrained within the discipline of the possible: it was not the planner's job to take a sketch by Le Corbusier for a seventy-storey office block and put it up to a committee of the London County Council as part of the Development Plan for Westminster. It was rather to

> understand and translate the principle, and to read the technical signs aright, so that the practical plan that is put forward helps towards the attainment of the idea *as soon as the other planning conditions are ready for it*–by which I mean social organization and the economics of transport and land values.[68]

The more one studies Holford's statements regarding the broader purposes of planning the more interesting they become. In the first instance one almost wonders whether he could be serious. Did he sincerely propose that planners could play this kind of waiting game, and that the undereducated local officials who constituted the bulk of the planning profession could constitute a kind of Coleridgian 'clerisy', an élite whose responsibility it might be to advance the 'general cultivation' of society? This concern with the cultural purpose behind the plan is inaccessible to practitioners and theorists alike in the 1980s: it was less so thirty years ago. What Holford hoped of planning was after all less dramatic than what was demanded of it by either Mumford or Le Corbusier. Abercrombie's dictum that the successful plan is 'more than a piece of skilful engineering or satisfactory hygiene or successful economics: it should be a social organism and work of art' has been much quoted as a characteristic example of 'pre-scientific', 'unitary', élitist and plain oldfashioned planning wisdom.[69] Yet as we have already seen, Holford was not

talking about the imposition of a blueprint from above, or of treating the fabric of a city like sculptor's clay. He did not believe the planner to be an artist in the same sense that a painter or even an architect was an artist: the planner's aim was not the exercise of his own creative impulse, but to bring to light those impulses, the 'big evolutionary ideas', which existed within society itself.

His own words express the principle thus:

> We all know places which can be described as a collection of houses rather than a town in just the same way as a wall may be described as a mere collection of bricks. And many of us suspect that it would even be possible nowadays to have a sort of administrative Jerusalem in England's otherwise pleasant land–I am using the word in the Miltonian sense; a settlement which alienated no firstclass agricultural use and was not ardently desired for military training, which was economically justified and demographically well placed, where transport and other services could be provided without crippling expense, and wherebut perhaps I am asking you to imagine too much—there are no minerals of any commercial value whatsoever, either on the surface or underground.
>
> Yet this triumph of compromise, this ideal town, might be quite insignificant in the full cultural sense of the term; it might have no landscape nor architecture, no contrasts, no surprises, no roots in the ground nor anything above it to express vividly the social idea in terms of lay-out and of building; in a word, no civic design.
>
> At the other extreme one can point both to significant and to insignificant towns which owe their existence to ideas and to the designs by which those ideas were expressed, rather than to economic or strategic considerations. It would be offensive to quote an unsuccessful example by name; but we can all think of model lay-outs in which so much has been done by the designer that the inhabitants have no initiative left to make a life for themselves.
>
> As a successful example I would quote Cambridge. A more unpromising and unprofitable site than that on the edge of the Fens, marshy and liable to flood and expensive to build (as in fact it still is), can hardly be imagined. Yet the monastic idea, expressed in quadrangle and precinct and walled garden, has resulted in an uplifting architecture and in a quality of civic design which makes Cambridge to-day, despite all its shortcomings of housing, transport and climate, a most desirable place in which to live.[70]

Clearly, Holford's conception of civic design is far removed from the Beaux Arts 'grand manner' or its modern successors about which Reilly had so enthused. 'The best work', Holford told his students, 'is collective, anonymous, disinterested, and carried out almost as a social service'.[71] One looks in vain in his writings for any attempt to conjure up a vision of what the product of this self-effacing civic design might be: the emphasis, again, is on process. While an emphasis on method rather than form is not unique in the history of town planning, it is unusual to find it expressed, at this time, by an architect-

planner in the course of a justification of design itself. The ends of civic design have unusually inspired and justified the means: in Holford's case the ends are obscure. He stated no strong personal opinions regarding design values beyond those which he espoused before the war, nor any definite preferences regarding their formal expression. It is a similar sort of puzzle to that presented by the architecture of Team Valley. The spectacle of an exhaustively comprehensive effort, leading to an indeterminate result, makes one wonder about the motive behind the effort itself. One can conclude that Holford's concerns as a planner transcended his concerns as an architect, if only on the intellectual plane of reasoned argument. Of his instincts we shall have more to say.

We believe, then, that Holford's case for civic design, though sometimes nebulous and far-fetched, can be judged in its own right. His position is clearer than it might otherwise have been because, during 1949, the Schuster Committee was deliberating upon the scope of town planning and the qualifications of its practitioners. His inaugural lecture at University College London is in fact an effort to enter a dialogue with the Committee. It addresses many of the same issues and in particular the conflicting claims of what were described as 'design' and 'administration' to primacy in town planning. The Committee was told by some witnesses, including a number of distinguished geographers, that the essence of planning lay in determining the right use of land, that it was thus fundamentally an economic and social activity, and that the technique of the designer was secondary. Other equally distinguished witnesses asserted that the creation of a physical design, encompassing land use and built development alike, was the main product of planning, and that economics, sociology, geography and other contributory disciplines were therefore ancillary to the skill of the designer.[72] This was just the sort of antithesis which Holford would go to inordinate lengths to avoid, yet the debate had the effect of forcing him to be specific in explaining precisely who he thought should be responsible for undertaking the planning task. This is what he said to his UCL audience:

> Suppose we break up this cultural activity, prismatically, into its components. From left to right there will be a succession of columns or activities, each fusing imperceptibly into its neighbour, but each distinguished as a separate colour in the spectrum. Out of the whole spread of range of activities let us take two as representing the subject we are discussing—town and country planning. I will call one column *Administration* and the other *Technical Planning and Design.* Their boundaries touch, and at the margin it takes a spectroscope to measure where one ends and the other begins; yet in the centre of their columns they are distinctive and different. To the right of the administration column are activities of a colour still further removed from design. They include other types of administration and management, economic planning, political science, government and law.
>
> To the left of the technical planning column are the scientific and research activities—and architecture and civil engineering—a long list ranging through the applied and natural sciences and specialist technologies… . These four columns represent the essential and the contributory elements of town and country planning.

> The two central columns are those on which interest is focused at the moment. In view of the appointment of the Minister's Committee on the Training of Planners under the Chairmanship of Sir George Schuster, I shall not express here my own purely personal views on training in detail, but simply describe the functions of the administrative and technical planners which seem to me to follow as a matter of course from this analysis of the nature of town planning itself….
>
> In the first place I think the technical planners must have knowledge of and experience in administration, and the administrators similarly in technique. But in neither case need it be more than a brief working acquaintance. The technical planners should come, in my view, from the adjacent column—men and women who have proved their capacity to master a technique, or to understand scientific process
>
> The administrative planner, preferably after a training in the humanities, should, I think, try his hand at design, or at least at design appreciation, and at social and physical surveys. He will not be expert, even after a course of one or two years, in presenting his findings; but he will at least have glimpsed the essential nature of the process that creates an engineering, an architectural or a landscape design….
>
> No one will ever ask the administrative planner, as such, to construct a building or a bridge or draw a map; but he will be able to *read* a plan or a map, and to tell the difference between a good design and a poor one. Best of all he will learn how to work with his opposite number in the technical field…in my submission, the old client-craftsman relationship should be retained; the administrative column standing in the place of the client, the technical column in that of the designer, surveyor or specialist. It takes two to make a plan.
>
> One further comment needs making on the relationship between these two columns, and that concerns leadership. I have no strong feelings myself on the choice of the chief for a planning team. With a first-rate Chairman of Committee, the local government team is usually happier under a technical chief. On the other hand, in central departments it is more usual, and I think more appropriate, for an administrative officer to have the technical man as his adviser. Urban authorities seem to find that an architect, engineer, or surveyor, with organizing ability or wide committee experience, makes the best planning officer. I would only make one reservation to that, namely that he should have a real and critical understanding of design in the sense to which I have already referred.[73]

We have quoted this passage at some length because of its importance in indicating Holford's initial position in the major debate over the issue of 'Who plans?', which was to flare up, more spectacularly than it did at the time of the Schuster Committee, in the mid-1960s. Setting his views against those of the Committee itself, they are very similar: neither advocates that town planning should be a single, strictly delimited professional discipline, nor that its practitioners should be trained up from an undergraduate level to perform it. To the contrary, planning is presented in both accounts as a task to be shared

among many disciplines. The designer has a special contribution to make insofar as the result of planning is built form, but it is research and synthesis which sets the programme within which the designer is to work. Most of the questions upon which the two points of view diverge are matters of relatively fine distinctions. In one respect, however, there is an obvious difference in the spirit of the two texts. The Schuster Committee came to its conclusions in conscious opposition to the view, expressed most forcibly to it by Thomas Sharp, that planning is design, in a sense which would be conveyed if a single Holfordian 'technician-craftsman' took charge of the entire planning operation. Holford arrived at a position similar to the Committee's, but from a position which perceived in the skills of the designer just those qualities which were threatened by 'bureaucratic rigor' and 'narrow professionalism', and yet which offered the means to elevate the plan from technical, functional competence to the level at which it might cater for the cultural, emotional and aesthetic needs of a civilized society.

Chapter Nine
Testing Times

It cannot be said of Holford that his views or his performance as a planner were representative of the state which British town planning had reached in the 1950s. It will by now be apparent that his conception of planning, even by the standards of a profession and a social movement that prided itself on the comprehensiveness of its outlook, was unusually wide. Predisposed to look for connections rather than distinctions between different kinds and levels of planning activity, he might with justice be said to constitute in the post-war years the fullest embodiment of the ideal of the omnicompetent, comprehensive planner. He had dealt with the distribution of population and industry at a national level, with urban redevelopment in terms of the design of individual buildings, and with all scales of planning problems in between. Only Abercrombie and Raymond Unwin before him had attempted so much and risen so high in the process. These distinguished predecessors, however, as prominent members of the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association, had been closely identified with a definite social and aesthetic programme, and had to a certain extent moulded that programme in their own image. Holford was not so identified: his intellectual approach to planning was informed by a generalized belief in the interconnectedness of things, and though it was capable of being expressed in terms of the motives or procedures of planning, this belief could not be reduced to normative statements about the kinds of environment towards which planning might work.

In the City of London and in Cambridge (if not in Corby) we have seen that Holford's general principles of motive and procedure, of design and synthesis, were largely realized. Rather than impose his own *a priori* assumptions regarding form and structure upon the fabric of these urban areas he mastered their complexities from many different points of view; and while maintaining a balance between different interests he managed to express some underlying idea about 'the genius of the place'. In encouraging his fellow planners towards greater sophistication and a high cultural conception of their role, he preached what he believed he could practise himself.

He had, however, been fortunate: though much-buffeted by powerful interests and steeped in heated controversy, Holford had enjoyed a number of tactical advantages. He had not, in the City, encountered much opposition over the general issues. It was only when matters descended to such particulars as land acquisition that the problem of gaining acceptance for the plan became acute. In that instance he had enjoyed the support of a determined and enthusiastic Minister in seeing the plan though. In Cambridge this

Ministerial support was diminished, and the broad lines of the plan were approved only at the cost of compromises over its constituent parts. While the policy itself appeared to succeed, the University and Colleges were able to mitigate the immediate practical effects of the proposals. In Cambridge the effect was not disastrous: the Holford-Wright plan aimed at maintaining an existing balance between academic and commercial needs, and further compromises did not severely damage a plan which was in the nature of a compromise itself. When, however, the circumstances called for more radical action, experience suggested that the planners would find themselves in difficulty. The general policies might gain approval, but if firm political support was lacking, it might prove very difficult to realize the detailed proposals which made the policies effective.

Supremely gifted in the handling of difficult committees and in the propounding of solutions which could command the widest available support, Holford was by temperament and capacity equipped to make the best of what circumstances had to offer. As TPI President he believed not only that he could sustain the germ of an idea through the procedural and political obstacle course, but that others could do so too. In the years that followed, this position was put to the test in what proved to be two of the most widely publicized environmental issues of their respective decades: the rebuilding of the precincts of St. Paul's Cathedral, and the replanning of Piccadilly Circus.

ST. PAUL'S

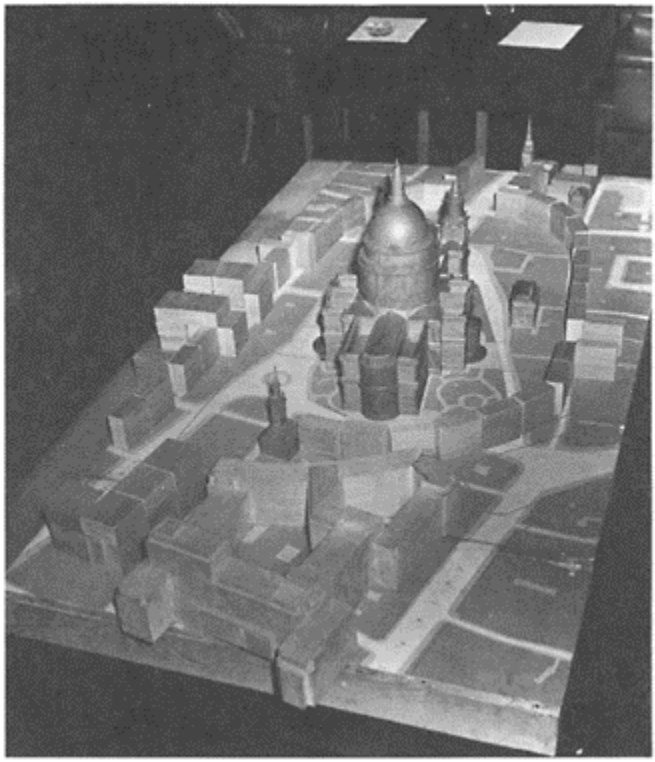
Even before the Blitz demolished much of the building around St. Paul's, the future treatment of the Cathedral's setting had been a subject of public and professional interest.[1] The building of Faraday House and the consequential obstruction of distant views of the dome from the south-west had led to the imposition of special height restrictions in the adjacent area in the 1930s. It was the Blitz itself, however, which lifted the matter to a level above that of mere townscape: the great dome's survival in the face of an incendiary and explosive onslaught became something of a national symbol. When the clearance of nearby bomb-sites opened up novel views of Wren's masterwork, considerable interest was aroused in the possibility of creating a new and more worthy setting for it. The Holden-Holford plan of 1947 had made special provisions for the control of redevelopment in the area and, as architectural adviser to the Dean and Chapter, Holden continued to act as 'a kind of unofficial assessor' on submitted designs.[2] It was on his advice that City planning officers sought to persuade potential developers to follow the example set by the Ministry of Works in its design for the extension of Faraday House, facing the Cathedral's south side. Uniform cornice lines and set-backs, and a very orthodox combination of brick and Portland stone, were to produce such bulky neo-Georgian office blocks as the Bank of England Building in New Change. It was as though the advances which Holden himself had achieved in his pre-war buildings for London Transport had never been, and J.M.Richards, editor of the *Architectural Review*, led a chorus of voices calling for a more ambitious and exciting architecture in the City. When Duncan Sandys, shortly after his appointment as Minister of Housing and Local Government in 1955, compelled the City Corporation to appoint a consultant to prepare a comprehensive scheme for the architectural treatment of the area round St. Paul's, his intervention was greeted with almost universal approbation. The architectural excitement

was a little premature: the intention was not to produce a complete design but a general scheme stipulating the shape and disposition of new buildings, to which their developers and architects might subsequently conform.

With his City connections and an easy relationship with the LCC Holford was an obvious choice for the job, and it was a commission which he was eager to accept. He might perhaps have been less enthusiastic had he anticipated the extent of the Minister's personal involvement. Sandys was a forceful and, from the point of view of those who had to work with or under him, an often difficult Minister. Before Holford began work Sandys had constituted a small committee consisting of himself and the Chairmen of the town planning committees of the LCC and the City, 'to give Holford such guidance as may be necessary'.[3] He had also brought into consultation a number of senior architects, among them Basil Spence, Leslie Martin, Sir Giles Scott and the President of the Royal Academy, A.E.Richardson.[4] Richardson was a man of strong classical convictions, and once drawn into the St. Paul's scheme he became a very vocal advocate for the preparation of a formal setting for the Cathedral. His advice was not directed merely to the Minister but to the newspaper-reading public at large. His views found favour with Sandys, and though the terms of reference did not stipulate the particular approach to be adopted, Holford was under pressure from the outset. He and the Minister spent considerable time with a large-scale wooden model of St. Paul's which Sandys had in his office, using wooden bricks to experiment with different forms of enclosure.[5]

Holford made his first report to a meeting of the advisory committee on the 3rd May, 1955. He presented two broad options, which he called the Formal and the Informal. One would result in an arcaded screen surrounding St. Paul's on all sides, creating a largely traffic-free precinct and a semi-circular piazza at the foot of the Cathedral steps. The other would attempt to tie the Cathedral in to the existing fabric of the City by an irregular and semi picturesque arrangement of buildings and open spaces. Development would be closer in to the Cathedral, but blocks would be arranged in such a way as to maintain important views to and from it. Holford himself made no recommendation, although he did warn that the formal approach could result in an open precinct which

> might tend to be dead, cut off from the normal business life of the City, and a bit dull to look at. The 'Piazza' is a Mediterranean feature and we do not get enough sun to justify many colourful outdoor activities such as give life to Rome, Turin and even Paris.[6]



St. Paul's: the Minister's model showing the basis for the 'formal' approach agreed at the meeting on 3rd May, 1955.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

This gentle caution was as straw in the wind of Sandys's certainty. Only the formal option was discussed in detail, and the meeting ended in agreement that Holford should proceed with a formal scheme for presentation to the Committee early in June.[7]

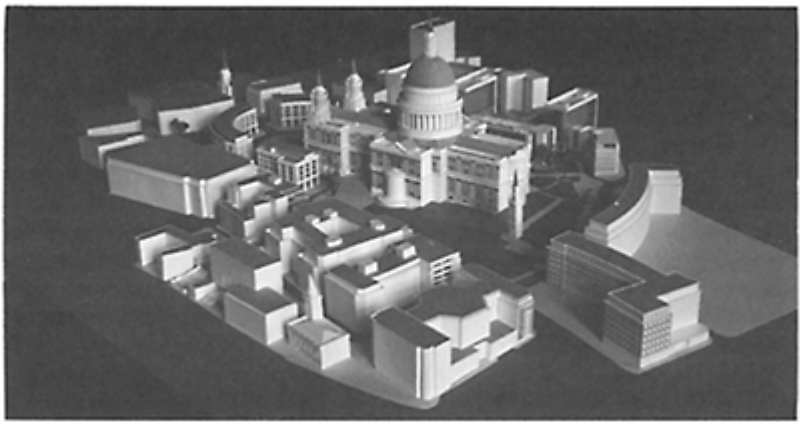
Photographs of the Minister's wooden model indicate clearly what was in the Committee's mind: on taking the matter back to his own office, however, Holford proceeded with a compromise scheme which incorporated an arcaded, semi-circular forecourt to the front of the Cathedral, but did not carry the arcade all the way around. There was to be an open area of grass stretching from the south wall to Carter Lane, and to the north a 'semi-formal' group of office buildings around a second piazza. The Minister was not impressed: Holford thought him to be disappointed both at the relative modesty of scale, and at the lack of a more complete and unified conception of the Cathedral in relation to its setting.[8] He was permitted to continue with the development of this scheme, but at the same time he was asked by Sandys to have the earlier version,

discussed at the May meeting and worked out with the aid of the wooden blocks, fully developed and properly modelled. This was further than Holford would go. He replied that there was only one man in the country who could carry this idea to an architectural conclusion, namely Richardson. Sandys promptly asked if Holford would mind the matter being referred to him, and it was Holford himself who wrote to Richardson, inviting him to submit a dimensional sketch plan and section. He perhaps hoped that if the older architect could be tempted into a detailed development of his sketchy ideas, the weaknesses of the ideas themselves might become apparent. In a straight comparison of plan with plan Holford could look after himself: it was the steady stream of broad-brush conceptions that was so hard to deal with.

Having given Richardson something to think about, Holford prepared for his next meeting with the Minister's committee. The day before it met he wrote to Sandys to prepare the ground:

> The model and plan which I hope to show you on Tuesday afternoon represents a scheme which has not been detailed—in the sense that new buildings are not fully designed—but it is now fairly complete as a conception. This conception is not, I know, the large-scale formal design that you expected. I tried that and failed; and I have written Richardson to say that if he can implement his masterly sketches by a complete plan, I would willingly have it modelled for him. I enclose a copy of my letter. But I feel that the idea of one 'precinct'—a form of arcading or surface treatment entirely surrounding the Cathedral—is out of keeping with the building as it now is, although it might have gone well with Wren's 'model' design, with its great single order of columns and completely symmetrical plan. I feel it would put St. Paul's into a kind of dry dock.
>
> So I have tried to suggest six connected linked open spaces in the precinct, each with its own character…
>
> I hope you will like this scheme at any rate sufficiently to think it worth pursuing; because your confidence means a very great deal to me. Even if you decide to back two horses, I hope you will let me run this particular course as best I can.
>
> There are, of course, variations to be tried out in each of the six areas; for example the rectangular forecourt has some advantages; and common elements such as piers or arcades, carried out in similar materials, would knot the scheme together. But a design made up of a variety of different effects is so much richer in possibilities than one form of enclosure ever could be, that I am naturally anxious to get your agreement to this course before I get down to detail.[9]

He got agreement to continued work on his 'semi-formal' scheme and, while Richardson continued to produce 'masterly sketches', Holford prepared a properly detailed model of his own proposals. This scheme, with its hemicircular forecourt, was presented to the Committee on the 20th September, and received general approval.[10]



St. Paul's: the hemicycle scheme.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

By this time Holford was beginning to have doubts. Though assisted by a small staff in his Harley Street office the direction of the work had been his alone; and in the course of this work he had been under continual pressure from the Minister, his committee, and from the necessity of dealing with other architects called in at the Minister's request. There were late-night meetings in Whitehall, and in time Sandys took to calling upon the Holford office, sometimes unannounced, to inspect progress.[11] Though he had resisted attempts to go the whole classical hog, Holford had incorporated formal elements into the scheme as much to placate the Minister as for their intrinsic merits. In a climate of architectural criticism which was not likely to respond with enthusiasm to formal courtyards and colonnades, his position was uncomfortably exposed. It was, apparently, a conversation with Kennedy which initiated a change of course.

After an unhappy conclusion to his career as Stephenson's successor in the Ministry, Kennedy had come to Holford's firm in the hope that the working relationship which they had enjoyed on the war-time building contracts might be resumed. He was sadly disappointed: in the midst of a difficult project Holford seemed to want neither help nor advice. Yet Kennedy was uneasy about the hemicycle scheme, and was eventually moved to say so. Holford had not invited criticism, and though not angered was visibly displeased. Kennedy suggested that if Holford was worried by his comments, he might consult two architects whose opinions they both respected. This Holford agreed to do, and shortly after he submitted the scheme to the September meeting he had a crucial correspondence with the distinguished architectural historian, John Summerson, whose views are conveniently summarized in a letter he wrote to Holford on the 8th November.

> The problem has been much in my mind and I keep thinking of elaborations of my point of view, which has become a settled one. I really think the values on which the Minister and others have set their hearts are quite unreal. One must choose between two roles for the buildings around the churchyard. Either (a) a harmonious resolution of the surrounding street-plan, aesthetically negative vis-à-vis St. Paul's or (b) a positive

> aesthetic role in which formal relations with the Cathedral are established. In my view there is simply not room for the latter—short of re-planning nearly the whole City! A building the size of St. Paul's has an immense psychological orbit—a 'throw'—and if external formal relations are to be established the formality *must be seen to extend to the limits of that 'throw'*. At St. Paul's it can't be done. A formal object situated *within* that throw but not touching its limits may be fine and handsome in itself but it has nothing to say to the Cathedral.[12]

In short, no formally-conceived piazza on a Renaissance model, placed in front of St. Paul's, could realistically hope to substantiate a relationship with the Cathedral: to do so successfully would have required more space and an altogether larger scale than could realistically be achieved in the City.

Holford confessed himself 'considerably shaken' by Summerson's criticism of the hemicycle scheme. He determined to have the model completed, because he had been instructed to do so by the Minister's Committee and in order to prove to himself that a formal forecourt could not be made to work; but looking further ahead he envisaged a new approach along the lines of the 'informal' option which he had originally put forward.[13] On 12th November he wrote to Sandys to tell him that

> the semicircular design for the forecourt will not do. It has been designed for looks, and yet it does not look right. The richer and more monumental it is made, the more finely modelled, the more incongruous it will appear. The experiment has been well worth making, because it shows that the best one can do in this line (or at least the best I can do) is not good enough; and that I ought to try an entirely different approach.[14]

Sandys's reply was regretful but reasonable: Holford was entitled to reject a solution he believed to be untenable, and might proceed with such other approaches as he thought best. He, the Minister, reserved the right to call in other architects should he wish to proceed with a formal arrangement of the forecourt, but they were in agreement regarding the layout of the office area to the north. In this respect Sandys made a point which was to have some considerable significance later.

> As you know, we think it would be right to take this opportunity to provide some distinctive contribution to the skyline, by the construction of a tall building in the area north-west of the Cathedral.[15]

If the Minister could not leave his mark upon London at ground level, he could try to do so in the air. It was suggested, again, that other architects with special experience of high buildings be brought in to advise.

Holford, thinking perhaps of a campanile, was not loth to see a slim tower rising above his office piazza, and although members of his own staff argued against the concept he invited Eugene Rosenberg (now a partner in the successful firm of Yorke, Rosenberg & Mardell) to produce a design. Holford hoped that the result would be something simple, slim and 'with a decorative silhouette'.[16] He spoke with enthusiasm of 'breaking the

height barrier' to his partner, Richard Gray. A block some 260 feet above ground level, side-on to the northern piazza, was included in the revised scheme when it was finally submitted in March 1956. The forecourt had been redesigned to create a rectangular paved space, irregularly enclosed by trees and by buildings of different heights. An aerial view of this was given in the perspective by Howard Mason which formed the frontispiece to the report drafted by Holford himself between Christmas and New Year.[17] The product of some of the best advice British architecture had to offer, the resulting scheme was a fine piece of civic design.

The manner in which Holford's assistants had worked on the design was in some respects reminiscent of the eighteenth century. Their approach had been strongly influenced by history, precedent and with the design of a 'stage setting' for street life and ceremonial events in mind.[18] Nonetheless the scheme met the requirements of both the market and the new floorspace controls, the Church Commissioners being given the full allowance upon which they had insisted. Height restrictions normally had the effect of producing bulky buildings up to the maximum permitted level, resulting in a distinctively uniform urban texture. By proposing a breach of the restrictions to the north, where the obstruction to views of the dome would be least, Holford was able to adopt the

> principle of more open planning, with blocks of different height and a varied skyline; thus permitting a less congested layout, and offering views through and between the taller buildings to the many interesting silhouettes of trees, towers, spires and domes in which this area is already rich.[19]

When Holford had presented his model and draft report to the Minister's Committee in January 1956, neither approval nor disapproval was minuted.[20] When it was made public, however, reaction was very mixed. The architectural establishment, with Richardson dissenting, was almost unanimous in its praise. In the pages of the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*, however, there was fierce criticism, the editor of the latter virtually disowning his architectural correspondent in opposing the scheme. Sir Alfred Bossom tabled a Commons motion critical of the design, prompting Holford to provide ammunition for his Parliamentary supporters, led by Jo Grimond.[21] The City Corporation was also critical: the proposals, the press was told, were 'not majestic enough'.[22] Nonetheless, the City accepted the report in principle, and the LCC expressed wholehearted support. Not so Duncan Sandys.

St. Paul's: Holforcd's pencil sketch for the perspective by Howard Mason which illustrates the 1956 Report.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

The Minister's behaviour, in the midst of a chorus of criticism, shocked Holford considerably. At a meeting in April, Sandys asked him if he would suggest the names of architects who might be commissioned to prepare an alternative layout for the St. Paul's precinct. It was the sort of suggestion which might be taken in two ways: either as a direct attempt to find an alternative, or as a means of bringing Holford around to the

Ministerial view. Holford recounted his reaction in a letter written to Sandys the following week.

> I said at the time that it was a difficult thing for you to ask me to do; it would be tantamount to suggesting that I should have insufficient confidence in the proposals I have already put forward…If you feel that my proposals are altogether on the wrong lines, I am sure you will not hesitate to tell me so.[23]

Holford declined to suggest architects who might draw up an entirely new scheme, but did suggest names of people 'whose views on amendment in detail I should of course welcome': these were Abercrombie, Brett, Aslin, Spence and Gibberd. These were all people who had already expressed sympathy with his position, or upon whose support he could rely. He was not inclined to make it a resigning issue: with a nearly united professional front now supporting him he evidently judged that he could sustain his position and in the interests of the cause it was inadvisable, as J.M.Richards put it 'to antagonize the Minister if there is any chance of his being won over'.[24]

Holford held on but in the meantime Sandys looked elsewhere using, among others, the services of Geoffrey Jellicoe.[25] Holford's scheme went forward to receive relatively gentle treatment at the hands of the Royal Fine Art Commission and the Planning Committees of the City Corporation and the LCC. When in August the Minister told Holford that 'he had climbed down over the question of a formal, symmetrical forecourt, and accepted the view that even if it were desirable, there is no room for it on the site', it must have seemed for a moment as though the scheme had finally won through. But then, having said this, he 'proceeded to suggest that almost every item in the scheme except the Terrace might be altered'. Among other things Sandys now suggested that the tall office block was too high and should, if possible, be broken down into two blocks of medium height.[26]

> The discussion flowed round these various points and I told the Minister that the easiest thing in the world was to whittle down a design until it was unrecognizable. But this design had stood the test of a certain amount of technical criticism and should be replaced by a design of at least equal unity and interest. I did not suggest for a moment that such a design could not be produced, but only that there had been no evidence of it, and that the schemes already sketched out by Richardson, Scott, Allen and others, were not practical.[27]

Holford allowed that variations might be made to the proposals south of the Cathedral, but in respect of the office development to the north he did not concede anything. Here, he would 'not agree to amend the design except in details and in the use of buildings. These amendments would naturally arise when programmes for these buildings were worked out'. In effect, he told the Minister that if these parts of the scheme which he considered critical were significantly altered, he would withdraw from the scene.

The Minister's reponse, in the shape of a new model, emerged at the beginning of October. The northern area which contained the high block was left unaltered, but the

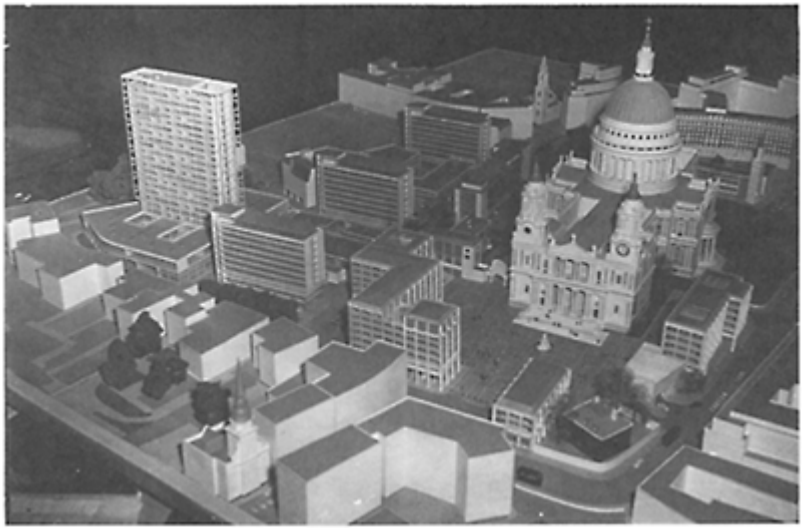
forecourt and east end were entirely redesigned. To the rear of the Cathedral the area which had been (and was finally to become) the site of the Choir School was left as 'a front garden for the Bank of England building': while to the front, there was to be a more domestic scale of building on the north side of the forecourt and an absence of building other than the Deanery to the south. Holford believed that these amendments disintegrated the unity of character and ideas behind the scheme, and recommended to the City Corporation that it resist in particular the new forecourt proposals, which would give

> no feeling of enclosure, no freedom from traffic, and no incidental interest…I have not been asked to comment on the probable cost but I think it is only right to say that in my opinion the amendment would not be worth it, in order to secure what I can only describe as a more suburban and tree-planted atmosphere in the forecourt of a great metropolitan building.[28]

This to-and-fro could, perhaps, have gone on for much longer. Sandys could not dismiss Holford or his proposals, for the commissioning authority was not the Ministry but the City. Holford himself would not, it seems, abandon the commission unless forced to a point which the Minister repeatedly approached, but at which he never quite arrived. It was a Cabinet reshuffle which put an end to the arguments: Sandys was promoted to Defence and was replaced by the gentler personality of Henry Brooke. With variations to allow for new road requirements stipulated by the Ministry of Transport, the Holford scheme went forward as an amendment to the County of London Development Plan to a Public Inquiry in the summer of 1957. The Minister's decision was announced on the 3rd January the following year. As approved, the scheme was substantially as Holford had envisaged it, but with the future of the southern forecourt buildings left undecided and the tall 'Block R' chopped down to just above 200 feet.[29] This latter decision puzzled Holford a little: the tall building had been rejected 'on the very ground that he thought he had proved untenable', namely, that it would interfere with important views of the Cathedral.[30] Nonetheless, he was able to take some satisfaction in what had proved a qualified success, unaware that the largest and most vicious public controversy arising from the scheme was yet to come.

Holford was retained by the City as its consultant on the redevelopment of the St. Paul's Precinct, and during 1958 he was involved in prolonged discussions with the architects appointed by the Church Commissioners, Trehearne & Norman, Preston & Partners, regarding the feasibility of achieving a development with floorspace equal to or greater than that envisaged in his original design. The lowering of Block R had left a shortfall, which owners and developers wished to make good by varying the provisions of the scheme. Holford found this most hard to achieve, not only because of the constraints imposed by the design itself, but because the City Corporation had never accepted his recommendation that redevelopment be undertaken 'either by Corporate Ownership, ownership by a joint body, or development by an accredited agent of the Corporation'.[31] Negotiating with several interested parties at once, he and the planning authorities found it particularly difficult to maintain the architectural cohesion of the scheme while respecting the original floorspace allocations made for each of its component parts; for it was practically impossible to compensate owners and tenants for reductions in floor area

in one part of the scheme by additions in another. Holford continued to argue that unified control was a prerequisite of an architecturally successful development, but the Corporation would not participate. It was a consortium of the Church Commissioners and three contracting firms (Trollope & Colls, Laing and Wimpey) which obtained permission for their scheme for the entire northern area at the beginning of 1962.



St. Paul's: model of a late version of the final scheme.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

What was finally approved was self-evidently the direct descendant of the Holford scheme. The architecture was contemporary but restrained, the lay-out in the north-east corner simplified with a large L-shaped block wrapping itself around the easternmost of the three central slabs. The model produced by Trehearne & Norman, Preston & Partners looked heavier and more bulky than its Holford predecessor, but especially around the north side of the forecourt, the spirit of the original was adhered to.

It was when building began that the trouble really started. One of the features of the 1956 scheme which was retained in the final developers' plan was the eight-storey 'Block A' which marked the right-hand side of the entrance to the forecourt as it was approached from Ludgate Hill. Since Wren's time the building line on the north side of Ludgate Hill had obscured the view of the Cathedral's West Front, but clearance after bombing had opened up a prospect which was all the more appreciated because of the post-war cleaning of the Cathedral stonework. It had been a conscious decision to set back the alignment of the buildings on the approach, but then to close partially the view at the top of the hill by bringing the new block (now known as Juxon House) forward almost to the original building line. The effect which was intended was that of gradual disclosure of the

Cathedral as the observer approached it from the west, and a definite transition as one moved into the forecourt enclosure itself. Unfortunately this little trick of civic design was not, to lay eyes, at all apparent from the published views of Holford's or the developer's models. Only when the scaffolding went up on the site did the significance of Block A dawn upon the public, and the public did not like it at all. The Dean of St. Paul's, the Very Reverend W.R.Matthews, made a public demand for an immediate halt to work on the building and there was a chorus of protest in the press at 'this shameless and vulgur national scandal'.32 On 25th March a considerable crowd gathered at the site to demonstrate against it, and questions were asked in the House of Lords. The Government, however, was unmoved, and the Paternoster development was completed in 1967.

Though the architectural press had stoutly defended Holford through long years of controversy, the final result was a disappointment to them.[33] The interior of the scheme was on most counts banal. The architectural detail which fleshed out Holford's conception was mediocre, and though the principle of pedestrianization was an admirable one, it was not in itself enough to create a comfortable environment. Wind whistled through rather bleak spaces, reminding the pedestrian of how little was known in the mid-1950s about the effects of high buildings on the passage of air around them. Two great weaknesses stand out as one walks about the precinct. The piazza, Holford had written many years before, 'is the pool into which life flows'. Even on the finest of days Paternoster Square is a backwater. Only a pub and a public convenience break the monotony of office walls facing onto this, the largest space in the scheme. There is little traffic through it and the space itself, architecturally anonymous and with little incidental statuary, fountains or other items that help to give interest to the Italian original, does not draw sufficient life from round about. One feels certain that in the details the developers' architects let Holford down; and it was a joint committee of City and LCC officials which, having taken over the environmental aspects of the scheme, cancelled the pavilions and services planned for Paternoster Square. The responsibility for the conceptual weakness of the thing is, however, his. The forecourt is a rather different matter. This could and should have worked as Holford intended. The continual flow of visitors to the Cathedral could have filled this more sheltered space with vendors, tourists, office workers taking lunchbreaks and other signs of life, but the southern part of Holford's scheme, however, was never built, and traffic roars around the side of a public space that has never quite realized itself.

