

Cities of the Plan: Visions of the Built Environment in Northern England,  
c. 1960-1985

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**Abstract**

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Professor Jordanna Bailkin  
History

*Cities of the Plan* is a cultural history of Britain's postwar urban renewal campaigns. I examine the culture of planning in postwar Britain—the language and images that planners deployed, and how this discourse shifted over time in response to economic necessities, political changes, and mounting public opposition. What do the shifting debates attached to urban space tell us about Britain in this period of rapid economic and social change? I place these debates in a context of international exchanges in ideas and people—examining how planners' philosophies of urban design and social engineering could be shaped by colonial experience, but also how new arrivals' ways of living and moving in the city could disrupt planners' normative conceptions of urban subjects' needs. I also take a vertical conception of urban planning: examining “planning from below” forces us to reevaluate the perception of the late 1960s and 1970s as a time of urban

crisis and decline. While this period was marked by economic turmoil and a crisis in technocratic, large-scale planning, it also provided a fertile environment for groups and individuals on the margins of British cities to shape their neighborhoods, streets, and homes. Finally, I argue that we need to reevaluate the received view of urban planners as rationalist technocrats by looking at the affective, romantic, and even spiritual nature of their projects. Projects of urban transformation contained ideas of how people would *feel* in these new spaces—excited to gaze at cars zipping by on a new urban freeway, calm in a pedestrianized shopping street, or chatty on the elevated walkway of a new concrete housing block. As Britain's public housing, transport, and even urban streets become increasingly privatized, I argue that we need to reexamine the apex of postwar investment in public space as a moment of hope and possibility as well as misfires and frustration.

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## Introduction

*All modern architects have a contempt for their clients...they tried to make modern architecture into an instrument of social reform: through their buildings they tried to change us—into hideous, modern, egalitarian creatures. Of course we did not want to be changed, and that is why no one likes their buildings.*  
—David Watkin<sup>1</sup>

*People don't fall in love with the buildings; they fall in love with the things made possible because of the buildings.*  
—Dennis Crompton<sup>2</sup>

If you ignored her dog and cat, Margaret Neary was the only living soul in Marianople Street by the late spring of 1972. Her house, once joined to a Victorian terrace, now jutted out of a wasted landscape like the last forlorn molar from a diseased jaw. Most of the neighbors had packed up and moved out eight years before, each bearing a check from Newcastle City Council, which had plans to cut a motorway through the warren of “outworn” streets on the eastern edge of Newcastle’s urban core. It was a central piece of a planned overhaul of Newcastle’s urban fabric. But Neary had repeatedly refused the Council’s offer of £2000 for her house, as well as their attempts to rehouse her on a nearby street. She contended that the money was insufficient compensation, and the new house unsuited for carrying on her bed-and-breakfast trade. The Council’s patience was fraying, and their most recent tactic had been to drop the keys to a new house through her mail slot. She promptly returned the keys to the Civic Centre. No more offers were forthcoming, but Neary suspected espionage—a black car was often parked on the street outside. The two men inside pretended to read newspapers, but seemed more interested in observing her house.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in “Up and Down the City Road,” *The Independent*, 4 March 1989, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Otto Saumarez Smith, “Concrete Dreams—Celebrating the Buildings of Southbank Centre,” Southbank Centre website (6 April 2018). <https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/blog/> (Accessed May 2018).

<sup>3</sup> “Motorway Madness,” *Muther Grumble* (Durham), March 1972, 5.



[Marianople Street in 1971, after clearance had commenced. Newcastle Libraries, image 042185.](#)

By June 1972, the “nice, elderly lady” was a folk hero. When the local historical conservation group Save Our City from Environmental Mess (SOC’EM) joined with Friends of the Earth to stage a protest against the motorway, they gathered outside of her house, picking their way over scattered bricks and skirting bulldozers. Friends of the Earth presented Neary with a box of chocolates and she vowed to keep fighting, then the crowd moved off toward the new civic center along one of Newcastle’s busiest roads. Some donned gas masks along the way while others performed elaborate fits of choking on the fumes of passing cars. The shouted slogans and colorful placards indicated a discontent transcending the immediate concern of the planned freeway—“Welcome to the dictatorship and country of concrete on Tyne,” read one sign, while a marcher shouted, “Your concrete future—no more trees, no more grass, no more

plants!” Recounting the events in a local countercultural newspaper, one participant seasoned the protest with bits of dystopian nightmare:

There’s a shadow wearing heavy metal boots walking shoulder to shoulder with us. He’s spitting lumps of concrete onto our marches and dark monoliths of human cells rise up from his every footstep. The once horizontal city is now vertical. Where once we waited for the bus, we now wait for the lift to come down from the 29<sup>th</sup> floor. Faster and faster go the bulldozers. Already, Newcastle looks like a blitzed city. All that’s good to look at and all that felt warm and friendly to live in is coming down.<sup>4</sup>

The jumble of images and associations that the protestors invoked, which ranged from dictatorship and air raids to ecological collapse, skyscrapers, and the death of friendliness, shows the wide-ranging discontents behind the march. Neary, who simply wanted a suitable new house from which to run her business, was a flashpoint for deeper concerns over the massive redevelopment projects that had changed the shape of the city over the last decade.

The protestors’ ideas have worn well. They fit with the consensus judgment on Britain’s postwar urban renewal projects. When *The Guardian* architectural critic Simon Jenkins described the source of his hatred for modern city planning in 2008, he recalled a 1965 trip to Liverpool, which was in the midst of a massive rebuilding campaign that was similar to Newcastle’s. He likened the replanned Liverpool to the blitzed cities of World War II, and concluded, “This was the end of the beautiful city and that reaction has infused everything I have thought since about planning and architecture.”<sup>5</sup> In a 2004 BBC documentary the journalist Peter Osborne contended Britain’s postwar planners

really did what the Luftwaffe had failed to do in the war: just knocked [buildings] down with not a single thought, really, for the communities that were being destroyed.... If I meet an architect who was active in the 60s, I always ask him or her, ‘what were you doing in the 60s?’ It’s a bit like if you meet—you used to meet—a German who’d fought

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<sup>4</sup> “Motorway Demo,” *Muther Grumble* (Durham), June 1972, 3, <http://www.muthergrumble.co.uk/issue06/mg0602.htm> (accessed May 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Huw Morris, “Siding with Communities,” *Planning* 15 (Feb 2008), 15. See also Theodore Dalrymple, “Do Sties Make Pigs?” *City Journal* (Summer 1995). <https://www.city-journal.org/html/do-sties-make-pigs-12343.html>.

in the war. You want to know what they did. I mean, maybe they were honourable people fighting for their country but maybe they were doing something terrible and the same applies to an architect in the sixties. Were you knocking down town centres for us? Thanks very much... These people did evil things.<sup>6</sup>

The documentary's narrator proceeded to label postwar planners as "crazed," "drunk on the possibility of change," "intoxicated by modernity," and "totalitarian." Linking these critiques is the idea that Britain's massive postwar investment in new housing and infrastructure was a misguided and fundamentally violent project thrust on ordinary people like Margaret Neary without their consent. As David Kynaston put it in his widely read history of Britain in early 1960s, "Across much of urban Britain, modernism was being imposed upon a deeply un-modernist populace."<sup>7</sup>

*Cities of the Plan* argues that the history of Britain's postwar urban renewal needs rethinking. The ambitious plans to reshape much of Britain's urban fabric in the 1960s were not, as recent scholarship has reminded us, dropped from above like the Luftwaffe's bombs.<sup>8</sup> They sparked contention and debate between local politicians, planners, environmentalists, social workers, artists, and the "planned for"—the people expected to live in the brave new urban world of space age Britain. This dissertation connects postwar urban planning to the cultural matrix in which it was embedded and explores the ways various actors offered competing visions of the built environment as a locus of political, social, and affective transformation. While postwar urban debates were usually articulated in a specifically British register (for example, the Blitz and Orwell's *1984* were ubiquitous frames of reference) the currents shaping them were global. The peak of Britain's experiment with modernist planning coincided with profound shifts in its

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Osborne, interviewed in *Why I Hate the Sixties*, directed by Gerry Dawson (June 2004, BBC, television).

<sup>7</sup> David Kynaston, *Modernity Britain: 1957-62* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 672.

<sup>8</sup> See Otto Saumarez Smith, "The Inner City Crisis and the End of Urban Modernism in 1970s Britain," *Twentieth Century British History* (2016, online publication); and David Ellis, "Pavement Politics: Community Action and Urban Renewal in Leeds, c. 1960-1990" (PhD dissertation, University of York, 2015).

relationship with its empire and the rest of Europe. British planners' philosophies of urban design and social engineering were often shaped by their experience working in these wider contexts, and their resulting ideas of ordinary Britons' wants and needs were often woefully mismatched with the social realities of 1960s and 1970s Britain. Further, recent immigrants' ways of living and moving in the city could disrupt planners' normative conceptions of urban subjects' needs.

Together with this attention to urban renewal's international entanglements, *Cities of the Plan* also employs a socially expansive conception of planning that focuses on the role that a range of actors played in remaking British cities in the last third of the twentieth century. Urban Britain was transformed through debates, compromises, and residents' creative repurposing that continued long after the planners, architects, and builders had finished their work.

In presenting an expansive picture of urban restructuring, this dissertation challenges interpretations of postwar Britain as a story of decline.<sup>9</sup> Histories that focus solely on planners and urban experts are prone to tell a story of urban Britain's rise and fall—a trajectory mirroring the declining position of urban experts by the 1970s.<sup>10</sup> Such accounts are punctuated by key turning points like the collapse of the Ronan Point tower block in 1968, the growing environmental and conservationist movements in the 1970s, and the advent of neoliberal urban policy under Margaret Thatcher and New Labour. These historical signposts do not vanish when we look at the history of urban renewal from the spatial and social margins, but their effects become more uneven and indirectly felt. By examining planning from below, *Cities of the Plan*

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<sup>9</sup> See Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Corelli Barnett, *Audit of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation* (London: MacMillan, 1986). A comprehensive historical analysis of “declinism” is Jim Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline: Understanding Post-War Britain* (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Classic examples of this tendency are Lionel Esher, *A Broken Wave: The Rebuilding of England, 1940-1980* (London: Allen Lane, 1981); and Gordon E. Cherry, *Town Planning in Britain since 1900: The Rise and Fall of the Planning Ideal* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996). I am grateful to Guy Ortolano for advice on positioning my dissertation within the planning history literature.

emphasizes openings and possibilities as well as ruptures and frustrations, and reveals how modernism's "inhumane" spaces often elicits feelings of fondness and nostalgia from the people who inhabit them.

The "planning as blitz" narrative rests on a powerful opposition between elite, arrogant planners and victimized ordinary people like Margaret Neary who were forced to live with the consequences of the experts' mistakes. There is a lot that is true in this story, as Lynsey Hanley's account of growing up on one council estate in outer Birmingham demonstrates.<sup>11</sup> But too often it elides the fact that for every Margaret Neary there were (and are) people for whom Britain's modernist urban landscape is beloved and worth fighting for. Take Shirley Magnitsky, who moved into London's Robin Hood Gardens Estate in 1995. Peter and Alison Smithson, the leaders of Britain's Brutalist architecture movement, had designed this social housing project in the 1960s with the goal of recasting the East End's working-class terraces through concrete "streets in the sky." By the time Magnitsky moved into Robin Hood Gardens, the estate had a reputation for socio-economic depravation and poor maintenance, but it provided her with a friendly and affordable place to make a new start in life. "I was very, very happy at Robin Hood," she told a journalist in 2016, after Tower Hamlets Council's plans to demolish the estate forced her to move out.

I came there after a difficult time in my life – a domestic violence situation – and once I got to know all my neighbours it felt like a proper east end street. The rooms were nice and big – much bigger than this new place.... I actually never wanted to leave Robin Hood. It was cheap and you had a big flat. Where else can you find that in London now? Working-class families just can't afford what's being asked of them to stay in central London.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: An Intimate History* (London: Granta, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Adam Forrest, "Robin Hood Gardens and the End of Council Housing," *The Big Issue* (21 March 2016). <https://www.bigissue.com/latest/robin-hood-gardens-end-council-housing> (Accessed May 2018).

Or take a family from the Newcastle working-class neighborhood of Byker, a mile to the east of Margaret Neary's bed and breakfast. In the late 1960s, Newcastle City Council chose to raze the entire neighborhood and replace it with new public housing designed by an internationally famous modernist architect. "We feel reborn," the wife told a visiting journalist as she showed him around her home in the rebuilt Byker in 1978. "These homes are palaces compared with the old ones, where there was no bathroom, the toilet was in the back yard, and everything was dirty all the time from the coal-fires. I was continually cleaning, and boiling kettles. And there was nowhere for the children to play in safety..."<sup>13</sup> For her family, as for Magnitsky, the new urban Britain created an opportunity to change their lives for the better—to be reborn.

This dissertation is not a story about buildings, or modernism, or post-industrialism or even about planners or architects, though it has a fair bit of all of these things. It is about a moment of unprecedented government investment in planning and building communal housing and public space, and how a diverse cast of individuals and communities shaped—and were shaped by—these plans and places. What people moving into homes in Byker and Robin Hood Gardens valued most was not that prestigious architects had designed the buildings (though they often took pride in that), but that they were clean, safe, spacious, and cheap. They were places to raise a family and meet new neighbors—to carve out a sociable horizontal city among the soaring tower blocks and flyovers of the new urban Britain. These building projects fostered new beginnings, but they also often shattered existing communities and severed deep and meaningful ties between people and their old homes and neighborhoods.

Margaret Neary and Shirley Magnitsky were both ordinary Britons whose experience of modernist urban planning diverged wildly. Stories such as Neary's have largely shaped the way this history has been remembered, since they slotted easily into a potent political discourse that,

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in John Ardagh, *A Tale of Five Cities: Life in Europe Today* (New York, 1979), 222.

gaining ground in the early 1970s, denounced the betrayal of “ordinary” people by distant and effete elites.<sup>14</sup> As the debates surrounding the “Brexit” vote of June 2016 showed, this view of recent British history remains a politically powerful one—for the Conservative politician and “leave” advocate Michael Gove, no evidence from economists was necessary to support his position, since “people in this country have had enough of experts.”<sup>15</sup> But this polarized opposition is also a lopsided and one-dimensional picture. This dissertation aims to provide a more nuanced and fully rounded view, both of the experts’ plans and of ordinary people’s experience of life in Britain’s modernist cityscape.

An equally forceful critique of Britain’s modernist planners focuses on their heavy-handed and insensitive treatment of tight-knit working-class urban communities. Concerns about the effects of affluence and slum clearance on the social structure of working class communities emerged during the late 1950s. These anxieties infused both academic and popular understandings of what was now seen as “traditional” working-class communities. Two studies published in 1957—Peter Willmott and Michael Young’s popular sociology book, *Society and Kinship in East London*, and Richard Hoggart’s blend of literary criticism and memoir, *The Uses of Literacy*—portrayed warm, gregarious communities torn apart by slum clearance and new

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<sup>14</sup> Reflecting the idea of the “silent majority” in the U.S., this was primarily a conservative discourse that encompassed government policies on race, sexuality, and religion, as well as urban policies. See Amy Whipple, “‘Ordinary People’: The Cultural Origins of Popular Thatcherism in Britain, 1964–1979,” (PhD Dissertation, Northwestern University, 2004); Matthew Grimley, “Thatcherism, Morality and Religion,” in Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders, eds., *Making Thatcher’s Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 78-94; and Camilla Schofield, “‘A Nation or No Nation?’ Enoch Powell and Thatcherism,” in idem, 95-110. As Claire Langhamer points out, members of minority groups countered by invoking their own rights to be ordinary British citizens. See Claire Langhamer, “‘Who the Hell are Ordinary People?’ Ordinarity as a Category of Historical Analysis,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (2018). New research is also calling attention to a leftist strand of “popular individualism” that drew on the same themes. See Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England, 1968-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); and Emily Robinson et al., “Telling Stories about Post-War Britain: Popular Individualism and the ‘Crisis’ of the 1970s,” *Twentieth Century British History* 28, no. 2 (June 2017): 268-304.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Henry Mance, “Britain Has Had Enough of Experts, Says Gove,” *Financial Times*, 3 June 2016. <https://www.ft.com/content/3be49734-29cb-11e6-83e4-abc22d5d108c>

forms of media.<sup>16</sup> As they gained increasing academic visibility, working-class communities also came into public focus in popular fiction and on television screens in the works of “angry young men” like John Osborne and Alan Sillitoe and soap operas like *Coronation Street*.<sup>17</sup> It was against this cultural backdrop that the modernist urban renewal drive of the 1960s got underway, and “community” served as a word to conjure with for all sides—planners, their critics, and the people whose homes and streets were to be transformed.

From the beginning of the 1960s—but with increasing energy as the decade progressed—planners were keen to show that they were approaching Britain’s cities with these communities in mind, and that they had learned from the mistakes of early postwar slum clearance. “People need not fear that they are going to be planned out of their traditional way of living,” planners assured the residents of Byker, a Newcastle neighborhood slated for redevelopment: “The old label of ‘heartless’ attached to so many planners by so many people who have been unimaginatively uprooted, is becoming old-fashioned.”<sup>18</sup> As Newcastle’s new chief planner Wilfred Burns contended in 1967, planning had “humanity as its primary regard,” and “the question is planning for [sic] the community and not of the community.”<sup>19</sup> But “community” is a notoriously slippery term to pin down; it is constantly moving and freighted with received assumptions and exclusions. What did it mean for urban planners like Burns? Is planning *for* community substantively more democratic than planning *of* community? Did all of the city’s residents fall within the community’s boundaries? In one of his first planning reports for Newcastle, Burns

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957); Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957).

<sup>17</sup> Ben Jones, *The Working Class in Mid Twentieth-Century England: Community, Identity and Social Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 124. “Angry young men” was a term to denote a group of working-class writers disillusioned by postwar British society.

<sup>18</sup> “Beauty will return again to Byker: New Plans will Keep Alive the Old Community Spirit,” *Evening Chronicle* (Newcastle), 10 November 1961.