It is only when one considers the Cathedral from further off that one realizes the extent of Holford's skill. From the river, from Ludgate Hill, from St. Martin's Le Grand, Cannon Street, and even Newgate Street, one is presented with views of the Cathedral that are carefully considered and full of interest. From close to the precinct, the great dome performs a slow dance with the surrounding blocks as one moves towards or away from it. From a distance it is unobstructed by the Paternoster scheme from nearly all important points, and a fine view has been created looking up the steps from the river across Queen Victoria Street. One only has to look at other contemporary or later developments to appreciate the way in which so much has been achieved, all in the context of a corporate landowner which demanded its full floorspace entitlement.

Further work on the St. Paul's area proved abortive. In 1964 Holford was asked to prepare a feasibility study on the redevelopment of the area south-west of the Cathedral,

incorporating the sinking of Carter Lane to carry traffic from Ludgate Circus to Cannon Street. If implemented this would have freed the forecourt of traffic and created the pedestrian space which he had advocated from the first. A final report was submitted in 1968. The response was generally unfavourable and a financial appraisal by Lichfield and Partners demonstrated that the likely cost would exceed what the Corporation was prepared to pay. Further planning studies have resulted, at the time of writing, in the designation of a Conservation Area, and the abandonment of any prospect that something more might be made of the Cathedral forecourt. Thus a longrunning planning history has culminated, not merely in inaction, but with inaction formalized and incorporated in a local plan.[34]

The St. Paul's episode is not, perhaps, the ideal test of Holford's conception of civic design. The personality of Duncan Sandys so dominates the story that it is hard to identify within it any conclusions that might have a wider application. For Holford himself, the outcome was a disappointment. Sandys at least had cared passionately about the scheme, but what its designer felt had ultimately shackled it was a lack of conviction on the part of its sponsors. It was possible to persuade a Committee to approve a plan, or a developer to accept it, but very much harder to whip up enthusiasm. Civic design of

St. Paul's. Left: Juxon House from the Cathedral forecourt; right: Juxon House, Ludgate Hill (showing the controversial foreclosing of the view of the West Front).
Source: Leith Penny.

lasting quality required patrons with the conviction to fight and pay for the result. In America or South Africa Holford knew of instances where private or corporate clients had had the vision to commission works that had architectural and civic significance:

where were their English counterparts? In the case of St. Paul's the designer had found himself poised between a planning authority interested in control, and a landowner interested in profit. Where was the *social* incentive to design?[35]

A further comment on the scheme was made by Terence Bendixson, an admirer of its overall form but a critic of the architecture, which he judged 'a complete flop'. The practice of commissioning architectural master plans for large areas, he argued, produced an unreasonable split in the process of design, tantamount to asking two men to cook a soufflé. While it was desirable to control commercial layouts themselves, what architect worth his salt would accept a straightjacket from another? Could the result in such circumstances be other than banal?[36]

As the Barbican north of Route 11 was to show, there could be as much danger in putting all one's architectural eggs in one basket as in spreading the risks. It is going too far to discount the 'master plan' approach on the evidence of what proved, in terms of landscape, to be both one of the most difficult and one of the most successful of post-war redevelopment schemes. It does how-ever require a particular sort of talent and a particular sort of temperament to undertake a design which is destined to a realization different from the original vision. It was Holford's tragedy as an architect that such a talent and a temperament were his.

PICCADILLY CIRCUS

The circumstances under which Holford prepared the design for St. Paul's precincts were different from those which he had envisaged when his involvement in the planning of London first began. Reviewing in 1962 the experience of post-war years, he remarked upon the extent to which the opportunities for reconstruction had been over-estimated. War damage had provided

> only half an opportunity and sometimes not even that, for its effects in most British towns was sporadic. Compared with Pittsburgh, for example, which had no war damage, or Hanover, in Western Germany, whose centre was 90 per cent destroyed, neither Coventry, nor Manchester, nor Exeter provided an ideal opportunity for replanning. Buildings and services which had escaped destruction had all the more to be preserved because of the loss of those that had been totally destroyed…And the *economic* opportunity, the incentive that lies behind the private enterprise redevelopment schemes of the last few years, was at first badly overestimated. So that, in the event, the high hopes of 1941–1951 were by no means fully realised. Economic stringency became the order of the post-war day; building licensing continued until 1954; and as the building industry was so largely employed on housing schools and factories and on catching up with areas of maintenance and conversion, it was the gaps in the town centres, the absence of inspired civic design and public architecture, which became most evident as the 1950s came to a close.[37]

Moreover, the political climate had changed. The Conservatives had restored the private market in land. Whereas at the end of the war it had been imagined that the initiative in central area redevelopment would lie with the planners, at the beginning of the 1960s it was clear that it had passed to private enterprise.

> Developers are no longer barnacles clinging to the sides of the ships of state and of the planning authorities. They are out sailing boats of their own, some of them of considerable size. Planning, as envisaged in the 1947 Act has given way to the improvisation of policies to meet a changing situation.[38]

The aim of achieving comprehensive redevelopment in accordance with a single co-ordinated plan or design was proving difficult to realize. New terms of compensation for compulsory purchase contained in the amending Act of 1959 were discouraging the planning authorities, and except under threat of compulsory purchase it was all but impossible to ensure that adjacent sites in different ownerships could be redeveloped in accordance with any phased programme. Developers were increasingly skilled in exploiting the opportunities which the legislation provided, most notoriously in the Third Schedule of the 1947 Act; and to deny them their full entitlement of floor area could be prohibitively expensive, even when the result was a building the bulk of which was too much for its particular site. Planning applications compatible with a preconceived scheme could not be summoned out of thin air, and every attempt to impose additional economic burdens upon developers met with strong resistance. In an article published in 1962, Holford imagined how Sir Christopher Wren might have been cross-questioned by Counsel at an Inquiry:

> 'You say this steeple of yours is 150 feet high. Would you tell us what accommodation it contains and what rent it is likely to command?' 'No rent at all. I had thought of hanging some bells at the top of the tower…'
>
> 'Bells! Sir Christopher. Surely that would be adding a common nuisance to an already ungainly and useless object…etc. etc.'[39]

Undistracted by large responsibilities for rehousing, and with large corporate resources at its disposal, the City of London had with Holford's aid achieved rather more than had been attempted in the majority of British city centres, or in the rest of central London. By the end of the 1950s it was engaged in two very large schemes of redevelopment at St. Paul's and the Barbican. In the West End, however, no concerted approach to the problems of redevelopment had yet emerged. Until 1959 the issues remained in the background, overshadowed in the public consciousness by housing and the New Towns. In that year, however, there occurred an event which was to mark a permanent shift in public interest, and which served to crystallize hitherto unexpressed feelings of disappointment at the course of post-war redevelopment.

The location which the commentators of the day portrayed as the test case for urban redevelopment was Piccadilly Circus, that awkwardly-shaped clearing created in the 1880s when Shaftesbury Avenue was formed to debouch into Nash's Regent Circus

South. The resulting junction was described by Sir Alfred Gilbert, designer of the statue of Eros, as:

> a distorted isochromal triangle, square to nothing of its surroundings…an impossible site, in short, upon which to place any outcome of the human brain, except possibly an underground lavatory…[40]

Repeated attempts to reorganize the Circus over the years following its creation had not been realized, but in the post-war years, despite, or even perhaps because of its seediness and vulgarity, it was a place of particular importance to the image of London as it existed in the minds of many millions of people. Its redevelopment would be significant not only for the West End but for the English-speaking world as a whole.[41]

In understanding the story of Piccadilly Circus it is helpful to have a clear idea of the principal sites involved. Along the south side between Regent Street and Haymarket was the block containing the Criterion Theatre, owned by the Crown Estate. To the east of the Circus was the Trocadero block, mostly owned and occupied by J.Lyons and Company; and in front of it, on a triangular island site owned by the London County Council, was the London Pavilion cinema. It was the sale of the Cafe Monico on the north side of the Circus in 1952, however, which began the chain of events. The seller was Walter Nell of Express Dairies, and the buyer Jack Cotton, an extrovert Birmingham property developer making his first foray into the London market. Cotton paid around half a million for the quarter-acre site, the largest in the block, and thus bought his way into the development game that was to follow. From the beginning, Cotton needed the assistance of the LCC to realize the potential of the Monico site, for not only was it the planning authority but it also owned the adjacent site of Piccadilly Mansions, a block of flats which Cotton hoped to incorporate into his own redevelopment. As Cotton needed the LCC, so the LCC needed Cotton. Its own roads plans allowed for the two-fold increase in traffic which was universally anticipated, but its funds were wholly inadequate to pay for the programme which such a forecast implied. When Cotton offered the southern 'nose' of the Monico site as part of the deal over the Piccadilly Mansions freehold, it seemed as though the LCC could obtain land for a new roundabout at the Circus which would otherwise be unaffordable for many years.

Though this was welcome news for the Council's valuation and roads officials, it posed major problems for its architects and planning committee. Cotton had made it a condition of the arrangement that his surrender of part of the site for road improvements should not reduce the floor area to which he was entitled: the plot ratio should be calculated on the basis of the original area. When in 1954 the 100-foot height restriction on London buildings was lifted, it became clear that Cotton's plans would result in a block of great height and girth, having no relation to the Circus either as it was or as the LCC hoped it might become. The obvious solution was a comprehensive scheme for the whole of the Monico block, but as central government would provide no money to enable the Council to buy it up, Cotton was asked to do so himself. Reluctantly he agreed, and began to buy up the remaining freeholds while the LCC architects' department prepared an informal plan for the overall redevelopment of the Circus.[42]

The LCC plan was presented to the owners of Piccadilly sites in 1957. Its principal feature was a system of decks carrying pedestrians between the three major blocks over

the circulating traffic below. The owners of the Trocadero site refused to countenance such an idea, and the plan was shelved without its existence ever having become publicly known. Cotton went ahead on his own, and in January 1958 the LCC Planning Committee met to consider his outline application for the entire Monico site. Though the Committee rejected it, the recently-appointed Chief Architect, Hubert Bennett, took Cotton's plans home and produced a new design for a cruciform tower resting on a podium and reaching a height of 172 feet-higher than Cotton's original proposal. This he passed back to Cotton's own architects as an indication of the sort of thing which might obtain the Committee's approval. They took him at his word and submitted a revised design. In February 1959 it was passed to the Royal Fine Art Commission for comment.

Holford's own reaction as a member of the Commission was one of disappointment, and this feeling was shared by his fellow-commissioners:

> …all the members present that day felt that the scheme, as it then was, did not have the quality of civic design which Piccadilly and the Quadrant have at the moment…and it did not pave the way for anything better…[43]

The Commissioners expected to have further informal dealings with Cotton's architects regarding the scheme which was at that time an outline proposal only. The casual manner in which they first dealt with the application is only comprehensible in the context of a period when, in the normal way of things, major redevelopment schemes were proceeded with in an almost total absence of public interest or critical comment. The scheme was criticized in very mild terms. Only two specific points were raised: the design of the podium, and the 100-foot advertisement panel facing the Circus. For the rest, the developers were invited to consult with the Commission at a later stage. No formal notice was given that the design *as a whole* was considered to be unsatisfactory. Cotton's architects made amendments to the design to take into account the criticisms of the podium, and the application began its journey through the LCC committee system. By October all matters except some relatively minor details regarding parking space were resolved. The revised drawings were not sent to the RFAC. Developer and planning authority were in agreement, and the lack of response when the scheme was made public in March indicated that the application was almost certain to receive formal approval with a minimum of fuss.

It was Cotton himself who wrecked the prospects for a swift conclusion when on the 27th October, 1959, he held a press conference. He was newly returned from New York and had not, apparently, seen the new drawings which had been produced to illustrate the scheme. Earlier perspectives had emphasized the building itself rather than the advertisements mounted upon it. The new drawings which he exhibited to the press featured a massive panel, running upwards for more than 100 feet, advertising an imaginary soft drink. The slogan 'Snap Plom for Vigour' was all too memorable. In addition, the retractable crane which was used for hoisting the advertisements into position was shown with its arms fully extended. The overall effect was that of an enormous fruit machine with a propeller mounted on the top. As an image, it was a succinct statement of all that a growing body of opinion felt was wrong with the form which urban redevelopment was taking, and reaction was immediate.

The press was unanimous in its condemnation and J.M.Richards, the architectural critic of *The Times* and a member of the RFAC, gave a radio talk so damaging to the scheme that Cotton's solicitors threatened proceedings against the BBC. Questions were asked in both Houses of Parliament, but it was only because of the unresolved details of car-parking relating to the application that the Minister, Henry Brooke, was able to bow to the chorus of protest and to call a public inquiry. Had Cotton held his press conference some days later it would have been possible to deny him only on the payment of a king's ransom in compensation.

The RFAC now had cause to regret the moderation of its earlier comments upon the new Monico block. Under strong pressure from some of its own members as well as from public opinion, the Commission examined the revised drawings and, on the day before the Inquiry opened, made public a letter to the Minister which effectively pronounced an anathema upon the entire scheme. This *volte face* was embarrassing in the extreme: the nation's supreme committee of aesthetic judgement, instead of leading public taste, was seen to be following laggardly behind it.

The Commission had never appeared at a public enquiry since its creation in 1924 and, although it did not do so now, some means had to be found of meeting Cotton's not unjustified complaint at the manner in which his prospects had been blighted by its eleventh-hour pronouncement. Holford was due to give evidence on behalf of the Civic Trust, and it was he who took on the additional and unusual burden of justifying the behaviour of the RFAC before a public inquiry. Under respectful but insistent cross-examination by Sir Milner Holland, he managed to salvage something of the Commission's dignity.

The Inquiry, conducted by Colin Buchanan, lasted eighteen days. Cotton did not stand a chance: though he had co-operated with the LCC since the beginning and had complied with the various requirements made of him at every stage, the Council now disowned the proposal in which its own officers had had so large a part, and which a month or two previously it had been about to approve. Among the many distinguished architects, planners and critics who appeared, only Sir Howard Robertson was prepared to support it. Buchanan recommended the refusal of the application, and in May 1960 the Minister issued his decision against it.

Even before the result was known, the Piccadilly Inquiry was being regarded as a turning-point. The apparent inability of the largest and most prestigious planning authority in the land to respond with any speed or certainty to the intervention of a developer like Cotton prompted the asking of many questions. In the first instance the planners themselves seemed inexplicably indecisive. Cotton was the most co-operative developer a local authority could hope to deal with: within the obvious limits he was genuinely 'ready and willing to co-operate to the full to ensure by collaboration between all parties that the results when achieved will be worthy of the location'.[44] Yet, in the words of a member of the LCC Planning Committee, the opportunity presented by this accommodating attitude was 'lost sight of as our technical staff sorted out such things as day-lighting, plot-ratio, car-parking and access'.[45] Vision had been displaced, it was implied, by technical elaboration. Yet it was not so much a lack of professional capacity as of policy preparedness which so embarrassed the planning authority. Where the initiative in development lay so firmly with the private sector, the broad proposals of a development plan were insufficient to secure satisfactory central area redevelopment. But

it was the weakness of the planning system as a whole which attracted most attention, and using the Inquiry and the press as a forum Holford did his best to emphasize this aspect of the affair. He had learned from the St. Paul's scheme how hard it was to achieve a satisfactory result when finance, development and public control were all in different hands, for reasons which he elaborated at the public hearing on the 7th January, 1960:

> …one of the things that is missed out of development under the present Town Planning Acts is so to speak the positive and constructive side of civic design or public development. After all, the public authorities, where they are not in fact owning the buildings, act only under the Planning and the Building Acts, and therefore their control, however collaborative and helpful it may be to the developer, is a negative control. There are certain minimum requirements stated by them in the public interest, there are certain minimum requirements put forward by the developer in his own interests, and the process becomes one of negotiating between the private and the public developer to secure some compromise between those two. But the imaginative, the positive, if you like the non-revenue-producing elements…are the things which tend to be left out of a scheme like this which is neither carried out completely by one developer nor carried out completely by the public authority.[46]

Holford's opinion that it was the system which was at fault expressed the general view: the story of the Circus was 'a tragedy without a villain'. Yet there was no action in response to demands for a change in the system. More acceptable to the Minister was his Inspector's call for a new comprehensive plan for the Circus, to which developers might conform. As in the case of St. Paul's, a problem which it had been beyond the powers of the statutorily-constituted planning system to solve was to be handed over to a consultant, an outsider who would attempt to be both master-planner to and mediator between the different parties involved. As in the case of St. Paul's, it was Holford who was given the job.

As before, he worked under great pressures, but on this occasion it was time rather than the will of the Minister which bore down upon him. His understanding with the LCC included the intention that the Monico site should be proceeded with as soon as possible. Cotton already had outline consent, and had vacated the block on the assumption that development would proceed relatively quickly. To further emphasize his willingness to oblige the planners he engaged as consultants two of the most eminent architectural names money could buy, Richard Llewellyn Davies and Walter Gropius. However, there was always the threat that if progress was not rapidly made, Cotton might re-let those parts of the block not already demolished, to cover his mounting expenses. This made the LCC as eager as Cotton himself to hurry the work along. Holford did his best to keep at arm's length from the developer, 'a master of the art of making progress by publicity and pressure',[47] but it was not to be expected that such a complex scheme could be prepared in isolation from the parties most interested in it.

The developers were not the only source of pressure. In the letter from the Ministry which had given the decision on the original inquiry, it had been stated that an important objective in any comprehensive plan would be 'to reconcile the function of the circus as a

traffic intersection with its function as a place thronged with pedestrians'.[48] Holford had the agreement of the Ministries of Housing and Transport that a 20 per cent increase in traffic capacity (or 70,000 vehicles per day) was the most that could be allowed for in any balanced compromise between cars and people. This was not, however, an agreement which was based upon any general plan for the future development of the traffic network in inner London. Since the war, the roads proposals enshrined in advisory reports and in the London Development Plan itself had languished in the slough of fiscal despond. The LCC had received from central government funds inadequate to deal even with the worst bottlenecks: the implementation of any major reshaping of the capital's strategic roads system had been out of the question. By 1960 the climate was changing. Traffic statistics were showing an inexorable rise in the numbers of cars crowding on to streets which had been designed for an era when the horse had been the main source of motive power. Forecasts were revised upwards, and as the scale of the problem increased, so roads came to occupy a larger and larger part in both the public and the professional awareness of planning issues.

A new era brought with it a new Minister of Transport, Ernest Marples. Excited by the prospect of making Piccadilly the showpiece of a new approach to the accommodation of traffic in the heart of a great city, he sent Buchanan, now the Minister's adviser on urban roads, to discuss with Holford the shape which the scheme was taking.[49] The mood of optimism among transport planners was not confined to the Ministry: even as Holford worked on this scheme the LCC's own roads engineers were producing new plans for a junction accommodating up to 85,000 vehicles per day, a 50 per cent increase on 1960 levels. Holford, however, stuck to his 20 per cent, and for the moment he retained the support of the two Ministries.

At the beginning of 1961 Holford's first drawings were released to the press. The proposals of this interim scheme were based upon traffic flow diagrams prepared by the LCC Chief Engineer's Department and the Ministry of Transport. It had not proved technically or economically possible to take traffic underground, and so Holford proposed a raised island piazza, seven feet above road level, reserved for pedestrians and linking upwards to covered decks and downwards to an underground shopping concourse by way of escalators. Eros was to be mounted above a florist's shop—a witty touch—on the corner of the piazza platform nearest Regent Street. Office blocks to the rear of the Monico site and along the eastern boundary would create a sense of distant enclosure, but the dominant interest for the pedestrian standing on the platform would be provided by a tall block projecting into the space from the Criterion site, a Monico building to be designed by Gropius and Llewellyn Davies, and a new London Pavilion. Holford produced two alternative versions of the Pavilion, one 'a sort of Crystal Palace' of light structure and transparent materials, brightly illuminated within and without, and the other a lower building carrying advertisement panels set at angles to each other, so that different facets would be revealed as the observer moved around it.[50] With cafes, shops, restaurants and the illuminated displays, the Pavilion was to strike an intended note of gaiety and light.

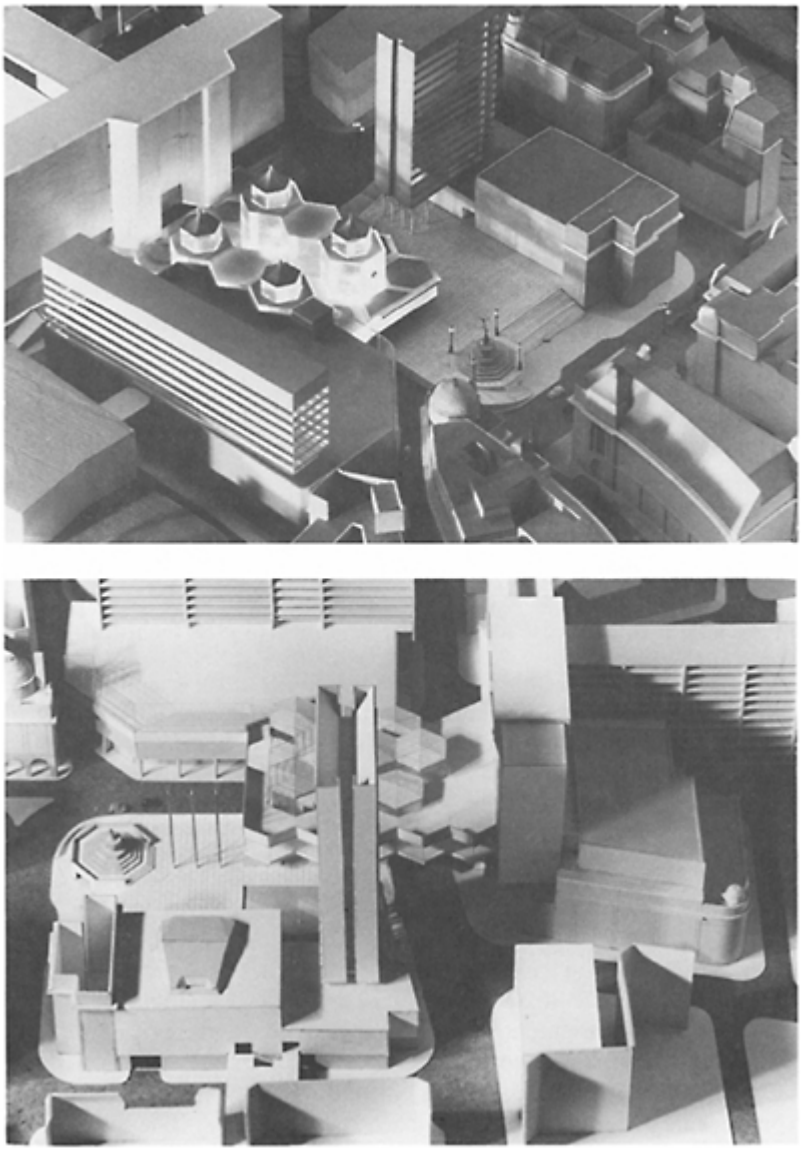
There was fulsome praise for this first attempt from the technical press.

> …he has had to work within a revised traffic pattern which is uninspiring, but despite this he has produced a quite brilliant tentative scheme for the

> development of the area, with its central feature a large pedestrian piazza, above which rises a new London Pavilion, a series of shimmering hexagons for pedestrian circulation, cafes, bars and the like, interlaced with a weaving pattern of advertisements. Despite the radical and forthright character of the winning schemes in the students' competition which were not limited by the stodgy lack of ideas of MoT they cannot equal the refinement and sophistication of this concept.[51]

So said the editors of the *Architects' Journal.* Holford's Piccadilly proposals were seized upon by the papers as constituting a test case as to whether or not the public good in general, and the good of the pedestrian in particular, could prevail in the redevelopment of city centres. The developers, however, did not like them. Their representative, Sir Thomas Bennett, held that the only party which stood to gain was the LCC itself: its new Pavilion would have all the best frontages and advertising space in the Circus. The scheme made plenty of provision for the tourist and the lounger, but not enough for the shopper upon whose spending its profitability depended. To reply that the development of the Pavilion was one of the means whereby the LCC hoped to recoup its own considerable investment of public money did not answer the developers' other objections—to the big hotel across Shaftesbury Avenue, to the 'tunnel' formed by the Pavilion block and to the tower at the top of Haymarket.[52] Such arguments did not, however, discomfit Holford greatly: it was in order to obtain such reactions that an interim report had been prepared. What was not expected was the response of the Ministry of Transport engineers.

At a meeting held on 15th May they announced that the scheme, though based upon their own and the LCC's proposals and upon numerous meetings with Holford and his team, did not constitute a traffic improvement of a degree that would qualify it for a Ministry grant. They proposed a number of radical revisions, including the cutting-away of the projecting corner of the piazza upon which the statue of Eros was to stand. Subsequent discussions and minor amendments failed to remove their objections to the interim scheme. Holford, however, was not prepared to concede more than was consistent with the Circus's role as a place of 'resort and display'. Convinced that it could not fulfil this function if the demands being made for traffic improvements were met, he referred the matter back to the LCC in order to obtain their backing in what had clearly become a major conflict of principle. He stated his own position in a second interim report submitted to the Roads and Town Planning Committees in June.[53]



Piccadilly Circus: Holford's Interim Scheme (version A, above and version B, below), January 1961.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

What the traffic engineers were demanding was the maximum improvement in traffic flow achievable by local revisions of the street pattern, including the channelling of vehicles by means of kerbs and signs, more sweeping curves, the prohibition of

pedestrian crossways at street level, and the use of part of the centre of the Circus to provide parking space. Holford argued that to succeed in the face of increasing numbers of vehicles and continuing demands for an acceleration in the flow of traffic, such measures would have to be not only complete but also consistently administered. Within the Circus itself this would mean the barricading of pavements, the discouragement of busy shopping frontages onto the Circus, and the diversion of shoppers to other areas which had traditional shopping pavements, such as Regent Street and Piccadilly. If this were done, the only way in which the Circus would need to be made visually attractive would be as viewed from a vehicle or from a distance; and the benefits to be gained in terms of civic design might not justify the cost and trouble of redeveloping what would in essence be little more than a major traffic intersection. Moreover, improvement in traffic flow would be by no means certain. The Circus was set in a network of old roads designed for other purposes than fast motor traffic, and to loosen one bottleneck would not benefit the network as a whole: indeed, unless improvements were carried out evenly across the whole area, the result might be to increase congestion in the surrounding shopping streets.[54] Holford therefore asked the LCC to accept:

> (i)that traffic improvements are-and must be in the foreseeable future-secondary considerations in the redevelopment of Piccadilly Circus.
> (ii)that they should be adopted in so far as they are consistent with the amenities and design of the Circus as a whole.
> (iii)that the proposals already outlined in the preliminary scheme, and to be revised in the final one, make a contribution towards better circulation for people and vehicles and easier deliveries for goods. The measure of improvement which they would bring is not out of scale with what can be done generally in the West End, and would be sufficient to meet the situation until such time as major improvements can be devised to draw off some of the traffic which only wants to pass through the area.[55]

This was not a matter upon which the Council could decide itself. Everything depended upon whether or not grants would be forthcoming from central government, and so Holford and the Clerk of the LCC, Sir William Hart, were instructed to consult informally with the two Ministries. On 15th November they attended a meeting of senior civil servants, at which the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Dame Evelyn Sharp, attempted to persuade Holford to increase further the traffic capacity of his scheme. Holford's response was recorded in Hart's minute:

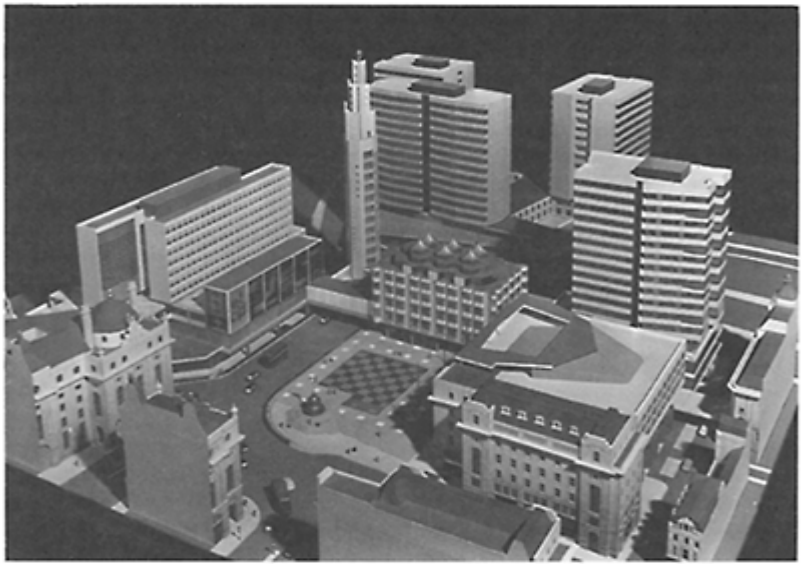
> …he was sorry he could not accept this further alteration of his plan. He had already gone a very long way—perhaps too far—in compromising his original conception in order to meet traffic requirements. These matters were always questions of degree but he could only say that this was the last straw. The element of design inherent in his scheme was being lost by continual paring. It must be remembered that the instructions in the Minister's letter were that Piccadilly should not only be a traffic intersection, but also remain a place of resort. The pedestrian must not merely be banished but he must be left some room to circulate, and this

> was one of the objects of the piazza. Further limitation of its size not only conflicted with this desire but threw it out of scale in relation to the whole square which would be formed.[56]

In the absence of agreement it was decided to put the issue to the Ministers themselves, so that an early answer could be obtained as to whether the scheme could be accepted as it stood or must be further amended.

Holford and Hart reported back to the LCC and began preparations for the formal meeting with the Ministers in December. Holford had determined privately that if his scheme was not accepted in its existing form, he would resign the commission.[57] This he did not have to do: Brooke and Marples decided that in principle the general basis of the plan would be acceptable. They were still, however, unhappy about the limited extent of traffic improvement, and therefore reserved decision on the question of traffic grant. It was not much, but it was enough. Holford worked on.

The finished design was unveiled for public inspection in April 1962. The scale of the buildings had been reduced: the blocks had been broken up into smaller masses and the rectangular space at the centre was surrounded by buildings generally no higher than 80 feet. At ground level a one-way traffic arrangement proposed by the Ministry of Transport had been adopted in place of the earlier roundabout system: it could cope with a 20 per cent increase on 1960 traffic levels. The piazza was lowered to 18 inches above road level, with a considerably enlarged underground concourse but with the



Piccadilly Circus: the April 1962 Scheme.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

upper deck reduced to a walkway connecting the main blocks. The new London Pavilion, originally conceived as being mounted upon a platform, was now to be a free-standing building forming the east end of the piazza. An entirely new feature was the slender tower, rising to more than 200 feet and symbolizing 'the hub of the West End', at the foot of Shaftesbury Avenue. In general, the scheme attempted rather less than its predecessor. Nonetheless, it met the developers' requirements and, with its piazza, towers, cupolas and carefully arranged displays, looked as though it might constitute a civic space of a kind and quality scarcely built in Britain since the war.

Critical reaction was again generally favourable although, now that the idea was presented in more detail, the specific architectural ideas with which Holford chose to clothe his project drew some unfavourable comment. In particular, the 'vertical feature', with its Greek lettering and champagne bubbles rising up its side, was not liked. However the scheme was accepted by the LCC subject only to the agreement of the Ministries of Housing and Local Government and Transport.

It was not a good time at which to expect a final decision from the Ministry of Transport, for a technical working party within the Ministry, the Adams Committee, was at that moment concluding its deliberations upon future highway design standards. Three months after Holford's scheme was sub-mitted, the Committee reported to the effect that all major junctions in London should be improved to take 60 per cent more traffic than in 1960 or the capacity of their approach roads, whichever was the less. The implications of this recommendation, if it were accepted, would be enormous. In the case of Piccadilly it implied an increase of 50 per cent on 1960 traffic, and the abandonment of any scheme along the lines Holford had proposed.[58] For more than a year, there was official silence while discussions between the two Ministries proceeded. Then, on the 2nd September 1963, a letter communicating the Ministers' joint decision was sent to the LCC. It stated that since the acceptance of Holford's interim proposals, forecasts of future traffic levels had had to be revised upwards, and improvement schemes scheduled for the surrounding area would inevitably direct a greater flow of cars through the Circus. Making reference to the findings of the Adams Committee, the letter went on to say that in the case of Piccadilly Circus the 50 per cent increase should be achieved: any redevelopment should cater for 85,000 vehicles in a 12-hour day. The letter concluded by remarking that the LCC

> will no doubt wish to ask Sir William Holford to consider how the additional traffic capacity is best achieved. This need not perhaps seriously affect the general massing of the building proposed in the scheme.
>
> The technical officers of both the Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government are available for consultation if this is wanted.[59]

When the letter was released Holford was in Australia, and it was not until the end of the month that he returned to make public his reaction. In the meantime, there was vigorous protest from other quarters. There were a number of highly objectionable implications in the Ministerial letter. Firstly, it reaffirmed the past practice of developing the road network on the basis of piecemeal improvements to the points of greatest traffic

pressure—the very procedure which was so widely held to have caused this 'most protracted and most badly bungled affair in the history of postwar urban planning'.[60] Secondly it denied the dichotomy which Holford had identified as the root of the problem, and which was the basis of the newly-completed report on *Traffic in Towns*, prepared for Ernest Marples by a group under Colin Buchanan.[61] In Buchanan's terminology, the argument was that an urban place like Piccadilly could be either an 'environment area' or a 'primary distributor', but not both. The governmental view, expressed by the Minister for Housing and Local Government, Sir Keith Joseph, in the House on 26th November, was to reject 'this antithesis between cars and people'.[62] It seemed that public policy was to be directed towards the accommodation of whatever future traffic demand could be foreseen. The alternative of deciding upon what volume of traffic might be acceptable in a given area, and acting accordingly, was not considered.

On his return Holford did not make an immediate response. He first investigated the possibilities of further revisions to his proposals in the light of new factors, such as recent developments in techniques of traffic management, the latest intentions of interested landowners and the conclusions of the Buchanan Report. He also studied once again the degree of compromise which would be involved in meeting the Ministers' target for traffic capacity, and produced drawings indicting the effects this would have upon the original scheme. He stated his conclusions in a letter to Sir William Hart, written on 18th November:

> Having carried out these further exercises, I am still of the same opinion. I feel even more fully convinced that if Piccadilly Circus is to remain something more than a name on the Underground Map of London, other means should be found, probably outside the Circus itself, of regulating or relieving its motor traffic to some degree. I should be glad to submit my views in detail to any working party which is set up for the purpose, or otherwise to assist it.
>
> But if the Ministers' decision is accepted by the Council and has the effect which it seems to me it must have on the comprehensive scheme already prepared, then this scheme and any minor modifications of it will be valueless as an instrument of planning control, and would be better withdrawn. In that case I must clearly, although with very great regret, resign the Council's Commission.[63]

Holford knew well how to make use of the press. He issued a plan showing the effect of the Ministers' proposals and his letter to the LCC received wide publicity and support. *The Times* complimented him for his stand, and condemned 'the art of coarse traffic engineering which has dominated central London (to the great benefit of traffic flow and the increasing subordination of the pedestrian) in the past few years'.[64] On the 26th November and again on the 4th and 20th December, his threat to resign was used as a stick with which to beat Ministers in Commons debates. Marples and Joseph did not give way on the 50 per cent capacity target, but 'urgent talks' with the LCC were sought. The Government was embarrassed, there was talk of a split in the ranks of the two Ministries, the LCC planning committee backed Holford, and copies of *Traffic in Towns* sold very well. In the House of Commons on 20th December, Sir Keith Joseph announced that a

working party, including representatives from both Ministries and the LCC was 'to work for the possibilities of relief outside the Circus and consider how far it will be possible to accept the traffic assumptions underlying the Holford plan'.[65] Though he had not saved his scheme, it appeared that Holford had made his point. He did not resign, and in June 1964 the working party convened under the chairmanship of James Jones of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. It worked closely with both Buchanan and Holford, and in May 1965 its report was received with considerable enthusiasm, most particularly from the new Minister of Housing, Richard Crossman.

The new proposals were not in the nature of an outline design for the Circus, but were an attempt to establish principles upon which design might be based. The particular concern was to establish a long-term context which, once agreed, would enable an early start to be made upon redevelopment. In effect, the working party attempted to fill the strategic planning vacuum with informed guesswork. They examined the likely effects on the Circus if a full primary distribution network on Buchanan's lines were to be built, and again if it were bypassed by local road improvements. Their conclusion was, once more, that Piccadilly Circus must be made to accommodate the 85,000 vehicles a day which the Adams Committee had recommended, and which had led to the rejection of the Holford plan. The implication which they drew was that the Circus must be redeveloped on a split-level system, with pedestrians raised above the torrent of traffic. In the longer term it was envisaged that this high-level pedestrian deck must be tied in with a similar arrangement in Regent Street and even, perhaps, with a deck system extending round Leicester Square to Soho, along Shaftesbury Avenue, and to Trafalgar Square and Covent Garden. In the meantime, however, the trick would be to find a form of redevelopment which would enable a start to be made without prejudice to this longer-term possibility. All of which put matters once more in the hands of a master-planner whose responsibility it would be to tie together the different threads of long- and short-tefm objectives, of land-owners, developers and public authorities. In theory, this further effort was to be a 'feasibility study'. Strictly speaking, there is in the realms of civic design no such thing. What was being sought was another outline plan to test whether, and to demonstrate how, the principles set out by the working party might be applied in terms of architecture, engineering and a programme. Inevitably it was Holford, together with the firm of Ove Arup as consulting engineers, who was given this charge.

By this time it had become clear that traffic planning in central London had been reduced to the level of the farcical. All over the West End substantial redevelopment proposals were nearing maturity. A plan by Sir Leslie Martin for the Whitehall area was due to be published in the autumn. In Soho, at least three really major planning applications were awaiting a decision from the LCC. A powerful consortium was preparing to move into Covent Garden following the anticipated removal of the Market to Battersea. These and other proposals were coming forward to be dealt with by a planning system that could offer no definite ideas about how they might be integrated into the future road network. Holford could count himself fortunate that he, at least, had explicit terms of reference. Assisted no doubt by the working party's pious statements about the need to cater for the pedestrian, he swallowed its traffic specifications and, by July 1966, had prepared a new scheme which, although not modelled in detail, was accompanied by diagrammatic plans and illustrative sketches.

Holford proposed an open 'traffic square' with Eros at its centre at ground level, while above and to the east was to be a promenade deck with a new London Pavilion mounted upon it. Traffic would flow under the concourse while, below ground level, a pedestrian concourse would connect with the Underground Station. The Pavilion was to come first, in the expectation that private developers would follow. The scheme was designed in discrete components so that the segregation of pedestrians from traffic, and the completion of the deck system, could be accomplished over an indefinite number of years. Though the elements were the same as before, their total effect was quite different. In the 1961 and 1962 schemes Holford had attempted to create an urban space—the piazza—with a distinctive character which could be enjoyed by pedestrians. What was now envisaged was the 'Piccadilly Cross' which he had previously warned would be the consequence of meeting the Ministry of Transport's demands for more roadspace. Above and below the milling traffic pedestrians would move from facility to facility, canalized and serviced, but not claiming any urban space as their own. A deck was what was left them once the ground had been taken over by buildings and traffic: it was the only place left for them to go. Illustrated by drawings which seemed intended to emphasize its dullness, Holford's final Piccadilly scheme was quite simply the expression of his brief. Of the *élan* possessed by the earlier versions there was no sign.

By this time reviewers were wearying of the game. In August *The Times* published a leader entitled 'Piccadilly Forever', which distilled the prevailing mood:

> The architects and town planners will be busy today discussing the much vexed Lord Holford's latest scheme for the development of Piccadilly. Its merits can safely be left to them. To the layman, the chief significance of yesterday's announcement may be that no official decision has been made, and nobody is apparently committed to anything. There is no reason to expect that they should be.
>
> After all, discussions about the future of Piccadilly have only been going on for ten years. The thing is in its infancy. The English genius for procrastination has hardly had a chance to display its inner resourcefulness. Piccadilly may be the best opportunity for some time to allow that genius to reach its finest flowering…
>
> The intricate ballet of planning committees, sub-planning committees, observations by interested and disinterested parties, references back of the views of traffic engineers, suggestions for further studies of points of detail; all this will develop its own momentum, its own balances, and will in the end consolidate into its own gravitational system, perfect, stable, self-perpetuating. Somehow, somewhere, there will always be a committee meeting, its proceedings punctuated by desperate silences, during which fingers pluck nervelessly at the yellowing pages of early planning manuals. Advance Britannia![66]

As *The Times* anticipated, the saga continued to run. Early in 1967 the Greater London and Westminster City Councils accepted the planning principles put forward in the 1966 report. Though they had discussed with Holford the possibility of proceeding to a fully-developed design and model, the local authorities now decided upon a different line of

approach. In September 1967 they issued a redevelopment brief setting out the broad lines of the road pattern, pedestrian circulation and building. On this basis a new scheme was prepared by Dennis Lennon and Partners, together with the architects of the major owners of the Trocadero site, Fitzroy Robinson and Sydney Kaye. This developers' scheme was exhibited to the public in July 1968. It featured a raised deck and a tower 435 feet high on the Criterion site. For the first time, there was a significant quantity of objections, but the scheme was dropped because, the developers said, it could not be made to pay without additional office space. The scale of operations was increasing all the time: it was even proposed that the traffic capacity of the 1966 scheme be increased. Holford was now reduced to keeping up a sniping fire from the sidelines. His earlier stand had made him popular. He wrote to his mother that:

> The press and public seem to be almost entirely on my side so I have told the reporters that while I shall of course look at any new factors in the situation my advice remains generally the same—that is, to plan Piccadilly for people rather than cars.[67]

In the same letter he described his later proposals as though they, and the controversy surrounding them, had been the earlier piazza scheme. He made much of his role as the pedestrian's champion, but in the end he had compromised too much to be wholly convincing in it.

In the remainder of the Piccadilly story he played no part. In 1969 the Circus was designated an 'action area', but adverse public reaction to a comprehensive redevelopment package put forward by the developers of the three main sites led, in 1972, to the rejection of the basic principles which had informed all thought on the subject since Cotton had stampeded the LCC into preparing the first outline plan seventeen years before. In October of that year the Westminster Piccadilly Circus Sub-Committee made its report to the City Council. It recommended *inter alia* that no more than a 10 per cent increase in traffic capacity should be contemplated, that there should be no upper-level pedestrian decks, and no increase in office space. New buildings should be of the same scale as the existing ones, and a number of older frontages should be retained. Priority should be given to improving pedestrian facilities at and below ground level.[68] For the Circus, the days of comprehensive redevelopment were over. Henceforth planning policy was directed towards the preservation of the existing shape and 'feel' of the Circus, the limitation of traffic and restoration or development on existing building lines.

Many of the themes of post-war urban planning are captured in the story of Piccadilly Circus. It was the earliest redevelopment project in Britain to generate a major national controversy over the process whereby British town centres were being renewed. It directed public attention to the function performed within that process by the developer. Cotton (who died in 1965) was a flamboyant figure with an appetite for publicity which journalists were happy to feed. The conflict between his profit and the public's attachment to a national landmark provided a rich source of material for press coverage. To this was added the argument about the volume of traffic for which the Circus should cater: this served as a specific focus for the general concern about the pressure which growth in car ownership was placing upon city centres. The connection between the

message of *Traffic in Towns* and the problems of the Circus would have been evident even had Holford not been a member of Buchanan's steering group, and from 1963 onwards the difficulties which Holford faced were invariably described in the context of that report. Buchanan made it clear that as traffic grew, the degree of mutual exclusiveness between the two desiderata of environmental quality and vehicular accessibility would become greater: if society wanted both, it would have to pay. It was estimated in 1966 that London's proposed 'motorway box' would take up the entire national allocation of funds for new urban roads for more than six years. Piccadilly Circus served as a test of whether or not local and national government would face up to either the general implications of cost, or the specific question of striking a balance between people and cars, upon which any consistent policy would have to be based. Government demonstrated that it was unable to make such decisions: it would neither admit to the conflicts which were created by mass private transport, nor pay for their resolution. Instead, there was piecemeal muddling-through and continuing inaction.

It was this which most aroused contemporary commentators: they judged the system to have failed not so much because it produced the wrong answers, but because it produced no answer at all. Money and politics were at the root of its difficulties: there was neither the cash nor the will to enable a local authority itself to participate in redevelopment, to pay the compensation which would have been incurred by infringements of landowners' development rights, or to resolve the traffic problem by planning and building new urban distributor roads. It was dependent upon the initiative, capital and co-operation of the developer.

This was not what had been foreseen by the authors of the 1947 planning system. Inadequate even for the purposes originally intended, the machinery had to contend with pressures with which it had never been designed to deal. The reinstatement of the private market in land, the growth in the potential profits to be got out of urban redevelopments, the rising population and the dramatic increase in car ownership all hit the system hard in the 1960s. Faced with these new pressures the conventional wisdom embodied in Abercrombie's London Plans and the Central Areas Handbook could not hold firm, and nothing equally definitive replaced it.

Into this confusion stepped Holford, seeking as in the past to weave some-thing coherent out of a tangle of circumstances and half-opportunities. But the situation at Piccadilly Circus was different from that which had prevailed at St. Paul's. In the earlier instance the arguments, whether economic, functional or otherwise, had been about design. The biggest problems at the Circus were not those which it was open to a designer to solve. Holford hoped that his scheme might provide a rallying-point around which a consensus might form, but this was too much even for him to hope for. Grossly over-worked, and not infrequently ill and depressed, his public comments upon this and other planning matters became increasingly sour. The voice of the enlightened planner, he told the *Sunday Times*, was being heard less and less in the land. Too many people were involved and the result was a stalemate, with everyone waiting to see which way the cat would jump.

> In the past ten years things have grown considerably worse. Now, unless you are prepared to behave like a prima donna, you just can't get anything done.[69]

Holford would not or could not change with the times. While others surrounded and protected themselves with large organizations, and worked through them, he remained an individualist in an increasingly corporate world. It was not true, at least in the provinces, that one could no longer get anything done. Despite the obstacles, corporate will could still redevelop the centres of Birmingham and Newcastle. This was not, however, the way in which Holford had ever worked, or would work.

As he knew, the civic designer could only function as an independent agent, and his art could only sustain itself, under the patronage of enlightened authority. This was the source of the power which was needed to see the initial vision through to its realization, and of the certainty of purpose which could only emerge from a settled planning context. In the absence of that power and certainty, there was insufficient for the designer to build upon. It has been one of the tragedies of post-war redevelopment in Britain that in places where the planning circumstances were favourable the talented designer was often absent, and that where they were unfavourable a great deal of talent wasted itself in unrealizable endeavour.

The policy of masterly inaction which denied London its 'primary distributor network' has been consistently applied in subsequent years, the position in the early 1980s being as chaotic as it was twenty years previously. At the more local level of the Circus itself, public taste is still so much jaundiced by the awfulness of developers' architecture in the period that Holford's schemes, had any one of them been built, would have done well to have earned indifference, let alone affection. Certainly we need not mourn the later version, and the evidence of the Playboy Club does not cause us to regret that Gropius was denied the chance of registering his presence. Yet examples of redevelopment which cater to the lighthearted, the humane or the uncommercial have been rare enough in London. The 1962 scheme would have been worth having. There would have been little danger of the lifelessness which afflicts the precincts of St. Paul's: a population which can enjoy the yawning, dull spaces of Trafalgar Square could certainly have claimed Holford's piazza, frivolous 'vertical feature' and all, for its own. No reasonable pleasure at the saving of the old Circus can be unqualified by sadness that one of the few attempts which were made in the 1960s to turn commercial redevelopment in London to positive civic account should ultimately have failed.

A FADING VISION

The inaction of the planning system which was manifested at Piccadilly Circus was not the only aspect of its failure to emerge in the 1960s. In other places, the alluring promises contained in advisory and statutory plans were realized in dreary shopping centres, anonymous housing estates and desolate acres of empty open space. The charmless, run-of-the-mill architecture of the period was no substitute for the familiar landmarks it so often seemed to replace, and the suspicion grew that the professions had promised more than they could perform.

The professionals, moreover, began to doubt themselves. During the 1960s the central ideas which had formed the core of post-war planning philosophy were called increasingly into question. The Neighbourhood Unit, the Green Belt, the hierarchical organization of urban functions, space standards and the rest had never been subjected to

the kind of detailed criticism with which, for example, new approaches to economic planning had been forced to contend. The operational concepts of British town planning rested not upon any tradition of analytical thought but upon a consensus of informed opinion. Now, sharper minds began to move into this intellectual vacuum, and many of British planning's central tenets were revealed as sacred cows.

Most prominent among the invaders were American critics and academics, in comparison with whom the domestic product seemed markedly provincial and old-fashioned.[70] Less spectacular but often more substantial was the impact of new disciplines, expanding with the universities in which they were based, which perceived in town planning an appropriate context for the deployment of new analytical tools. Sociology, once marketed as a useful contributory element in the planning process, developed an increasingly independent and critical voice, and turned its attention to the planning process itself. Management science and systems analysis threatened to transform the planner's perception of his own task, while economists, statisticians and engineers produced new techniques and new applications to meet needs which planners had sometimes scarcely even identified. The more specialized the new knowledge became the more complicated planning problems appeared to be, and the more planners looked to specialists to help in their solution. In 1944 Abercrombie had analysed the London region and had propounded his poli-cies within a single conceptual framework. Now, the question of how British cities might be made better places in which to live was disaggregated into many questions about the technical feasibility, social benefits and economic implications of different courses of action.

This new climate was very different from that in which a younger Holford had professed his enthusiasm for the collaboration of different disciplines within the planning team. The new planning-related knowledge did more than expand the boundaries of what might be considered relevant in the preparation and implementation of a plan. It put in doubt the very purposes of planning by questioning the means whereby they were defined and pursued; and in doing so it produced a reaction which drove a deep rift through the ranks of the profession. It forced a taking of sides to an extent which quite overshadowed the related arguments which had surrounded the Schuster Committee, and Holford's conduct in these difficult circumstances provides some clue as to how his view of planning had changed in the twenty years of practice following his departure from the Ministry.

In 1961 a Special Sub-Committee of the TPI had been established to consider (among other things) the future membership and recruitment policy of the Institute. Its report, issued in 1963, put forward the view that the scope of planning had widened to such an extent that it was no longer realistic to expect any one individual to embody in himself all the different skills which might be involved. What was now needed was the recognition of planning as a team job, a uniting of different skills under effective leadership to a common end. The report proposed that the profession should be broadened to embrace those with specialist knowledge, as well as those with an overall grasp of the planning field.

That there was ample room for improvement was not in doubt. Criticism from architectural journals or the right-wing press might be accepted with a shrug, but the insistent warnings of Whitehall could not be discounted. In 1964 Dame Evelyn Sharp, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry, effectively told the Institute that if it did not adapt its policies to meet the challenge of changed circumstances it would lose what influence it had; and in the following year the message was repeated by the Minister himself.[71] Yet the pressures for change were not met with enthusiasm by the majority of planners. Those who toiled in lowly positions in borough engineers' departments, and those whose only qualification was in planning, were sensitive to any matter touching upon their own status. They were disinclined to entertain any suggestion which seemed to imply either that they were not up to the job, or that members of other professions might be allowed to colonize their own field of expertise. It was no academic matter: self-esteem was at stake.

The issues came to a head at an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Institute held in London on the 29th January, 1965. It is not easy to summarize concisely the two sides of the argument which were mustered on that occasion. Matters of procedure were intermingled with matters of substance; motives were mixed; and misunderstanding and rhetoric abounded. In the crudest of terms one might say that the conception of planning practice established after the war was under attack on two fronts. Firstly, it was argued that the profession should broaden its terms of reference and its membership, developing and expanding into new areas of teamwork and technique to match the changing demands of society. Secondly, to this general argument was added a more particular one. The land-use and plan-based, largely regulatory form of planning which had come into being over the preceding years was demonstrably failing to produce the three-dimensional results which had been hoped for. Many planners who had obtained the Institute's qualification were nonetheless ill-equipped, on the basis of the training then available, to tackle the questions of detailed design which specific schemes of development or redevelopment inevitably posed. If, according to the general argument regarding team work, the contribution of the economist and the transportation engineer might be recognized, might not the urban designer also come into his own?

The counter-argument to this two-pronged attack was to emphasize the distinctive nature of the planner's skills. Mastery of the field embodied in the existing professional examinations constituted (so the argument ran) a separate and particular expertise, the object of which was the settlement as a whole and the inter-relationships of its parts. While it could be deduced that matters of architecture, engineering, surveying, law and social science would register as elements in this totality, the sum was greater than the parts: these 'local' skills could not of themselves be synthesized to produce the same comprehensive vision that was possessed by the person whose primary concern was with the totality itself. For the majority of planners, however, it was a more simple matter of whether their Institute should retain its professional integrity, or become a sort of club for all professionals interested in planning.

Holford's participation in this debate was a matter of importance to all the main protagonists. He had largely withdrawn from Institute affairs in the preceding years, but his prestige was still immense. No one could be sure what Holford's personal position might be, but there was a suspicion that this man who seemed happiest in the company of architects and artists, and whose enthusiasm for teamwork had been publicly expressed, could well add his weight to the call for a widening of entry to the profession. Yet in

Church House on the night of 29th January, Holford rose and urged the sponsors of the proposed changes to reconsider their position.[72] To one of his colleagues who was present, it was clear from this point onwards that the reforming position held by the President and immediate Past-President (Leslie Lane and Colin Buchanan respectively) was lost.

Holford, while supporting the idea of a broad membership policy, opposed the specific recommendations on the grounds that they would lead to a lowering of professional standards. There was something disingenuous in this claim to represent the principles of reform while opposing the practice. If he was prepared to support a broadening of the basis of membership, what material steps was he taking to make that support effective? His own answer was to hold up the planning courses at UCL as examples of how the profession might be widened without compromising its standards or cohesion. He, it was implied, was doing his bit. Yet Holford's conduct as an educator, and his part in the course changes at UCL in particular, yield no such impressions. Indeed, there are few aspects of his post-war work in which the innumerable complexities and contradictions of his personality, and of his philosophical outlook upon planning, come closer to the surface than in his academic career.

One of the greatest attractions of the part-time Chair of Town Planning at UCL had always been its London location and the light teaching and administrative duties which it involved. It was the perfect post for an active individual keen to pursue outside interests. When Holford arrived there in 1947 the single course was more or less the same as it had been when Stanley Adshead had occupied the Chair some three decades previously, being a three-year, part-time conversion course for graduates in architecture, surveying and engineering. With no full-time academic staff, it relied heavily upon the services of individuals in the London area who were able to lecture in the evenings at its premises in Gordon Square. Until 1955 Holford took no significant steps to modernize the department: it was run on thoroughly relaxed lines, with a liberal allowance of exemptions for those students who could be persuaded to join from the Bartlett School of Architecture.

By the mid-1950s this manner of conducting planning education had become archaic. In Liverpool, Gordon Stephenson had revised radically the curriculum of the Department of Civic Design, which was now admitting graduates from a broad range of disciplines and teaching a widened syllabus as part of a two-year full-time Master's course, praised by the Schuster Committee. Holford made no move to follow suit, but did begin to make full-time staff appointments, the most important of which was the employment of Lewis Keeble as Director of Studies as successor to Arthur Ling on the latter's departure for Coventry. Keeble was left in no doubt that his job was to 'take over and do it all'.[73] Holford's own involvement in teaching and management was minimal: he taught on the history of planning to the first year, and lectured occasionally on general planning topics, but dealt little with the fundamentals of practice. Nor did he draw upon his own planning experience in any depth. He enjoyed the company of students and would often turn up at parties and other functions, but he kept himself distant from his own staff.[74]

It was during Holford's Presidency of the RIBA that two of his senior colleagues in the department, Bruno Schlaffenburg and Lewis Keeble, conceived the idea of establishing a Master's course along lines similar to that of the Liverpool course. Having discussed the idea in general terms with Holford they proceeded to set it up, without

further reference to him, to begin at the start of the autumn term of 1963. As Holford knew, the course at Liverpool admitted students with good degrees in practically any respectable academic subject. Schlaffenburg and Keeble proceeded on the same assumption, but when a few days before the start of the new term the details were explained to him, Holford expressed plain resentment that he should be asked to sanction the recruitment of students without a background in one of the established technical disciplines. Despite his misgivings the course was established, but his colleagues' attempts to interest him in it, or in the idea of undergraduate education for planners, were wholly unsuccessful.

If Holford had ever had any great enthusiasm for the training of planners, then by the 1960s that interest was moribund. On more than one occasion he suggested resignation, but University College was reluctant to part with so distinguished a professor, and he continued to hold his Chair through the decade. Aware that he was not properly pulling his weight, and bearing the criticisms which were sometimes made of his absenteeism,[75] he was nonetheless unable or unwilling to curtail his outside activities to make more time for academic duties. He tried to make amends in other ways. There were other professors with extensive outside interests who were happy to accept full pay: Holford never did. He was in the totally unnecessary habit of making good departmental deficits out of his own pocket, much to the annoyance and puzzlement of those colleagues who were trying to bring some order to the accounts. That a man should explain that he could not afford to have his wife come up from Brighton because of the cost of rail fares, and thereafter disburse one or two hundred pounds of his own money into the departmental coffers, was incomprehensible to his own staff. He also tried to be of service to the college in other ways, by advising upon building and development and by attendance at committees when he could manage it. In plain terms, Holford did all he could to fill the role of professor short of actually doing the job.

Clearly, Holford's public opinions and his private preferences were very different. He presented himself as a supporter of the development of planning as a discipline distinct and separate from the parent professions, with its own characteristic skills and methods. Yet he did absolutely nothing to further that development. He would not put his heart into anything that involved estrangement from the traditional concerns with construction and design. The sort of educational process which he enjoyed was to set talented and highly-motivated people with technical skills to work upon some practical planning problem—in other words, the kind of studio training which had produced his own generation of planner-designers. Intellectually, he could grasp the new arguments without difficulty: indeed, in some respects they were merely the reheated arguments of 1940–1942. He was entirely convinced of the need for a flexible and effective planning system which could relate social and economic programmes to land use and development. He was also convinced of the need to train people for that task. If however the system or the training could not provide scope for creative design, then this was something more than a weakness: it was to remove the very motivation which had brought Holford into planning in the first place.

He had always been somewhat apart from the mainstream of British planning, based as it was upon the practice of local authorities, the longterm implementation of land-use plans and the day-to-day regulation of development. As this practice became more firmly established he moved further away from it. In the 1940s he had been involved with

regional and national planning, and with advising local authorities on how to go about reconstruction. In the 1950s, he had still taken on ‘prestige’ commissions for the comprehensive planning of towns. By the 1960s, however, he had almost abandoned the ‘middle ground’: though as a senior statesman of the profession he still gave advice and made public pronouncements upon planning matters, his professional work was largely devoted to the service of national bodies and charitable institutions on the one hand, and to the design of individual building projects (among which we include such undertakings as Piccadilly Mark II and St. Paul’s South-West) on the other. Naturally there were a few exceptions, such as the plan he prepared with R.A.Haskell for the conservation of the Old Town of Hastings; but most of the burden of new planning commissions, such as that for the Glasgow motorway network or for the Edinburgh High Buildings policy, fell upon the shoulders of his partners.

It was increasingly clear from the mid-1960s onwards that the planning world in general no longer shared Holford’s preoccupations. The 1965 report of the Minister’s Planning Advisory Group (PAG), which led three years later to the creation of a new Development Plan system, almost passed him by. During the passage of the 1968 Town and Country Planning Bill through the House of Commons, he did express to a colleague his anger that neither Ministers nor their advisers seemed to have a clear idea of how the new legislation would operate in practice.[76] However, when the Bill had its committee stage and third reading in the Lords (of which he was by now a member) his own contribution was insubstantial. The philosophy behind the PAG Report was not incompatible with his own, but it did not really address the issues which were for him the most important: the procedural and financial obstacles to planned development which had existed since the dismantling of the 1947 system, and the link between planning and design. He could, had he wished, have retired peacefully to the professional sidelines. Elevated to the peerage in 1965 and with a long list of consultancies, trusteeships and other work to do, he might now have been justified in thinking himself above it all. Yet his nature was such that he could not help being hurt by the tokens of declining influence that came his way.

His work had once been practically immune from the criticism of his peers: response to the 1966 scheme for Piccadilly and that of 1968 for St. Paul’s South-West showed that this was no longer so. Nor did his integrity in professional or political matters remain unquestioned. Though he was not subjected to the kind of sustained attack which was made upon Roy Kantorowich at Manchester, his extensive work in South Africa drew increasing criticism. So far as we can tell he was free of racial prejudice himself, but he was as much a pragmatist and gradualist in relation to South Africa as he was in mitigate the worst effects of the notorious Group Areas Act, and that conother things. He argued when challenged that enlightened planning might tinued contact between British and South African professionals could only assist in the wearing down of apartheid. That others should see matters differently was inevitable, but the accusations of complicity in the maintenance of apartheid pained him considerably. His pride took a particularly sharp blow when it was announced that the Ford Foundation had made a grant for the establishment of the Centre for Environmental Studies. As the Professor of Town Planning at UCL and the country’s most distinguished planner, he had been neither consulted nor informed. These slights to Holford’s professional and personal dignity were not the worst things that happened to him in his later years, nor were they the chief

factors which led to the disintegration of his career at the end of the decade. They are however part of a process of gradual disillusionment, of which his closer colleagues were increasingly aware. Increasingly, he found his satisfactions in fields other than planning: in architecture, and in his wider public career. It is to these that we now turn.

Chapter Ten
The Committee Man

The wider we cast the net of inquiry the greater does Holford's prominence as a public figure appear to be. As his career developed through the post-war years his connections grew in number and prestige. At one time or another the Chairman and then Vice-President of Political and Economic Planning (PEP), Prime Warden of the Goldsmiths' Company, Trustee of the British Museum, Treasurer of the Royal Academy and Fellow of the Royal Society, he appeared to know everything and everyone. His international reputation was no less than his national one and his opinion was sought all over the world, most particularly in South Africa and in Australia. Gareth Roberts would later recall how his advice upon the work of the latter country's National Capital Development Commission (established in accordance with Holford's suggestions in 1958 to supervise the development of Canberra) was 'usually accepted, literally and almost without question'–at least, that is, until the 1968 decision to locate the new Parliament House not on Holford's lakeside site but on Capital Hill.[1]

By the late 1950s he was seriously over-stretched by these and many other commitments. Increasingly his advice was extemporized at brief meetings or worked out on the back of the metaphorical envelope, and then passed on to colleagues whose responsibility it was to carry the idea through. He was sustained by his physical and mental stamina, his uncanny ability to perceive the essence of a problem, and by a growing Holfordian mystique which, in 1965, acquired the reinforcement of a life peerage.

He was not the first architect-planner to be so honoured. Richard Llewelyn-Davies had received his own peerage two years before. Unlike Llewelyn-Davies, Baron Holford of Kemp Town did not accept a party whip: although he had 'helped out' the Liberals with their planning policies for a number of years and was nominally a member of that party's Town Planning and Transport Group, he resisted Jo Grimond's attempts to secure his formal support in the Lords.[2] Nor did he turn out to be one of the 'working peers' with which Harold Wilson was then attempting to strengthen the Upper Chamber. He was an infrequent attender of debates and committees, and although he enjoyed the ceremony and the recognition, this was not among the settings in which his influence was most notably deployed.

That influence was by the mid-1960s all but invisible to ordinary mortals. He had risen into a rarefied atmosphere and much of his important work was done on boards or committees whose proceedings were concealed from public view. Many of those who sat

with Holford through meetings of one sort or another have remarked that his ability in dealing with committees amounted to a kind of genius. An examination of how this genius applied itself at the highest levels is a necessary part of any assessment of the man and his influence.

QUESTIONS OF TASTE

Holford's first experience of the work of a major national body (other than a government department) had come with his appointment in 1944 to the Royal Fine Art Commission (RFAC). He continued to sit on the Commission until 1969, by which time he was its longest-serving member. Twenty-five years is a remarkable span of service on such a body, and its length is not explained merely by reference to Holford's comparative youth at the date of his appointment. We have spoken already of his inclination towards negotiation and conciliation, and a committee of taste which embraced both the modernism of Maxwell Fry and the traditionalism of A.E.Richardson had great need of one with a talent for compromise. In this, and in his skill at cross-examining architects and teasing out of the substance of what they really intended by their proposals, he became over the years a central figure in the Commission's deliberations.

It was a service which was perhaps more evidently useful inside the RFAC itself than to society at large. The Commission has often been accused of timidity by those who would see it adopt a more forthright attitude towards the ugly or the merely banal.[3] The papers which survive in the Holford archive suggest that it had considerable difficulty in getting to the scene of the crime and establishing a common view among its members, let alone in accusing the criminal, before the damage was done. Yet with its own prestige and the power of publicity its only weapons, it is not easy to say what more such an inherently diverse body could do. Even those who were much less reluctant than Holford to stir up controversy found the RFAC an unwieldy campaigning instrument. It was not (and is not) an aesthetic police force, nor even a court: it is a disparate group of informed people performing a curious sort of advisory jury service.

There is nonetheless the lingering suspicion that the RFAC was unduly lenient towards developers and their architects. Sir James Richards, whose criticisms of the Commission in 1951 were promptly followed by its recruitment of him, later wrote of its

> habitual reluctance to come out in the open, to announce its disquiet about any proposal at an early enough stage for public opinion to be effective…I tried without any success to persuade [the Commission's Chairman] Lord Bridges to make public announcements of the Commission's views, claiming that its important role was that of a watch-dog and that the first duty of a watch-dog is to bark–especially if it has been given nothing to bite with–rather than to try to persuade the burglar to take only a little of the silver.[4]

Another former member of the Commission, Lord Esher, has recalled that Bridges placed considerable reliance upon Holford's ability to draw different strands of opinion together into a statement upon which all could agree.[5] How far Bridges might have been prepared

to move towards a more prominent public stance had Holford urged him we cannot say, but it seems clear that no such pressure was exerted. Both men preferred to steer a safe course.

We find a similar reluctance to be overly-critical of the work of living architects in Holford's career elsewhere. There is more to this than simple professional etiquette. As a practising architect whose own designs sometimes got into difficulties with the Commission he was aware of the need for justice in the treatment of those whose proposals came before it. Was it fair to damn a fellow-architect's drawings with a condemnation whose wording concealed wide differences of opinion? There were many instances where the Commission agreed that a design was inadequate, but could not agree upon the reasons why, or what improvements were required.

Papers were often referred to the Commission at a very late stage, and sometimes not at all. In these circumstances the question arose of whether it was fair to blight an applicant's prospects by an eleventh-hour intervention at the start of a planning inquiry, as happened in the Piccadilly case. This happened to Holford himself in 1963 when, on the eve of an inquiry into a proposed export trade and conference centre north of Osterley Park, the RFAC wrote to the Minister and the local authority in terms critical of Holford's scheme. He felt sufficiently strongly about the wrongness of this procedure to offer his resignation, which was refused.[6] He was reluctant to do to others what he would not accept for himself.

Many of the constraints which blunted the cutting edge of the RFAC's activities operated also upon another important but less well-known committee to which Holford was appointed in 1945. The Town and Country Planning Act of the previous year had provided, among other things, for the statutory listing and protection of buildings of architectural or historic interest. To assist the Minister in establishing the criteria for listing and in supervising the working of the new controls an Advisory Committee was created, of which Holford became Chairman (in succession to Sir Eric Maclagen) in 1951. Like the RFAC, the Advisory Committee on Buildings of Special Architectural and Historic Interest lacked any executive powers. Unlike the Commission it was denied also the power of publicity. Its members could exercise no independent sanction whatsoever short of resignation. Its work was nonetheless significant and in the years immediately following the war, it was probably the most powerful single influence for the preservation of the country's built heritage, its importance exceeding that of such independent groups as the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings or the Georgian Society.

Working closely with the investigators responsible for compiling the statutory lists, the Advisory Committee established the basis of listing which has survived with modification to the present day. Contentious or difficult issues of principle were referred to it, and it was quite successful in changing the Minister's mind in such matters as the 'spot listing' of individual buildings. It also dealt directly with building owners, and attracted the odium of those who wished to demolish their historic houses and were prevented from doing so, or merely objected to the imposition of restrictions upon what they could do with their own property. The preservationist lobby also found aspects of the work less than satisfactory. The progress of listing-an immense undertaking–was slow: the compilation of the lists was to take more than twenty years. Nor could the Committee offer grants to encourage preservation, nor influence directly the Ministry of

Works in its issuing of licences for demolition. Many valuable buildings slipped through the net.[7]

Nonetheless the Advisory Committee was well in advance of the prevailing climate of opinion, which had not yet been permeated with conservationist values. It took a stern line with Bath City Council in the 1950s, and frequent applications for the demolition of historic buildings in the second rank of merit (such as the old King Edward School) were resisted. The Committee tried to toughen the criteria whereby demolition was justified especially in relation to road works, and in 1954 held the City Council back from implementing Abercrombie's damaging proposal for a new road running diagonal to the existing road pattern.

The Committee (in common with the other agencies which attempted to do the same) was able to moderate but not avert what was later called 'the Sack of Bath'.[8] Its influence upon local authorities had to operate through the Minister to be effective, and its efforts to diminish the amount of demolition involved in the new Development Plans was seldom sufficient to counter the pressures for redevelopment. If it could not save Bath, how much less so could it save towns where the case for conservation was not so blindingly obvious. Ultimately, its deliberations hinged not upon what was the best way of planning Worcester or Newcastle: this was a job for the planners and consultants involved. Rather the Advisory Committee had to address itself to the question of whether the retention of such-and-such a building could be justified. It was not placed to resist single-handed the flood of redevelopment.

As its Chairman, Holford was prepared to see the Advisory Committee stand in advance of public opinion in recommending the retention of individual buildings and bearing the subsequent friction or criticism, even where demolition would have evoked no great outcry.[9] He knew that such a body had to look ahead to subsequent changes in the appreciation of buildings: what was not historically or architecturally interesting in 1950 might be so in 1980. Yet the Committee's papers show that he was slow to appreciate the changes in taste which began to occur in the 1960s. He encouraged the Committee to make a stand over Georgian Bath, for he himself appreciated that style of architecture. (Indeed all the houses in which he lived his adult life were of the Georgian or Regency periods.) But when the preservation of Victorian buildings became an issue, as it did increasingly under the promptings of Nikolaus Pevsner, he did not respond at all.[10]

The London suburb of Bedford Park, begun in 1875 as an area of small 'picturesque' housing for people of moderate means and an early example of planned housing development, was a case in point. In June of 1963 the Advisory Committee refused to recommend the listing of buildings at Bedford Park because of what it believed to be the unworthiness of the individual houses, excepting only those by Voysey. Holford's own view was that despite the area's renown as one of the earliest planned garden suburbs, Visitors to it tended to return deflated, as he had himself'.[11] At a later meeting Pevsner expressed disquiet about this: Victorian architecture's time would come, and then the Committee members might be seen 'to have failed in their responsibility through excessive caution'.[12] Holford's response was that while it might be that the standards set for Victorian architecture were too high, 'it was necessary to consider what public support would be forthcoming for a more liberal approach'. He stood by his earlier

judgement and, though it noted Pevsner's remarks 'with sympathy', so did the Committee.

At the time, J.Brandon Jones minuted his view that foreign art historians 'would be surprised at the Committee's decision', and so are we. The neglect of important areas of Victorian building is excusable only in the context of the wider investigations which the Committee was undertaking into the need for and methods of 'area preservation' supplementary to that which was provided for in statutory plans. Holford was involved in this work as a member of the sub-committee which made pilot studies of five historic towns, but the minutes of the 136th meeting make it clear that his own views were cautious, almost to the point of insipidity. It was a fine hope that education and the more informed use of existing planning powers could secure the necessary degree of protection for valuable building groups, but the extent to which he underestimated both the coming changes in public attitude and the extent of the threat, not only from developers but from local authority planners, is in retrospect considerable. Yesterday's balance is today's bias, and what constituted a reasonably enlightened attitude to preservation in 1963 no longer seemed so only ten years later.

Blindness to the merits of Victorian architecture was a general phenomenon of the time, and Holford should not be judged too harshly because of it. He did much else that was of lasting benefit both for the Advisory Committee and for the Historic Buildings Council (HBC), a body which was created to advise the Minister of Works on the exercise of his powers under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act of 1953. These powers included the making of grants towards the repair, maintenance or acquisition of buildings of outstanding architectural or historic interest. The Council also had certain non-statutory duties, among them the general review of building preservation throughout England, and advising upon possible new uses for historic buildings. The illogical split of functions between the HBC and the Advisory Committee continued until 1966, when the latter (still under Holford's Chairmanship) became a sub-committee of the former.

Because the responsibilities of the two bodies were so closely related the Council encountered many difficulties which had already been experienced by the Advisory Committee. It met strong resistance to its efforts to widen the scope of building preservation, not only from owners but from local authorities also. For example, the County Architect for Warwickshire wrote to Holford in 1964 to say that he was 'more and more convinced that only the very best examples of our architectural heritage can be retained', and that the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century magnificence of Ragley Hall did not, to his mind, come within that category.[13] Holford gave this argument short shrift in his reply, but the attitude expressed by the County Architect was far from being a local aberration. Councils were everywhere seeking the demolition of important buildings and with eight or nine meetings of the HBC annually, about the same number of the Advisory Committee and site visits and other associated business in between, Holford was active in moderating the tide of demolitions over a thirty-year period. There are many buildings which survive today because of his intervention on their behalf (among them Holy Jesus Hospital in Newcastle), but because he was a Ministerial adviser he did not generally make his efforts public. Instead he represented his views to senior civil servants, not only through the bodies of which he was a member but on a personal basis too, and in this way

he gave much influential support to the efforts of local preservationists who often called for his aid.

Owners of deteriorating buildings sometimes gained more from Holford's service with the HBC than they might have expected. Before giving grant in aid for preservation work the Council invariably examined the financial circumstances of the applicant, and there were instances where Holford argued that aid should be given for reasons that owed more to his sympathy for the people involved than his appreciation of their building. There was, for example, the deserving but unbusinesslike headmaster whose small private school was failing, and would in all probability have to be bought out before very long. Other Council-members took the perfectly proper view that a grant towards background heating would be enough to preserve the fabric, and it was no part of their responsibility to subsidize a badly-managed enterprise. Holford deadlocked the discussion by insisting upon a grant which would enable the proper heating of classrooms and dormitories. Human sympathy could impel him to be awkward where his own principles would not do so.

By the early 1970s public opinion had undergone a transformation. As Holford remarked himself in a speech to the House of Lords, the listing of a house which would, some ten years before, have provoked bitter protest was by now welcomed as a mark of the building's merit.[14] This was a source of some satisfaction to him: his involvement in the work of the two principal bodies advising upon the preservation of historic buildings was, after his academic career, the second longest period of active service in a single cause that he undertook throughout his life. It was a commitment that became increasingly public in his later years. After the move to Brighton he took a prominent part in agitations to preserve the town from a succession of brutalities: he saved the Pump Room but did not succeed in his opposition to the Marina. He never, however, lapsed into architectural reaction. At the same time as he was working for the RFAC and HBC he was engaged upon work that seemed to many to be the antithesis of all that amenity and preservation represented.

POWER IN THE LANDSCAPE

Since 1949 Holford had been architectural adviser to the newly nationalized British Electricity Authority on the design of new power stations in England. With the re-organization of the industry brought about by the Electricity Act of 1957 a new body, the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB), was created. Among the responsibilities with which it was charged was to take into account the effects upon environment and amenity of any new developments which it considered.[15] It was with this requirement in mind that the then Minister of Power, Lord Mills, asked Holford to join the Board as a part-time member. Holford was at first reluctant to accept, but a series of meetings with the Board's first chairman, Sir Christopher Hinton (later Lord Hinton), persuaded him to do so.[16] He was to serve as a Board member from 1958 until his retirement in 1973.