<sup>19</sup> Wilfred Burns, “The Social Plan for Newcastle upon Tyne,” December 1967. Draft report held in Local Studies Room, Newcastle Library. L352.7 958250A. Emphasis in original.

hinted that some groups were outsiders when he decried “overcrowded occupation (by our standards) by certain dark-skinned people” in one Newcastle neighborhood.<sup>20</sup> In a book published soon afterward, Burns argued that breaking up urban slums was “a good thing when we are dealing with people who have no initiative or civic pride.”<sup>21</sup> As with his discussion of Newcastle’s “dark-skinned” residents whose living standards differed from “ours,” Burns’s distinction between the enlightened “we” and the benighted urban poor traced a stark meridian line between those entitled to mold urban space and the passive subjects of their interventions.

As Burns’s concern with newly arrived outsiders shows, discussions of Britain’s presumably white working-class communities were inseparably intertwined with broader concerns among social scientists over the way non-white immigrants from the commonwealth were integrating—or failing to integrate—into the country’s cities.<sup>22</sup> That urban planners should share many of the race- and class-based distinctions between insiders and outsiders as their fellow social scientists is to be expected. The planning scholar Huw Thomas contends that planners’ claims to objective technical expertise rather than social welfare allowed them to ignore the way that their profession upheld racial hierarchies throughout the postwar period.<sup>23</sup> This is an important insight, but it also overlooks the varieties of planners’ ambitions and claims to authority, which took different forms across differing local contexts. In Newcastle, where the newly established planning department was the most powerful arm of local government during

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<sup>20</sup> Wilfred Burns, “Annual Report, 1961-62,” 17. Typed report held in Local Studies Room, Newcastle Library.

<sup>21</sup> Wilfred Burns, *New Towns for Old: The Technique of Urban Renewal* (London: L. Hill, 1963), 94.

<sup>22</sup> See Shiela Patterson, *Dark Strangers* (London: Tavistock, 1963); and Chris Waters, “‘Dark Strangers’ in Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947-63,” *Journal of British Studies* 36, no. 2 (April 1997): 207–38. For a discussion of how these preoccupations filtered into visual culture, see Stephen Brooke, “Revisiting Southam Street: Class, Generation, Gender, and Race in the Photography of Roger Mayne,” *Journal of British Studies* 53, 2 (April 2014): 453-96.

<sup>23</sup> Huw Thomas, *Race and Planning: The UK Experience* (London: UCL Press, 2000), 64. Thomas observes that through urban containment policies valorizing a rural English national identity, planners helped to exclude non-white portions of the British population.

the 1960s, Wilfred Burns commissioned detailed plans encompassing social life, leisure, social malaise, and non-white immigrants in the city, in addition to dozens of studies on Newcastle's neighborhoods, housing, and roads.<sup>24</sup>

For the study on immigration, the planning department hired Sudha Telang, a recent immigrant who had previous experience in an Indian planning office to make an in-depth study into the needs and experiences of Newcastle's non-white immigrant population—primarily from India, Pakistan, and the Caribbean. From her report, Burns concluded that Newcastle needed to establish a liaison officer to help new immigrants take part in the life of the city, since their presence “adds to the general enrichment of society. The real benefit of city life is that an assembly is permitted of the widest possible variety of people representing perhaps the strangest minorities of opinions values, life styles and requirements. The influx of the coloured immigrants adds to the kaleidoscope of city experiences.”<sup>25</sup> Burns's comments are both familiar (reminiscent of New Labour celebrations of the multicultural “Cool Britannia”), and jarring, with the reference to “strange” minority views establishing a firm division between hosts and strangers.

The results of Burns's policy interventions were also mixed. He sought to promote minority groups' distinct cultural backgrounds and avoid deliberately assimilationist policies, and his department published their planning handbooks in Hindi and Urdu as well as English (though there was some embarrassment when it was discovered that the translation had been done in an obsolete form of Hindi).<sup>26</sup> At the same time, the planning department continued to see the areas with large immigrant populations as problem areas because they failed to match

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<sup>24</sup> See Wilfred Burns, “The Social Plan for Newcastle upon Tyne,” City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne, December 1967; Burns, “Surveys into Leisure Activities,” City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne, September 1966; Burns, “Social Malaise and the Environment,” City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1965; Burns and Sudha Telang, “The Coloured Immigrant in Newcastle upon Tyne,” City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne, September 1967. All reports held in Newcastle Local Studies Room.

<sup>25</sup> Wilfred Burns and Sudha Telang, “The Coloured Immigrant in Newcastle upon Tyne,” 27.

<sup>26</sup> Minutes for Newcastle Commonwealth Immigration Group, 4 December 1967. Tyne and Wear Archives, MD.NC/149.

planning standards for population density. Burns's department went ahead with clearance and redevelopment plans, despite most immigrants' expressed aversion to council housing and modern flats and preference for privately owned housing shared among kinship networks.<sup>27</sup> Despite their well-intentioned attempts to understand and provide for the welfare of non-white immigrants, Newcastle's planners continued to see them as a problem population to be managed.<sup>28</sup>

That international circuits of people and expertise shaped British architecture and planning throughout the twentieth century is not a new proposition. Leading figures of European modernism (examples include Walter Gropius, Nikolaus Pevsner, Arthur Korn, and Berthold Lubetkin) either spent time in Britain or settled there permanently as they fled from fascism in the years leading up to World War II. Planning ideas and urban design policy migrated more freely, as concepts of neighborhood design, new town planning, transportation, and traffic management were enthusiastically taken up and applied in a wide range of contexts.<sup>29</sup> But how these itinerant ideas accrued new meanings across changing national contexts and historical circumstances demands more attention from historians. Did seemingly universal concepts like space, place, neighborhood, and community have the same meaning for an urban planner working in 1950s East Africa as it did for the same planner working in Britain ten years later?

The expert knowledge that formed the basis of Britain's welfare state was enmeshed with and

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<sup>27</sup> On immigrants' housing preferences, see Wilfred Burns and Sudha Telang, "The Coloured Immigrant in Newcastle upon Tyne," 15; and Jon Gower Davies, *The Evangelistic Bureaucrat: A Study of a Planning Exercise in Newcastle upon Tyne* (London: Tavistock, 1972), 23-41. For a broader discussion of non-white immigrants' experience in Newcastle, see Sarah Hackett, *Foreigners, Minorities and Integration: The Muslim Immigrant Experience in Britain and Germany* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Gordon Cherry, who worked as a junior planner under Burns before becoming Britain's most prolific planning historian, agonized in a 1970 book over "how far one should seek to scatter or concentrate immigrant community areas." Gordon E. Cherry, *Town Planning in Its Social Context* (London: Leonard Hill, 1970), 103.

<sup>29</sup> See Patsy Healey and Robert Upton, eds., *Crossing Borders: International Exchange and Planning Practices* (London: Routledge, 2010); Rosemary Wakeman, "Rethinking Planning History," *Planning Perspectives* 29, no. 2 (April 2014), 153-163; and Ian Cook, Stephen Ward, and Kevin Ward, "A Springtime Journey to the Soviet Union: Postwar Planning and Policy Mobilities through the Iron Curtain," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 3 (May 2014): 805-822.

constituted by the concomitant processes of decolonization and immigration from the empire.<sup>30</sup> In the 1950s and '60s, planners were returning from imperial commissions and applying at home the knowledge they had gained abroad.<sup>31</sup> As chapter 2 will argue, notions of community gained through the management of urbanization in colonial contexts had an afterlife in Britain, as planners sought to guide working-class Britons through the traumas of deindustrialization.

Planners' increasing preoccupation with designing spaces that would foster community did not, of course, ensure success. One of the strongest and most persistent indictments of modernist planning was that it had destroyed traditional communities through slum clearance and replaced them with sterile estates that, in the words of the geographer Alice Coleman, "create anonymity, not community."<sup>32</sup> Such criticisms, which formed the basis for the demolition of many postwar buildings and housing estates during the past four decades, are correct in highlighting the disconnections between the planners' ideals of community and the messy realities on the ground. They ignore, though, the changing meanings that people attached to the notion of community, and how residents created new bonds to neighbors and place, which, while bearing little resemblance to the forms of "traditional" community, ran equally deep. Definitions of community continue to fluctuate, and need to be seen as part of what Stephen Brooke terms the "ongoing moment in the life of the postwar working classes."<sup>33</sup> *Cities of the Plan* explores

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<sup>30</sup> Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Ruth Craggs and Hannah Neate, "Post-Colonial Careerism and Urban Policy Mobility: Between Britain and Nigeria, 1945–1990," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 42, no. 1 (2017): 44–57; and Jesse Meredith, "Decolonizing the New Town: Roy Gazzard and the Making of Killingworth Township," *Journal of British Studies* 57, no. 2 (April 2017): 333–363.

<sup>32</sup> Alice Coleman, "The Psychology of Housing," *The Salisbury Review: the Quarterly Magazine of Conservative Thought* 28, no. 2 (2009): 10–12, at 10.

<sup>33</sup> Stephen Brooke, "Revisiting Southam Street," 457. Recent histories that follow this approach are Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class* (London: John Murray, 2014); Ben Jones, *The Working Class in Mid Twentieth-Century England*; and Stefan Ramsden, "Remaking Working-Class Community: Sociability, Belonging and 'Affluence' in a Small Town, 1930–1980," *Contemporary British History* 29, no. 1 (Jan. 2015): 1–26.

these complex and shifting relationships between people and place, highlighting continuities and new openings as much as caesuras and closures.

To foreground the ways in which planners' and residents' notions of community and belonging converged and diverged demands a close attention to a topic often omitted from planning history—the key role that affect and emotions played in the production, implementation and dismantling of modernist urban planning schemes.<sup>34</sup> To take a concrete example, many British housing estates built in the 1960s and 1970s incorporated high-level walkways, dubbed “streets in the sky,” which were meant to imitate the layout and function of the street in working-class terraces. These walkways, their designers believed, would be places to meet and socialize, fostering feelings of warmth and neighborliness among residents. The reality, of course, failed to align with the planners' idyllic visions. The streets in the sky were often exposed to the elements and became icy and drafty in the winter. Worse, by the 1970s they were notorious as ideal spots for muggings and vandalism. For critics, they embodied not warmth and friendliness but discomfort, paranoia, and fear. Affect thus served first to legitimize and then to discredit a modernist design feature in public discourse.

Yet this symbolic force field, which dominated media depictions of modernist estates, scarcely encompassed the range of feelings the “streets in the sky” evoked among residents. The former tenants of Killingworth Towers, a modernist estate near Newcastle, recalled the elevated walkways as crucial sites for making new friendships. Since they canalized foot traffic for the estate's upper-story residents walking to the town center, they encouraged rendezvous and

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<sup>34</sup> This lack of attention is not true of urban history more generally, however. See, for example, Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992); and Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).



Young mothers and children on Killingworth's "streets in the sky" in the late 1970s. Newcastle Library. established routines as new neighbors shared shopping trips to the local Woolco supermarket.<sup>35</sup> The walkways also gave children thrills of excitement—they made ideal venues for games of “knocky nine-door,” which involved rapping on people’s front doors and then sprinting away. “It was dead easy to get away with the long walkways,” a man who grew up in the Towers recalled decades afterward.<sup>36</sup> For those targeted by such youthful hijinks, the walkways were annoying. Friendship, excitement, and irritability—these everyday emotions infused life along Killingworth’s streets in the sky. To them we can add another layer of feelings that emerged only after the estate was knocked down—relief, sadness, or longing for a demolished place.

A complex affective economy circulated around Killingworth’s walkways and shaped how they were designed, used, destroyed, and remembered.<sup>37</sup> Modernist planning is usually seen

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<sup>35</sup> John R. Topping, *The New Technopolis: Streets in the Sky or Corridors of Hell?* (John Topping, 2010) 12. Unpublished book manuscript held in the Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/D20. I am grateful to Topping for sending me an electronic version of his manuscript.

<sup>36</sup> M. H., comment on “Killingworth Photos and Videos,” *Facebook* community page, 15 Dec. 2013.

<sup>37</sup> The phrase “affective economy” comes from Sara Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” *Social Text* 79, vol. 22, no. 2, (July 2004): 117-139.

as a hyper rational and cerebral endeavor that sought to mold functionally segregated cities and saw homes as, in the arch-modernist Le Corbusier's words, "machines for living in."<sup>38</sup> *Cities of the Plan* argues that planners were equally concerned with what W. B. Yeats called "the dark corners of the soul:" the feelings of security, joy, and desire that carefully designed urban space could inspire. Equally important, the persistent failure of the built reality to align with the planned ideal provided grounds for portraying places like Killingworth as misconceived utopian failures ripe for demolition or market-driven "regeneration."<sup>39</sup> As the following chapters will show, the critics had a point: people often did not feel the way they were meant to feel in Britain's modernist spaces. But as the people recalling Killingworth's streets in the sky show, the complex web of everyday emotions that stick like spat-out chewing gum to streets and buildings in individual memories suggests fondness and nostalgia more often than alienation.

### **"Boom Cities": Placing the Project**

Describing Newcastle in August 1967, a writer for the *Daily Mirror* compared the city to a "mighty Meccano set, with cranes and scaffolding the sight, and the damp thud of pneumatic drills the sound. The change is *so positive*."<sup>40</sup> Many Newcastle residents might have disagreed with the last statement, but the fact that the city was changing dramatically was undeniable. And this urban restructuring shaped people's experience of the city, impinging on their senses

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<sup>38</sup> This influential characterization gained momentum from the early 1960s through critiques of planning aimed at a popular audience. See Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961); James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); and Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life* (New York: Knopf, 1970).

<sup>39</sup> Alice Coleman, *Utopia on Trial: Vision and Reality in Planned Housing* (London: Hilary Shipman, [1985] 1990). For a historical case study, see Michael Romyn, "The Heygate: Community Life in an Inner-City Estate, 1974–2011," *History Workshop Journal* 81, no. 1 (April 2016): 197-230. For a nuanced picture of planners' utopianism, see Matthew Hollow, "Utopian Urges: Visions for Reconstruction in Britain, 1940–1950," *Planning Perspectives* 27, no. 4 (2012): 569–585.

<sup>40</sup> John Pilger, "The Boom Cities! Newcastle & Co., Ltd.," *Daily Mirror*, 17 April 1967, 13. Emphasis in original.

whenever they walked to Newcastle's new covered markets (or, by the mid-1970s, its inner-city shopping mall) or strolled along the banks of the Tyne. The sense of flux was shocking and seemed to be proceeding in an unstoppable headlong rush. Willingly or not, the city's residents were sucked into what Marshall Berman terms the "maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish" that defines modern life.<sup>41</sup> Urban planning was not just the distant and desiccated musing of eggheaded elites in 1960s and 1970s Newcastle—it was a viscerally felt part of everyday life.

Newcastle was at the forefront of Britain's urban renewal drive, but it was far from alone. The 1960s saw a surge in state-driven urban construction schemes centered on the nation's provincial Victorian-era cityscapes. The number of planned Comprehensive Development Areas (urban areas designated for complete rebuilding) submitted to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government shot from 15 in 1959 to 70 in 1963, and there were roughly 400 urban renewal schemes in progress by 1965.<sup>42</sup> The most ambitious of these proposals were in the beleaguered northern heartland of the Industrial Revolution. In 1960, Newcastle's modernizing Labour-led Council established Britain's first independent city planning department with a remit to turn Newcastle into the "Brasilia of the North"—a reference to Brazil's new totally planned modernist capital.<sup>43</sup> The new planning department was made the most powerful of the council's departments. Wilfred Burns, one of Britain's most radical planners, used his powerful position as Chief Planning Officer to implement the latest theories on remaking urban space to

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<sup>41</sup> Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), 15.

<sup>42</sup> John Pendlebury, "Alas Smith and Burns? Conservation in Newcastle upon Tyne City Centre, 1959-68," *Planning Perspectives* 16, no. 2 (2001): 115-41, at 116; and Simon Gunn, "The Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism: Planning Bradford, circa 1945-1970," *Journal of British Studies* 49, no. 4 (2010): 849-869, at 852.

<sup>43</sup> Before this, city planning had generally been a part of the city engineer's department.

accommodate motor traffic.<sup>44</sup>

Liverpool soon followed Newcastle's example. In 1962, the City Council hired the architect-planner Graeme Shankland as a private planning consultant for the renewal of the city center. In the same year it established an independent city planning department led by Walter Bor, a Czech émigré whose work for the London County Council had cemented his reputation as one of the nation's most radical architect-planners. Suddenly, their planning colleague Lionel Esher later wrote, "two of the brightest stars in the high planning firmament of the sixties were in conjunction in Liverpool, and much was expected of them."<sup>45</sup> Like Burns in Newcastle, Bor was a member of the Planning Advisory Group (PAG), a team officially tasked with reconceiving the role of the planner and the city in late twentieth-century Britain.<sup>46</sup> When the group released their report, *The Future of Development Plans*, in 1965, they called for:

the physical reshaping of the large towns and cities, the modernisation of their road and transport systems, the redevelopment of town centres and the wholesale renewal, whether by comprehensive improvement or redevelopment, of obsolescent housing. This process will call for a radical re-appraisal of the town's functions and of the distribution of activities within the town.<sup>47</sup>

Bor saw his position in Liverpool as a chance to formulate the latest planning theories in PAG meetings in Whitehall, then "get on the train to be in Liverpool in the afternoon to actually implement it on the ground. It was an interplay between theory and practice which I found fascinating."<sup>48</sup> Like Newcastle, it was Liverpool's fate in the 1960s and 1970s to become a petri

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<sup>44</sup> Otto Saumarez Smith, "Central Government and Town-Centre Redevelopment in Britain, 1959–1966" *The Historical Journal* 58, no. 1 (2015): 217–244, at 227.

<sup>45</sup> Lionel Esher, *A Broken Wave*, 229.

<sup>46</sup> See John Delafons, "Reforming the British Planning System, 1964–1965: The Planning Advisory Group and the Genesis of the Planning Act of 1967," *Planning Perspectives* 13, 4 (Oct. 1998): 373–87. In addition to serving on the PAG together, Burns and Bor were also both presidents of the Royal Town Planning Institute in 1967–68 and 1970–71, respectively.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Alison Ravetz, *The Government of Space: Town Planning in Modern Society* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 81.