The scale of the undertaking of which he became a part was enormous. During the 1960s some twenty-two million kilowatts of new generating capacity was built, and by the end of the decade the CEGB was investing more than £400 million a year.[17] This constituted a significant element in the total national building programme and a major

architectural opportunity: a single station might extend for half a mile and vary from 200 to 375 feet in height. The effects on the surrounding environment were correspondingly great.

It was evident that this was more than a part-time Board member could be expected to cope with on his own. Accordingly a small section of architects under Michael Shepheard was established within the Generation Design Department, not only to advise upon design but also to assist Holford in the exercise of his duties as a Board member. The section did not initially do any actual designing itself, although it later undertook a number of internal commissions, mostly for office buildings. It was however involved in the briefing of outside consultants, the use of which was increased as a result of Holford's activities.

The commissioning of architects for power station design was no new phenomenon, but its adoption on this scale was significant, not least for those who benefited from this patronage. Although it was the prerogative of the President of the RIBA to make specific recommendations about architectural appointments Holford did express personal preferences, which in practice had the same effect. Of particular importance was the use which was made, at Holford's instigation, of the services of landscape architects. Even before his appointment to the Board had been confirmed he had met with Sylvia Crowe to discuss the employment of members of the Institute of Landscape Architects. He was responsible for the Board giving her its first ever landscaping commission, and the subsequent flow of work which he generated played an important part in stimulating demand for landscape architecture as a professional service.[18] The result of all this patronage of independent consultants was a collection of well-designed installations ranging from the functional purity of Cottam in Nottinghamshire to the remoter stations at Trawsfynydd and Ffestiniog, whose colours and materials sought to accommodate themselves to the surrounding landscape.[19]

The maintenance of design quality in what was built was the constructive side of Holford's achievement with the CEGB. It would nonetheless count for much less in most eyes than his success in the more negative and regulative sense of restraining a massive engineering enterprise in the impact which it was making upon the environment. No matter how well-designed the installations, their scale and character constituted a destructive intrusion into the landscapes that held them. The impact of power developments had already become an issue when the Board was established, and indeed the attitudes engendered by earlier schemes (especially hydro-electric projects in rural Wales) were the major factor which led to the inclusion of the amenity provisions in the 1957 Act.[20]

Over the course of his fifteen years as a member, Holford was able to use the ever-rising level of public disquiet as a political stick to impel the Board towards the aesthetic carrot of improved design and location. He consistently exhorted it to assuage the widespread view that nowhere was safe from the Board's attentions by declaring certain areas inviolate, at least in the medium term.[21] In a note which apparently pre-dates his appointment he identified these areas as

> Places of special character (together with most nature reserves–but not all), where the degree of interest, amenity or beauty is such that visible

> transmission lines and service plant would appear as a flat contradiction of their special value.[22]

In areas such as this, he argued, no conflict between the interests of power generation and amenity should be allowed to arise. Transmission lines should be re-routed or put underground and no major plant constructed.

As a statement of principle this was apparently straightforward and admirable; but as Holford himself pointed out, difficulties began as soon as one attempted to define in specific terms either the criteria for inclusion in the category, or the boundaries of the particular areas to which it might apply. Moreover, the Board's planning engineers resisted attempts to tie their hands by any public declarations that specific areas or specific categories of area would be excluded from 'areas of search' for new installations. Holford nonetheless continued to press for this and other changes which, he argued, would improve the Board's public image.[23] Such an argument could, of course, prove to be a double-edged sword, and in time Holford came to worry that the Board was meeting the rising tide of environmental opposition with a greater improvement in its public relations output than it was achieving in actual performance. In 1972 he wrote to Michael Shepheard's replacement, Howard Mason, to ask that

> as the Board has to be very careful at the moment about the extent to which they can claim to be preserving the environment, I should be glad if you could let me know in confidence whether the [forthcoming] pamphlet is likely to make any extravagant statements. For example, the Chairman's invitation to Kenneth Allsop to attend a Conservation Rally and plant a symbolic tree was answered by a blistering reply to the effect that if we had asked him to cut down a pylon, he would have been there like a shot. The point is…that we cannot help worsening the environment by power lines. Our job is to reduce the impact as far as possible, but we cannot hide them except at impossible cost, and I do not think we should pretend to be conservers, which we are not.[24]

That matters should have reached this pass towards the end of Holford's service with the CEGB is in some respects a token of earlier success. Though its achievements were patchy-with, for example, well-designed and landscaped stations being spoiled by a lack of adequate site management subsequently–enough ammunition had been provided for the Board to be able to present itself as an enlightened preserver of amenities. Though the claim was exaggerated, it could not have been made if there had been no evidence to support it at all.

Two major examples illustrate both the Board's successes in the field of amenity, and their relative and essentially ameliorative nature. The first is the building of the 400 kilovolt supergrid system between 1964 and 1970. Both Holford and Hinton (who shares much of the credit for the CEGB's achievements in amenity) were anxious that this most aesthetically damaging of all the Board's activities should be undertaken with the maximum affordable sensitivity to its effects upon the landscape. Holford advised upon the routeing of the entire supergrid system, surveying some of the routes from a helicopter, and the set of guidelines which he devised in the late 1950s are still used by

the Board's wayleave officers.[25] Although there is no way short of undergrounding in which a major transmission line may be concealed, the routes along which they have been erected have generally been established in accordance with Holford's precepts. Attempts have been made to avoid areas of residence or high amenity, to keep away from the skyline and to make use of woodland to break the visual continuity of the succession of pylons; and in flat open country efforts have been made to keep high voltage lines away from smaller lines and other masts. The visual damage is still very considerable, especially in the vicinity of generating stations; and the failure to evolve more elegant pylon designs is much to be regretted. If, however, it is accepted that this is the price to be paid for economic power transmission, it is apparent that the worst possibilities have been avoided.

A more specific example of Holford's approach and influence is provided by the Board's proposals for pumped storage in Snowdonia. At the beginning of the 1970s public concern was awakened by investigations into the possible use of three locations in the National Park for hydro-electric water storage: Bowydd in the Penamnen Valley; Croesor; and Dinorwic, at the western end of the Llanberis pass. The site search was conducted by the Board's own planning division, and the firm of Sir Frederick Gibberd reported on the treatments whereby each of the three alternatives might be best designed in relation to their natural settings. Holford's note to the Board on the issues involved gives a clear account of his views.[26]

He began by reasserting the argument, which he had often advanced before, that the Board was expected by an increasingly conservation-conscious public to limit the intrusions which it allowed itself in areas of unspoilt countryside. Only if it met this expectation could it avoid having standards of design or limitations upon action imposed upon it by Government or other public bodies. The 'wild and timeless' Croesor Valley was not a place in which such intrusion could be accepted, and legitimate public concern should be met with a public assurance to that effect. Bowydd, too, he felt to be too valuable a landscape to admit such a development.

The Dinorwic proposal was, he believed, of a different character. Though it would introduce a new potentially alien element into the landscape, the valley had already lost its pre-war remoteness. The existing lakes, the history of quarrying and the extent to which it was already being exploited for tourism all had the effect of diminishing the threat to amenity which a storage scheme would involve. With careful design (and here Holford added to Gibberd's recommendations some of his own) development could go ahead without any essential change in the valley's character.

This is the same conclusion to which the Board's own planners had already come. The important point to note is that their recommendation was arrived at as a result of an investigation that had evaluated economic, operational and environmental factors side by side. That this was the case owed much to Holford's influence, as did the Board's persistence with the Dinorwic scheme despite it being the only site which was opposed by the county planning authority: had the easiest political option been taken, it would have pressed for Bowydd. Holford spoke and voted in favour of the resulting North Wales Electric Power Bill during its passage through the Lords, and the scheme was finally completed amid much publicity in March 1984.

It was a sort of vindication of Holford's efforts. The Board had shown itself capable of environmentally responsible behaviour despite the many conflicting pressures upon it. It

had weighed the environmental costs of alternative courses of action in a way the planning authorities had not been able to do. In an inadequate system of checks and balances it was vital that such a powerful body act with restraint, and it had done so. It was not all Holford's own doing. Public pressure was what had initially made the Board publicity-conscious, and its amenity responsibilities had been imposed upon it by statute. But it was Holford's persuasiveness in a potentially hostile engineering environment that was the prime force pushing the awareness of amenity issues beneath the skin. The results are now widely acknowledged to constitute a considerable achievement and the Board has received some forty or so awards for architecture, landscape design and amenity. None of them, of course, are for anything designed by Holford, but each is in some measure a testament to his success as an organizational adviser. They also serve to show what he could achieve when placed in a position where he had to fight his corner, instead of merely holding the ring. The results are such as to make us wish he had been so placed more often in his career.

Chapter Eleven
The Architect and his Office

In our account of Holford's years in Italy we saw how his interest in 'urbanism' originated in an interest in the context of the individual building. The broader concern expanded subsequently to embrace many varieties and different scales of spatial planning, some of which lacked any architectural element at all. He came to advocate (or at least to accept for the purposes of argument) the view that there was such a thing as a discrete expertise in 'town planning', whose principal object was the right use and development of land. Yet while others stressed this separateness of town planning, Holford returned again and again to the 'urbanism' of his youth, in which *all* the relevant arts and sciences were married in the physical and social regeneration of towns.

There were two aspects to this continuing emphasis in his thought and actions. On the one hand there was Holford, the honest broker between the environmental disciplines, overcoming in his own person and attempting to overcome for others the division of the urban field into a sequence of separate professional compartments. On the other was the Holford who argued that insofar as the end result of either urbanism or town planning was built form, physical design of an architectural kind–in other words Civic Design–was indispensable.

> It is true of architecture…as it is true of surveying, that it is not enough by itself to secure good town planning. On the other hand, sound planning must embrace civic design, and should always create good opportunities for architecture.[1]

It is a continual problem in trying to unravel the intention behind Holford's public pronouncements that one meaning rarely seems to exclude another, and the subjects which he addressed rarely seem to have any boundaries. Certainly we cannot consider him as a planner without also considering him as an architect. Yet there is another and more obscure sense in which we look to his architecture to further our understanding of his life. As Richard Gray noted some five years after Holford's death, in everything that he did as a town planner or as a public figure, or wrote or said in any context whatsoever, he addressed audiences whose expectations moulded the shape and sense of what he offered them. This was as true for his social life as it was for his public career: to different friends he manifested himself in different ways, to the extent that people who knew him well over many years could nonetheless form widely divergent impressions of

his character. Confronted with this apparent mutability the biographer looks to primary sources for some indication of underlying motivations. But in the post-war years there is practically nothing: there are no self-revealing correspondences, and no personal diaries such as survive from the 1920s and 1930s. Only his creative work, his architecture, survives from his years of success and honours to provide any clues as to the nature of the essential Holford that lay behind the brilliant public persona.

UN-ARCHITECTURAL ARCHITECTURE

When in 1945 Holford came out of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning to begin work on the City Plan, he had to start building up an organization of his own. He had always intended to maintain a practice after the war, and with his reputation already made he had little initial difficulty in attracting either work or staff. Between the autumn of 1945 and that of 1946 three offices came into existence: the first at Bank Buildings where the City Plan was done; one in Paris Street, where Leslie Creed looked after the work on the rebuilding of St. Thomas's Hospital across the Thames from the Palace of Westminster; and a third at '80 Beds' in Liverpool. This last had been brought back to life in order to prepare Liverpool University's Development Plan, and was run by Ward Shennan, a contemporary of Holford's from their days as students under Reilly. The pattern for the growth of the practice was thus established early on. When a job arose for which existing resources were insufficient, Holford would pick a trustworthy associate to undertake it and establish him in an office near the site. Once the job was completed, the problem would then arise of finding other work for the staff which had been engaged, and so the new office would look around for other work to do. This was growth according to principles of cellular multiplication, which until 1960 had no formal organizational, nor indeed any legal basis. The loose-knit structure was, as Myles Wright has described it, a commonwealth of offices held together by loyalty to Holford, and by his loyalty to them.[2]

It was not an especially convenient or efficient basis upon which to establish a practice. Hard times followed the first flush of reconstruction work, and architects suffered from the restraints imposed by post-war austerity and the system of building licences. After Holford's resignation of the St. Thomas's commission in 1949 there were lean years in which the income was barely sufficient to keep four or five small offices going. It would have made more sense to have run the practice as a single operation, controlling and delegating work from a head office in which administration and cash flow were centrally managed. Equally, when prosperity returned a more business-like organization would have given the practice the opportunity to become very wealthy indeed. Planning commissions were potentially the gateway to much more lucrative architectural work. Moreover Holford's personal prestige and connections were such as might have been made to yield rich returns. His friendship with Leonard Elmhurst, dating from PEP weekends at Dartington, did result in a considerable volume of work in the South-West, and his standing in the City was undoubtedly good for the firm. He was forever being approached by those seeking advice on the appointment of architects. Yet he never actively capitalized on these advantages. That the firm did not prosper as it might have was the result both of Holford's fastidiousness in such matters, and of his managerial (or rather, anti-managerial) style.

When a partner in one of the most successful post-war practices once told him that it needed a million pounds in income a year before the partners began to get anything, Holford was tactful enough to disguise his distaste with a show of surprise.[3] Yet he retained with absolute consistency his earlier antipathy towards 'design factories' staffed by regiments of assistants and run on normal business lines. None of his offices, even in the peak years of the mid-1960s, ever had a total staff of much more than forty, and most had considerably fewer. Each semi-autonomous office was a kind of *atelier* with Holford as its *patron.* The individual architect within this organization would not become rich, but he could exercise responsibility for his own work. Holford was very much more *primus* than *pares* within the firm which bore his name, and it was probably because his colleagues were reluctant to force the issue with him that organization and finance were not put on a formal footing until 1960. In that year a partnership arrangement was instituted, and Holford himself became a partner in the London practice and consultant to the other offices. Though the firm itself benefited from the reform, Holford's own role changed little.

Holford's personal office at 5 Cambridge Terrace.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

He did not involve himself in the day-to-day work of any of his offices. It was up to his partners to get on with the work in hand and to come to him for advice when needed. He did however maintain a personal office with one or two assistants in his own home. Here he worked upon most of the planning commissions which he obtained. These tended to be more politically sensitive than architectural jobs, but on the other hand involved fewer practical complications such as liability for negligence or the handling of contracts. It was from his first-floor room at Cambridge Terrace and in the drawing office below

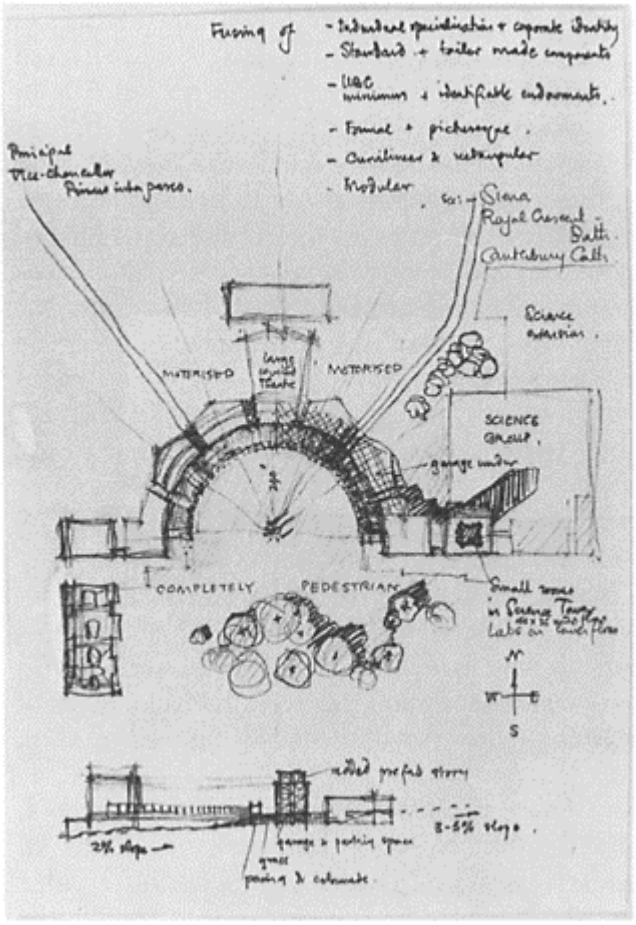
that the schemes for St. Paul's and Piccadilly Mark 1 were prepared; and after the move to Brighton he continued to work from a London *pied-à-terre* in Eccleston Square. He also used his own office to go over designs prepared by his colleagues, or to work upon individual projects which especially interested him.

There was no immediately obvious pattern in the way in which Holford 'dropped in' on work which his firm was doing. Commissions would often go from start to finish without his being involved at all, while on other occasions he might give advice on a particular problem or come in at public inquiry to support a colleague's work. Thus far, his behaviour was what one would expect of the senior partner in a major architectural practice, whose other commitments limited the time available for the firm's own business. What was less normal was his treatment of those projects in which he did involve himself. He would very often suggest a general line of approach to a particular brief, and represent the firm in its dealings with clients and other parties involved (work at which he was consummately skilled, and which was also gratifying to the client); but seldom did he sit down to do any serious designing. Instead he contented himself with an advisory role, until the impulse to put his personal signature upon a building took hold.

This impulse might manifest itself in a sudden and very specific idea about which he could be absolutely categorical. One such was the lyre bird on the wall of the common room in the Arts Building at Exeter University.[4] On other occasions he would sometimes take working drawings home with him and devise some small detail to be added to a building designed by colleagues. It was Howard Mason who was chiefly responsible for the restrained facade of the Clarendon Building in Oxford's Cornmarket, but the design of the carved and gilded keystone above the office entrance, incorporating the initials of the client (Woolworth's), the contractor, Mason and Holford himself, was Holford's own. It still survives, a small memorial to a sensibility very much at variance with the gimcrack additions subsequently made to the shop-fronts. In the late 1950s the firm undertook the design of multi-storey flats at Kensal for the Royal Borough of Kensington, and among the many plans and drawings which survive among his papers, the only one in Holford's own hand is a small sketch showing seventeen different patterns of brickwork, a typical example of the fascination which such details held for him.[5] Such dabbling in surface treatment was wholly characteristic: he had a part (with John Haskell) in the elevations of the National Army Museum at Chelsea, but not in the plans.[6]

One major example will perhaps suffice to indicate the way in which Holford could be involved in and influence a project without actually producing any architecture himself. When his term of office as RIBA President ended in 1962, he was appointed architect for the first phase of the new University of Kent at Canterbury. It was also understood that he would act in an individual capacity as planning consultant upon the overall development of the site, his fee being one quarter of one per cent of the first six million pounds of building work.

Holford had experience of university planning at Nottingham, Liverpool, and St. Andrews as well as Exeter, but at Kent the opportunity was an exceptional one, with a particularly favoured site of 260 acres on a ridge looking south over Canterbury. The building had to be ready to receive the first intake of between five and six hundred students by October 1965, a target which the newly-appointed Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Geoffrey Templeman, thought might be unattainable.[7] A sketch survives showing



Holford's initial sketch for the layout of the University of Kent at Canterbury.

Source: Holford Papers, University of Liverpool.

Holford's initial reaction to the site, a plan with a formal basis but with strongly picturesque elements. A wall of buildings, curved around an open amphitheatre, faced southwards across wooded slopes to the cathedral spire and was set off by a twenty-storey tower containing, of all things, accommodation for the sciences. It was a romantic conception with conscious references to Bath's Royal Crescent and to Siena (the tower approximating to the campanile which had so engaged his interest thirty years before). Something of the original idea survived the initial discussions, but not much. The University urgently required two colleges, a science building and a library in order to achieve a relatively complete academic environment within the shortest time possible, and which could subsequently be augmented to meet growing numbers at a later date. It

did not however want or need a rigid master plan. Among the heads of the new universities created in the wake of the Robbins Report, Templeman was noted for his scepticism and indeed dislike of explicit schemes which might commit an institution to developments many years ahead. The provisional scheme which emerged during 1963 proposed a far looser framework for subsequent expansion than Holford's initial sketch had suggested.

With an office established in Canterbury for the purpose, two teams worked in great haste upon the new buildings. One under Anthony Wade designed the first and second colleges, very compact and complex blocks on a cruciform plan. These are the buildings which still dominate the ridge and which have been accurately described as presenting to the town the appearance of a fortified hill town or castle.[8] The second team worked on the physical science block under Bernard Cadd, who also managed the contract as a whole. This was a more conventional but ultimately more satisfactory building in brick. A monumental library, the start of which was deferred by reductions in the University Grants Committee (UGC) budget, eventually had its first phase completed in 1968 and was the last building on the campus to be both designed and put up by the Holford practice. The second phase, proportionally symmetrical with the first but with less lavish finishes and internal arrangements, was not designed by the firm. In all of this design work Holford was only marginally involved. The idea of placing a 'romantic' composition on the ridge had been his, and in the formal symmetry of the buildings we may detect the aftermath of his Beaux Arts training. His concern to establish the buildings in a definite axial relationship to the cathedral, apparent in his first sketch, was carried through: in the case of the college refectories it produced what is one of the outstanding architectural experiences offered by any modern university. The view through the south windows which frame the cathedral is visible from the entrance causeway all the way through the centre of the buildings, and the moment when one reaches the head of the stairs leading down to the dining areas will not be soon forgotten. This axis was an instance of Holford getting a very specific idea into his head and pursuing it with utter conviction, but its execution was left to others, and in no particular sense can we describe the architecture of the University of Kent as his own.

It was inevitable that the contract for this 'instant university' should have encountered difficulties. Building at breakneck speed is seldom easy or cost-effective, and at a time when the construction industry was stretched to capacity it was even less so than usual. Nonetheless Holford's firm had good working relationships with the quantity surveyors and consulting engineers, and all might have gone amicably if not smoothly had the architects enjoyed the confidence of the client.[9] This they signally lacked. The University had taken a considerable risk in setting so fast a pace, and the Vice-Chancellor and his Buildings Officer were very reluctant to see the stakes raised any further. The worry that their architects might incur some unnecessary delay or excessive expenditure led to an intensiveness of supervision over, and sometimes even interference in the management of the contract, sufficient to generate an extraordinary degree of friction between the Holford office in Canterbury and the University Buildings Office. So tight was the Vice-Chancellor's control over the programme that the architects were not permitted to approach either the prospective users of the buildings which they were designing or the UGC within whose cash limits they had to work.

It was to try to resolve the difficulties that Holford came once more into the centre of affairs in an attempt to clear up at a personal level what it had not been possible to resolve on an office-to-office basis. Between January and October 1965 there was a series of letters and meetings between Holford and Templeman, but far from improving relations this exchange resulted in Holford publicly disassociating himself from the University's further development. The cause of the final rift was not so much the management of the first phase contract as his own personal role as planning consultant. Very general and provisional plans for the site as a whole had existed since 1963, but these plans were almost entirely speculative. Because of the absence of any forecasts or instructions which would have enabled him to plan more than a few months ahead Holford had never felt justified in accepting the fee offered by the University for his personal services. In June 1965 he was nonetheless still regarded both by Templeman and himself as the University's planning consultant.[10]

Holford had from the outset advised the desirability of agreeing principles upon which the location, use and general character of future development, arrangements for circulation and parking and most particularly the provision of services could all be determined. He was not arguing for a detailed master plan, but pointing out that the broader framework of a development policy would protect longer-term options from prejudice by sudden or temporary expedients. So long as he could argue this case and in the meantime give interim advice, Holford's was an honourable if not a particularly fruitful position. In June 1965, however, he learned from other sources that the University had gone behind his back in approaching other firms of architects with a view to their taking responsibility for further buildings. It was by then understood that Holford's own firm would not be doing any additional architectural work beyond that to which it was already committed, so there was no suggestion of special pleading when he drafted a letter to Templeman protesting that

> Even though it is clear that my concurrence has been taken for granted, I have nothing against the two firms you have named; and I have always been willing to work with other architects. But I should wish to do this as a consultant, not as a rubber stamp. In fact I have not been consulted in the matters of greatest importance for the development of the site for which I am nominally responsible. I have not met the General Committee or the Council...In the face of this complete lack of confidence, what authority could I bring to discussions with these architects, and how could I interpret your mind or the Council's policy?[11]

By October he had notified the University formally of his withdrawal, and it was made public in May 1966.[12]

It had not been a happy experience for any of those involved. When in 1970 Holford wrote once more to Templeman declining the terms of an invitation to design the second phase of the library, he wrote:

> I have not been on the site for three years. I was able to spend a day there last Thursday 23rd and I must confess I was disappointed by what I saw. The Senate Room, interesting as a structure, is in my view out of scale

> and context with the Library–an ineptitude made more obvious by the broad walk of concrete pavings, leading nowhere, and off the axis of the main building which looks out on one of the finest views in England. This has nothing to do with costs or UGC requirements: but these departures reduce the value of a feature of the site, which, with the two first Colleges, might have been appreciated by generations to come when you and I are dead and gone.[13]

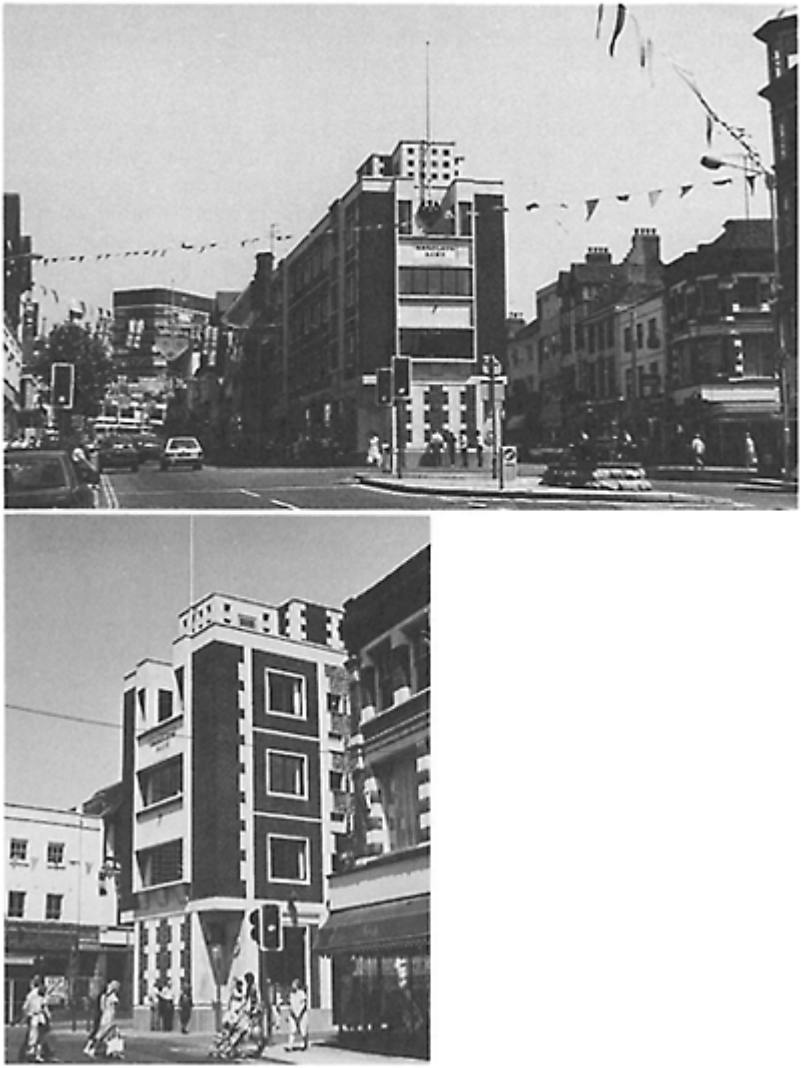
For the casual visitor the disappointment is more generalized. Even had the University taken Holford's advice from 1963 onwards it is unlikely that the campus would have outgrown the lack of cohesion for which it has sub-sequently been criticized, at least on the basis of the plans which came out of his office up to 1965. Even twenty years later only half the library which he envisaged has been built, and gaping holes which are merely extension space remain in the very centre of a stiffly formal layout. In the absence of any definite commitment from the client Holford tried to fix what could be fixed: the view, the main axes, the silhouette. The formal symmetry of the buildings made some sense as an attempt to impose a definite identity upon an open, empty site. It was not enough: the architecture is insufficiently emphatic, the gaps between the buildings are too large, and the vision behind the plan is diluted both by space and circumstance. It is a case of Holford having attempted too much with too little.

A PERSONAL STYLE

So hurried a programme and so strained a relationship with the clients as existed at Canterbury was far from Holford's normal experience, but in many other respects it was a typical commission. The allocation of functions between the firm and his private office, his intervention at moments of crisis and his involvement in what might be called architectural policy but not in actual design were all typical. Where, then, do we look to find examples of Holford's personal work which might illuminate his qualities as a designer? We have already touched upon three: Team Valley, the St. Paul's Precinct and the Piccadilly Circus schemes of 1961 and 1962. Single buildings which bear the mark of his own hand are harder to find, for they are few in number and have largely been ignored by the critics. It is almost as though there was a conspiracy of silence, attributable in part to Holford's own reticence regarding the publication of the firm's work, but perhaps more so to a feeling that it was bad form to attack a man who, at least until the mid-1960s, was a leading spokesman for practically every cause that the liberal architectural establishment held dear.

The difficulties which a Holford building could present to a critic are nowhere better exemplified than in the case of Barclay's Bank, Maidstone. The site, shaped like a slice of cheese, was not one which allowed an architect much room for manoeuvre. Holford's approach to the design began as it usually did with an *esquisse*,[14] but whereas at Canterbury many of the elements of the original idea were subsequently lost, at Maidstone the elevations (though not, again, the plans) are as Holfordian as any building ever was. A reinforced concrete construction is disguised beneath a pot-pourri of facing brick, stone dressings and knapped flint. The 'prow' of the building which divides High

and Bank Streets is the most important facade, and is clearly intended to provide an emphatic vertical marker on this prominent site: far from being self-obsessed in its idiosyncracies the building is very much designed with its setting in mind. But as a whole it defies the conventional categories.



Barclay's Bank, Maidstone.

Source: Leith Penny.

Holford's attention to texture, colour, symmetry and shadow-creating modelling has often been ascribed to his love for the Italian rennaissance, and certainly he enjoyed

reinterpreting the things which that place and age had made so much of: paving, colonnades, stairways and piazzas. His admiration for Italian skill in placing sculpture, painting or decoration in the right relation to a building or a public space was reflected in his own fondness for adding the work of other artists to his own. At Maidstone this resulted in the four medallions mounted within the recesses on the ground floor. What is most striking of all, however, is the evident fascination with modelling and surface pattern.

The outcome is, at least at first, hard to 'read'. It belongs to no recognized style (although its central elevation has a slightly old-fashioned air about it, the attic looking as though it was designed in the 1930s). Eyes that respond to pure or logical forms will find it fussy. Yet its cheerful, superficial individuality manages to draw together the jumble of building styles that surround it, and gives a pictorial focus to the space which it overlooks. Its solidity and warmth of character contrast markedly with the tacky blandness of the other post-war buildings visible from the High Street. It is a building of real quality, albeit a quality scarcely acknowledged since the war.

A more immediately accessible example of Holford's architecture is provided by the library at Tonbridge School. The site is exceptionally well-favoured, with fine prospects of hop fields, meadows and the first range of the Kent Downs. The character of the main buildings is neo-Gothic, not particularly well designed or planned but with plenty of space available in which to make the best of the School's considerable 'development assets'.[15] It presented Holford with a problem–not a severe one–of the sort which he most enjoyed, and indeed was best at. If he had any outstanding merits as an architect, they were those of site planning and of responding sympathetically to the existing environment. Accordingly the new buildings–library, master's house and cloister–which were completed in October 1962 were the

The new library at Tonbridge School, Kent.

Source: Holford Associates.

fruits of his own mind although, as always, most of the practical work was left to partners and assistants.[16]

The new library resembles in form the converted chapel which its predecessor actually was, an impression which is heightened by the great gable window and the cloister. The enclosure of the parade ground and the achievement of a 'collegiate feel' is very successfully achieved: this is the sort of architecture which because it is unspectacular, mannerly and dignified, achieves little wider fame. 'When did expensive materials ever make up for timid design?', asked John Newman.[17] Yet this is the sort of thing most people would want from architecture, if they could get it. The Doulting stone and clean lines provide a welcome relief from the sombre castellated range of the main buildings, and there is enough novelty and interest to engage the attention without detracting from the Gothic character of the whole ensemble. A building of this sort would receive a warmer reception in the neo-vernacular 1970s or the post-Modern 1980s than it did in the more puritan critical climate of the time.

If the premium on this sort of restraint was low, then the stock of architectural pastiche was lower still. Now that the stone has weathered, it takes an acute eye to notice that his firm's extension to Bodley's building alongside the River Cam at King's College Cambridge dates from no earlier than 1955. In this instance no-one was upset, but no less authoritative a critic than Sir Nikolaus Pevsner took issue with Holford's response to the far more difficult problem presented by the roof of Eton College Chapel.

Holford's involvement with Eton had begun in 1947 when he was asked to advise upon the erection of a college memorial. It was not until 1949, however, that William Holford and Partners became Eton's architects. The cause of their appointment was a stained-glass window. One of the first projects to face the school at the end of the war had been the replacement of the bombdamaged East window of the fifteenth-century chapel. The Victorian glass which had been destroyed was deemed no great loss; indeed, it was even thought that on the morning after the bomb had fallen 'certain masters with an eye for beauty and the requisite avoirdupoids may even have trodden on some of the bigger pieces, thus making sure that they would never be put back'.[18] A decision upon how to replace it was not so easily accomplished. It was only after heated controversy that the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres succeeded in his advocacy on behalf of the Irish artist Evie Hone. When her design was submitted the then College Architects, Seeley and Paget, asked to be allowed to disassociate themselves from the scheme, and as Holford and Lord Crawford were personal friends the appointment of Holford and Partners as replacements was not unexpected.

Holford's firm has continued its association with Eton over the succeeding thirty-five years and has undertaken approximately a hundred separate jobs for the school in that time.[19] It was work in which Holford took a personal interest and its result is evident in the careful restoration of the existing fabric and in unobtrusive new buildings. The characteristic attention to detail is everywhere in evidence, most obviously in the decorative brickwork: in the case of Villiers House, the most successful of the firm's new buildings at Eton, the builders worked to drawings which showed each individual brick.[20] As always happened when he was involved, Holford produced many of the main ideas and 'set the tone', but it was left to a colleague, E.A.Duley, to do the practical architectural work.

The most important single project which Holford undertook at Eton was undoubtedly the replacement of the chapel roof. The old wooden structure carrying some of the heaviest lead in England had been constructed in 1699, and the original timbers still supported the later gothic additions which had been attached to it in 1848. Towards the end of the summer of 1956 it became apparent that the seventeenth-century oak was thoroughly infested with Death Watch Beetle, and Holford at once set about investigating methods of treatment which included a proposal to 'bomb' the beetles with a radioactive isotope.[21] This came to nothing, and by February 1957 the options were clearly established. Either the existing roof could be removed and made good by conventional methods of restoration and repair, or it could be replaced with a different type of structure. Holford favoured the latter course: the existing roof was not in his view worth preserving both because of the risk of further infestation and because it was 'a bastard affair and not worth preserving for its own sake'.[22] It was the practical rather than the aesthetic argument, however, which finally convinced the Provost and Fellows (though not, at that stage, the Head Master) that Holford's proposal to replace timber with fan faulting was finally accepted.

Viewed in one way this was a surprising and perhaps even a daring solution for a modern architect. It is not of course a structural vault: the work of carrying the roof of super-pure aluminium is done by a framework of steel, and the ribs and stone-faced concrete panels of the vaulting are suspended from it. The job was made more difficult by the technical problems involved in mating a piece of modern engineering to an asymmetrical fifteenth-century base, built by rule-of-thumb. However, the greatest problem which Holford had to face was one of taste. Could it be possible for a twentieth-century architect to cap one of the nation's major examples of the late perpendicular style, a building of the same family and generation as King's College Chapel and St. George's Windsor, without either letting the historic structure down or doing violence to it? Some very fine judgement was required.

The result was considered by Pevsner in his 1960 volume on Buckinghamshire:

> …the question yet remains as to whether this is the vault one would have expected from the designer of the precincts of St. Paul's. At St. Paul's, the problem was to combine a monument of venerable age with new elements whole-heartedly in the style of the C20. Was the situation at Eton not the same? Architects on the Continent, faced with buildings damaged in the Second World War, have shown that a radical juxtaposition of old and new can come off. Basil Spence's vault for his cathedral at Coventry is designed to be of the C20 yet not out of sympathy with the Gothic past. Admittedly, a vault like that projected for Coventry would not have done for Eton. What should it then have looked like? The critic is in the enviable position of not having to give an answer. Sir William Holford's answer, coming from this particular architect, remains puzzling.[23]

The new roof in the chapel at Eton.

Source: Holford Associates.

Sir Nikolaus wrote under the impression that as well as being an ally of the modernism which he himself espoused, Holford was also a practitioner of it. In this, and in his judgement of the new roof, he was mistaken. It is true that there are many occasions upon which new and old may be combined within the same building. The roof of Eton's chapel was not a place in which such an attempt should have been made. The architecture is able to survive the tension between itself and the new glass, but in Pevsner's own words, the interior 'achieves greatness by means of uncompromising consistency'.[24] To destroy that consistency would be to destroy the chapel itself. The perpendicular style could not survive the kind of treatment which Pevsner had in mind. Even in the hands of an architect of the quality of Spence or Gibberd it is impossible to imagine how it might have been done successfully. Holford was not in this class, and that he took the course he did is something for which Etonians may feel grateful.

Granted that the result was a ‘period piece’, it was a successful one. The chapel was transformed, but far from having to do battle with the new addition its architectural personality was amplified by the vault. The finished roof convinced the most important of the doubters, the Head Master, whose letter to Holford says all that needs to be said in its favour.