<sup>48</sup> Interview between Walter Bor and Louise Brodie, 20 May 1997. Held in British Library, National Life Stories Collection, Architect's Lives, <http://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Architects-Lives/021M->

dish for avant-garde planning techniques, and Bor later reflected that the two cities competed to attract the period's brightest young planners.<sup>49</sup>

These two cities that perched themselves on the cutting edge of modernist urban planning are the focus of *Cities of the Plan*. In step with Prime Minister Harold Wilson's paeans to forging Britain anew in the "white heat of technology", their reimagined city spaces featured high-speed urban freeways, streets in the sky for pedestrians, modernist civic centers, enclosed shopping precincts, towering office and apartment blocks, and adjacent new towns to house people cleared from their slum housing. Newcastle and Liverpool were the shock cities of Britain's short-lived modernist planning revolution—they pioneered the latest techniques in municipal urban planning and also revealed the psychic impact of those schemes on communities and individuals.

The term "shock city," itself new in the 1960s, helps answer the inevitable question: why choose not to focus on London, that quintessentially modern center of Britain's "swinging sixties?" Asa Briggs coined the phrase "shock city" to describe Manchester in his 1963 book *Victorian Cities*.<sup>50</sup> For Briggs, Manchester distilled the jolting, unsettling experience of industrial modernity as it remade space, social relations, technology, and politics. While cities like Birmingham and London were also decisively industrial cities, in Manchester the experience of pell-mell change percolated across all social classes and penetrated to every cranny of the city. This experiential dimension characterized parts of London's East End, but London above all remained the national and imperial capital and a sprawling metropolis featuring whole districts that remained untouched by the smoke, noise, and energy of nineteenth-century industry.

Londoners were similarly buffered from the totalizing impact of urban renewal and its

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[C0467X0013XX-0012V0](#). An early study of Bor's planning department in Liverpool is David Muchnick, *Urban Renewal in Liverpool: A Study of the Politics of Redevelopment* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1970).

<sup>49</sup> Interview between Walter Bor and Louise Brodie, 20 May 1997.

<sup>50</sup> Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1963] 1993), 56.

fallout in the 1960s and 1970s. As we will see, this was partly because ambitious planning was a dispersed and ongoing process in London that began with wartime reconstruction plans and continued throughout the postwar period. In Newcastle and Liverpool, by contrast, the 1940s and 1950s saw only halting and piecemeal interventions in slum clearance, which made the urban renewal campaigns of the 1960s doubly frenetic as the new planning departments made up for lost time. As compact provincial cities marked by distinct regional dialects (Geordie in Newcastle and Scouse in Liverpool) and each served by two daily local newspapers, Newcastle and Liverpool also offer the historian insight into how residents responded to the planners' attempts to reshape their cities. For the people of these cities, urban modernism implied total, sweeping change. For its supporters, it promised to rejuvenate the physical, economic, and social structure. Yet for critics, it betokened destruction and homogenization; for one Liverpool artist, the planners' vision augured "a chromium-plated, automated, jackpot city with a Las Vegas look.... a neon-lit concrete cemetery."<sup>51</sup>

Just as they offer insight into the subjective, experiential impact of modern planning on British city dwellers, Newcastle and Liverpool also were laboratories of innovative urban interventions from the 1960s into the early 1980s. Recent scholarship has focused especially on Liverpool's role as a site of changing forms of planning interventions—from large-scale slum clearance and urban renewal projects in the 1960s to focused neighborhood-level interventions in the 1970s.<sup>52</sup> But Newcastle and Liverpool also stand out among British cities that embraced what Simon Gunn calls "the techno-utopian ideal" of urban modernism.<sup>53</sup> While cities like Birmingham and Bradford both embraced sweeping modernization plans to open their urban

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<sup>51</sup> Arthur Dooley, "The New Liverpool: Is It for Liverpudlians?" *Liverpool Daily Post*, Feb. 3 1966.

<sup>52</sup> Otto Saumarez Smith, "The Inner City Crisis"; Aaron Andrews, "Decline and the City: the Urban Crisis in Liverpool, c. 1968-1986," (PhD Dissertation, University of Leicester, 2018).

<sup>53</sup> Simon Gunn, "Ring Road: Birmingham and the Collapse of the Motorway Ideal in 1970s Britain," *The Historical Journal* 61, no. 1 (March 2018): 227-248, at 230.

fabric to car traffic and new office blocks, these were bureaucratic engineering projects carried out by “middling modernist” functionaries.<sup>54</sup> The 1960s urban renewal projects in Newcastle and Liverpool, by contrast, were distinguished by an almost messianic faith in “master planners” like Wilfred Burns, Graeme Shankland, and Walter Bor. Equipped with both an artist’s sensibilities and technical expertise in the latest planning concepts, these master planners promised to preserve the best of the existing city while ushering in a new era of confidence and prosperity. As their top-down, planner-led projects petered out in the 1970s, both cities were pioneers in attempts to democratize planning through what became known as “community architecture,” which took the form of housing co-operatives in Liverpool and extensive tenant involvement in the redevelopment of Newcastle’s Byker neighborhood. These projects, and the debates surrounding them, highlight how shifting cultural notions of authority, community, and the individual dictated what forms of urban interventions were deemed possible and desirable in late twentieth-century Britain.

### **Structure and Chronology**

*Cities of the Plan* opens with the arrival of the modernist city planners in Liverpool and Newcastle in the early 1960s, with their goals of starting, in Wilfred Burns’s words, a modernist “revolution” in the Victorian city center. Chapter one examines the cultural underpinnings of this revolution by analyzing the planners’ rhetoric together with the images and physical models they used to communicate their plans. I argue that the planners in charge of the redevelopment campaigns in Newcastle and Liverpool sought to wed technocratic efficiency with democratic

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<sup>54</sup> On “middling modernism,” see Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989), 13. On urban renewal in Bradford, see Simon Gunn, “The Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism.” On Birmingham’s redevelopment, see Elaine Harwood, “White Light/White Heat: Rebuilding England’s Provincial Towns and Cities in the Sixties,” *Twentieth Century Architecture*, no. 6 (2002): 56–70, at 62–63.

consent, and that they did so chiefly through affective channels. Examining exhibitions, wooden city models, and the design of planning ephemera, I contend that modernist planners projected their visions of the urban future by stirring a range of emotional responses in their audiences. They invoked established paternal notions of authority by asserting the planner's moral mandate to shape the dank and dangerous space of the Victorian city. At the same time, though more subtly, their vision of the modernist city offered the promise of excitement and libidinal release. Both of these emphases would come under increasing criticism by the late 1960s from emerging cultural currents that challenged notions of deference and demanded gender equality.

Chapter two explores a similar ambivalence infusing the planning philosophy that shaped Killingworth new town on the outskirts of Newcastle. The chief planner for Killingworth, Roy Gazzard, combined cutting-edge modernist design with goals of replicating the proportions and psychic impact of medieval Northumbrian castles. Gazzard's colonial experience and outspoken Christian beliefs informed his goals to create an ideal urban community. This chapter examines letters, private papers, planning documents, and diagrams held in the newly opened archive of Gazzard's work to chart the course of colonial expertise as it migrated from 1950s Uganda to the postcolonial metropole. Like the planners discussed in the first chapter, Gazzard rooted his planning vision in the idea that built forms could elicit affective responses in individuals and communities. But his understanding of the wants and needs of Killingworth's people came as much from his colonial experience as it did from the anxieties aroused by social and economic changes in northern England in the 1960s and 1970s.

Chapter three looks at the redevelopment of Newcastle's Byker neighborhood in the 1970s, focusing on clashing perspectives on the area's transformation and the community's experience weathering demolition and resettlement. It is a hinge chapter in more ways than one.

First, it traces a period where grand planning projects such as those examined in the first two chapters yielded to sensitive neighborhood-focused projects that experimented with tenant consultation and involvement. Secondly, it decenters the planner, giving equal attention to new actors with competing visions of Britain's urban communities. And finally, it seeks to capture not just the planner's vision but also how people inhabited and made meaning out of Britain's planned spaces. The chapter begins with a discussion of the political background of the project. It then examines Byker's architect, Ralph Erskine, who pioneered a humane, participatory form of modernist planning that would retain the communal ties between the area's primarily working-class residents. I contrast Erskine's vision of a soft, Scandinavian-style modernism with the documentary work of the Finnish transplant Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, whose photographic work offered a rebuke to this gentler approach to planning. Erskine and Konttinen each sought to represent themselves as a spokesperson for ordinary Britons whom the state had failed, and in doing so they reveal rifts in the British Left's approach to class and urban community in the 1970s. The final part of the chapter explores how Byker residents' ideas of community and belonging—often at odds with these outsider perspectives—weathered the process of demolition, rebuilding, and settling into the new Byker.

Chapter four explores the brief lives and long afterlives of two modernist housing estates: Killingworth Towers in the new town of Killingworth, and Southgate in Runcorn New Town, near Liverpool. Both estates were completed in the mid 1970s and demolished in the late 1980s. I explore the reasons for each estate's decline—some structural, but chiefly rooted in mismanagement, poor maintenance, the lack of economic opportunities, and the stigmatization of social housing in the 1980s. Though both estates were written off as anti-social “sink estates,” I examine how this picture is challenged by Facebook community pages that former residents have

created to celebrate life on the estate. These pages, to which members can contribute photos, videos, and memories, form an archive that compels us to rethink received interpretations of social life on Britain's modern estates that portray them as sites of anomie, crime, and social collapse.

The chapter structure follows a progressively narrowing trajectory, moving from two large cities, to a small new town, to an urban neighborhood, and finally to the level of two housing estates. The view also moves progressively downwards from the experts' plans to the everyday experience of ordinary people. Partially this is a result of archival necessity. Municipal urban planners produced ever fewer documents as the 1960s progressed to the 1980s, as their profession steadily shifted from a design-focused art to a systematic, analytical approach, and then to an emphasis on the planner as a manager and facilitator of urban change.<sup>55</sup> Simultaneously, the bases of governmental funding and support shifted and then contracted, as it emphasized first localized state interventions and then private, property-led forms of development.<sup>56</sup> As a result of these changing circumstances within the profession and in the broader political and social context, the professional planners were progressively dislodged from their central place as creative agents responsible for shaping Britain's cities.

From the perspective of someone looking at the city planning folders in official archives like the Newcastle local studies room or the Liverpool Record Office, it appears that the creative energy put into designing urban Britain flared to life in the 1960s and then quickly burned out over the following decades. But as in physics, that energy was transformed rather than destroyed. As large-scale modernist urban plans petered out by the middle of the 1970s, people were

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<sup>55</sup> Nigel Taylor, "Anglo-American Town Planning Theory Since 1945: Three Significant Developments but No Paradigm Shifts," *Planning Perspectives* 14 (1999): 327-45, at 332.

<sup>56</sup> Otto Saumarez Smith, "The Inner City Crisis"; Nicholas Deakin and John Edwards, *The Enterprise Culture and the Inner City* (London: Routledge, 1993).

settling into those new towns, neighborhoods, and homes. In doing so, they overlaid the original designs with plans of their own—physical alterations to homes and public spaces, unforeseen uses of buildings and walkways, and new forms of meaning mapped onto modernist space. Traces of this second layer in Britain’s urban modernist palimpsest can be found in archives—through memoirs, community newspapers, and the records of community organizations. I have made use of these whenever possible to recover the experiences, plans, and ambitions of the pioneer settlers in modernist Britain. In the final chapter, I have also turned to resources offered by what media scholars term “Web 2.0”—the profusion of user-generated online content over the past fifteen years.<sup>57</sup> Through personal blogs, Facebook groups, or forums like SkycraperCity and Pathetic Motorways, the legacy of Britain’s experiment with modernism is still being fiercely debated and gradually reevaluated.

Placing modernist planning within this broad cultural web illuminates how Britain’s postwar built environment contributed to changing cultural ideas of community, friendship, and selfhood. As recent scholarship has demonstrated, urban space was an active agent of cultural change in postwar Britain.<sup>58</sup> A wide-angle view of planning allows us to see how the new modernist spaces changed people, though not usually in the deterministic way that planners intended or their critics feared. What did it mean for people to feel “reborn” in a new council house? The answer depends, of course, on the tenant’s age, race, gender, class, and family circumstances. For many people, the feeling of renewal or rebirth came through strongest in social relationships—in new friendships that were cemented in the communal courtyards and

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<sup>57</sup> For a cultural history of Web 2.0, see Alice Marwick, *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 21-71.

<sup>58</sup> For example, Matthew Hollow has explored how British council housing propelled affluence and consumption in the 1950s, while Sam Wetherell has shown how experiments in urban policy drove Thatcherite experiments with deregulation and free market capitalism. Matthew Hollow, Matthew Hollow, “The Age of Affluence Revisited: Council Estates and Consumer Society in Britain, 1950-1970,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 16, 1 (2014): 279-296; and Sam Wetherell, “Freedom Planned: Enterprise Zones and Urban Non-Planning in Postwar Britain,” *Twentieth Century British History* 27, no. 2 (June 2016): 266-289.

high-level walkways of modernist estates like Tyneside's Killingworth Towers, or in looking out for each others' children as they played on shared play areas spread throughout Runcorn's Southgate estate. The ubiquity of peoples' memories of community belonging on these two notorious failures of estates (both were demolished within fifteen years of their completion) challenges the political truism that such estates bred isolation and anomie.

In a less tangible way, many former tenants recalled life in their council home as a personal transformation. For teenagers growing up in Runcorn New Town, Southgate's edgy modernist design gave it a reputation of risk and experimentation—a place to test the town's constraining limits. When one former resident confessed on Southgate's Facebook group to having “spent my teens on Southgate! (Unbeknown to my parents!),” another member responded, “I think we all did.”<sup>59</sup> Beyond hosting all-night party crawls and serving as a recording studio for teenage rock bands (facilitated by the apartments' thick concrete walls), Southgate also offered a chance for self-discovery for some of its young adult residents. As one resident who moved into a flat on the estate as an eighteen-year-old put it, “My time on Southgate was life changing and character building.”<sup>60</sup> Sentiments like these are vague and avoid easy classification, but they suggest that Britain's modernist cityscape played an active role in advancing notions of individuality, particularly among young tenants. Individuality, responsibility, and self-reliance—it was these qualities that Margaret Thatcher claimed public housing lacked and private ownership would promote. That modernist public planning projects like Southgate dovetailed with these Thatcherite ideals does not mean that they led to the triumph of the New Right at the end of the 1970s. Instead, it suggests that residents mapped their

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<sup>59</sup> G. M. and M. R., comments on “The Development of Runcorn to a New Town,” *Facebook* community page, 10 January 2014.

<sup>60</sup> M. M., comment on “The Development of Runcorn to a New Town,” *Facebook* community page, 17 July 2018.

own meanings onto Britain's planned spaces, adapting them to emerging conceptions of selfhood.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> On the emerging conceptions of "popular individualism" in 1970s Britain, see Emily Robinson, et. al, "Telling Stories about Post-War Britain."

## Chapter One: “A New Vision of What We Want to be Ourselves:” Renewing the Victorian City

“As school children we were taken to exhibitions of city regeneration,” the music critic Paul du Noyer later recalled of his Liverpool childhood. “I remember how I gasped at the planners’ balsa-wood models: audacious schemes for a space age metropolis of towers and walkways in the sky. I was amazed by the architects’ impressions of futuristic piazzas, full of sleek, laughing people in car-coats. I honestly couldn’t wait.”<sup>1</sup> Du Noyer’s gasp of amazement, an involuntary response to a wooden city model, hints at an affective dimension to the “clean-sweep” redevelopment of postwar British cityscapes during the 1960s. This jars with the familiar criticism, running from Jane Jacobs to James C. Scott, that planning is inherently technocratic and rationalistic.<sup>2</sup> According to one account of Britain’s postwar reconstruction, the rationalizing trend reached its peak in the 1960s, by which point planning was “no more than totalitarian, authoritative, and statistical.”<sup>3</sup> There is little room for nuance in this interpretive straitjacket. But are calculation and excitement, hubris and anxiety, mutually exclusive? Might Britain’s modernist urban planners have been more ambivalent than their critics maintain?

This chapter examines the cultural apparatus undergirding urban renewal in the local context of 1960s Newcastle and Liverpool—the culture that Newcastle’s planner, Wilfred Burns, described as “the ‘atmosphere’ of planning.”<sup>4</sup> For Burns, this “atmosphere” referred to the lyrical dimension of urban design that inspired hope and excitement in its public audience, transcending

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Du Noyer, *Liverpool: Wondrous Place: Music from Cavern to Cream* (London: Virgin, 2002), 79

<sup>2</sup> See Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*; James C Scott, *Seeing Like a State*; and Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder*.

<sup>3</sup> Rob Bartram and Sarah Shobbrook, "Body Beautiful: Medical Aesthetics and the Reconstruction of Urban Britain in the 1940s," *Landscape Research* 26, no. 2 (2001): 119-135, at 132.

<sup>4</sup> Wilfred Burns, *Newcastle: A Study in Replanning at Newcastle upon Tyne* (London: L. Hill, 1967), vii.

the humdrum of surveys, graphs, and land use maps which comprised planning's prose. Exhibitions of town planning models, conceptual drawings, glossy brochures, television programs—such paraphernalia formed the basis on which planners hoped to build a popular consensus for the comprehensive redevelopment of their cities.

The deluge of material that planning departments spewed out during the heyday of urban renewal reveals a deep desire to overcome the anti-democratic implications of what Peter Mandler refers to as the “more *dirigiste* version of urban (and, now, also regional) planning” born in the early 1960s.<sup>5</sup> Could planning engage the public? Could it be exciting? Could it make the scalp tingle or send shivers down the spine? Modernist planners—together with their allies in politics and the building trades—in 1960s Newcastle and Liverpool believed so, and unleashed enormous public relations campaigns to convince their publics that comprehensive redevelopment along modernist lines was not only inevitable, but also desirable.