Dear Holford,

I must write a line at once. Yesterday I went to Eton to see the roof.

It’s absolutely superb. You probably realized that I had been somewhat sceptical. I just could not imagine a 20th century fan-vaulted roof which was not a pastiche. Your model went some way towards convincing me, though I rather think I should have voted for the groined roof—out of sheer cowardice. The bits I saw convinced me that it would be ‘all right’. But until I saw the whole uncovered, I had no idea how splendid it would be.

There are three things which impress the most. First, and most important of all, the spring of the ribs from the columns. This is really exciting. The rocket goes up in one and bursts.

Second and this is what seems to me to make it so original—the setting back of the panels produces the most lively effect of light and shade, especially when you look along the roof from the west end.

And, third, the whole roof combines dignity and liveliness in a way which I found very moving indeed.

I do congratulate you most warmly. I think it is a great piece of architecture. It is well worth the three years of exile.

Yours ever,
Robert Birley[25]

The case of the chapel roof may appear to be something of a freak occurrence in the career of a twentieth-century architect but it exemplified, albeit in extreme form, some of the characteristics of Holford’s work. Many architects might feel with Pevsner that the best thing to do with an historic fabric is to leave well alone, and to avoid confusion of periods or styles. Thus red Victorian brick may meet grey concrete panels or an eighteenth-century mansion find itself extended with a rectangle of reflecting glass. Holford would not; indeed it seems he could not design in this way. His reaction to the prevailing character of a given architectural context was to respond not with a contrast but in kind, to find something with which his own work could strike up a sympathetic resonance. Indeed where such a note from which he could tune his own designs was lacking, he seems to have been unable to get into his stride. In the isolation of Team Valley the result was a strangely aimless architecture, and at Canterbury we find no real architecture of his own at all. Whenever Holford had anything to say there was something else in the immediate vicinity to which his design referred: to the style or materials of surrounding buildings, to the landscape, or sometimes to something less obvious. Not only was the architectural dress in which he clothed his St. Paul’s scheme intended as a uncompetitive backdrop to the cathedral: he also took pains to establish modules and ratios of proportion which would be compatible with Wren’s great work. He actually

needed an immediate stimulus from which to develop an idea: he could harmonize, but needed to cast about for his themes.

It is not surprising that to such a man, and especially to one with the sort of training Holford had received, formal principles in architecture should matter a great deal. From the time of his visits to Greece onwards, he believed that there were architectural verities of symmetry, proportion, scale, compositions and the like, which might evolve over time but which were always of first importance. It was in the light of this understanding that he reacted to a given problem, searching for such principles as could be abstracted from the con text and to such precedents as might be relevant, and only when these had been digested did self-expression come into play. A perpendicular chapel does not provide much latitude for demonstrations of individuality, and nor for that matter does Eton as a whole. In that setting, Holford's was thus a subdued and discreet architecture which only permitted itself a few flourishes when it was tucked away from the dominating atmosphere of the main historic buildings. The Maidstone bank, surrounded by a variety of buildings of different styles and materials, allowed scope for something more distinc tively personal; but to see Holford's architectural individuality on a larger scale we have to look to a site in which he was involved for two decades, which provided him with a framework to which he could respond but which also gave him the freedom to do so with his own individual touch. Nowhere in Britain is Holford the architect so much in evidence as on the campus of Exeter University.

BUILDING FOR PLEASURE

It was through his connection with Leonard Elmhurst that Holford was in 1953 brought into the planning of what was then the University College of the South-West.[26] The college's main site was the grounds of Streatham Hall, immediately to the north-west of the city. Hilly and richly wooded with a great variety of trees and shrubs, its slopes mounted on three sides to a summit which the college's original architect, E.Vincent Harris, had proposed to mark with a monumental crown of buildings. From here Harris had projected a great axis aligned on the distant towers of Exeter Cathedral, but by 1953 the axis extended only in embryo, terminating with the chapel which Harris was about to build in memory of his mother. It was not an easy site to develop. Because of the sloping ground and the almost total lack of available building land that had direct access from any existing road its further development was likely to be expensive. Also to be taken into account were the desirability of preserving the parkland character of the site, and the accommodation within any new layout of the buildings already put up by Harris and other architects.

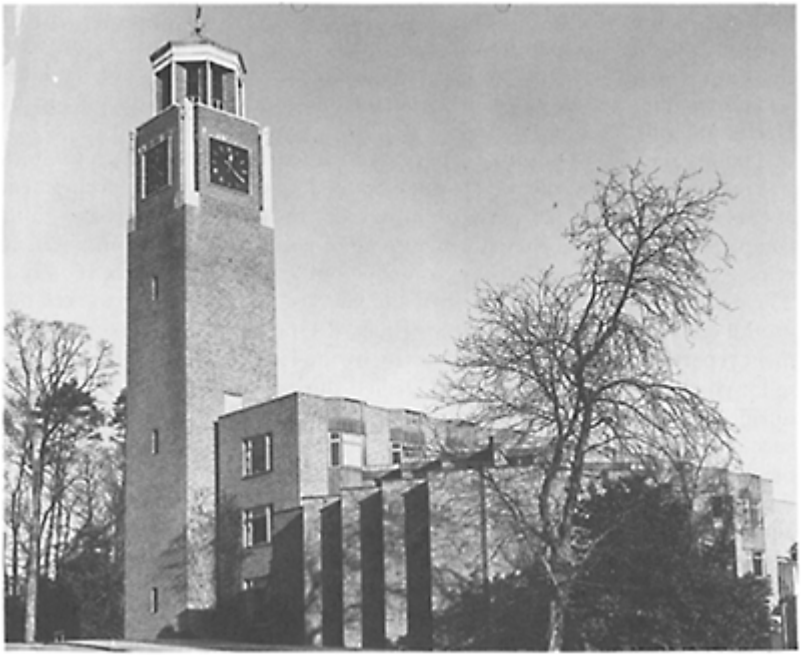
Though the idea of pointing an axis at a cathedral was one which Holford was to pursue at Kent, the need to open up the Exeter campus to development at reasonable cost did not permit him to carry through the Harris axis to its completion. Instead, a phased programme of roadbuilding was proposed to release back land as sites for new academic buildings as these were required. The new layout, necessarily informal and curvaceous, was largely worked out on the ground by Holford's partner Richard Gray, and successive development reports prepared for the University by the Holford practice have largely followed the lines which Gray established during a ten-day visit to Exeter during Easter

of 1954.[27] The nature of the ground has required that each successive stage of development be self-contained, separated from its neighbouring buildings by changes of level. The central buildings thus take the form of a sequence of compact quadrangles, separated and surrounded by a naturalistic landscape. The residential buildings are at some distance from the academic, being located either in mature woodland, or over the brow of the hill, or on the other side of the valley east of the academic centre.

The main buildings which were produced by the Holford firm in the earlier stages are small for the size of institution which the University has since become. The refectory was designed in 1958 for a student body of 1,000 which, in the pre-Robbins era, was expected to rise to 1,500. It was part of a group of buildings which included a Students' Union, common rooms, an Administration block and Great Hall, all of which were at the same scale. There was provision for 30 per cent expansion by addition to the buildings, as well as limited expansion within the outer walls.[28] But shortly after the first buildings were opened the planned figure for expansion was raised, then raised again, and by 1970 the annual intake of first year students was greater than the total population had been twelve years before. Holford himself commented in 1964 that had forecasting been taken more seriously five years ago, no more need have been actually built; but the unity of layout and composition which we could have aimed at would have been a later and larger unity. In other words we could have planned from the start with an expansion factor of 100% or 150%, and the form of the buildings could have been different.[29]

It may be that the University gained in atmosphere what it lost in utility through this under-provision, for the intimacy of building, together with the care taken to preserve mature trees and the comfortable irregularity of the site, compares most favourably with the wide-open spaces of Kent, and indeed helps to make Exeter the most obviously appealing of Britain's modern campuses. The credit is not all Holford's: much that contributes to the present-day character of Exeter University existed before ever he set eyes upon it. Yet although most of the initial planning was done by one of his partners he took a close personal interest in both individual buildings and overall development. What was built at Exeter constitutes with Team Valley the largest and most complete realization of his own wishes for a particular site.

His starting points appear to have been the landscaped setting itself, and the scale and bricky character of the buildings already in existence. In the area immediately to the north of the Harris chapel, which includes most of the main central buildings put up between 1958 and 1960, Holford took up these cues and created a composition of considerable charm in which most of the characteristics of his personal style are seen to their best effect.



The clocktower at Exeter University.

Source: Exeter University Photographic Department.

What first strikes the observer about this ensemble, and is perhaps one of the ingredients contributing to its popular success, is the thoroughly conservative nature of both concept and materials. The ‘collegiate’ layout at once establishes the level of expectations; the eye looks not for any large statement but for variety, ‘grain’ and the small surprise, and it is not disappointed. The clock-tower which marks the centre, itself a very traditional idea in campus design, exemplifies the tone of the whole. It is placed not on an axis but is informally offset from its associated buildings. With its modest scale and mellow brickwork it eschews monumentality, and indeed indulges in amiable eccentricities of form and detail. The grotesque faces carved upon the stone corner-posts do not strike the eye when reproduced in a photograph, but when seen for the first time *in situ* they produce a marked and even slightly unsettling effect. The gilt weather-cock confirms that this tower marks a place designed not to impress with its seriousness but to welcome, and occasionally amuse.

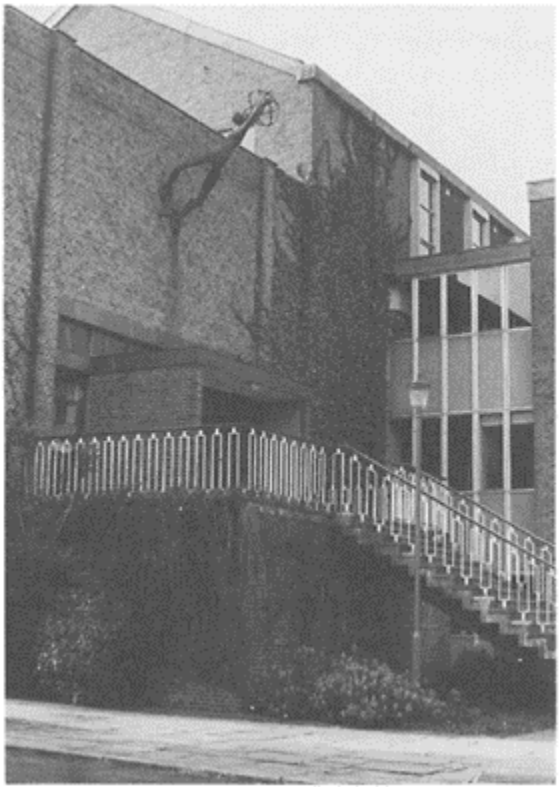
The Administration Block, Senate Chamber and Clock Tower at Exeter.

Source: Exeter University Photographic Department.

The quadrangular complex of which this tower forms a part incorporates the Union building, the Refectory, the Administration block and the Great Hall. The layout and building forms are irregular, the materials lavishly varied, and the planting profuse. The result is an environment unusually rich in texture. The variety of shapes and materials is matched by that of the spaces between and around the buildings. In this, the planting plays an important part. External as well as internal corners are so organized that a screen of mature trees and shrubs may create an enclosed space where one was not expected; and so one enjoys a sequence of spatial experiences of the sort which is so much talked about but achieved comparatively rarely. The observer who moves from east to west, perhaps approaching the rear of the buildings from the northern car-park, experiences first the mixed enclosure of building and dense foliage, then that of the buildings themselves, and then the more open wooded parkland and views over the city onto which they face.

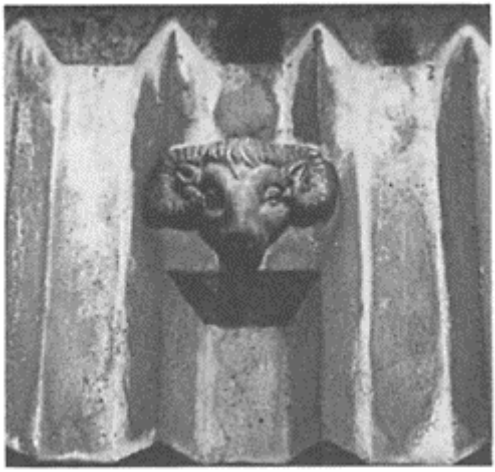
The refectory at Exeter University.

Source: Exeter University Photographic Department.



Exeter University: the use of sculpture and attention to detail and planting are characteristic of Holford's sometimes fussy style.

Source: Leith Penny.



Ram's head boss at Exeter University.

Source: Leith Penny.

For once, Holford's hand is evident in the interiors as well as in the external appearance of the buildings. A view of the interior of the Refectory gives a good idea of what he could do. It is as one would expect: pleasantly refined, not at all original in general conception, but with touches such as the gallery or details of finish and furnishings—in this instance the geometrical relief of the ceiling, the chandeliers and the star-shaped bosses—which give personality to what might otherwise be bland. To the south and downhill of this group, in the Queen's Building, the same attention to detail is also evident. The curve in the arched screen in front of the west entrance reconciles the frontage to the bend of the road as well as creating an intermediate paved and planted space between parkland and building. The gilt dodecahedron placed upon it is a typical flourish. So are the tiny gilt rams' heads—a motif occurring throughout this part of the site—on the leadwork covering the entrance lobby. They provide a small example of how Holford continued to draw upon his Italian years in his later work: a drawing of just such a head, in stone, survives from his trip of 1929.

Only occasionally does the profusion of idiosyncracies become excessive. The transition from patterned brickwork to zig-zagging stone wall and then back to brick again on the Senate Chamber south of the clock tower may be a case of over-design: the cocktail of brick, lead and glass peeping half-heartedly over the cornice certainly is. But these examples of care for detail degenerating into fussiness are minor irritants in what is generally a very successful exercise in picturesque architecture.

Outside this tight central area the character of the campus becomes more open. Individual buildings by a number of architects, Holford and Spence among them, stand free of each other at different levels looking south from the slope of the hill towards Exeter. All seem to sit easily in the landscape, the parkland character of the site and the curve of the land away to the east of the centre drawing even this loosely-knit campus into visual coherence. The silhouette of the central buildings from the North Park holds the whole thing together. Holford's hand seems to slip only in the case of the Northcott

Theatre, which sits uneasily at the back of the Great Hall. The mixture of plain brick cladding and, uncharacteristically, a functionally expressive form—it is nothing if not theatre-shaped—is presumably intended to contrast with the very varied texture and more traditional character of the other Holford buildings immediately adjacent to it while still remaining part of that group, and to prepare one for Spence's more muscular science buildings further up the hill. However, although there is nothing wrong with the building itself, and while it has a fine interior, it ends up looking dumpy, plain and uncomfortable, as though it is being ignored by the other guests at the party.

There remain other works which bear Holford's mark, both in Britain and overseas, which any conscientious attempt to review his architectural career should take into account. It is not for the present authors to pretend that they have made such an attempt. Their purpose is more limited: it is to convey something of the flavour of his working life as an architect, and to discover any bearing it might have upon his personality and his larger public career.

So far as the architecture is concerned its broad characteristics will by now, we hope, be apparent. Convention and derived ideas are reinterpreted, sometimes in interesting or unexpected ways, so as to respond with considerable sympathy and individuality to the practical, political and aesthetic circumstances. Indeed where the cues provided by these circumstances are lacking it falls below its best, which is comfortable and humane, sophisticated and modest, which is more than can be said for much modern work that has received far wider acknowledgement. It is however too conventional, too rooted in history and precedent and too 'safe' to claim a place of any significance in the history of British architecture.

It is not, however, without its own personality. Though by no means a feature unique to Holford's work, it is noteworthy that his buildings are concerned primarily with what might be called the theatrical values in architecture. While his executed works are all too well-mannered to be showy, all seem intended to create certain visual effects by means of the purely formal manipulation of spaces, screens, relief, silhouette, colour, light and applied decoration. There is in particular an evident preoccupation with detailed pattern, texture and proportions, and with surface geometry. Again, this is not unique, nor is it of any wider significance. Certainly it is not symptomatic of any philosophical attachment to an 'arts and crafts' approach to building, nor indeed to any other publicly-expressed view about what architecture should be like beyond the general argument that it should relate to its environment, and a gentle insistence upon the importance of formal values. It was done in the way it was mainly because Holford enjoyed what another distinguished architect has called 'messing around' with buildings. Those things we find most characteristic of his work were done to please himself, and in the post-war years much of the time he spent at the drawing-board was in the nature of a recreation from more onerous pursuits.

The surprise in all of this is that it was so at odds with what Holford, as a public figure, professed to believe in. His support of modern architecture was more than mere rhetoric: he put a good deal of work in the way of such distinctly austere architects as Eugene Rosenberg, and his delight at having an opportunity to work with Mies van der Rohe on the proposed office block and square on the west side of the Mansion House was quite genuine.[30] In few episodes in his career did he take more pleasure than in his association with the building of Brasilia: he had been an assessor in the Pilot Plan

Competition for Brazil's new federal capital in 1957, and was a strong supporter of Lucio Costa's plan, and subsequently of the architecture with which Oscar Niemeyer clothed it. His enthusiasm and knowledge was communicated privately as well as in public and he could discuss architectural problems in general or in particular in ways that could delight young graduates of the Architectural Association. Yet when he put pen to paper the result was not at all what his words led one to expect. Why this discrepancy?

Creativity and talent in design are qualitatively very different from verbal or analytical skills. The outstanding critic does not always make a good artist, and vice-versa. Indeed, very few really good architectural critics are also known for their accomplishments as designers. Holford did have some talent as a designer, but it was overshadowed by his other far greater abilities. The nature of his career fairly reflected the nature of his brilliance. Undoubtedly he could have developed his architectural capacities and have produced more work had he concentrated upon architecture alone, and worked his way up through the profession. But this he never had to do. Though he loved architecture above all other occupations, the 'Mistress Art' had to compete for his time with a formidable number of other interests. His abilities and his personality were such that the need to pursue a conventional architectural career never arose: other routes to eminence were available, and in the end he did the sort of things he was best at.

Even if we were to assume that Holford had the ability to become a great architect, we should have to conclude that he was born out of time. It does not require too much effort of imagination to picture him practising with dis tinction in almost any previous era, when he might have had the opportunity of interpreting the established idioms of one or several established styles. Success in the climate into which he graduated in 1930, however, was begin ning to require a kind of fundamental originality which he did not possess. His admiration for the better modern architects was sincere, but it was not within his artistic capabilities to emulate their achievements.

It has been suggested to the authors by several people who knew Holford and his work that he was aware of this deficiency, and that his method of working, which spread the load of design between several partners and which sometimes (as in the St. Paul's and first Piccadilly schemes) involved the bringing-in of other architects, betrayed a lack of confidence in his own powers. Certainly it indicates an absence of that creative egotism which is the driving force behind so much art. Leading architects can be bullies: he was not. Can we deduce from his willingness to collaborate with others, and his resort to persuasion rather than brute determination to have his own way, that he was the victim of creative uncertainty? Surely not on these grounds alone. Nor are there many examples of his being discomfited by difficult issues of aesthetic judgement. The St. Paul's episode is the most obvious, but the pressures in that instance were extreme. More usually he gave every appearance of complete confidence in his own taste and abilities. His buildings, however, tell their own story.

Though Holford's ability to conceal limitations behind a brilliant facade was unsurpassed, executive architecture does not permit such deceptions. Design commits one in a way that words do not. Nor was Holford given to self-deception: he never pretended that he was a great architect. That he was aware of certain deficiencies in himself seems clear enough. He did not, he knew, have enough technical or practical experience of building, and it was perhaps a consequence of this that he would sometimes set himself apparently trifling, practical tasks, as though to demonstrate to himself that he could

indeed turn his hand to such things if he wished. More generally, we can be sure that if Holford has any place in the history of British architecture, he would not have expected it to be a consequence of his executed works. Though he was reported to be disappointed when Spence obtained the com mission for the new British Embassy at Rome, he cannot have been surprised that the job which he would have treasured above all had gone elsewhere.[31] His gifts were those of intellect, diplomacy and helpfulness, and perhaps the best thing he could do in a direct way for British architecture was to deploy these talents in its service. This he did when, in 1960, he was elected President of the RIBA.

THE BROAD AND THE NARROW WAY

Holford came to the Presidency of an unsettled profession in unsettled times. The pages of the RIBA Journal between 1960 and 1962 reveal the mixed feel ings with which architects viewed themselves and their place in the world. There was still a great deal of self-assurance in evidence: the victory of modern architecture over the pre-war establishment had made the profession not more but less humble. Aalto, Le Corbusier, Nervi and Gropius were elevated to the status of heroic gurus and venerated in a way which Lutyens or Holden had never been. The prevailing attitude of the architect-technocrat as reflected in the pages of his house journal seemed to be one of internationalism, elitism and confidence in his own ability to cope with the problems of his time. Beneath the surface gloss, however, doubts stirred. The victory of the moderns had not after all ushered in a new era. Britain was still governed by the Conservatives; bad architecture in the new style could prove itself to be even worse than bad architecture in the old; and most insufferable of all for some, the architectural gains of the past thirty years were not themselves secure. Concern regarding a creeping reassertion of formalism led some to wonder whether ‘the International Style is dying’. It is small wonder that Holford did not seek to thrust his own buildings into the critical limelight.

That architects should argue about the politics, quality and style of architecture was nothing new. As Carr-Saunders and Wilson, the sociologists of the professions, had noted in the early 1930s,

> faction has become the distinctive feature of architectural politics. The RIBA is a very active and energetic body, with much valuable work to its credit. But it is agitated and restless…[32]

It might then have been expected that the ‘New Left’ of the profession would in 1958 launch an effective attack upon the notion of the Institute as a ‘cosy club for elderly private practitioners’, and thus give impetus to the train of reforms which was already in prospect.[33] Style was not at the root of the changes: the only thing that was surprising about the first election of a practising advocate of modern architecture, Basil Spence, to the Presidency in 1958 was that it should have taken so long to come to pass. The truly significant issue for the profession was that presented by the building boom, which threatened to overwhelm the established way of doing architectural things. The boom was no cyclical upturn in the building industry: it was a major transformation of the urban

scene created by the combined forces of private capital and public policy, which brought about the reconstruction of British city centres on a scale not matched in the century.

We have already seen how the weakened machinery of town planning creaked under the load and the established apparatus of architecture, too, was inadequate to the task. Some of the managerial and procedural difficulties were lightheartedly described when Holford gave his Inaugural Address to the RIBA on 1st November, 1960.

> ...the average client usually requires a wider range of services from his architect than he did 50 years ago. What is even more significant is that these services are spread *over a longer period of time.* During that time overheads run on and a loyal design staff stands by. This is not necessarily the client's fault. All organization in a highly industrialized and democratic society tends to become more complex; and we are a long way from Xanadu, where 'Kubla Khan a stately pleasure dome decreed'. Poor Kubla today (and he might not be an individual any longer, but a corporation or a trading company) would need planning permission first and he might not find it easy to get it. Kubla might have to find a developer who would take a building lease from the landowner, finance the pleasure dome and rent it to him when built. There might be delay in this if permission were dependent on other domes being included in a comprehensive scheme; or if Parliament decided that even occasional pleasure domes were too frequent or had no export value, they might even ask for a Royal Commission.
>
> And Kubla's architect (whether private or official) would have to advise him on loan sanctions, prepare half a dozen alternative designs, correspond with the Edwardian Pleasure Group and probably the Anti-Dome League, fight for a subsidy on the number of habitable dwelling units provided, and on the 'abnormals', give evidence at public inquiries, satisfy the Royal Fine Art Commission, advise on the type of contract, and then after years of indecision on these matters, produce working drawings and full particulars at one month's notice, so that a firm price contract, without variations, could be let forthwith in the immediate future.
>
> That would not be the end of the matter. In the course of construction a horrified Kubla would ring up to say that the Anti-Uglies were holding a mock funeral in front of the pleasure dome and what should he do? Should he call in a consultant?—with Thurber's famous character one might cry: 'Well, if I asked for the wrong number, why did you answer the 'phone?'[34]

It was not only the political, bureaucratic and market contexts which made architecture more complex. The technology, management and economics of construction itself had changed. As the building process became more complicated the traditional boundaries between different areas of professional responsibility became blurred, and if architects were not prepared to expand their function to encompass the interlocking of technique, finance and management, quantity surveyors and engineers would be very happy to take a

larger share in the work. Developers were perfectly willing to set up their own design organizations, or to avail themselves of multi-professional 'package deals', if they could not get the service they wanted from established architectural firms. With their resources already overloaded by the boom, architects had to expand their field of competence, and to become more productive at the same time, if they were to retain their professional independence let alone their leadership of the building team.

Holford's arrival at the RIBA Presidency under these circumstances was widely welcomed: he had nothing like the record of distinguished building possessed by his predecessor, but he was more intellectual and policy-minded than Spence, and politically much more sophisticated. He knew at first hand about the workings of the planning system, property development and White-hall, and though it had not been he who had instigated the chain of events which was leading the profession to re-examine itself, his were the talents which were needed if it was to be steered to a safe harbour. It was under his Presidency that the RIBA undertook what was then the fullest and frankest public self-examination ever undertaken by a professional body, and it was largely through his diplomatic skill that it was able to do so with a minimum of internal disturbance.

At the heart of this exercise lay the office survey, established in 1961 with a grant from the Leverhulme Trust to examine the state of architectural practice. The survey was based upon postal sampling and visits to sixty-nine of the better private, local authority and industrial offices. As chairman of the Survey Co-ordinating Group Holford was closely involved with the inception and running of the survey, and it was he who presented it to the public in April 1962. Published by the RIBA under the title of *The Architect and his Office*, the report ranged across the entire span of considerations which bore upon the quality and productivity of architectural practice, but underlying the whole was the insistent theme that the architect's position was under serious challenge, and that only by raising technical and managerial standards, by improving productivity and by coming to terms with the changing nature of construction and development could he hope to deal effectively with all the work that was likely to be available.

If the motive behind the survey was essentially a self-interested concern to protect the architect's position in relation to the construction industry, the report was nonetheless a rational, timely and thorough attempt to come to grips with rapidly-changing circumstances. Holford's presentation of it and his tactful management of the subsequent debate within the Institute won many admirers: at his retirement from office in 1962 *The Builder* recorded the view, 'pretty generally held both inside and outside the profession, that he has been the outstanding President within living memory'.[35] For a time it seemed as though the 1958–62 reforms might assure the profession a place in the era of technological revolution which Harold Wilson proclaimed to the Labour Party Conference in October 1960. The Institute began taking practical steps to promote effective management, sensible conditions of service and useful research, and with the growth of salaried architects as a political force within, the resemblance to a gentlemen's club steadily diminished.

Yet the appearance of reform was more than the reality. Alerted to the technical and managerial challenge architects just about managed to hold their place in private development, but they never attained that undisputed hegemony over the building team to which they aspired. After a period of growth, architectural hopes for greater responsibility and a more rewarding career structure within local authorities were to

suffer the same fate as those of most other public sector employees, while in the schools of architecture the observer would have been hard-pressed to find any major change in attitude attributable to the RIBA initiative at all. There is little to choose in terms of social utility between a fanciful restoration of a Greek temple and the kind of science fiction which began to come out of many of the schools at about this time. In retrospect the managerial crisis in which architects found themselves in 1960 is altogether overshadowed by the far greater and rather different crisis of architecture as a whole which confronted the profession by the early 1970s. Under Holford the RIBA attempted to respond to the challenges of affluence and growth: by the time of his death the technical and managerial problems had faded into insignificance in comparison with the more fundamental question of whether society had any use for the kind of architecture, the fruits of fifty years of evolution, that the profession had to offer.

It may be asked whether one who occupied as prominent a position as Holford must not have played some part in the decline which brought the popular reputation of British architecture to its nadir. If there is such a thing as historical guilt by association, and supposing that aiding and abetting the spread of the International Style is judged a crime, Holford's support for the work of the better moderns and his willing acceptance of the new forms and scale of building provide the obvious evidence for the prosecution. Yet he was not a purist, an ideologue or a visionary. He believed that Modernism was the inevitable and sensible outcome of the economic, technological and social forces of the day, but that like the architecture of any other era it should be fit for its purpose, companionable and possess the formal qualities and personality that belong to a work of art. This was a very moderate and generalized sort of enthusiasm, and as such it failed to make any impact upon the architecture of the time. Although he occupied a central position in the profession, in as much as he represented the middle ground, possessed great personal prestige and had unsurpassed Establishment connections, in no important architectural development of his day (other than the internal reform of the RIBA itself) did he play any significant part. Changes of style, form and structure occurred without any contribution from Holford, and his own architecture was consistently unfashionable and uninfluential. Many causes tried to recruit him, but even where they were successful (as, for example, was the Modular Society) his participation was usually peripheral.

The campaigning themes which he adopted during his RIBA Presidency were such as could hardly raise a murmur of dissent from the spectrum of interests which he represented in one capacity or another. He argued for the better integration of new architecture into the context of existing buildings. He attempted to persuade local authorities to appoint chief architects as heads of independent architect's departments, an argument unpopular with City and County Engineers whose responsibilities were thereby threatened with diminution but the reasonableness of which was otherwise incontestable at a time when the value of the architectural element in municipal building investment was more than double that of the engineering equivalent.[36] In his efforts to alert British towns to the coming onslaught of property development he put the prestige of the Presidency behind several local campaigns to prompt lethargic local authorities into augmenting the inadequate prep arations represented by their development plans, and had the satisfaction both of doing some good in particular cases and more generally of being proved right by subsequent events. In all of this, what he said and did generally related to

the ways and means and the social and physical settings of architecture, and not to architectural design as such.

He was, in his own words, ‘a very dispersed kind of architect’. As he told a meeting of the RIBA in 1963, his training and experience had been more broad than deep. After summarizing his past career he remarked that

> The point of this little recital is that I have to confess to being a generalist; I know something of the role of the consultant in architecture and planning and also in the listing and preservation of historic buildings and landscapes.
>
> I also believe in the future of the consultant, as a person able and willing to give objective advice and design co-ordination (if they are asked to do so) over a constantly widening range of activities in which architecture plays a part. And my experience at the RIBA convinces me that this kind of work is more than ever necessary for the well-being of the profession.
>
> But it is not the central activity of an architect;…
>
> Architecture, like that old-fashioned piece of office equipment, the drawing pin, needs a head broad enough for the user to get hold of and to press in the required direction; but its point—or points (for sometimes there is a partnership of them)—do their real work when they penetrate to break new ground and hold it.[37]

As he acknowledged himself, his place was at the broad head rather than the sharp point of architecture.

In this respect at least, Holford fulfilled the aims which he had set himself in Rome. In *The Great Baroque Masquerade* he had written that there must be ‘a certain amount of co-operation and the establishment of a common basis of opinion. Co-operation is a hollow-sounding word, but there must be a con solidation of effort in order to lay the necessary simple foundation on which more complex structures may later be raised’.[38] In his later career he brought together what is perhaps the nearest thing we can find in the factious world of post-war architecture to ‘a common basis of opinion’. His connections with the worlds of planning, housing, conservation, building and Whitehall all served this end. It was however part of a wider commitment which he expressed to a different audience as ‘a broadening of the planning front’, and which we should describe ourselves as a seeking-out of an enlightened consensus in environmental design. In short, it was not the achievement of an architect at all but of an environmental diplomat. Moreover, the conjunction of interests and knowledge represented in this ‘common basis’ was personal to him. Of the early ambitions to found a school of architecture in which the seeds of co-operation might grow, a campaigning headquarters for the philosophy of group work, there is no sign. Holford’s post-war career was conducted not in opposition to the Establishment, but from deep within it. Heading no movement, leading no followers in any particular direction, his personal influence had no wider significance outside the specific contexts in which it was applied.

So far as the man himself is concerned it is apparent that the dispersal of energies which he noted in his own career spanned more than a mere diversity of experience and

interests. As an architect he embodied a succession of contradictions. In noting these inconsistencies between the public and private dimensions of his architectural life we begin, perhaps, to appreciate something of the nature of a most opaque personality.

Holford was blessed with an exceptional richness of interests and talents, and a catholicity of taste which extended to his social life: the company he enjoyed was as varied as the work he did. He was motivated by a strong sense of altruism, but what we know of his youth shows that he was also ambitious; and, as we have seen, the things that satisfied his creativity were not such as might best serve to achieve the success which he sought. Of the internal processes whereby he coped with these competing desires we can only guess. We can be sure that they were to a considerable extent conscious, for as his relationship with his wife clearly shows he was remarkably cool and objective about even the most deeply-felt emotions. But if ever he attempted to explain what it felt like to be Holford, no record of what he said survives.[39]

What is apparent is that in the business of making choices between the different options presented to him by his own personality and abilities, he had no single touchstone upon which to rely. There is an indeterminacy in Holford's buildings and writing, both of which show much good taste and cleverness and sensitivity, but no force. His is not a kind of architecture which expresses strong feelings, for there were none to express. Accordingly, when he was presented with a choice, as he was in his own career at the end of the war and as he was architecturally in almost every project in which he was involved, the result was not clear-cut. He balanced things against each other, he accommodated himself to circumstances where he felt he decently could, and he defused rather than resolved the tensions which presented themselves to him.

There is however a limit to the extent to which such accommodations can be made. The more taxing circumstances become the harder it is not to take sides, and the circumstances of being a leading figure in the world of architecture are rarely easy. It seems that Holford coped with the anomalies implicit in his architectural career in the same way in which he coped with everything else: he kept qualitatively different things strictly apart. This may seem slightly paradoxical in view of his talent for synthetic, integrative thought, but before one can integrate one must first learn to make clear distinctions. It was only because Holford had an exceptionally tidy mind that he was able to spread his interests over as wide a range as he did. Conversation with his former colleagues and friends conveys a strong impression of a compartmentalized personality. Seldom did he inform people who he knew in one capacity what he was doing in another, and even his friendships seem to have been remarkably self-contained: the makings of a 'Holford circle' existed at the end of the war, but drifted apart because its centre declined to hold. Only by keeping different parts of his life in separate pigeonholes was it possible for him to sustain the contradictions between his architectural theory and his practice. He could, if he had wished to, have made the necessary connections and arrived at some resolution on an intellectual plane. Perhaps he did. But he did not seem to *feel* the anomaly. He could juggle with the elements of his personality as easily as he could with ideas, and his own inconsistencies did not worry him at all.

They did not worry his contemporaries either. In 1963 he was accorded the Royal Gold Medal for Architecture, the profession's highest honour, for 'the distinguished contribution he has made throughout his life to the whole field of architecture and planning'.[40] Unusually, he was presented with the medal at a private audience with the

Queen, which he described at some length in a letter which he wrote to his mother a fortnight later.

> I went to Buckingham Palace on 9th and was received by Sir Edward Ford and Lord Plunkett, both of whom I knew. They told me when the Queen came into the morning room, took me and closed the door behind me. I was astonished to be left alone. The Queen gave me the gold medal, which is really a beauty-very plain and simple, but rather a weight-and said she hoped I would not want her to put it round my neck…I said she was more than kind to receive me; the first since Queen Victoria's day, and she said, 'Well, now, sit down and talk to me'…[41]

They talked, very informally, for half an hour, but the sweetest moment for Holford must have come at the end of their conversation. Leaving the morning room he found Duncan Sandys waiting outside with the Tanganyikan High Commissioner–Sandys 'very impatient, the African quite unperturbed'.[42] It is the only occasion we know of on which Holford took pleasure in another's discomfiture.

Chapter Twelve
The Latter Days

In 1965, the year of his peerage, Holford spent some time in hospital suffering from a disorder of the blood. Thereafter his influence began to decline as his role changed from that of leading light to elder statesman. Though one cannot imagine him keeping himself less than fully occupied he now had the opportunity to relax a little, and to concentrate upon the things that came most easily to him: advising others, and dealing with the interesting puzzles thrown up by his work with the RFAC, the HBC and his architectural practice. But at the end of November 1969 there came what was to be the decisive blow to his career, and to Holford himself. Marjorie suffered a cerebral stroke, and was prostrated by a heavy paralysis of the right side of her body, a loss of speech and very limited vision.

Holford threw himself into caring for her with an emotional intensity that surpassed anything else of which he was capable. By mid-February 1970 she was still unable to speak or move, and he spent many hours at her bedside at St. Thomas's Hospital, convinced (as he wrote to friends in South Africa) that he could communicate with her by some process of telepathy. Her symptoms were almost identical to those of 1952, but from this later attack she never fully recovered, and for the rest of her life she was an invalid. Speech nonetheless returned, and the two were eventually able to entertain friends quietly at Brighton. She even began with Holford's encouragement to paint again, although with her left hand and with mixed results. There were tears of frustration when a portrait of her husband was rejected by the Royal Academy.

The Holfords' domestic arrangements became, under these circumstances, increasingly bizarre. Marjorie did not like having 'strange women' around her, and so no nurse was engaged. Instead there were two 'family retainers', Mary and Boris. Mary was the Holfords' housekeeper, who unfortunately for them both did not provide the kind of company Marjorie enjoyed. She was banned from the living room for laughing at all the wrong moments when the two of them watched television together, but Mary got her own back by persisting in addressing Marjorie as 'milady', despite the irritation it caused. Boris was the odd-job man, of whom Mary, not without reason, disapproved. He had two characteristics that must have commended him to Holford: he was a skilled house-painter and, for one whose humour sometimes inclined towards the masochistic, he was an 'amusing' personality. Absentminded and longwinded, he felt that shopping was beneath his dignity, and so on Saturdays Holford would sometimes do his personal shopping for him while Boris himself repaired to a local pub.[1]

When Holford was in London (as he was more often than not) Marjorie relied for company upon the landlady of the adjacent Lascelles Hotel. After her stroke it became necessary to install a lift, and rather than wreck the ionic colonnade of their own hall Holford suggested that they acquire a portion of the hotel, which was not prospering. In the end they bought the whole building, and two enormous properties thus came to house a childless couple, an arrangement which Holford nonsensically justified to friends by saying that he believed in a patriarchal system in which several generations of the same family could live together under one roof.[2] This unwillingness to recognize any limits to what was reasonably practicable was wholly characteristic. It was not reasonably practicable to be both Marjorie's nurse and to continue with a workload such as his, but he attempted both.