Jostling with this desire to build their plans on a broad public consensus, though, was a deeply ambivalent perspective on the idea of wedding democracy to planning. As Burns's successor put it in a 1970 presentation, “whilst we recognise the need to attain a high degree of public acceptance for and public acceptance of the reasons for change... we are extremely concerned at the delays these processes are inducing into already lengthy renewal procedures.”<sup>6</sup> I contend that one of the cardinal functions of the “atmosphere of planning” was to mend—or, at the very least, to suture—the fissure separating democratic consent and technocratic efficiency. To be sure, one side of this campaign was a rational appeal to the merits of redevelopment, backed up by the hefty data-laden appendices published with each plan; more pressing, though,

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Mandler, “New Towns for Old,” 220.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Galley and Derek Bradshaw, “Mobility and Environment in Newcastle upon Tyne,” 1970, 14. Paper given at the International Road Federation Sixth World Meeting, Montreal, Canada, October 1970. Held in Newcastle Local Studies Room, L352.7, 558430A.

was the winning of converts to planned urban futures by way of emotional channels. It is a commonplace that architects and planners expected that their modernist spaces would make people feel certain ways.<sup>7</sup> But in another sense, people were expected to have certain feelings about the plans themselves—creating an atmosphere of excitement around the future city to win public support was as important as creating affectively transformative cityscapes.

I also attempt to excavate the culture of modernist planning and its public outreach at the zenith of its influence, before its “atmosphere” was palpably punctured by the economic tribulations and public protests of the 1970s. As Frank Mort has noted, plans need to be analyzed not just for their overt content, but also for their latent resonances in a broader cultural web. “Policy directives,” writes Mort, “are not simply the product of rationally judged professional and political initiatives, launched into a clearly demarcated public arena; they frequently draw on a wide range of cultural visions, which are assembled out of an expansive repertoire of intellectual meaning systems about city life.”<sup>8</sup> Parsing out how modernist planning operated within a web of desires, hopes and ambitions for the future of Britain’s cities allows us to avoid a sterile narrative of modernist planning’s progression from “utopian” dreams to “realistic” disillusionment.<sup>9</sup>

### **The International Context: Modernist Urbanism from the Athens Charter to Urban Renewal**

The motivating idea behind Britain’s postwar urban renewal campaigns was the notion that the cityscape inherited from the nineteenth century was deeply flawed and was the source of a host of social ills. It was not a novel idea. By the mid 1920s, the conviction that cities needed

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<sup>7</sup> See Cor Wagenaar, ed., *Happy: Cities and Public Happiness in Post-War Europe* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Frank Mort, "Fantasies of Metropolitan Life: Planning London in the 1940s," *Journal of British Studies* 43, no. 1 (2004): 120-151, at 123.

<sup>9</sup> Two excellent recent studies that take the imagery and discourse of urban plans as their subject are Guy Ortolano, "Planning the Urban Future in 1960s Britain," *The Historical Journal* 54, no. 2 (June 2011): 477–507; and Otto Saumarez Smith, "Graeme Shankland."

to be rationalized had penetrated the thinking of the rising cohort of architects and urban planners across Europe and the USA. Just as the modernist architects Adolf Loos, Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (better known as Le Corbusier) insisted that buildings' forms be dictated by their function (and hence free from superfluous ornamentation), modernist urban planning was rooted on the principle of reordering cities along functionalist lines.<sup>10</sup> Nineteenth-century industrial cities like Manchester, London's East End, Pittsburgh, or Berlin were malignant, modernists contended, because they came together as a chaotic hodge-podge, with shabby workers' housing surrounding noisy, noxious factories. In the modernist city, by contrast, the functions of urban life—defined in 1933 at the fourth congress of the International Congress for Modern Architecture (CIAM) as dwelling, working, leisure, and circulation—would be kept firmly segregated. These principles formed the idea of the “functionalist city,” championed by the Swiss architect Le Corbusier in the Athens Charter, a manifesto for modernist urbanism he published following the congress. Rigid zoning controls would ensure that the functionalist city was clean, healthy, and easily managed, high-rise apartments would open up space for greenery in the city, and traffic would be channeled away from residential areas.<sup>11</sup>

While there was ample room for variation in how modernist principles were applied to individual cities, the functionalist framework was enormously influential among urban experts,

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<sup>10</sup> There was a significant overlap between architects and urban planners during the first two thirds of the twentieth century, with many architects gaining planning credentials and adopting the title “architect planner.” Until the mid-1960s, planners approached their job as architecture writ large; the planner's remit was to design the physical layout of the city according to aesthetic design principles. In the middle of the 1960s, there was a shift to approaching planning as the management of the city as a complex and changing system. See Nigel Taylor, “Anglo-American Town Planning Theory since 1945,” 330-31.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 10-11; Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 73-91; and John R. Gold, *The Experience of Modernism: Modern Architects and the Future City, 1928-53* (London: E & FN Spon, 1997).

and served as the paradigm for the reconstruction of European cities following World War II.<sup>12</sup> The destruction wrought by the war created an opening for architects and planners keen to test their theories on a relatively clean slate, and modernists often gained leading places in reconstruction efforts. As Brigitte Le Normand contends, the modernist emphasis on transparency, clean lines, and functionalism fit well with the desire to clear away the corruption of the past and start anew. Also, modernism's avowed political neutrality made it "available to any state that fulfilled its requirement of a strong central authority and shared its vision of modernity."<sup>13</sup> Bombed cities like Berlin, Rotterdam, Le Havre, Coventry, and Plymouth are the paradigmatic examples of the application of postwar urban modernism, but modernism's appeal reached beyond these cases to cities that emerged from the war largely unscathed.<sup>14</sup>

"Modernism," writes Rosemary Wakeman in her study of postwar Toulouse, "became the established art of the city within the capitalist, state-managed economy.... As urban planning, modernism was the *leitmotif* for experiments in a mass-produced futuristic built environment and for regulating and harmonizing the material basis of urban existence."<sup>15</sup>

But it took more than an aesthetic allure for the principles of the Athens Charter to be put into practice. A conjunction of political will, aesthetic taste, and economic support in the 1950s and 1960s provided the necessary alchemy to convert ideals to concrete policies. In his study of urban renewal's transatlantic history, Christopher Klemek describes four "pillars" on which urban renewal was based. Beginning in the USA, these "interlocking foundations" soon spread throughout North America and Western Europe: modernism's shift from an outsider movement

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<sup>12</sup> See Jeffrey M. Diefendorf, *Rebuilding Europe's Bombed Cities* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1990); Junichi Hasegawa, *Replanning the Blitzed City Centre: A Comparative Study of Bristol, Coventry, and Southampton, 1941-1950* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> Brigitte Le Normand, *Designing Tito's Capital: Urban Planning, Modernism, and Socialism* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), xvii.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Simon Gunn, "The Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism."

<sup>15</sup> Rosemary Wakeman, *Modernizing the Provincial City: Toulouse, 1945-1975* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

to an established public taste; the emergence of professional urbanists trained and credentialed as experts on city management; central government commitment to planning and intervening in urban affairs; and the rise of local political elites determined to enact ambitious redevelopment schemes. By the middle of the 1960s, Klemek argues, these circumstances had penetrated Europe so thoroughly that urban renewal appeared to be an “impregnable edifice on the political landscape.” Urban renewal, in this view, was driven by technocratic elites who strengthened their power by stimulating a demand for their own expertise.<sup>16</sup>

Klemek’s account provides a compelling explanation for modernist urbanism’s meteoric rise across much of Europe and the USA following World War II. Urban renewal was an uneven process, though, varying in scope and inflection according to the national and regional context. British planners imported the term—and many of the techniques—of urban renewal from the USA, but their work was shaped by the context of Britain’s extensive planning legislation that was established following the war, and by a national tradition of modern urban planning that had grown up separately from the more radical CIAM internationalism. Added to these national peculiarities were regional differences that shaped the way urban renewal plans were put into practice, as well as how the local public received them. London has naturally attracted the most attention from urban historians; the London County Council’s (LCC) architecture department was the training ground for the country’s new cohort of urbanists following the war.<sup>17</sup> Together with blitzed cities like Coventry and Plymouth, the capital was the incubator for putting modernist principles of housing and slum clearance into practice.

In the 1960s, though, the focal point of urban renewal shifted from the prosperous south to the cities of Britain’s increasingly tattered northern industrial heartland—places like

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<sup>16</sup> Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal*, 19-20.

<sup>17</sup> John R Gold, *The Practice of Modernism: Modern Architects and Urban Transformation, 1954-1972* (London; New York: Routledge, 2007), 44-47.

Liverpool, Sheffield, and Newcastle. Here, modernist redevelopment incited a response that was both more intense and more ambivalent than it aroused in the south. Renewal offered a tangible means to escape from industrial decline and regional isolation; at the same time, it threatened the Victorian townscape that formed the heart of these cities. To understand why urban renewal aroused the mixture of excitement and antipathy that it did, we need to examine the peculiarities of how modernist redevelopment played out at the national and local level.