For a time he sustained this double burden, but it was evident to his friends that he was doing so at enormous personal cost. In his devotion to his ailing wife he became quite careless of himself. Never self-indulgent in material things, he now ate even less, and less well. Inspection of the refrigerator in his flat in Eccleston Square might reveal a small piece of cheese or a half-eaten tin of sardines–even, by one account, a scrap of toast. He was almost permanently exhausted, both physically and mentally, and the thought that despite her frail condition Marjorie might survive him led to worries over money. Although by no means badly-off he had laid out a considerable sum on the Lascelles purchase, and although he remained a full partner in his firm until 1973 he had surprisingly few other sources of income. The CEGB had paid him £1,000 a year but most of his other public work brought in no income at all. When in 1972 he accepted the Chairmanship of the Leverhulme Trustees he explained that he had done so because the job provided 'wonderful insurance cover for Marjorie if anything happens to me during my 4-year tenure'.[3]

Professor Myles Wright has expressed the astonishment of many of his friends at this course of action.

> It really was an extraordinary last act for a man of so many interests; and there was no neglect of those duties. For three and usually four days a week he travelled from his flat near Victoria to New Fetter Lane by underground at about 8 a.m. and returned at 7 p.m. to avoid the rush hours. He boasted that he and perhaps two others examined all applications for grants, asked for expert opinions when needed and, subject to the Trustees, allocated all funds. The Leverhulme Trust Fund's administrative costs were, he said, markedly lower than those of any comparable foundation in proportion to annual revenue and grants made. He sometimes looked very tired and ill, and when old friends, seeing this, told him that he was wasting his great gifts, and should do nothing himself save that which subordinates had tried hard to do and failed, he showed no resentment, but just seemed puzzled.[4]

Nor was this the only new responsibility he had to carry. He was prevailed upon to chair the Department of Environment's Joint Committee on the Planning of Bath in 1974, a task for which he was ideally suited but from which he got little satisfaction. Despite his withdrawal to consultant status in the Holford practice circumstances conspired to

maintain the pressure upon him from this direction also. In 1961 he had been appointed by the United Liverpool Hospital Board as architect for its new General Teaching Hospital. Although in practice most of the work was carried out in the Liverpool office of the firm, the client had insisted that the formal appointment be personal to Holford. By the early 1970s the commission had run into contractual and other problems of prodigious difficulty, and the illness of the senior partner in charge of the contract meant that Holford had to involve himself in coping with the political and commercial pressures which were, he felt, being unfairly applied. Another former partner in the Liverpool office, John Cooper, later speculated that the burden which these problems placed upon Holford's shoulders in 1973 and 1974, coupled with Marjorie's illness, may have contributed to the physical collapse which brought Holford's career to a close in 1975.[5]

In February of that year it was clear to those who attended Holford's Leverhulme Lecture in Liverpool that he was far from well. Friends were shocked by his gaunt and grey appearance. By April he had referred himself to a consultant at St. Thomas's, and by May it was known that he was suf fering from a cancer that had disseminated throughout his body, and was beyond the reach of any therapy. By now he had retreated to one of the houses at Icklesham which he had built for his mother-in-law in 1937. Alone, and in a desperate state of mind, he tried to come to terms with his condition and to make arrangements for Marjorie.

Holford's peculiar, subtle personal mystique had proved an advantage in the past, but in these last days it did so no longer. There had always been an ambivalence about him, a combination of easy warmth and cool reserve that some found intimidating, and which made others (especially women, it seems) suspicious. When the time came for him to need some of the support which he had so freely given others, less of it was forthcoming than might have been expected.

We do not think it is going too far to see in Holford's final months the symptoms of something essential in the nature of his relationships with his fellow men. So thoroughly did he immerse himself in the life of the British Establishment that we may easily forget that throughout his life he remained in some inner respect an outsider. We can only speculate about the relative extents to which his South African background and his natural temperament contributed to the detachment which he had disclosed in a letter to Marjorie forty-three years before.

> I think the time will soon be ripe for me to go South again. You understand, don't you, how it is with me? I think I was born on a bridge between North and South. Every now and then I have an inner feeling that makes me go away by myself and consolidate things and think. When I am with other people, particularly those I like very much I am very much with them and part of them and their world and they have a great effect on me. But when I am by myself I see things from my own point of view entirely, and express myself that way. I can always be alone in a crowd and with people I don't care about…I meet all sorts of people and see them, somehow, in proper perspective. Then the time passes and I become fit for human society again. This sounds rather horrid and very selfish. It probably is, but it seems natural to me and so I do it.[6]

He remained thus throughout his life. Though in society he was never entirely of it, and he was too objective and too sophisticated to be thoroughly enmeshed in that web of unconscious allegiances and proprieties that binds the Anglo-Saxon bourgeoisie together.

He and Marjorie had always preferred the company of free-thinkers and cosmopolitans. Many of those whom they befriended were younger people who had either, under Holford's influence and with his encouragement, left Britain to work abroad, or who had come to Britain from elsewhere, particularly from South Africa. They had a large number of Jewish friends, which included some of the refugee architects Holford had helped before, during and after the war. Among others in their closer circle few, if any, were wholly conventional, and some were even the cause of mild scandal, something which Marjorie in particular enjoyed.

This, then, is the sort of company with which the Holfords chose to surround themselves: bright, sophisticated and not at all a part of England's deferential protestant culture. Those most firmly rooted in that culture found Holford least emotionally accessible, whereas his complexities were less of an obstacle to those with less precisely focused notions of what a man might be. In any event, when his final illness drove him to the brink, this man whose connections were innumerable found himself with surprisingly few friends who felt close enough to him, and sufficiently sure of themselves, to intervene.

Of his partners, perhaps the only one who was in a position to take him in hand was Richard Gray. When the time came, however, Gray was in Australia, and it was Roy Kantorowich who, after consulting with Eugene Rosenberg (another firm friend in adversity) summoned Neil Holford from South Africa. By the time Neil arrived in London his brother was in St. Thomas's, and in a very poor state. On Monday June 2nd, in pouring rain, Holford had set out from Eccleston Square to Victoria, from where he hoped to take a taxi to the hospital. Failing to find one he set out on the walk to Millbank. He reached St. Thomas's late in the morning wet through and in a state of collapse, 'slumped out in a puddle in [the] City Ward'.[7]

For the first twelve days he was scarcely rational. On June 7th he tried to discharge himself, but was restrained and sedated before he could make good his escape. Visitors the following day found him bitter and abusive towards the hospital staff, and by June 12th, when his brother and sister-in-law had arrived, he dictated and signed what he thought would be his last letters. Nonetheless, Neil's arrival and two visits by Marjorie seemed to improve his state of mind, and by the 25th his condition had stabilized sufficiently for him to leave hospital to attend a few undemanding engagements: the Royal Academy on the 26th and an office lunch the day after. Through July he was able to get out and about, meeting friends and even spending a weekend or two in Brighton, and in the following month he was still lucid when receiving visitors; but towards the end of August his diary entries became increasingly incoherent and illegible, the last entry being on the 27th. On October 17th, he died.

Marjorie survived him by three years, his professional reputation scarcely even that long. Memories are short, and for architects or planners who had not come within the range of his personal influence there was little to remind them that a major presence had departed. For although he had accumulated more in the way of offices and honours than any other architect or planner, before or since, he left no obvious imprint upon the disciplines which he professed. He had been superbly equipped to probe the issues of the

moment, but he was not a setter of agendas for the future. The subtle force of his personality and the clarity of his mind, so compelling in personal contact, did not convey itself in his writings or even in radio or television recording; and so he left no archive from which we can extract any essence of the man or his ideas that exists independently of the circumstances in which he moved and worked. Even in those most critical war years it was as a bearer of other people's standards that he had his greatest influence; but the causes were honourable, and he deserves to be remembered for his espousal of them. It is not as a pioneer but as a man quintessentially of his own time that we have studied his career, and in which such interest as he offers the historian may be found.

Of Holford the man, a little yet remains to be said. Other critics than ourselves have noted that his success owed a good deal to his talent for not saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. With this we would agree, but rather than judging him to be an opportunist and a trimmer we should note that for one who badly needed to be liked, and who was more than usually sensitive to unpleasantness or controversy, he endured a great deal. He did not stretch a compromise beyond what he felt was morally supportable, and he remained his own man, uncorrupted by his own success in a period in which uncorruptibility was an increasingly noteworthy quality.

If his morals stand scrutiny, what of his principles? Clearly there is a major discrepancy between the young Holford as revealed in his private correspon dence and the public career of the mature man. In the 1930s, while not a thoroughgoing radical, he had nonetheless possessed a strong desire to put his shoulder behind the wheel of social and political progress. After the war this impulse seems to have lost its edge. The change is not an uncommon one, for few are as militant at forty as they were at twenty-five. Yet Holford seems to have laid aside things that had been almost articles of faith: disdain of the Establishment and all its forms, the idea of an English Bauhaus, the 'big idea of the Socialist State'. All came to nothing in the post-war years.

To this the reply must be that the radicalism was more apparent than real. Our main source of knowledge regarding his opinions are, after all, his letters to Gordon Stephenson, who as well as being his closest friend was also the most militant, both architecturally and politically. It is not to be doubted that Holford addressed his friend, as we all do, in a particular mode. Other correspondence with other friends (such as Denis Harper) show him in a different light, and even at his most radical he admitted that 'commitment' was denied him. Marjorie was his life's only true obsession. Everything else was a balancing-act.

One final charge against him remains to be considered. Stated at its severest, it is that he was an accomplished charlatan whose speed of thought, fluency and superb dramatic gifts concealed a fundamental lack of substance and of practical grasp. He needed so little time to make himself the apparent master of a situation that the suspicion was sometimes aroused that the appearance was all there was. It is certainly true that he gave less to some commissions than he ought to have done, and that his capacity for rapid concentrated thought was something he came to rely upon too much. He rarely met a deadline by other than the slimmest margin, and could have done far better had he taken more time. But Holford's ordinary performance far excelled others' best, and it was he himself who lost most through this, perhaps his worst fault.

If in following Holford's career or in reading the texts of his speeches or lectures we detect a lack of substance, its cause is not superficiality of thought. It is rather an apparent

superficiality of *purpose* in relation to the matter in hand. We sense a man hiding behind a public face that exists, not to further some hidden private end, but for its own sake. We cannot express this difficult conclusion in any better words than did Richard Gray.

> The public personality was a front that protected the private personality but the enigma did not hide anything. The private personality was so to speak fully expressed in creating the public personality.[8]

In this sense Holford's entire public life was in the nature of a theatrical performance, and the motivations behind it were akin to those that might have led to a dramatic career, including the need for applause. But no life that spent itself so prodigally for the benefit of others can be decently explained away by a mechanistic theorem of self-gratification. The personality Holford created was not a mere sham, for it was formed in accordance with a profoundly humane moral sense. If we are to accept the testament of his coming-of-age, it was a spiritual as well as a social achievement.

> I know that everything is *future*, that life is a building up of character and personality and that nothing matters much in comparison with that– certainly not death.[9]

If we judge Holford not as a man of affairs or ideas, but in terms of human kindness and disregard for personal advantage or convenience, we may have to conclude that of all the things he designed or built during his lifetime, he was himself his best piece of work.

Chapter Thirteen
A Backward Glance

And so the story is told. Earlier chapters have sketched the chronology against which Holford's life and career unfolded. The main periods have been easy to identify, and indeed make for a logically progressive account, but for ease of reading it has been necessary in later chapters to consider certain long-running aspects of his professional work separately.

The main elements of Holford's life can be briefly summarized. His early years were spent in South Africa and we know sufficient of his family and school background to give us clues to the shaping of his personality. Placed in an architect's office in Johannesburg he came across the prospectus of the Liverpool School of Architecture and it was for a training there that he set sail for England in 1925. At Liverpool he fell under the influence of C.H.Reilly, Head of the School, and absorbed a Beaux Arts philosophy of design. He prospered academically and his experience widened with visits to Italy and America. His great friendship with Gordon Stephenson, a fellow student, dates from this time, but the award of a Rome Scholarship in 1930 marked a pivotal point for his future.

During a number of happy and carefree years in Rome, he arrived at a view of urbanism which embraced the totality of civic life as it impinged on the building of towns; this forged a link between architecture and planning on which his future career in civic design was to draw. He was sympathetic to the newly formed Modern Architectural Research Group (MARS), but at the same time Italy left its mark, for Holford retained a love of detail and a wider concern for the formal arrangement of buildings and manipulation of space. Another legacy from Italy was his wife; he and Marjorie Brooks, a winner of the Rome Prize in Painting, were married in London in 1933.

Holford returned to England to take up a Senior Lectureship at the Liverpool School, and as a virtually unknown twenty-eight year old he succeeded Abercrombie to the Lever Chair in Town Planning in 1936 in the same University.

An early excursion in regional planning came with a collaborative study of the future of Merseyside but this was overshadowed by his design of the Team Valley Trading Estate in 1937. This was followed in the early wartime period with the building of an Ordnance Factory at Kirkby and workers' hostels on Merseyside and in the Midlands.

Holford's career now turned to central government. In early 1941 he was appointed to advise Reith and his small team on their responsibilities for physical reconstruction. After a year of uncertain direction, the setting up of a new Ministry of Works and Planning was announced in early 1942, to replace the then Ministry of Works and Buildings and to take

over the statutory duties in regard to town and country planning from the Ministry of Health. Lord Portal succeeded Reith and Holfbrd found himself enmeshed in issues concerned with the reform of statutory town planning to meet the needs of Britain after the war. In 1943 Holford became head of Research in a much expanded Research Division in the new Ministry of Town and Country Planning. A brilliant team was assembled and the technical principles of the new planning system were worked out. A revolution in planning method emerged, its key element the Floor Space Index for central area redevelopment. Advances too were made in matters of housing design and layout.

After the war Holford resumed his academic career in association with consultancies and private practice. In 1947 he followed Abercrombie (again) to a Chair at University College London and this enabled him to engage successively in some of the major planning development proposals of the next twenty years. He was an author with Holden for the Plan for the City of London in 1947. He worked with Myles Wright on a Plan for Cambridge in 1952 and later appeared for the County Council in the Lion Yard enquiry in 1959. Again with Myles Wright he drew up the Master Plan for Corby New Town in 1950. He prepared the scheme for the redevelopment of the St. Paul's area, though the long saga in the mid-1950s, soured by difficulties with the Minister of Housing and Local Government, Duncan Sandys, had a controversial outcome. Even longer and more frustrating was his involvement with proposals for the redevelopment of Piccadilly Circus.

Elsewhere Holford had the satisfaction of his own architectural practice. There were commissions for university work at Canterbury and Exeter; and for public schools, Eton and Tonbridge. There were a number of other substantial commissions, and work overseas included that in South Africa and Australia. But his office failed to prosper as it might have done and some wider disillusionment accompanied the recognition that by the 1960s he found himself increasingly apart from mainstream British planning practice.

Instead he was caught up more and more with involvements in public life. He served for twenty-five years on the Royal Fine Art Commission; he was Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Buildings of Special Architectural and Historical Interest, and later a member of the Historic Buildings Council; he was a member of the Central Electricity Generating Board during an influential fifteen-year period; and as late as 1972 he became Chairman of the Leverhulme Trust.

In short, Holford had a dazzling career. He was knighted and gained a Life Peerage. He became President of both his professions and was awarded both their Gold Medals. He held a University Chair from the age of twenty-eight. He was sought after for numerous public appointments; he had modesty, charm, tact and great committee skill. Yet in many ways his life and career remain something of an enigma. A public man, he lived a very private life and few, if any, of his friends and colleagues knew the full range of his many-sided personality.

As an architect he was no great designer; he was the head of no movement and he led no disciples. He preached Modernism but practised a Beaux Arts tradition. As a planner he was for many years the Establishment's favourite adviser upon all matters of environmental design, and few individuals in the field ever had a greater potential for influence than he. Yet an evaluation of his career finds, at many points, a curious lack of substance in his own contribution. Frequently he appeared to be living on his wits, skating on a thin ice of marginal comment. We have attempted to explain something of

the motivations behind this elegant but often ambiguous performance, but there remains the final assessment of its significance, in the context of Holford's and our own times.

In the history of planning ideas Holford stands as a subtle rather than as a truly original thinker. He was profoundly influenced by a number of strands in contemporary thought, most markedly in the post-war years by the work of Lewis Mumford. He became a personal friend and correspondent of the author of *The City in History*, and if it were necessary to summarize his ambitions as a planner in a few words, we should say that they were to interpret Mumford's vision of a vital city-building culture in terms of built form. Mumford himself acknowledged the St. Paul's scheme, as conceived if not as executed, as a worthy expression of his own ideas.[1] Yet though individual students or colleagues might sometimes glimpse and be infected by an underlying sense of purpose, it is apparent that in wider terms Holford contributed little or nothing to the development of post-war planning ideas. The mixture of Mumfordian civics, architectural influences ranging from the École des Beaux Arts to Le Corbusier, a smattering of Gestalt psychology and Humanist philosophy, and an unsurpassed knowledge of planning thought: all this constituted a synthesis which it would have been a life's work to communicate. Holford never had the time, nor apparently did he feel the need, to systematize these influences or to develop them into a coherent statement of philosophy.

Even had he done so, it is not likely that the result would have had any significant impact, for his formidable mental equipment was never concentrated for very long upon any precise target. The breadth of his interests had the effect of diminishing his force, for while others more singleminded than himself might confront the obstacles in their path Holford's inclination was to find his way around them or, if that failed, to find another more rewarding focus for his talents. He got little satisfaction from pushing at locked doors, and he never applied his powers with the persistence that would have made a lasting mark. His talent for compromise brought him personal success but at a time when the environmental professions were locked in disagreement, both internally and with each other, his readiness to embrace all points of view stretched his position across so wide a range of opinion that it became too thinly spread to be recognizable as a position at all.

If his interests, ideas and sympathies were subtle and diffuse the manner in which they were communicated was even more so. He had no appetite for controversy and was sensitive, to an unusual degree in one who had risen so high, to the opinions of others. The resulting tactfulness was extreme. In formal speeches and informal conversation alike he tailored his message to suit the predelictions or prejudices of the particular audience which he happened to be addressing. Occasionally he contradicted himself: more often his elegant phrases would render palatable an underlying theme of unexceptionable but exciting worthiness, or a banal balancing of alternatives that lacked a conclusion. These characteristics did not save him from the pain of controversy, but did deprive him of the satisfaction of having fought, successfully or not, for his own convictions. Posterity recognizes a sort of glorious failure in the careers of men who, like Thomas Sharp, throw everything into the battle for unrealized ideas. Holford had a far greater weight of personal prestige to put behind a chosen cause, but no cause was ever so dear to him that he staked everything upon it.

His was a gentle style of persuasion. It was expressed not in terms of any definitive statements, whether in the form of a plan, a speech or a book, but was reactive to the particular circumstances which presented themselves. Because it was informed by a

highly-developed intelligence, enormous knowledge and a broad background of philosophy, it amounted to more than mere expediency. Its outcomes, however, were always likely to be unobtrusive—a local authority persuaded to make preparations to meet the commercial onslaught here; an unquantifiable but nonetheless valuable raising of environmental consciousness there. It operated most effectively at the level of personal contact and in circumstances where Holford was able to develop a relationship with a client or an institution in the long term. The advice which he gave the City of London over many years is one example; Cambridge, where he maintained close links with the County Planning Officer, Leath Waide, is another. His work as a part-time member of the Central Electricity Generating Board was among the best if least known examples of his influence for good.

So far as the general history of British planning is concerned, however, there was only one decade in which he was so placed that he could in this way do work of genuinely national significance. As we have shown, the creation of the technical apparatus of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, and the demonstration of the new techniques in the City, were major stages in the transformation of planning from its pre-war to its post-war forms. Yet subsequently, as Holford's prestige grew his influence upon the further development of planning diminished. The effects of his work tended to spill over from the immediate area of operations into the wider professional or public consciousness only on those particularly spectacular or controversial occasions which have been described in the preceding chapters. Those occasions reveal not a continuing development of ideas, but rather, different aspects of the same ideas as they were put to practical tests in circumstances of increasing difficulty.

Because the argument underlying these ideas was couched in terms that are not easy for modern planners to accept, and because it is central to our understanding of Holford as a planner, it is worth attempting a sympathetic reformulation of it ourselves. The argument would run thus: cities are shaped by the economic, political and social forces which they contain, and in their form they reflect the balance of those forces, and the culture of the age. Planned or not, they are the most significant artefacts produced by a culture, the repositories of cultural values, and agents of those values' perpetuation and regeneration. If planning is limited to technical organization and management, the resulting environments will express, quite blindly, the interplay of those forces dominant in an advanced industrial society. If, however, planning can assist in the process of city development by cultivating the fuller expression of some vital idea or humane principle which is itself part of the civic culture, then the result may be a truly civilized and civilizing environment.

This was the 'supporting background of philosophy and ethics' to which Holford had referred in his Presidential Address to the TPI in 1953, and it was the guiding hope behind all the major public commissions which he undertook. It is visible in the open spaces, the workers' canteens and clinics and the tree-lined boulevards of Team Valley, which express a vision—not, significantly, the artist's stroke of creative inspiration, but an intimation of currents running within the culture of the time—of the industrial order of the future. It is visible, too, in the earlier Piccadilly schemes, in which the purely functional requirements of motor traffic and the financial demands of property development are mediated by a concern to preserve the civic functions and significance of public spaces. This underlying impulse is not conceived as a Great Baroque

Masquerade, an aesthetic exercise intended to achieve a superficial beautification of the city; nor is it advanced in terms of specific forms of urban organization or of a particular architectural vision. Rather the governing idea is of civic design as a process, the ends of which are a fuller civic life.

Holford's post-war career shows the collision of this high aspiration with the obstacles presented by hard economic and institutional realities. At St. Paul's he was able to achieve a qualified success. The architectural arguments were conducted within the straightjacket imposed by the Church Com-missioners' insistence upon their full floorspace entitlement: but these demands were in turn limited by the application of plot ratio controls. What resulted was not great architecture, but it was building which succeeded in transcending the merely commercial and achieving a civic dimension. The struggle which was involved in attaining this partial victory was in itself a warning of the difficulties which could be encountered in other places where the public significance of the site was not so great, or the individuals involved not so persistent or able. Moreover, these events occurred at a time when the pressures upon the planning system had not yet reached their full pitch.

At Piccadilly Circus, the idea that the public qualities of the place could be preserved rested upon the ability of the planning system to contain the twin demands of the motor car and of property capital within the limits imposed by a wider public good. But in failing first of all to mobilize the available controls to meet the challenge and exploit the opportunity presented by Jack Cotton, and then in failing even more comprehensively to respond in any coherent way to the rising tide of traffic, the apparatus of planning revealed itself as impotent to act in the pursuit of the ideals Holford professed on its behalf. It was not so much that the system lacked the means to resist the pressures, but rather that it was unable to settle upon the terms of the collective good in whose name resistance was to be offered.

Holford's experiences show that while it is one thing to assert the importance of the vital idea or the humane principle behind the plan, it is quite another to sustain that spark through a lengthy series of negotiations (between different arms of the planning apparatus itself as well as between planners and developers), through the legalistic rituals of a public inquiry, and then at a distance as the original idea is reshaped by other hands. In short, it is too much to hope for that a process as complex, uncertain and protracted as this can with any consistency produce outcomes which retain the overall characteristics of design, however defined. Public institutions in a democracy are not intrinsically equipped to deliver the basis of assent necessary for the pursuit of such a difficult goal, and the private market in land is an unwilling instrument for the achievement of public values. Yet the backing of public authority for civic design is occasionally forthcoming, and then a second level of difficulty interposes itself.

Whatever its underlying objectives, the end result of civic design is built form, and it cannot be expected that the public will appreciate the motives informing the plan if they do not like the architecture. For all Holford's advice and all the acres acquired under the 1947 dispensation, the City of London emerged with more credit for what it had preserved than for what it had created. We have revealing evidence of Holford's own disappointment at the course of post-war redevelopment in another city, which was unsurpassed in the enthusiasm of its political leaders and the dynamism of its planners. In

June 1967 he travelled with a party from the Royal Fine Art Commission to Newcastle-upon-Tyne. A handwritten note records his impressions.

Mon: 17July 1967

Early train from Brighton: Victoria—King's X: 10.00 to Newcastle—missed this owing to BR being late as usual, but caught slower train at 10.10: read N'castle Development papers on way. Met by G.S. [Godfrey Samuel, RFAC Secretary]: taken to George Kenyon's galumphing yet effeminate City Hall, with its cotton-reel tower facing the noble entrance to the city by the Great North Road. A different marble on each floor. City Fathers (3 of them), Burns [Wilfred Burns, City Planning Officer], City Engineer and acolytes gathered round model. After explanations set off in private bus to tour city centre and site of new urban motorways. Holy Jesus [Hospital] still in its hole, untended but not yet demolished. The marvellous Royal Arcade reduced to nonsense: Dobson & Grainger mostly cleaned-but threatened at its edges by the new developments, reduced in scale by towers existing and to come; Eldon Square-where I had breakfast with Lord Gort at the Club more than once—is doomed, and a hotel & new offices & flats are to replace it. Design said to be by Arne Jacobsen and the hotel tower 300' and 120' across the diagonal, on plan. So this will be the new focal feature of Newcastle, not the City Hall or any other public building.

Wilfred B., I imagine, must be going to the Ministry to take Jimmy James's place…Wilfred is just now P.T.P.I.; a good organiser and as insensitive a designer as you could find. The plan as shown in full development is a kind of madness. Vertical features are popped into the model with all the abandon of an amateur pastry cook decorating a cake. A reason for everything but the whole is a disaster.[2]

The planners of Newcastle might, perhaps, have been justified in asking Holford whether his own career as a Professor of Civic Design had made sufficient contribution towards the inculcation of that sensitivity in urban design which he felt they so signally lacked. From whom were younger planners expected to acquire the all-important values if not from the author of *The Piazza?* This, however, is not a point to be laboured. Of far greater significance was the weakness intrinsic in the post-war relationship between the environmental professions. Even before the Great War a lecturer at the Liverpool Department of Civic Design, Thomas Mawson, had seen that between architecture and town planning as then practised there was an intermediate terrain, which the establishment of the Institute of Landscape Architects was intended to fill. That attempt had languished between the wars for want of patronage, and after the Second World War, urban design in three dimensions remained a disputed no-man's land across which the professions of architecture and planning regarded each other with mutual suspicion. Only in the 1970s did the RIBA and the RTPI begin to move towards a degree of mutual understanding regarding the place of urban design in the planning process, and any joint approach to training.[3]

The professions themselves must accept much of the blame for the failures of post-war design. Certainly, in cities like Newcastle there were few grounds for laying it at the door of the planners' patrons, the politicians. The designers themselves had failed. The accommodation between the two dominant traditions in civic design, the suburban

populism of the planning movement and the metropolitan elitism of modernist architecture took forms which lacked the merits of either but possessed the vices of both. Yet it would be too simplistic to see in this failure nothing more than lack of talent or understanding. There was a genuine problem in turning the administrative machinery of local government to the purpose which Holford had in mind for it.

As both Newcastle and the wartime Ministry of Town and Country Planning show, bureaucracies are not immune to contamination by visionary enthusiasms. Yet such bouts of constructive energy tend to be the product of extraordinary circumstances. In more ordinary times the force of evangelism is damped by the inertia of bureaucratic convention. The bulk of the planning task is regulatory in nature and the manner in which it is undertaken is largely determined by statute and by guidance from central government. Neither the work nor the pay and status that go with it are such as would attract a really talented designer: certainly one cannot imagine Holford labouring in the municipal vineyard. Yet this is the context in which he hoped there might occur a phenomenon which would constitute the culminating achievement of twentieth-century culture: the realization of an agreed programme of economic land use in terms of unified design, such as would have the power to touch hearts and to rival the greatest achievements of the Rennaissance princes.

That it did not occur is now painfully obvious, and the whole idea of environmental design on a large scale has fallen into disrepute. Many architects now seem to want nothing more than to be left alone to design their individual buildings in peace, while others look to community participation or vernacular traditions for the civic dimension which eluded them on the larger scale. Planners still try to hold on to their powers of aesthetic control, but only because the prospect of what would be built if they relinquished them is too awful to contemplate. It will be a long time before the public forgives the professions, or the professions forgive each other, for the things that went so badly wrong in post-war redevelopment.

The failure was double-edged. There were those instances, which still attract the bulk of general indignation, of planners and architects who tried to impose their clumsy and ultimately unrealizable master-visions upon the fabric of British cities. Much more damaging in the long run has been the indecision and anonymity, the sheer lack of inspiration and cheese-paring which has characterized the great mass of urban rebuilding. Lack of personality and conviction in design, lack of sensitivity to the context of design, and above all, lack of the will and means to realize the wider civic dimension in design: these were the great failings of post-war redevelopment to which Holford repeatedly returned but which, it seems, he was powerless to remedy.

Because of the very varied and diffuse nature of his career, it is difficult to point to any single event or date at which it might be said that the kind of planning in which Holford believed stood revealed as a lost cause. The ‘planning front’ which he occupied, and of which he spoke to the TPI in 1953, was so broad that defeat in one sector was not necessarily critical to the final outcome of the battle. Gradually, however, its key salients fell. His hopes for regional planning were frustrated as far back as 1945. In 1959 the last vestiges of the financial provisions of the 1947 legislation were removed, and the kind of creative planning in which he believed—the active design of new environments in the public interest—suffered a crippling blow. He did not live to see the 1975 Community Land Act come into force, and by that time the damage had already been done, not only

to city centres but also to the public's faith in 'positive planning'. The rationale which underlay that short-lived enactment had little to do with the high ambitions of post-war civic reconstruction. In the intervening years, public authority had had its economic legs cut from under it, and in the period during which redevelopment was at its most profitable, it had perforce to stand by and pick up the crumbs that fell from the developer's table.

It was an invitation to disillusionment to expect so much from so little. That Holford's ambition was a worthy one we do not doubt. It is not civic design triumphant, but civic design divided, neglected and defeated which has made such a mess of great swathes of urban England. Holford did not, after all, aspire to be another Haussmann: the aim was rather to create visually satisfying environments which would reflect the constructive values of a democratic culture. It was a consummation devoutly to be wished; but to bring together in every city in the land the talent, resources and political commitment that were needed, and to hold them together over the course of ten, fifteen or more years −and to do this, moreover, in a culture which was undergoing more rapid change than at any previous time in its historyrequired more than sweet reasonableness alone. As a teacher, as a professional statesman and as a consultant, Holford did more than any other planner of his generation to create the conditions in which this flower could bloom. His gift, however, was that of cultivating a natural growth, not of forcing an artificial one. That the soil which he had to work was ultimately so barren is both his tragedy and ours.

Notes

PREFACE

1. Cherry, Gordon E. (ed.) (1981) *Pioneers of British Planning.* London: Architec tural Press.
2. Cherry, Gordon E. (1975) *Environmental Planning, Volume II: National Parks and Recreation in the Countryside.* London: HMSO.
3. Cullingworth, J.B. (1979) *Environmental Planning, Volume III: New Towns Policy.* London: HMSO.

CHAPTER ONE

1. This chapter is based almost entirely upon manuscripts written by Mr. Richard Gray, who before his death visited South Africa and meticulously investigated Holford's family and boyhood.
2. There was at least one other son. The Reverend William had a brother, George, who on William's return from South Africa was working for W.H.Smith in The Strand.
3. The Zulu language Xhosa.
4. The method is outlined in popular form in Huxley, A. (1943) *The Art of Seeing.* London: Chatto & Windus (3rd impression).
5. Gray, Richard (undated) PTS and bishops. MS from the papers of Richard Gray in *ULA* D.147, not indexed.
6. George Holford was an associate member of the Institute of Civil Engineers and a member of the South African Association of Engineers; the Chemical, Mining and Metallurgical Society of South Africa; the Geological Society; and the South African Society of Engineers. He was a member of the Rand Club and of the New Club of Johannesburg.
7. Hence the School's nickname.
8. Radley was founded in 1848, the year in which Bishop Gray sailed for the Cape.
9. Letter, Dr W.N.Vellacott, to Richard Gray, Bridport, 12th November, 1978.
10. *Diocesan College Magazine*, Vol. III, No. 45, December 1922.
11. *Diocesan College Magazine*, Vol. XIV, No. 6, December 1924.
12. Vellacott, *op.cit.* (see note 9).
13. Statement by R.Harold Birt, Principal of Diocesan College, MS, 25th July, 1925 in *ULA* D.147, not indexed.
14. Hind, Arthur M. (1924) *The Etchings of D.Y.Cameron.* London: Halton & Truscott Smith.
15. Holford quoted in the papers of Gray, Richard (undated) A year of decision. MS, *ULA* D.147, not indexed.

CHAPTER TWO

1. Truscot, Bruce (E.Allison Peers) (1943) *Redbrick University.* London: Faber & Faber, p. 17.
2. This and other information concerning the University is to be found in Kelly, T. (1981) *For Advancement of Learning: The University of Liverpool 1881–1981,* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
3. Truscot, *op. cit.* p. 25 (see note 1).
4. For Reilly's own account of his life, see Reilly, C.H. (1938) *Scaffolding in the Sky.* London: George Routledge & Sons.
5. Holford, W.G. (1948) Sir Charles Reilly: an appreciation, in *The Listener,* 15th July, p.93.
6. Kelly, *op. cit.,* pp. 147, 227 (see note 2).
7. Kaye, B. (1960) *The Development of the Architectural Profession in Britain.* London: George Allen & Unwin, pp. 156–7.
8. Gray, R. (undated) *Liverpool 1,* p. 5, MS in *ULA* D.147, unlisted.
9. Reilly, *op. cit.,* pp. 208–9 (see note 4).
10. *Ibid.,* p. 209.
11. See Budden, L. (ed.) (1932) *The Book of the Liverpool School of Architecture.* Liverpool and London: Liverpool University Press/Hodder & Stoughton, for examples of the work of graduates and students (including Holford's Rome Prize entry).
12. Holford's fellow students included Hilary Archer, G.Y.Dawbarn, C.L. Fairless, Denis Harper, C.W, Hutton, George Kenyon, B.B, Lewis, P.S.P.Morter, Herbert Owen, Gordon Stephenson, Denis Winston, H.J.Wood and J.H.Wright.
13. His weekly letters home were of twenty to forty pages in length. Some ninety of these survived to be seen by Richard Gray. The letters from his parents survive in the archives of Liverpool University.
14. Stephenson, Gordon, notes accompanying letter to JLP, Nedlands 8th February, 1983.
15. Wright, H.Myles, (1976) William Holford 1907–1975, Obituary in *Town Planning Review.*
16. Holford,W.G. (1948) Sir Charles Reilly: an appreciation, in *The Listener,* 15th July, p. 94.
17. Letter, Stephenson, Gordon, to Richard Gray, 9th February, 1976, copy supplied to authors by Professor Stephenson.
18. Gray, R. (undated) *Liverpool 2,* pp. 6–7, MS in *ULA* D.147, unlisted.
19. Stephenson, G. (1978) Notes on Bill Holford, p.1. Typescript in *ULA* D.147, unlisted.
20. Holford, W.G., *Diary 1927–31.* Entry for 22nd December, 1927 in *ULA* D.147/P/2.
21. *Ibid.,* entry for 12th March, 1928.
22. *Ibid.,* entry for 29th March, 1928.
23. *Ibid.,* entry for 9th April, 1928.
24. Summerson, Sir John (1982) The Mars Group and the 1930s. Open University Broadcast: No. 28 in the series *The History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939.* September 7/8 and 10/11.
25. Gardner-Medwi, R. (1978) *Fifty Years of Liverpool Architecture.* Booklet to accompany an exhibition at Liverpool School of Architecture, 10–15 July, p. 2.
26. Staats, H.P. (1929) *Californian Architecture in Santa Barbara.* New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co.
27. Holford, W.G., *Diary 1927–1931.* Entry for August 1929, in *ULA* D. 147/P/2.
28. *Ibid., loc. cit.*
29. Commonwealth Fund Fellowships worth up to $3,000 per annum were available to graduates, but these awards were not restricted to architects, and the element of submitting designs in competition was absent. Hence the Commonwealth Fellowship lacked, among architects, the cachet of the Rome Prize.
30. In 1929 and 1930 the members of the Faculty of Architecture of the British School at Rome were: Sir Reginald Blomfield (Chairman); Professor S.D.Adshead; Sir Herbert Barker; H.Chalton Bradshaw (Hon. Secretary); Sir John Burnet; A.J. Davis; Professor A.C.Dickie; H.M.Fletcher; W.Curtis Green; Harold Hughes; H.V.Lanchester; Sir Edwin Lutyens;

W.G.Newton; Professor C.H.Reilly; Professor A.E.Richardson; H.M.Robertson; Sir Giles Gilbert Scott; Sir John Simpson; Louis de Soissons; J.H.Worthington. The Chairman and Secretary of the Board of Architectural Education of the RIBA were ex officio members also.

31. Stephenson (1983) *op. cit.* (see note 14).
32. Holford took as pseudonym his mother's name.

CHAPTER THREE

1. 'What are we coming to. Pleasant people—if you can call a person pleasant who is not definitely unpleasant—but they reduce everything they touch to a soluble powder—or rather a better metaphor would be to say that they carefully round the edges of every brick so that it can roll away and find, like water, its lowest level. Well, the English will perish if these people multiply and the others don't. I can see Rome in a hundred years with thousands of well preserved English women and old maids and vicars all becoming more and more of a curio to a reawakening Europe'. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Rome, 21st March, 1931, p.6.
2. Banham, R. (1960) *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age.* London: The Architectural Press, p. 222.
3. News of the result of the competition for the Palace of the Soviets was met with incomprehension. Stephenson had worked on Le Corbusier's entry during 1931, and broke the news of its failure to Holford in a letter of 15th March, 1932. The following memorandum had been sent round the office:

   'Nous avons appris par M.Lounatcharsky, Commissaire du Peuple de L'URSS que la Palais des Soviets sera execute par M.Zoltowsky de Moscou, *en Style Renaissance Italienne.*
   Paris 10 Mars
   Le Corbusier

   M.Zoltowsky est un architecte de veritable talent.
   L.C.'

   Holford's response from Rome was thus:

   'I can't make out whether the communication on the Palais des Soviets is madness or crookedness. Apart from it being a hell of a blow to Le Corbusier it must represent an absolute landslide of principles in Russia—which is really more serious…'

   (Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Rome, 28th March, 1932).

4. Benevolo, L. (1971) *History of Modern Architecture,* Volume 2. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
5. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Rome, 16th October, 1930, *ULA* D.147/P/17.
6. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Rome, 18th November, 1930, *ULA* D.147/P/17.
7. Sir Ian Richmond, CBE, eventually became Professor of the Archaeology of the Roman Provinces at Oxford and a fellow of All Souls. He died on 4th October, 1965 at the age of 62. His obituary appeared in *The Times* on 6th October.

8. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Rome, 16th October, 1930, *ULA* D.147/P/17.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Rome, 18th November, 1930, *ULA* D.147/P/17.
11. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Rome, 11th November, 1930, *ULA* D.147/P/17.
12. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Rome, 12th January, 1931, *ULA* D.147/P/17.
13. The Piazza del Popolo was started in Baroque times, though it was not completed in the form in which Holford saw it until early nineteenth century.
14. The University lectures were less help than he had hoped. 'At the end of the third lecture I am beginning to wonder what we are driving at. I am still waiting pencil in hand to start my first note. I refuse to write down a sentence like this: 'e poi giungiamo alla prima citta del mondo Roma antica, Roma medioevale, Roma papale, Roma Fascista, bella bella bella Rome-madre di cultura, figlia di Dio, glorissima Roma nostra'. We all sob heavily with emotion and not a dry eye leaves the hall. I'm afraid such an orgy even for 2 hours a week will be too much for me'. (Letter, Holford to Stephenson, 14th March, 1931, *ULA* D.147/P/17.)
15. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Rome, 21st April, 1931, *ULA* D.147/P/17.
16. Published as Holford, W.G. (1933) The Great Baroque Masquerade. *JRIBA*, 40 (v), pp. 153–72.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 171.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 172.
19. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Rome, 4th December, 1931, *ULA* D.147/P/17.
20. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Rome, 12th November, 1931.
21. Holford was not to do any serious reading in the history or theory of Marxism - Leninism until his return from Rome.
22. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Vicenza, 20th February, 1932, *ULA* D.147/P/17.
23. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Rome, 8th December, 1931, *ULA* D.147/P/17.
24. Holford, *Diary 1929–33.* Entry for November 1931, *ULA* D.147/P/2.
25. Gray, R. (undated) The Holfords in Rome. Incomplete MS, pp. 2–3. *ULA* D.147, unlisted.
26. Stephenson, G. (1978) Notes on Bill Holford, p. 4. Typescript in *ULA.* D.147, unlisted.
27. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Vicenza, 20th January, 1932, *ULA* D. 147/P/17.
28. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Ascoli Picano, 2nd February, 1933, *ULA* D.147/P/17.
29. Holford, *Diary 1929–33.* Entry for 25th February, 1932. *ULA* D. 147/P/2.
30. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Vicenza, 20th February, 1932, *ULA* D.147/P/17.
31. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Vicenza, 8th February, 1932, *ULA* D.147/P/17.
32. We are indebted to Professor Stephenson for this observation.
33. Letters, Holford to Shaw (Hon. General Secretary, BSR), Rome, 7th December, 1931, and Shaw to Richmond, London, 18th December, 1931, from the records in the London Office of the British School at Rome.
34. Richmond, I.A. and Holford, W.G. (1935) Roma Verona: the archaeology of its town plan, in *Papers of the British School at Rome*, Vol. XIII, pp. 69–76. Richmond wrote the draft and Holford commented upon it: a letter to accompany the returned manuscript survives. (Holford to Richmond, Rome, 9th February, 1933).
35. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Rome, 22nd June, 1932, *ULA* D. 147/P/17.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Holford, W.G. (1933) The Piazza, pp. 6–7. Typescript, *ULA* D. 147, unlisted.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 42–13.
39. Letter, Stephenson to Holford, Liverpool, 20th November, 1932, *ULA* D.147/P/17. E.R.F.Cole and Wesley Dougill were lecturers in the School of Architecture, the latter in its Department of Design.
40. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Rome, 28th November, 1932, *ULA* D.147/P/17.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Rome, 2nd February, 1933, *ULA* D. 147/P/17.

43. The Antwerp competition, advertised in 1932, was organized by the Counseil de la Societe Intercommunale de la rive gauche de 1'Escaut. The Jury consisted of H.P.Berlage of the Hague; H.Prost of Paris; Baron Horta and Henry Van de Velde of Brussels and P.de Diern, G.de Ridder and J.de Bruey of Antwerp. The first premium was 100,000 francs.
44. This was a facility which had been denied a previous holder of the Scholarship, Amyas Connell.
45. Letter, Hardie to Shaw, (Hon. General Secretary, BSR), Rome, 12th February, 1933, from the records in the London Office of the British School at Rome.
46. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Rome, 9th February, 1933, *ULA* D.147/P/17.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Letter, Holford to Reilly, Rome, 19th December, 1932, copy in Holford's hand, *ULA* D.147/P/29.
49. Letter, Stephenson to Holford, Liverpool, 15th February, 1933, *ULA* D.147/P/17. H.C.Bradshaw, a Liverpool graduate, had been the first Rome Scholar in Architecture. The other Bradshaw—'the railway one'—was a compendium of train time tables.
50. Letter, Reilly to Holford, Liverpool, 20th February, 1933, *ULA* D. 147/P/29.
51. *Ibid.*
52. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Rome, 9th February, 1933, *ULA* D.147/P/17. In the event, the sum passed over was only £50.
53. Report of the Faculty of Architecture of the British School at Rome, 1934.
54. 'Astragal' commented on the changed status of 'the Rome' in the *Architects Journal*, 85, 11th March, 1937, p. 414:

> 'Why then is the "Rome" unfashionable? The answer is fairly obvious. First of all, it is not sufficiently realised that the Rome scholar is not tied to the British School, but that, on the contrary, the "Rome" provides a unique opportunity for travel and research generally. On the other hand, it is, of course, only too true that the Faculty is diehard, and stupidly diehard at that'.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. The one major design project which he had undertaken in Rome, the Traveller's Club exhibited in 1932, had a Beaux Arts plan. It represented little stylistic development from his winning Rome Prize entry.
2. It may be noted that Reilly eventually became an advocate of the communal provision of services which had hitherto been private.
3. Letter, Stephenson to Holford, Liverpool, 3rd February, 1933, p. 5, *ULA* D.147/P/17/1.
4. *Ibid.*, pp.5–6.
5. Stephenson, G. (1978) 'Notes on Bill Holford', p. 3. Typescript, in *ULA* D.147, unlisted.
6. Adams, A., Holford, W., Sammer, F. & Stephenson, G. (Anvers Contemporarain) *A Project for the Planning of the Left Bank of the River Scheldt facing the City of Antwerp, as a residential town for 150,000 inhabitants.* Typescript, 1933, pp. 1–2, in *ULA* D. 141/P/17/3.
7. Holford and Adam had visited Antwerp to view the site. Holford's notebook for the year 1933–34 contains pages headed 'History of Town Plan' [of Antwerp] with notes on relevant articles in the *Town Planning Review* by Henri Vaes, H.V. Lanchester and A.Portielje. *ULA* D.147/P/2.
8. The population density was calculated by them as 150 persons per hectare, with 95 per cent of the ground area being given over to open space. This compared with a density of 1,000

persons per hectare proposed by Le Corbusier's 'Ville radieuse'. See Le Corbusier (1933, 1938) *The Radiant City*, London: Architectural Press.

9. Stephenson (1978) *op.cit.*, p. 3 (see note 5) and conversation with the authors, 20th July, 1982.
10. The 1911 Gidea Park exhibition had been a notable affair, attracting widespread attention in the press and the patronage of a large number of political and literary celebrities.
11. Gidea Park Competition Result in *JRIBA*, 3rd series, 41(3), 9th December, 1933, p. 159. The assessors were S.D.Adshead, A.E.Beresford, Ewart G.Culpin, E.Maxwell Fry, Howard Robertson and W.Harding Thompson. Competitors submitting designs in the International Style would have had little to fear from such a panel.
12. Stephenson (1978) *op. cit.*, p. 4 (see note 5).
13. The second year examination paper in architectural history for 1934 was devoted entirely to the Italian Renaissance.
14. *Architectural Review*, 77, April 1935, p. 183.
15. An anonymous reviewer of the School's 1938 exhibition noted, rather wearily, 'much of the sort of work one had come to expect of Liverpool', distinguishing in a design by D.W.Notley 'almost the only good deed in, to say the least, a dull and sometimes rather vulgar world'. *JRIBA*, 3rd series, 45(17), 1938, p. 897.
16. For example, Walter Gropius in an address at the opening of the 1936 exhibition of the School's work at the Building Centre in London 'made particular reference to the group and research work which has been considerably developed in the last three years'. Quoted in the *Manchester Guardian*, 31st March, 1936, p. 12. Two years later, the reviewer of the School's annual exhibition commented: 'It is good that the social implications of the work of an architect have received greater emphasis in the past few years than formerly, and Liverpool certainly has achieved for itself a reputation in this field'. *JRIBA*, 3rd series, 45(17), 1938, p. 897.
17. Walter Gropius, quoted in the *Manchester Guardian, loc. cit.*
18. Holford, W.G. *An Architect in Greece.* Report of the Henry Florence Bursar for 1935: Introductory Essay and Small Illustrations. Typescript, March 1950, in the Library of the RIBA, London.
19. Holford, W.G. (1967) Architecture as structure and environment: the Maitland Lecture 1966. *The Structural Engineer*, 45(1), p. 5.
20. Draft reply to letter from A.R.Powys, Secretary of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, London, 11th July, 1935, in *ULA* D.147/P/17/3.
21. In *Country Life* 11th February, 1933, p. 132, a full-page leading article remarked:

> 'Mr Holford, instructing us in the principles of modern architecture, would have us reject the entire Renaissance tradition from Alberti onwards, as too flippant to make part of this serious modern world. Is this not elevating honesty dangerously near to monumental vapidity? Restricting conversation literally to "yes" and "nay", lest the use of any further words, how scrupulously soever selected, convey by overtone or association some idea foreign to the eternal verities? It would seem that our sceptical youth have reached a point when, to continue the analogy of speech, any clothing of a bare statement in figurative and allusive words renders it fulsome'….'Vitality will have died out of men no less than from their architecture when all laughter rings hollow, when no exuberant gesture is worth the

pleasure of making or beholding. No: unmitigated honesty ceases to be a virtue when it becomes boring. A single “modern” building, an individual up-to-date room, is interesting because it is something fresh. But when every deviation from the matter-of-fact is to be frowned upon as dishonesty, all exuberance to be repressed as licence, “Dora” and Mrs. Grundy must be recognized as our architectural mothers.’

Holford’s unpublished reply is reproduced in Wright, H.Myles (1982) *Lord Leverhulme’s Unknown Venture.* London: Hutchinson Benham, p. 167.

22. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Liverpool, 10th April, 1937, *ULA* D. 147/P/17/1.
23. Wright, *op. cit.*, pp. 170–171 (see note 21).
24. Letter, Reilly to Holford, Brighton, 15th May, 1935, *ULA* D.147/P/17/3.
25. Letter, Reilly to Marjorie Holford, Brighton, 3rd August, 1935, *ULA* D.147/P/17/3. Reilly evidently did not know that Fry was collaborating with Gropius on the Windsor scheme: the resulting design appeared under their joint authorship.
26. Letter, Adrian Allan (Liverpool University Archives) to JLP, 30th June, 1983. Shaw was the General Secretary of the British School in Rome, Robertson the Director of the Architectural Association School, and Braddell the Chairman of the RIBA Board of Architectural Education.
27. Letter, Reilly to Holford, Brighton (?), 28th April, 1936, *ULA* D.147/P/17/3.
28. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 171 (see note 21).
29. For an account of the founding of the Department, see Wright, *op. cit.* (see note 21). The important role of perspectivists such as Adshead in the architecture of the early twentieth century is explained in Stamp, Gavin (1982) *The Great Perspectivists.* London: Trefoil Books.
30. Letter, Reilly to Holford, Brighton, 23rd December, 1935, *ULA* D. 147/P/17/3.
31. Harding, T.W. (1932) Review of *Six Aspects of Town Planning* by S.L.G. Beaufoy. *Town Planning Review*, 15(2), p. 147.
32. Adams, T. (1935) The architect and civic design. *JRIBA*, 3rd series, 42(5), p. 324.
33. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Liverpool, 22nd January, 1937, D.147/P/17/1. (The original is dated 1936, but this is evidently an error.)
34. Holford, W.G. (undated) Outlines of Town Planning: Lecture Notes. Typescript. University of Liverpool Department of Civic Design, *ULA* D.147/P/23, and note from Gordon Stephenson to JLP, Neston 4th July, 1983.
35. Letter, Martin to Holford, Liverpool, 6th November, 1935, *ULA* D.147/P/17/3.
36. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Liverpool, 10th April, 1937, *ULA* D.147/P/17/1.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*
39. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Liverpool, 10th April, 1937, *loc. cit.* (see note 36). This letter reveals that in order to encourage Dougill to seek promotion elsewhere, Holford deliberately refrained from obtaining preferment for his second-in-command; this despite strong pressure from Reilly, in letters referred to previously, to do something for ‘poor old Dougill’. In some ways Holford was an excellent man to work under, but as Dougill was the first to discover, these excel lences were least evident in an academic context, and none of them had anything to do with material benefits.
40. Letter, Holford to Stephenson, Liverpool, 10th April, 1937, *op. cit.* (see note 36).

41. Holford, W.G. (undated) Text of Inaugural Lecture, University of Liverpool 26th November, 1937. MS, *ULA* D.147, not listed.
42. The University of Liverpool: Social Science Department (1934) *The Social Survey of Merseyside* (3 Vols). Liverpool and London: University Press of Liverpool/Hodder & Stoughton. The special studies were published in pamphlet or paperback form.
43. Holford, W.G. and Eden, W.A. (1937) *The Future of Merseyside: Town and Country Planning Schemes.* Liverpool: University Press of Liverpool.
44. *Ibid.*, p.71.
45. Holford, W.G. (undated) Notes on a Visit to Germany 21st August–1st September, 1937. Typescript with illustrations, *ULA* D.147/V/5.
46. Holford, W.G., Text of Inaugural Lecture, *op. cit.*, (see note 41).
47. *Ibid.*
48. Marwick, Arthur (1964) Middle opinion in the thirties: planning, progress and political agreement. *English Historical Review*, 79, p. 285.
49. Calder, A. (1968) *The People's War.* London: Cape, p. 470.

CHAPTER FIVE

1. *The Times*, 25th July, 1935. Sadler Foster later became Chairman of North Eastern Trading Estates Ltd, and later still of the English Industrial Estates Corpor ation. He was knighted in 1965, and died in 1973.
2. Methven's curriculum vitae, running to six pages, survives in the archives of Liverpool University *(ULA* D. 147/C/80). It was apparently submitted to Reith and passed on to Holford for his observations.
3. Holford, W.G, *Team Valley Diary 1936.* MS in *ULA* D. 147/C/64–67.
4. Holford and Appleyard reached formal agreement on the former's appointment on September 1st.
5. Holford gave a concise account of trading estate developments between the wars in a paper presented to a meeting of the TPI in 1939: The Location and Design of Trading Estates. *JTPI*, 25(5), 1939, pp. 151–67.
6. The obvious comparison to make is with the two other government-sponsored estates started at this time, Hillingdon near Glasgow and Treforest in the Taff Valley. The latter, substantially smaller than Team Valley, was designed by a president of the RIBA, Percy Thomas, and was also developed by Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners. Neither was subjected to the degree of control, sustained over a number of years, which was exercised at Team Valley.
7. Mr. David Spreull, conversation with JLP, 4th April, 1983.
8. Ministry of Town & Country Planning, New Towns Research Section. Trading Estates: First Paper, Appendix One. Typescript, 7th December, 1949, p. 6.
9. The executive architect for the Central Administration Buildings was L.V. Couves. Among the architects involved in other early buildings were J.H.Napper & W.Taylor of Newcastle; Douglas Crawford & Ellis of Bishop Auckland; D.D.Main; A.K.Tasker & Austin Hill of Newcastle, and J.W.Hanson & Son. Others whose names appear on the list of factories among Holford's papers are Milburn; Morton; Marshall & Tweedy; Mackellar; Newcombe & Newcombe; W.B.Edwards and P.L. Browne & Harding.
10. For example, Pevsner, N. (1953) *The Buildings of England: Durham.* London: Penguin Books, 1st ed., p. 151.
11. Holford (1939) *op. cit.*, p. 163 (see note 5).
12. Holford, W.G., *Team Valley Diary 1936, op. cit.* (see note 3).
13. The latter parallel was put in the authors' minds by Mr. Bob Jarvis.

14. Mr David Spreull, conversation with JLP, 4th April, 1983.
15. Letter, Appleyard to Holford, War Office, 31st December, 1939, *ULA* D.147/P/17/3.
16. Kohan, C.M. (1952) *Works and Buildings.* London: HMSO and Longmans, Green & Co.
17. Kennedy, R.T. (1977) William Graham Holford, p. 2. Typescript, *ULA* D. 147 unlisted, p. 2.
18. Mr. David Spreull, conversation with JLP, 4th April, 1983.
19. Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p. 3 (see note 17).
20. *Ibid.*, p.5.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 5. The list of architects as printed in the *Architectural Review*, was as follows:

    R.T.Kennedy (Deputy Chief Architect),

    G.Stephenson, F.W.B.Charles, F.F.C.Curtis, J.Schreiner (Design)

    F.R.S.Yorke and A.J.Norcliffe (Chief Site Architects), J.Boyle, C.Brighouse, A.J.Caney, C.Davison, C.G.Dixon, C.Dyer, M.G. Gilling, H.M.Hedges, S.B.Howard, A.F.Humphreys, A.S.Knott, W.Pecorini, T.S.Shearer, F.C.Williams and Lewis Wilson (Site Architects),

    and

    A.G.Bullen, M.L.Cobbett, G.T.Cotton, A.Cox, L.G.Creed, A.Doffman, J.Earley, Benedict Fleming, J.M.Forsyth, A.H.Gall, A.M.Gear, J.G.L.Gibbs, B.Haward, J.M.Kidall, R.A.Kirby, F.H.Littler, P.McNeil, H.S.Pite, A.E. Rice, F.E.Simpkins, D.W.Spreull, L.B.Thearle, E.C.Thompson, G.T.Timmis, R.W.Tippetts, L.Williams, H.Myles Wright. *(Architectural Review*, 92(552), 1942, p. 13).

22. It was proposed by the National Council of Social Service, for example, that the hostels might provide accommodation for a national holiday centre scheme after the war. Davison, Sir Ronald (1942) Hostels for holidays, *The Spectator*, 14th August.
23. *Architects Journal*, 5th March, 1942, p. 171.
24. Kennedy *op. cit.*, p. 7 (see note 17).
25. Copy letter, 5th September, 1940, *ULA* D. 147/P/17/3.
26. Holford, W.G. (1942) Hostels. Notes by the Chief Architect on the Reports from the Select Committee on Natural Expenditure: No. 7 (March) and No. 11 (July) in Duplicate Book 1942, *ULA* D. 147/P/17/2.
27. Favourable coverage of the hostels was given in the *News Chronicle*, 1st August, and 3rd August, 1942; the *Yorkshire Post*, 28th July, 1942; the *Manchester Guardian*, 27th July, 1942; the *Spectator*, 24th July, 1942; *The Times*, 24th July, and 6th August, 1942; the *Architectural Review*, December 1942. They were also filmed and reported upon by the US Housing Administration, as 'the most attractive feature of British war time housing'. Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p. 8 (see note 17).
28. Kennedy *op. cit.*, p. 8 (see note 17).
29. Circular to be addressed and signed personally by W.Holford, 17th September, 1942, in 1942 Duplicate Book, *ULA* D. 147/P/17/2.

CHAPTER Six

1. Addison, Paul (1975, 1977) *The Road to 1945.* London: Quartet, pp. 121–22.
2. Quoted in Cullingworth, J.B. (1975) *Environmental Planning 1939–69, Volume 1: Reconstruction and Land Use Planning 1939–47.* London: HMSO, p. 4.
3. Cullingworth, J.B. (1982) *Town & Country Planning in Britain,* 8th ed., London: George Allen & Unwin, pp. 8–12.
4. Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population (1940) *Report.* London: HMSO, para 428.
5. Public Records Office *(PRO)* file HLG 68/22. This is an earlier version of the final paper presented to the Cabinet in December, which is described in Cullingworth (1975) *op. cit.,* pp. 54–55 (see note 2).
6. The meeting was described in a letter Reilly wrote to Holford from Twickenham in December. *ULA* D.147, unlisted.
7. Letter, A.N.Rucker, (MoH) to H.G. L. Vincent (MoW&B), 8th February, 1941, *PRO* file HLG 86/3.
8. *Liverpool Daily Post,* 28th February, and 1st March, 1941; *Liverpool Echo* 28th February, 1941.
9. Sir Graham Vincent, KCMG, CB, CVO, died on 5th November, 1981. An appreciation by John Sheail appeared in *Planning History Bulletin,* 3(3), 1981, pp. 14–17.
10. Information regarding the early organization of the Reconstruction Group is drawn largely from *PRO* file HLG 124/5 and from interviews with Mr S.W. C. Phillips.
11. Memo, Vincent to Reith, 4th April, 1941, *PRO* file HLG 124/5.
12. Letter, Professor Gordon Stephenson to the authors, 25th October, 1982.
13. Letters, Vincent to Sir William Douglas (Treasury), 29th July, and 23rd August, 1941; Letter, Douglas to Vincent, 2nd September, 1941, *PRO* file HLG 124/5.
14. Memo, Vincent to Reith, 6th March, 1941, *PRO* file HLG 71/574.
15. Fantastically, the Ministry of Health was arguing in early 1941 that it wanted to be ready for a short war. One wonders who was expected to win it. See *PRO* file HLG 71/574.
16. Memo, A.N. Rucker (Ministry of Health) to Vincent, 20th August, 1941, *PRO* file HLG 71/574.
17. Cullingworth (1975) *op. cit.,* p. 13 (see note 2).
18. *Ibid.,* p. 16. See also p. 67 for evidence that Reith sought to expand the scope of inquiry to embrace social and economic development.
19. Sharp, T. (1977) William Holford—reminiscences, p. 2. Typescript, December. From the papers of Professor Myles Wright.
20. *Ibid.,* p. 4.
21. Statement by Lord Reith in *House of Lords Debates,* Volume 121, Cols 755–757, 11th February, 1942.
22. Letter, Holford to 'Tom: not forgetting Margaret & Jimmy' (Simey), 7th January, 1942. Holford Duplicate Book 'D' 1942, pp. 8–11.
23. *House of Lords Debates,* Volume 121, Cols 752–755.
24. Draft Memorandum, Whiskard to Portal, April 1942 in *PRO* file HLG 86/3.
25. Addison, *op. cit.,* p. 198 (see note 1).
26. Reith, 1949, *op. cit.,* pp. 441–2.
27. Gillie, B. Reminiscences of Past Planning Administration. Typescript, n.d., from the personal collection of G.E.C.
28. Letter, Holford to 'Frank', 12th May, 1942, Holford Duplicate Book 1942, *ULA* D.147/P/17/2.
29. Letter, Holford to 'Sir Ralph', 9th December, 1942, *loc. cit.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. See, for example, Mumford, Lewis, (1938, 1958) *The Culture of Cities.* London: Secker & Warburg, p. 415.

32. Memorandum, Holford to Vincent, Note on the Preparation of a National Survey. Typescript, 4th March, 1942, *PRO* file HLG 71/794, p. 1.
33. Note, Vincent to Whiskard, 4th March, 1942, *PRO* file HLG 71/794.
34. Memorandum, Holford to Vincent *loc. cit.*, p. 1 (see note 32).
35. *Ibid.*, p.2.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.
37. Memorandum, Vincent to Neal, 7th September, 1942, and note by Neal of talk with Dudley Stamp, 30th November, 1942. Stamp was one of a number of experts whose services the Ministry attempted and failed to secure at this time.
38. Memorandum, Vincent to Neal, 20th May, 1942, *PRO* file HLG 71/794.
39. Memorandum, Holford to Vincent, 4th March, 1942, *loc. cit.*, pp. 5–6 (see note 32).
40. Memorandum, Holford to Vincent and Strauss, National Survey, 20th May, 1942, *PRO* file HLG 71/794.
41. *Ibid.*, *p.* 5.
42. *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*
43. Note, Vincent to (?), Review of Research Organisation, 4th September, 1942, *PRO* file HLG 71/796. (Though signed by Vincent, this and its companion paper on the functions of a Central Planning Authority were drafted by Holford. Memorandum, Vincent to Root, 28th March, 1942.)
44. Letter, Holford to Pople (his Liverpool accountant), 27th April, 1942, London, in *ULA* D.147/P/29.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. See Ward, S. (1975) *Planning, Politics and Social Change.* Occasional Paper 1/75. Department of Town Planning, Polytechnic of the South Bank, London, pp. xviii-xxii for a concise account of this change in the climate of opinion.
2. Cullingworth, J.B. (1975) *Environmental Planning 1939–1969; Volume I: Reconstruction and Land Use Planning 1939–1947.* London: HMSO, p. 77.
3. The Town and Country Planning (Interim Development) Act 1943. See Cullingworth, *op. cit.*, pp. 82–83 for a description of the considerations influencing the Government's actions in proceeding with the Bill.
4. Keeble, L. (1982) The Town and Country Planning Act 1947: Anticipations and Disillusionment. Presentation made to a meeting of the History of Planning Methodology Workshop. London School of Economics and Political Science, January.
5. Osborn, F.J. (1943) Town Planning and Public Opinion, in *Report of the Town & Country Planning Summer School, Birmingham, August 24th to 31st, 1943.* London: Town Planning Institute, p. 69.
6. Morrison, W.S. (1944) Opening Address, in *Report of the Town & Country Planning Summer School, University of St. Andrews. September 18th to 25th, 1944.* London: Town Planning Institute, p. 4.
7. The formal organization of the Research & Techniques Division at March 1943 is set out in figure 1 (see page 272).
8. Holford, W.G. (1943) Towards a National Planning Survey: some notes on methods of research and classification. Paper given to a meeting of the Town Planning Institute, London, 29th April, 1943 in *JTPI*, XXIX(4), p. 149.
9. Vincent [drafted by Holford]. Note on Review of Research Organization, 4th September, 1942, *PRO* file HLG 71/796.
10. Note by Vincent, undated, *PRO* file HLG 71/638.
11. See *ULA* file D.147/C/86.

12. Memorandum, Vincent to Neal, 8th March, 1942, *PRO* file HLG 71/796.
13. Anon. Location of Industry. Note following Board of Trade meeting, 1st September, 1942, typescript, *ULA* file D.147/C/80.
14. Anon, Planning Machinery and Industrial Location, p.4. Typescript, undated, *ULA* file D.147/C/80.
15. Holford Correspondence Book, *ULA* file D. 147/P/17/2.
16. Note. Daniel to Vincent. 20th October, 1943, *ULA* file D. 147/C/80.
17. Quoted in Cullingworth, *op. cit.*, p. 99 (see note 2).
18. Memorandum, Morrison to Whiskard, 3rd February, 1944, *PRO* file HLG 71/694.
19. *White Paper on Employment Policy*, Cmnd. 6257. London: HMSO, 1944.
20. Memorandum, Vincent to Neal, 28th March, 1944, *PRO* file HLG 71/694.
21. *Ibid.*
22. McCulloch, F.J. (1949) Physical planning and industry. *Town Planning Review*, 52, reprinted in *TPR*, XXX(1), 1959, p. 86. McCulloch was referring to the Ministry of Town and Country Planning's Circular No. 40. *Town & Country Planning Act 1947: Surveys for Development Plans.* London: HMSO, 16th April, 1948.
23. Abercrombie, P., quoted at the Public Inquiry into the County of London Development Plan, 5th June, 1953, in *Town and Country Planning*, XXI(111), 1953, p. 327.
24. Hebbert, M. (1981) Pre-Scientific Planning Methods in Britain: a bibliographic review. Paper presented to a meeting of the Regional Science Association (British Section) Workshop on History of Planning Methodology, at the London School of Economics, 22nd May, 1981 (typescript), pp. 14–15.
25. Professor G.H.J.Daysh, conversation with JLP, 26th August, 1982.
26. Memorandum, Holford to Hill, 23rd October, 1945, *ULA* file D. 147/C/86.
27. Willatts, E.C. (1982) Some Recollections of Planning in the 1930s and 1940s. Paper given at the History of Planning Methodology Workshop on 'The New Planning Process: the 1940s'. London School of Economics, 29th January, 1981 (typescript), p. 5.

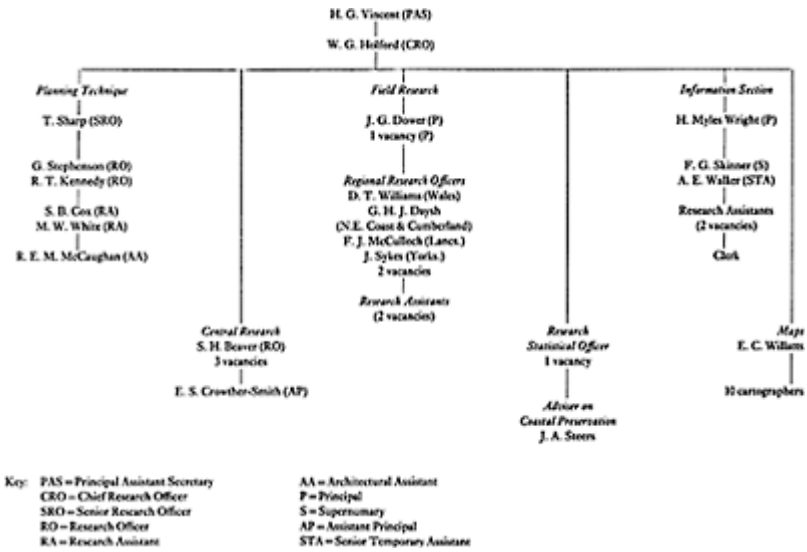


Figure 1.

28. Memorandum, Holford to Hill, 23rd October, 1945, *ULA* file D. 147/C/86.

29. See for example, Powell, A.G. (1970) The geographer in regional planning, in *Geographical Essays in Honour of Professor K.C. Edwards.* Nottingham: Department of Geography, University of Nottingham, pp. 224–232, and also the various papers by Dr E.C. Willatts quoted elsewhere in the text.
30. Morrison, *op. cit.*, p. 5 (see note 6).
31. Daysh, G.H.J., O'Dell, A.C, Caesar, A.A.L. *et al*. (1949) *Studies in Regional Planning: Outline Surveys and Proposals for the Development of Certain Regions of England and Scotland.* London: George Phillip & Sons.
32. Hebbert, *op. cit.*, p. 9 (see note 24).
33. Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 230 (see note 29).
34. The authors are indebted to Mr. S.W.C.Phillips for his advice in helping them to understand the Whitehall context within which the proposals for regional planning were received.
35. Letter, Holford to Vincent, 16th July, 1944, Holford Duplicate Book 1943, *ULA* file D.147/P/17/2.
36. Letter, Professor Myles Wright to JLP, 18th April, 1983.
37. Memorandum on Regional Boards, Holford for file (?), 5th November, 1945, *ULA* file D.147/C/86.
38. *Ibid.*
39. Cullingworth, J.B. (1982) *Town and Country Planning in Britain.* 8th ed. London: George Allen & Unwin, p. 22.
40. Powell, *op. cit.*, pp. 225–6 (see note 29).
41. Cullingworth (1975) *op. cit.*, p. 113 (see note 2).
42. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
43. The original reference, by Neal Ascherson, was to the Callaghan Government's attempts to achieve a workable arrangement for Scottish and Welsh devolution.
44. Letter, Professor R.T.Kennedy to JLP, 2nd December, 1982.
45. Among the imitators were Birmingham, Blackpool, Eastbourne, Bournemouth and Southampton.
46. W.Townsend, a Newcastle surveyor, gave an account of the operation of the city's local Act to a meeting of the Surveyors' Institution in January 1930. It was reported in *JSI,* XI(7), January 1930, and *JTPI,* XVI(4), February 1930.
47. Nor, at the other end of the architectural spectrum, did the 1942 Royal Academy Plan.
48. Advisory Committee on Reconstruction. Draft minutes of meeting held on 9th July, 1941, p. 2. *ULA* file D.147/C/86.
49. *PRO* file 71/779.
50. Letter, RTK to JLP, Christchurch, 2nd December, 1982.
51. Note of meeting by Holford, 10th April, 1945, *PRO* file HLG 71/801.
52. Note by Sir Stephen Tallents, 30th October, 1945, *PRO* file HLG 71/310.
53. Their only conceivable rivals were their counterparts at the Scottish Office with whom they maintained close links. Some larger local authorities, of which Liverpool was one example, had acquired a reputation for dynamism within a necessarily more limited range of functions.
54. Pound was a former Chief Planner, Indian Railways, and Stewart the manager of the Calcutta Improvement Trust. Letter, Stephenson to JLP. Nedlands, 25th October, 1982.
55. For example, Beckett, M.G. (1935) Population Density and the Height of Buildings', Note No. TC 795. Building Research Station, Herts. March.
56. Sir Hugh Casson, Conversation with JLP, 26th July, 1982.
57. It is worth noting an incidental correction to the view put forward by Oliver Marriott in his generally excellent account of the property boom, that 'Nobody dreamt that the developers would want to build as much on a site as the plot ratios [the direct derivatives of the FSI] allowed'. (Marriott, O. (1967) *The Property Boom.* London: Hamish Hamilton, p. 31). To the contrary, the system was devised with the intention that the allocation of floorspace

would be fully taken up. An unsigned note circulated within the Ministry towards the end of 1945 explained that:

> ‘In practice it is only necessary to fix a maximum floor space index which must not be exceeded, as economic considerations ensure that a site will be used up to the maximum allowed, unless there is some compelling reason to the contrary.’ *(PRO* file HLG 71/231)

58. The technique is explained in Appendix 3 of Ministry of Town & Country Planning (1947) *Handbook on the Redevelopment of Central Areas.* London: HMSO.
59. Memorandum, ‘RW’ to Sir Stephen Tallents, undated. *PRO* file HLG 71/310.
60. The authors thank Dr Michael Cuthbert for this highly appropriate analogy.
61. Holliday, J. (ed.) (1973) *City Centre Redevelopment.* London: Charles Knight, p. 7.
62. The value of the new techniques was discussed in a leader in *The Times,* 21st January, 1948.
63. *PRO* file HLG 71/782. Wrigley’s paper was circulated 3rd May, 1943.
64. Note by Holford, 13th April, 1943, *PRO* file HLG 71/782.
65. The papers relating to the argument between the two departments over their architectural responsibilities are in *PRO* file HLG 71/782.
66. Note, Holford to Neal, 7th December, 1944, *PRO* file HLG 71/782.
67. Letters, Abercrombie to Stephenson, Hong Kong 17th November, 1947, and Stephenson to Abercrombie, London, 31st December, 1947. From the personal papers of Professor Gordon Stephenson.
68. Note, Holford to Whiskard, 13th April, 1943, *PRO* file HLG 71/782.
69. Ministry of Town & Country Planning (1953) *Design in Town and Village.* Essays by Tom Sharp, Frederick Gibberd and W.G.Holford. London: HMSO.
70. The National Housing and Town Planning Council and the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association, which in 1941 had changed its name to the Town and Country Planning Association, were the most important.
71. Hebbert, M. (1981) Frederic Osborn, in Cherry, G.E. (ed.) *Pioneers in British Planning.* London: Architectural Press, gives an admirable and concise account of Osborn’s career.
72. Letter, Osborn to Holford, Welwyn, 7th May, 1941, *ULA* file D. 147/P/17/2.
73. Pepler, G.L. (1931) Twenty-one years of town planning in England and Wales. *JTPI,* XVII, January.
74. See *TPR,* X, February, 1924. p. 288, for an example of the inflexibility with which the Ministry of Health imposed this standard.
75. APRR, The Problem of Density: A Framework for Research. Undated (but presumably wartime) typescript from the personal papers of Dr E. Christie Willatts.
76. Minute. Stephenson to Holford, 28th January, 1942, *ULA* file D.147/P/17/2.
77. Abercrombie, P. and Forshaw, J.H. (1944) *County of London Plan (1943).* London: Macmillan, pp. 80–82.
78. Minute. Stephenson to Holford, 28th January, 1942, *op. cit.* (see note 76).
79. Letter, RTK to JLP, Christchurch, 12th February, 1982.
80. Design of Dwellings Sub-Committee of the Central Housing Advisory Committee (1944) *Report: The Design of Dwellings* (The Dudley Report). London: HMSO, pp. 8–9.
81. The group included Holford, Sharp, Stephenson and Kennedy, with assistance and advice from Louis de Soissons and Ministry of Health architects Scott and Pointon-Taylor. Letter, RTK to JLP, 2nd December, 1982. According to Sharp it was he who chaired the group, and who drafted the greater part of its report, the rest being written by Stephenson. Ministry papers suggest, however, that it was Stephenson who played the main part in the critical negotiations with the Ministry of Health.

82. Note by Holford, Osborn's review of the Housing Manual 1944, 4th December, 1944, *ULA* D.147, not indexed, and Note, Stephenson to Holford, 'Density', 5th December, 1944, *ULA* D.147, not indexed.
83. All figures quoted in the text are for net residential density within the meaning of the Dudley Report's definition, which is to say the average number of persons per acre of housing area comprising the curtilages of the dwellings, access on internal roads, and half the boundary roads up to a maximum of 20 feet where these are contiguous to residential property.
84. Ministry of Health & Ministry of Works (1944) *Housing Manual 1944.* London: HMSO.
85. It is worth noting that the 1944 Manual watered down the space standards within dwellings which had previously been advocated not only in the Dudley Report but also in the much earlier Tudor Walters Report, which established the standards of inter-war council housing.
86. Memorandum, Holford to Pepler, Mr. Osborn and density, 6th December, 1944, *ULA* D.147, not indexed.
87. Letter, Osborn to Mumford, Welwyn, 24th March, 1944, in Hughes, M.R. (ed.) (1971) *The Letters of Lewis Mumford and Frederic J.Osborn: a transatlantic dialogue 1938–70.* Bath: Adams & Dart, p. 51.
88. Osborn, F.J., Draft Review: The New Housing Manual. Typescript, 13th November, 1944, *ULA* D.147, not indexed. Osborn's review, slightly altered but with its criticisms of the Manual's density recommendations intact, appeared in *Town and Country Planning,* XII, Winter, 1944–45, pp. 161–5.
89. Memorandum, Holford to Pepler, 30th December, 1944, *ULA* D.147, not indexed.
90. Memorandum, Holford to Neal, 9th February, 1945, *ULA* D.147, not indexed. The 'outside' names he put forward were those of J.H. Forshaw, the LCC architect; David Glass; the Tory peer Lord Balfour of Burleigh (who had proved a troublesome critic of Ministry inaction in the past); and Osborn.
91. Letter, Osborn to Mumford, Welwyn, 26th July, 1945, in Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 86 (see note 87).
92. For example, Buchanan, C.D. and Crompton, D.H. (1950) Residential density, in *Town and Country Planning Summer School, Nottingham University 1950. Report of Proceedings.* London: Town Planning Institute, pp. 7–34.
93. Stephenson was a particularly forthright opponent of high densities, which amongst other things contradicts the impression promulgated by certain contempor ary critics that those who admired Le Corbusier were the stooges of Modernism. A note to Holford dated 28th September, 1945 advocates opposition to the Ministry of Health over a specific housing scheme at 137 ppa, to Liverpool's proposals for high-density flats and to the LCC's 'piecemeal proposals other than those slipping through in the first year housing programme'. He went on

    'Whole question of land costs affecting density should be reviewed. Present cycle is vicious. High land costs seem to suggest solutions which entail high building costs: high land and building costs entail abnormally high subsidy. Who gains from this?'

    Note. Stephenson to Holford, 28th September, 1945, *ULA* D.147, not indexed.

    As Holford's successor, Stephenson was to argue the density issue with, among others, Dame Evelyn Sharp. A particularly noteworthy exchange of memoranda survives in the Public Records Office.

94. A full if uncritical account of the development of the concept is given in Dahir, J. (1947) *The Neighbourhood Unit Plan: its spread and acceptance.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
95. The Dudley Report, *op. cit.*, p. 58 (see note 80).
96. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
97. Memorandum, Stephenson to Holford, 31st July, 1945. From the personal papers of Professor Gordon Stephenson.
98. Glass, R. (1944) 'Social aspects of town planning', in *Town & Country Planning Summer School, University of St. Andrews, 1944: Report of Proceedings.* London: Town Planning Institute, pp. 20–28.
99. Chapter 8 of the Greater London Plan was written by Stephenson, and the impetus behind the plan's general development of the 'community planning' and neighbourhood ideas came from the Techniques Section members of Abercrombie's team.
100. It was in the course of these discussions, co-ordinated by Pepler, that Holford made the suggestion that an independent board financed by the Exchequer might prove the simplest and most effective form of organization for the development of new towns. This solution was the one eventually adopted. Memorandum, Holford to person unknown, 26th September, 1944, quoted in Cullingworth, J.B. (1979) *Environmental Planning 1939–1969, Volume III: New Towns Policy.* London: HMSO, p. 8.
101. Hall, P. *et al.* (1973) *The Containment of Urban England.* London: PEP/George Allen & Unwin, Volume II.
102. Holford, W.G. (1943) Physical Planning, in Osborn, F.J. (ed.) *Planning and Reconstruction Year Book 1943.* London: Todd Publishing Co., pp. 55–56.
103. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
104. See, for example, Bruton, M. (1983) The changing face of planning. *Housing and Planning Review,* 38(2), June, (3), August.
105. His official designation was that of Chief Technical Officer, with a salary of £2,000, equivalent to that of an Under-Secretary. Pepler had on retirement become 'Chief Technical Adviser'. Stephenson was to inherit the title of CTO, but with diminished responsibilities and salary; he would in effect be the head of a strengthened Planning Technique section.
106. Kantorowich, Roy, Reminiscences of Bill Holford. Typescript, Manchester, April 1978.
107. Recounted in Wright, H.Myles, 'Recollections of Bill Holford', MS, 8th September, 1977, *ULA* D.147, unlisted.
108. Wright, H.Myles (1982) *Lord Leverhulme's Unknown Venture.* London: Hutchinson Benham, p. 178. Holford was referring to those who, like himself, had been exempted by the Ministry of Labour from war service because of the nature of their work. Professor Wright points out that Holford was very conscious of not having served in the forces, but adds that his physical courage was not in doubt. He never deviated from his intended engagements because of bombs or 'doodlebugs'.
109. *PRO* file HLG 124/6.
110. Astragal, in *AJ*, 26th May, 1960, P. 783.
111. A note in the Public Records Office, in the hand of the Former Ministry of Health administrator Blaise Gillie and dated 7th September, 1945 notes Stephenson's suggestion that any new system of land-use zoning should include a 'special zone' defining a 'small area in a town or village which comprises a group of buildings each one of which may not be of special interest, but as a group is of special architectural or historic interest. The demolition or alteration of one of these buildings, their change of use, or the intrusion of a building or use out of keeping with them, might spoil the whole group'. Gillie's comment on this suggestion is that 'I am not very happy about this proposal as it looks rather like an attempt to make part of a town into a museum piece, but it will do as a kite'. *PRO* file HLG 71/231.

112. Some of the evidence remains in official files, but here one is confronted with the dilemma described by the official historian. ‘It is impossible to master all the facts or to be sure that all the relevant facts have been collated. It is difficult to sift fact from opinion. And, above all, one is overwhelmed by the volume of materiar’. Cullingworth (1979) *op. cit.*, p. xiii (see note 100).
113. Letter, Holford to John Dower, 6th May, 1942, Holford Duplicate Book 1942, *ULA* file D.147/P/17/2.
114. This idea appeared in many places, among them Holford’s obituary in *The Times*, 20th October, 1975. It would not have been out of character for Holford to have encouraged it himself. If anyone could be described as the ‘author’ of the Act, that person would be E.S.Hill. To these names might be added that of Dower who, in addition to his work on National Parks, was in the early days a general planning adviser whose status was equivalent to Holford’s. It may be protested that Osborn too was a key figure, but as we have attempted to show, his influence as a professional ‘outsider’ was of a different kind.

CHAPTER EIGHT

1. City of London Improvements and Town Planning Committee (1944). *Report on the Preliminary Draft Proposals for Post-War Reconstruction in the City of London.* London: Batsford.
2. *Town and Country Planning*, XII (A7) Autumn, p. 137.
3. Morrison’s letter of the Corporation, dated 2nd July, 1945, was reproduced in *JTPI*, XXXI (6), pp. 207–8.
4. Holden, C.H. and Holford, W.G. (1946) *Reconstruction in the City of London. Interim Report to the Improvements Town Planning Committee.* Typescript. Among those who worked with Holford at that time were Christopher Bon, Leslie Creed, Edward Duley and H. Myles Wright. Part-time assistance was given by P. Vassilades and from the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, by John Earley, Denis Crompton and R.E. McCaughan, among others.
5. *The Architect and Building News*, 12th July, 1946, p. 21.
6. The southern relief road took the form of a widened Upper Thames Street.
7. For the sake of brevity we have anticipated, in this summary of the Holden-Holford road proposals, the recommendations of their final report.
8. *Roads and Road Construction* (1946) Leading article, XXIV (284), 1st August, 1946.
9. *Manchester Guardian*, 5th July, 1946.
10. *Manchester Guardian*, 10th July, 1946 and *The Times*, 4th July, 1946.
11. Holden, C.H. and Holford, W.G. (1947) Reconstruction in the City of London, Report to the Improvements & Town Planning Committee. Typescript.
12. *City Press*, 18th July, 1947 and *Evening Standard*, 19th September, 1947.
13. The Bill was published in January.
14. *City Press*, 18th August, 1947.
15. The plot ratio differed from the FSI in relating floorspace not to the site of a building plus its immediately adjacent area, but to the site alone. Professor Myles Wright has recalled that City landowners mistakenly believed that the FSI ‘stole’ some of their development rights by the inclusion of surrounding streets in its calculations. No arguments would convince them otherwise, and so the simpler and from the developer’s point of view, the more convenient plot ratio was introduced. H.Myles Wright to JLP, Liverpool, 25th October, 1983. FSI calculations were still done, however, and used as the basis for the specification of plot ratios. Thus the planners had more work to do, but the developers were no better off.
16. Mr. Leslie Lane, in conversation with JLP, 29th April, 1982.

17. Height restrictions in the City followed closely those of the London Buildings Act, including a 100 ft ceiling and the control of cornice heights in relation to street width. Site coverage was restricted to 75 per cent in all commercial buildings above 40 ft, with appropriate variations at lesser heights and for different types of building. Details of pre-war controls may be found on pages 12–13 of Forty's plan of 1944.
18. *City Press*, 5th September, 1947 and 30th April, 1948.
19. As the 1947 Town & Country Planning Act had not yet come into force, the inquiry related to powers granted under the Act of 1944.
20. Wright, H.Myles (1982) *Lord Leverhulme's Unknown Venture.* London: Hutchinson Benham, p. 178.
21. 'Astragal' in *AJ*, 5th February, 1948.
22. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 178 (see note 20). Holford's notes, made at the Inquiry, survive in *ULA* D.147/P/29/1.
23. *The Times*, 23rd October, 1948 and *City Press*, 29th October, 1948.
24. Esher, L. (1981, 1983) *A Broken Wave: The Rebuilding of England 1940–1980.* Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, p. 111.
25. Note by WGH in his own hand, undated, *ULA* D. 147/C/55.
26. Heap, Sir Desmond (1982) Rebuilding London, edited version of the 1982 Hampton's Lecture, *Chartered Surveyor Weekly*, 1 (3), p. 222.
27. Quoted in *The Times*, 12th November, 1959.
28. Holford, W.G. and Wright, H.Myles (1950) *Cambridge Planning Proposals: A Report to the Cambridgeshire County Council*, volume 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 35, 47.
29. Professor Myles Wright in conversation with JLP, 30th March, 1982.
30. They proposed an ultimate ceiling of 100,000 for the Borough, and 125,000 for the larger area of Urban Cambridge. The 1981 Census preliminary report showed a 1981 population of 90,440.
31. Letter, Mr. G.F.Mills to JLP, Cambridge, 27th November, 1983.
32. *The Times*, 19th July, 1954.
33. Judgement was given on 24th January, 1955.
34. Copy of letter, Holford to Waide, 1st July, 1962, *ULA* D.147/C/12.
35. The *Observer*, 20th May, 1962 and Holford's reply (copy letter), 24th May, 1962, *ULA* D.141/C/12.
36. Copy letter, Holford to Waide 19th April, 1962, in which Holford refused to accept a retainer. *ULA* D.141/C/12.
37. There were fifteen days of hearings in all.
38. Copy letter, Holford to Waide, 16th July, 1962, *op. cit.* (see note 34).
39. Copy letter, Holford to Samuels, 4th June, 1959, *ULA* D. 147/C/12.
40. *The Guardian*, 12th November, 1959.
41. *The Times*, 12th November, 1959.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *The Times*, 18th November, 1959.
44. Holford, W.G. and Wright, H.Myles (1952) *Corby New Town: A Report to the Development Corporation on the Master Plan.* Corby: Corby Development Corporation, pp. 5–7; Rodwin, Lloyd (1956) *The British New Towns Policy: Problems and Implications.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, p. 125; Edwards, K.C. (1951) Corby-a new town in the Midlands. *TPR*, XXII(2), pp. 122–31.
45. *Town & Country Planning*, XXI(111), 1953, p. 330.
46. Twenty-five acres of unwanted land were to be excluded, giving a general increase of 177 acres.
47. Cresswell, Peter and Thomas, Roy (1972) Employment and social balance, in Evans, H. (ed.) *New Towns: The British Experience.* London: Charles Knight & Co., pp. 66–72.

48. Holford and Wright (1952) *op. cit.*, p. 38 (see note 42).
49. Unsigned typescript accompanying the consultants' meeting with Corby Development Corporation, 24th September, 1951, *ULA*, D.147/C/16, p. 1.
50. *Ibid., loc. cit.*
51. Holford, W.G. (1971) Notes on the past and future of Corby New Town, on the occasion of its coming-of-age. MS, *ULA* D. 147/C/10.
52. *Ibid.*
53. Rodwin, *op. cit.*, p. 128 (see note 44).
54. Professor Myles Wright, conversation with JLP 28th November, 1982; note by Brooks Grundy, R.F., former General Manager Corby New Town, November 1983.
55. *ULA* D. 147/P/8.
56. Holford, W.G. (1949) Design in city centres. *JTPI*, XXXV(3), p. 77.
57. Holford, W.G. (1953) Presidential Address, *JTPI*, XL(1), pp. 2–6.
58. Just before Holford took up the Presidency, the TPI Journal reported on the lamentable standards achieved by candidates in the Institute's professional examinations. *JTPI*, XXXIX(9), 1953, pp. 262–3.
59. Gardner-Medwin, R. (1950) The English planning tradition. JTPI, XXXVI(6), p. 223.
60. By the 1953 Town & Country Planning Act.
61. Report of address by Holford to the West Midlands Branch of the TPI, 10th April, 1954, in JTPI, XL(7), 1954, p. 187.
62. Holford (1953) Presidential Address to TPI, *op. cit.*, p. 3 (see note 57).
63. Holford, W.G. (1949) *Civic Design: An Inquiry into the Scope and Nature of Town Planning*, University College London Inaugural Lecture. London: H.K. Lewis, p. 16.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
67. Holford (1949) Design in city centres, *op. cit.*, p. 77 (see note 56).
68. *Ibid., loc. cit.*
69. Abercrombie, P. (1933) *Town & Country Planning.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 27.
70. Holford (1949) *Civic Design: An Inquiry etc., op. cit.*, pp. 4–5 (see note 63).
71. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
72. Ministry of Town & Country Planning and Department of Health for Scotland (1950) *Report of the Committee on Qualifications of Planners* (The Schuster Report). London: HMSO.
73. Holford (1949) *Civic Design: An Inquiry etc., op. cit.*, pp. 16–19 (see note 63).

CHAPTER NINE

1. See, for example, *The Times*, 5th March, 1933 for a letter from Godfrey Allen, *and JRIBA*, 3rd series, 40(11), p. 339.
2. Harling, R. (1955) Problems of St. Paul's new neighbours. *The Sunday Times*, 19th june, p. 11.
3. Copy letter, Sandys to the Governor of the Bank of England[?], 2nd May, 1955, *ULA* D.147/C/55.
4. Note of meetings on 14th April, 1955, in Holford's own hand, *ULA* D. 147/C/55.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Holford, W.G., Notes for the Minister preliminary to the meeting on 3 May 1955, *ULA* D. 147/C/55.
7. Minutes of a Meeting held at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government on Wednesday, 3rd May, 1955, in *ULA* D.147/C/55.

8. Copy letter, Holford to Richardson, 14th June, 1955, *ULA* D. 147/C/55.
9. Copy letter, Holford to Sandys, 20th June, 1955, *ULA* D. 147/C/55.
10. Minutes of a Meeting held at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government on Tuesday 20 September 1955, *ULA* D.147/C/55.
11. Mr Ian Purdy, conversation with JLP, 27th October, 1983.
12. Copy letter, Summerson to Holford, 8th November, 1955, *ULA* D. 147/C/55.
13. Draft letter, Holford to Summerson, 7th November, 1955, *ULA* D. 147/C/55.
14. Copy letter, Holford to Sandys, 12th November, 1955, *ULA* D. 147/C/55.
15. Letter, Sandys to Holford, 23rd November, 1955, *ULA* D. 147/C/55. It should also be noted that item 32 in the 'Notes for Guidance of the Consultant', produced by the Advisory Committee in September 1955, stated that 'In order to make a distinctive contribution to the skyline, there should be a really high building north-west of the Cathedral well set back, as near as possible to Newgate Street'. It was only after further prompting from Sandys that Holford took the Committee at its word.
16. Copy letter, Holford to Sandys, 29th November, 1955, *ULA* D. 147/C/55.
17. Holford, W.G. (1956) *Report to the Court of Common Council of the Corporation of the City of London on the Precincts of St. Paul's.* London: William Holford.
18. Mr Ian Purdy, conversation with JLP 27th October, 1983. Mr Purdy's account of his historical researches in connection with the scheme were published in *Architecture & Building,* April 1956.
19. Holford (1956). The Precincts of St. Paul's, *op. cit.,* p. 11 (see note 17).
20. Minutes of a Meeting held at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government on Thursday, 19th january, 1956 in *ULA* D.147/C/55.
21. Copy letter, Holford to Grimond, 19th April, 1956 and Grimond's reply, 23rd April, 1956, *ULA* D.147/C/55.
22. *The Sphere,* 2nd June, 1956, p. 324.
23. Copy letter, Holford to Sandys, 25th April, 1956, *ULA* D. 147/C/55.
24. Letter, Richards to Holford, 9th April, 1956, *ULA* D. 147/C/55.
25. Letter Holford to Gibberd, 10th July, 1956, *ULA* D.147/C/55. Among the others with whom Sandys told Holford he had consulted privately were Richardson, Scott, Gibberd, Howard Robertson, Emberton and Godfrey Allen. Holford, W.G., Note of meeting with the Minister at Whitehall, 2nd August, 1956, *ULA* D.147/C/55.
26. Holford, Note of meeting with Minister, 2nd August, 1956, *op. cit.,* (see note 25).
27. *Ibid.*
28. Holford, W.G., Observations on the Minister's Model and an accompanying letter from Dame Evelyn Sharp dated 5th October, 1956, 1st November, 1956, *ULA* D.147/C/55.
29. *The Times,* 4th January, 1958 and *Daily Telegraph,* 4th January, 1958.
30. *The Manchester Guardian,* 4th January, 1958.
31. Holford, W.G., Proof of Evidence to be given at the Informal Hearing held by the Minister of Housing and Local Government, 13th January, 1959, into the Appeal by the Church Commissioners in the case of an Application to develop within the area bounded by Newgate Street, Panyer Alley, Paternoster Row and Warwick Lane, in *ULA* D. 147/C/55.
32. Pakenham, Ivo (1964) Letter in the *Daily Telegraph,* 23rd March.
33. See, for example, *AJ,* 2nd August, 1967, pp. 299–306 and *The Times,* 12th April, 1967.
34. See Chandler, E.G. (1973) *St. Paul's-South West Area-1973.* London: Corporation of London, for a concise account of the post-war history of the St. Paul's area. See also Corporation of London (1984) *City of London Draft Local Plan.* London: City Corporation.
35. Holford expressed these thoughts somewhat obliquely in a short piece published in *AJ,* 17th January, 1957, p. 81–82.
36. Bendixson, T. (1964) Pushing out Sir William. *The Spectator,* 16th October, p. 510.
37. Holford, W.G. (1961, 1962) Rebuilding at the Centre. *TPR,* **XXXII,** (3/4), pp. 236–7.
38. *Ibid.,* p. 239.

39. *Ibid., loc. cit.*
40. Quoted in City of Westminster Information Office (1974) *Piccadilly Circus Profile.* p. 1.
41. Holford, at an after-dinner speech at the RIBA Conference on 'Rebuilding our Cities', Manchester 15–18th June, 1960, quoted in *JRIBA*, 3rd series, **LXVII** (10), p. 404.
42. A fuller account of the story up to 1959 is given by 'The Great Piccadilly Circus Muddle' in the *Observer* Magazine, 13th June, 1965, pp. 8–14.
43. Holford, W.G. (1960) Evidence given before the Public Local Inquiry into an Application for Planning Consent to the erection of a building on the Monico site, County Hall, 7th January.
44. Cotton's agents, quoted in the *Daily Telegraph*, 31st December, 1959.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Holford (1960) *op. cit.* (see note 43).
47. Copy letter, Holford to Gropius, 6th September, 1960, *ULA* D.147/C/45.
48. Quoted in *Piccadilly Circus Profile, op. cit.*, p. 2 (see note 40).
49. Letters, Buchanan to Holford, 4th November, 1960 and 17th November, 1960, *ULA* D.141/C/45.
50. *AJ*, 16th December, 1962, p. 239. Richard Gray had written notes for Holford on the displays he had seen while visiting Japan, and Holford was at pains to provide an array of lights which would be 'amusing'. Gray's notes and illustrative postcards are among the Holford papers in *ULA* D.147/C/45.
51. *AJ*, 16th February, 1961, p. 235.
52. Note by W.O. Hart, Clerk of the LCC, of conversation with Sir Thomas Bennett, 16th March, 1961, *ULA* D.147/C/45.
53. Holford, W.G., Piccadilly Circus: Second Interim Report to the LCC, June 1961, Typescript in *ULA* D.147/C/45.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
56. Hart, W.O., Minute of meeting between Dame Evelyn Sharp and Mr Kacirek of the Ministry of Housing & Local Government, Messrs Heaton & Hollinghurst of the Ministry of Transport, Sir William Holford and Sir William Hart, at the Ministry of Housing & Local Government, 15th November, 1961, in *ULA* D.147/C/45.
57. Note, presumably by Holford, on procedure to be followed following discus-sions with Sir William Hart and Mr. F.West, 23rd November, 1961, *ULA* D. 147/C/45.
58. *Observer* Magazine, *op. cit.*, p. 14 (see note 42).
59. Quoted in *The Times*, 3rd September, 1963.
60. *The Times*, Leader, 4th September, 1963.
61. Buchanan, C. (1963) *Traffic in Towns.* London: HMSO. The Buchanan Report was not published until November 27th but it had, of course, been widely circulated within the Ministries by the time the decision on the Piccadilly scheme was issued.
62. Quoted in *The Times*, 27th November, 1963.
63. Copy letter, Holford to Hart, 18th September, 1963, *ULA* D. 147/C/45.
64. *The Times*, Leader, 27th November, 1963.
65. Quoted in *The Times* 21st December, 1963. The specific terms of reference were 'to determine the area which is of significance in relation to the traffic passing through Piccadilly Circus and to consider probable developments in the area affecting the volume and composition of that traffic … and in the light of this to assess the load of traffic for which the circus will have to provide'. Ministry of Housing & Local Government and Ministry of Transport (1965) *Piccadilly Circus: Report of the Working Party.* London: HMSO.
66. *The Times*, Leader, 5th August, 1965.
67. Holford, W.G., Letter to his mother, Brighton, 21st September, 1968, *ULA* D.147, not indexed.

68. *Piccadilly Circus Profile, op. cit.*, p. 7 (see note 40).
69. Holford W.G., quoted in the *Sunday Times* 12th November, 1967.
70. Among the Americans whose views were widely circulated in Britain were Jane Jacobs, Christopher Alexander, Lloyd Rodwin, Donald Foley and Melvin Webber.
71. Sharp, E. (1964) Reflections on *planning, JTPI,* 50(6), and Crossman, R. (1965) Report of Address to the Institute. *JTPI,* 51(5).
72. Holford, W.G., quoted in *JTPI,* 51(3), 1965. Special Supplement on Membership Policy, p. 5.
73. Keeble, L., Lord Holford—A Memoir. Typescript, 17th February, 1978, *ULA* D.147, unlisted.
74. Collins, M., conversation with JLP, 26th April, 1982.
75. See, for example, a letter from Sidney Loweth in the *Daily Telegraph* 14th November, 1961, and the reply of Ifor Evans (Provost of UCL) 21st November, 1961.
76. Collins, M., conversation with JLP, 26th April, 1982.

CHAPTER TEN

1. Roberts, Gareth, Memoir accompanying letter to GEC, 6th February, 1984. The re-siting of Parliament House left the National Library isolated on the edge of the lake, an outcome which has attracted much subsequent criticism.
2. Correspondence between Grimond and Holford, 1965, in *ULA* D.147/P/22/3. Holford reinforced his general disinclination to be tied to party discipline, especially on matters upon which he had a professional opinion, with a specific reluctance to be identified with a political position because of his membership of a number of statutory bodies.
3. For example, Richards, J.M. (1951) The Royal Fine Art Commission. *Architectural Review,* 109, pp. 205–7. Richards states in his autobiography (cited below) that this article was written by himself, although attributed in print to The Editors'.
4. Richards, J.M. (1980) *Memoirs of an Unjust Fella.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, pp. 243–4.
5. Lord Esher, conversation with GEC and JLP, 6th December, 1983. Lord Esher's description of Holford's talent for staking out the common ground followed almost word for word that of Sir Hugh Casson in an earlier conversation with JLP, 26th July, 1982.
6. Correspondence between Holford and Lord Bridges, June, 1963, in *ULA* D.147/T/28/3.
7. Holford's Advisory Committee papers are in *ULA* D.147/HBC/2/2.
8. Goodman, B. (1973) *The Sack of Bath.* Salisbury: Compton Russell.
9. See, for example, MS in Holford's own hand, Note on Birthplaces and Buildings with Social History or Personal Association, 31st January, 1958, *ULA* D.147/HBC/2/2.
10. Pevsner was both a member of the Advisory Committee and founding Chairman of the Victorian Society.
11. Minutes of 132nd meeting, 17th June, 1963, *ULA* D. 147/HBC/2/2.
12. Minutes of 135th meeting, 14th October, 1963, *ULA* D. 147/HBC/2/2.
13. Letter, E. Davies to Holford, 23rd September, 1964, *ULA* D. 147/HBC/5/3.
14. Holford, W.G., 11th April, 1973, in *House of Lords Debates,* Vol. 341, No. 69, col. 698.
15. Section 37 of the 1957 Act provided that 'having regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty, of conserving flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest, and of protecting buildings and other objects of architectural or historic interest, [the Generating Board, the Electricity Council and the Minister of Power] shall each

take into account any effect which the proposals could have on the natural beauty of the countryside or on any such flora, fauna, features, buildings or objects'.

16. Letter, Mills to Holford, 5th September, 1957, *ULA* D.147/EB/2, and letter, Holford to F.J. Lane, 20th January, 1972, *ULA* D.147/EB/7.
17. Holford, W.G. & Shepheard, M. (1971) *The Architecture of Power Engineering.* Paper read to the Institution of Electrical Engineers Power Division, 1970. London: CEGB.
18. Correspondence between Crowe and Holford, 1957, in *ULA* D.147/EB/18; letter from Dame Sylvia Crowe to GEC, 14th June, 1982; and Jellicoe, G.A. in *The Times,* 22nd October, 1975.
19. Examples of the Board's architectural and landscaping achievements are given in its public relations booklet, England, G. and Savidge, R. (1982) *Landscape in the Making.* London: CEGB.
20. For example, Williams Ellis, A. & C. (1951) *Headlong Down the Years. A Satire against British Electricity Authority projects for hydro power development in Snowdonia.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
21. For example letters, Holford to Hinton, 27th January, 1958, *ULA* D.147/EB/7.
22. Holford, W.G., undated note in *ULA* D.147/EB/13/1.
23. For example, Holford, W.G., Landscape and Amenity. Internal paper circulated 27th May, 1966, CEGB, in *ULA* D.147/EB/10. This document contained wide-ranging proposals for the initiation of studies leading to a more rigorous and exact method of assessing the impact of developments upon the landscape; for increasing the control of the Central Board over the activities of the Area Boards; for establishing a link with an outside body, such as a university department, in order to provide a continuing flow of independent advice; and for creating an Amenity Study Group within the Board itself.
24. Letter, Holford to Mason, 7th September, 1972, *ULA* D. 147/EB/7.
25. Clark, D. (1975) in *Power News,* November, p. 3; and England and Savidge *op. cit.,* p. 11 (see note 19). One of the authors can testify, from experience as a local authority planner, to the sensitivity which the Board's wayleave officers can show towards landscape in their proposals for the routeing of lines.
26. Holford, W.G., Pumped Storage in Snowdonia. Internl Paper circulated 27th March, 1972, CEGB, in *ULA* D.147/EB/16.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1. Holford, W.G. (1949) *Civic Design: An Inquiry into the Scope and Nature of Town Planning,* University College London Inaugural Lecture. London: H.K. Lewis, p. 12.
2. Much of the information given here on the growth of the Holford firm is drawn from Professor Myles Wright's monograph, *The Holford Partnership.* London: Holford Associates, 1982.
3. The incident is recalled in Wright, Myles, Recollections of Bill Holford. MS, 8th September, 1977, *ULA* D. 147, unlisted.
4. Professor Myles Wright has provided, in his 1982 monograph, a list of the Holford offices established since the war. In chronological order of formation, these were as follows: Bank Buildings, Princes Street, London EC (1945–1954); 80 Bedford Street, Liverpool (1945–1966); Paris Street, London SE l (1946–1952); 13 Church Street, Chesterton, Cambridge (1949–1954); 5 Cambridge Terrace, Regents Park, London NW1 (Holford's home and personal office from 1952 to 1964); 14 Harley Street, London W1 (1952/3–1981); 2 Angel Court, London EC (1954–1961); Guildhall Chambers, London EC (1958–1961); 25 Melville Street, Edinburgh (1959–1965); 4 Park Circus, Glasgow (1960 to date); Adelaide House, London Bridge (1961–1979); 7 Dane John, Canterbury (1963–74); 20 Eccleston Square,

London SW (Holford's personal London base, in succession to Cambridge Terrace, until his death); 26 Howe Street, Edinburgh (1965 to date); Exchange Chambers, Bixteth Street, Liverpool (1966–1978); Palace Street, Canterbury (1974 to date). Since Holford's death the following offices have come into existence and remain at the time of writing: Queen's Building, Dale Street, Liverpool (1978); 2 Berkeley Square, Bristol (1981); and Fishmonger's Chambers, Upper Thames Street, London EC4, which in 1981 became the main and only London office of the partnership.

4. Mr. Frank Stower, conversation with JLP, 30th January, 1984.
5. *ULA* D.147/C/29.
6. Holford worked on revisions to the elevation after the original design had got into difficulties with the Royal Fine Art Commission.
7. As reported to the *Guardian*, 11th October, 1965.
8. Birks, Tony and Holford, Michael (1972) *Building the New Universities.* Newton Abbott: David & Charles, p. 86.
9. The quantity surveyors were Gardiner & Theobald, and the consulting engineers the firm of Ove Arup & Partners.
10. Letters, Templeman to Holford, 27th January, 1965, and Holford to Templeman, 11 February 1965, *ULA* D. 147/C/75.
11. Draft letter, Holford to Templeman, Johannesburg, 17th August, 1965, *ULA* D.147/C/75.
12. For example, *The Guardian*, 7th May, 1966.
13. Letter, Holford to Templeman, London, 5th August, 1970, *ULA* D. 147/C/75 B.
14. Mr Frank Stower, conversation with JLP, 30th January, 1984.
15. Holford,W.G., Note of visit to Tonbridge School, 23rd May, 1958, *ULA* D.147/C/68.
16. The final drawings were prepared by Colin Bates and the partner in charge was Frank Stower.
17. Newman,J. (1969) *The Buildings of England: Kent and the Weald* (ed. Pevsner). Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 549.
18. McConnel,J.D. R. (1970) *Eton Repointed.* London: Faber & Faber, p. 16.
19. A list of the work carried out by the firm at Eton between November 1949 and September 1968 lists 84 different items. Many of these are of course projects of alteration or restoration on a small scale. *ULA* D. 147/C/18.
20. McConnel, *op. cit.*, p.61 (see note 18).
21. Letter, Holford to C.A.Elliott, London, 6th September, 1956, *ULA* D.147/C/18.
22. Letter, Holford to the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, London, 25th February, 1957, *ULA* D. 147/C/18.
23. Pevsner,N. (1960) *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp.123–4.
24. *Ibid.*, p.123.
25. Letter, Birley to Holford, Canterbury, 20th August, 1959, *ULA* D. 147/C/18.
26. Young, Michael (1982) *The Elmhirsts of Dartington: The Creation of a Utopian Community.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p.266.
27. Letter, Holford to Garland, London, 29th April, 1954, *ULA* D. 147/C/73.
28. Holford, W.G. (1964) Growth and Form in University Building. Paper given to the Conference of University Building Officers. Typescript in *ULA* D. 147/C/73.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Holford's Mansion House papers are in *ULA* D. 147/C/39. There is also a note in his own hand upon the subject in *ULA* D. 147/P/29/2.
31. Wright,H.M. (1982) *Lord Leverhulme's Unknown Venture.* London: Hutchinson Benham., p.192.
32. Carr-Saunders,A.M. & Wilson,P.A. quoted in Kaye, Barrington (1960) *The Development of the Architectural Profession in Britain.* London: George Allen & Unwin.
33. Esher,L. (1981, 1983) *A Broken Wave.* Harmondsworth: Pelican, p. 65.

34. Holford,W.G. Inaugural Address as RIBA President, given 1st November, 1960, in *JRIBA*, 68(2), 1960, p. 52.
35. *The Builder*, 29th June, 1962, p.1324.
36. Holford,W.G. (1961) The architect and local government. *Municipal Journal*, 13th January, 1961, p.96A.
37. Holford,W.G. (1964) The Broad and the Narrow Way, RIBA Discourse given on 26th November, 1963, in *JRIBA* 71(iii), p.11.
38. Holford,W.G. (1933) The Great Baroque Masquerade, *JRIBA*, 40(v), p. 72.
39. Two people, Gordon Stephenson and Lewis Keeble, had conversations with Holford towards the end of his life which they recall as being uniquely self-revelatory; but neither has recounted the substance of these talks.
40. Press release D. 2488/62, Royal Gold Medal for Architecture 1963, *RIBA* released 2nd January, 1963.
41. Letter, Holford to Kathleen Holford, London, 22nd May, 1963, *ULA* D. 147, unlisted.
42. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER TWELVE

1. Haskell,J. C, Lord Holford—a memoir, Mosman, N.S.W., April 1979, in *ULA* D. 147, not listed.
2. Letter, Professor J.C.Haskell to JLP, University of N.S.W., 1st February, 1984.
3. Holford, letter to Monte Bryer, Brighton, 4th August, 1972, *ULA* D. 147, not listed.
4. Wright,H.Myles (1982), *Lord Leverhulme's Unknown Venture.* London: Hutchinson Benham, p.193.
5. Cooper,J., Memoir of Lord Holford, April 1978, in *ULA* D.147, not listed.
6. Quoted in Wright, *op. cit.*, p.166 (see note 4).
7. Holford diary 1975, entry for June 2nd, in *ULA* D. 147/P/2.
8. Gray, Richard,W.G.H. Bibliography: Notes, 2nd February, 1976, *ULA* D. 147, not listed.
9. Holford,W.G., *Diary 1927–31* entry for 12th March, 1928, *ULA* D. 147/P/2.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1. Mumford,L. (1961) *The City in History.* London: Martin Secker & Warburg.
2. Holford,W.G., note in own hand, 17th July, 1967, *ULA* D. 147/T/28/3. Those who know Newcastle will doubtless want to know what else Holford had to say on the subject. His memorandum continued later:

> '…I went to the station to get the 11.00 sleeper to London, promising G.S. to send him a few notes of my conclusions if I could do this before leaving for Chicago. These are not easy to put into words; and it is unfortunately too late, after the public inquiry and Jack Napper's gallant defeat, to alter the really fundamental misconceptions of the Development Plan. But points which might be put to the RFAC for discussion include the following:—
>
> 1. The Plan is a "City Centre" plan, which pays only lip-service to decentralization, or to the regional patterns on Tyneside. It is

assumed that values will increase; activity & “life” continue to throng the core of the City; and concentration, in high & dense blocks of new building, will go on growing.

2. On the contrary, the whole City Centre is going to be burst wide open and made more and more intolerable (in terms of smell, noise, inconvenience of movement for pedestrians, and congestion of vehicles) by a series of brutal motorways crashing through the fabric of the City and in places reaching a height of 60 ft above ground. Pedestrians are provided for, but become a nuisance.

3.There is no relief or repose anywhere—except perhaps in the old Dobson & Grainger streets (like Pilgrim St). No really urban open spaces out of the sight & sound of traffic; few tree-planted spaces, avenues, or recreational gardens or bowling greens. Those that exist are being raised or cut down.

4.The hierarchy of tall blocks is likely to be confused and to convey no “image” of the City: they do not reflect the topography—either as a hill with the objects on the top of the hill, nor as an amphitheatre with the tall buildings clustered in the valley. The hotel, (however well-designed by Jacobsen) will be a poor substitute for Eldon Square; vertical instead of horizontal and out of scale with its immediate surroundings.

5.The University campus becomes a fruit salad, some nice chunks in it, but lacking in form & coherence & consistency.’

3. In 1970 both the RIBA Board of Education and the TPI Education Committee presented reports on the need for more specialized training in urban design. Holford was consulted both by the RIBA Board and privately by the author of the TPI paper on The Special Skill of Urban Design’, Professor Roy Kantorowich. *ULA* D. 147/RBA/22.

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