### **The Foundations of the Planning System in Postwar Britain**

World War II came as a boon for those bent on refashioning Britain's centuries' old urban landscape according to modernist principles. The need for intensified government coordination of economic and industrial affairs during the war served to galvanize the advocates of central planning, and the physical devastation wrought by German air raids put the needs of urban areas into sharp relief. According to the planning historian Gordon Cherry, the extent of war damage "encouraged a social psychology of deep purpose and determination to a new future. Rebuilding meant planning."<sup>18</sup> Three wartime reports—Barlow (1940), Scott (1942), and Uthwatt (1942)—dealing with population dispersion, the protection of rural areas, and the governmental control over the purchase and redevelopment of property, laid the foundation for the expansion of planners' powers after the fighting stopped.<sup>19</sup> Town planners were able to ride the swell of the broader enthusiasm for social and economic planning entailed in the establishment of the welfare state and the development of structure plans became mandatory for each county authority in the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act.<sup>20</sup> As Peter Mandler observes, however, this initial burst of welfare state planning veered much more towards the familiar and inherited forms of the British townscape than it did futuristic experimentation. Even the boldest

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<sup>18</sup> Gordon Cherry, *Town Planning in Britain since 1900*, 92.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Ward, *Planning and Urban Change* (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 79-84.

<sup>20</sup> Gordon Cherry, *Town Planning in Britain since 1900*, 92.

designs, as at Coventry and the new towns, were marked by a “soft modernism” built to human scale using vernacular materials.<sup>21</sup> “Far too few [development] plans contain any positive proposals that can excite interest, confessed the planner Thomas Sharp in 1957, “they are presented in documents of such insupportable dreariness... specially designed to produce the maximum amount of bewilderment and boredom.”<sup>22</sup> The few “exciting” designs that were mooted in the 1940s and 1950s, such as the Modern Architectural Research (MARS) Group’s 1942 plan for London, were drawn up by planners and architects working outside of the state planning machinery.

The years following the war witnessed a progressive diminution of radical plans for British cities, as the initial planning enthusiasm waned. In the half-decade immediately following the war, austerity conditions circumscribed local authorities’ ability to invest in massive rebuilding projects. A Conservative victory in the national election of 1951 provided an ideological restraint, as the central government abolished the planning ministry and relaxed state development controls in favor of private developers. With profit as the main guiding motive, developers were attracted to the possibilities of London and boom cities such as Birmingham, while northern industrial cities were left waiting for commercial developers.<sup>23</sup> There was also a feeling among planners that their star had fallen among popular opinion as well. As Thomas Sharp commented in a 1957 article for the *Journal of the Town Planning Institute*, planning had become “just a colossal bore” for most of the population, while for others it was “something to dislike with an active hostility.... We used to be so respected—even if it was with the rather indulgent respect that idealists and do-gooders are generally given! And now we are not

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<sup>21</sup> Peter Mandler, “New Towns for Old: The Fate of the Town Centre,” in Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters, eds., *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945-1964* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1999), 214.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Ward, *Planning and Urban Change*, 116.

<sup>23</sup> Alison Ravetz, *The Government of Space*, 72-73.

respected.”<sup>24</sup> This sense of having been shunted aside by the tide of history goes some way to explain the enthusiasm with which urban planners embraced the idea of planning-led urban renewal in the early 1960s.

There was also a practical political reason for the lack of government attention to city centers. Modern housing, rather than prestigious city-center redevelopment, promised the largest political dividends, and it was in this direction that local officials of both parties focused their energies—often in the form of large housing estates on the urban fringes.<sup>25</sup> Part of the appeal that propelled the Conservatives to victory in 1951 was their promise to lift the remaining austerity measures put in place by Labour, and also to build 300,000 new houses per year.<sup>26</sup> The housing drive also, as Alison Ravetz notes, provided a circuitous way for local authorities to circumvent the increasingly prohibitive cost of public building projects. Massive slum clearance projects, in which whole blocks of privately owned houses could be condemned as “unfit” and “obsolete,” offered a chance for city governments to cheaply buy up land.<sup>27</sup> It was through such methods that the “twilight fringes” of working class housing at the edge of industrial cities like Liverpool and Newcastle were earmarked for demolition, to be replaced by urban motorways and shopping precincts.

The state of inertia in the centers of Britain’s depressed industrial cities began to shift towards the end of the 1950s, as developers began to turn their attentions from the capital to new investment opportunities further afield. In Liverpool, for example, the first comprehensive plans

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Gordon Cherry, *The Evolution of British Town Planning: A History of Town Planning in the United Kingdom during the 20th Century and of the Royal Town Planning Institute, 1914-74* (New York: Wiley, 1974), 160.

<sup>25</sup> See Peter Weiler, "The Rise and Fall of the Conservatives' 'Grand Design for Housing,' 1951–64," *Contemporary British History* 14, no. 1 (2000): 122–150.

<sup>26</sup> Ravetz, *The Government of Space*, 75. On the Conservatives' political use of austerity's unpopularity, see Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls, and Consumption, 1939-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> Ravetz, *The Government of Space*, 75. Owners of “unfit” houses only had to be compensated for the price of the land, not the house, since it was judged to have no value as a habitation.

for redevelopment weren't advanced through the town planning committee, but by two London-based property developers: Ravenseft Properties, which proposed to redevelop the city's historic retail market; and Charles Clore, a London financier who proposed a sweeping plan to raze and rebuild an entire district, replacing "outworn" buildings with a new civic center, shops, high-rise apartments, car parks, and a hotel.<sup>28</sup> The proposals, which came in quick succession in fall 1960 and spring 1961, provoked a sense of urgency among Liverpool's politicians. While the city's two main newspapers ran a series of articles prophesying the dire costs of delay or obstruction on the council's part (arguing that these proposals could be the only such that the city would see, and that Liverpool had to "develop or die"), London's recent property boom<sup>29</sup> provided several cautionary examples of the aesthetic toll unrestrained construction could take on the townscape.<sup>30</sup>

By this time, planning's fortunes began to rise again. Across the political spectrum, there was an emerging consensus that a *laissez faire* approach to Britain's urban fabric could have disastrous consequences. While Conservative Prime Minister Harold MacMillan had boasted in 1957 of the unprecedented economic prosperity available to all classes under Conservative rule, assuring Britons that "most of our people have never had it so good," unchecked affluence appeared to have potentially damaging effects as well. Sociologists worried over the breakdown of tight-knit (typically working-class) communities under the pressure of slum clearance and

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<sup>28</sup> "Clore Has a Plan for Liverpool—To Cost Millions," *Liverpool Daily Post*, 25 April 1961. Ravenseft was the first property development firm to capitalize on the rebuilding of provincial commercial properties after the war, and had come to dominate the provincial market by the 1950s.

<sup>29</sup> Oliver Marriott, *The Property Boom* (London: H. Hamilton, 1967), 58-65.

<sup>30</sup> Ravetz, *The Government of Space*, 81-82; Peter Mandler, "New Towns for Old," 219; Oliver Marriott, *The Property Boom*. The *Liverpool Daily Post*'s planning specialist, George Eglin, churned out a series of editorials in the late fifties and early sixties, with titles like "Liverpool Needs a Comprehensive Plan for the City's Centre" and "Liverpool Beware: A City Must Develop or Die." See *Liverpool Daily Post*, 4 May 1961 and 14 March 1960.

television ownership, yet affluence's most visible manifestation was the private car.<sup>31</sup> As Otto Saumarez Smith argues, there was a broad political consensus that social change needed to be directed by experts; following the 1959 election the Conservative government commissioned a raft of reports dealing with how to most efficiently manage Britain's affluent society—from housing (the Parker Morris Committee, 1961) to secondary education (Crowther report, 1959).<sup>32</sup> Most important for those concerned with shaping British cities, though, was *Traffic in Towns*, the Buchanan Report of 1963. Colin Buchanan, an urban planner commissioned by the Ministry of Transportation to lead an inquiry into urban traffic, contended that the boom in car ownership meant that British cities would soon be paralyzed by their outdated road systems; only efficient and concerted planning could avert an urban catastrophe.<sup>33</sup> Private affluence and public interest increasingly seemed to be working at cross-purposes.

By the early 1960s, planners felt increasingly confident that they had a mandate to tailor Britain's urban fabric to meet the demands of the space age. After thirteen years of Conservative rule during which state-led urban planning was rolled back in favor of piecemeal projects by private developers, Harold Wilson's Labour Party entered office with a commitment to modernizing the welfare state through a union of science and the state. "In all our plans for the future," Wilson pronounced, "we are re-stating our Socialism in terms of the scientific revolution.... The Britain that is going to be forged in the white heat of this revolution will be no

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<sup>31</sup> See Robert Colls, "When We Lived in Communities," in David A. Reeder, Robert Colls, and Richard Rodger, eds., *Cities of Ideas: Civil Society and Urban Governance in Britain, 1800-2000: Essays in Honour of David Reeder* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004); Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*; Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London*; John Goldthorpe, *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968). For a revisionist account of these vanishing communities, see Joanna Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: Gender, Class, and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> Otto Saumarez Smith, "Central Government and Town-Centre Redevelopment in Britain."

<sup>33</sup> See Simon Gunn, "The Buchanan Report, Environment and the Problem of Traffic in 1960s Britain," *Twentieth Century British History* 22, no. 4 (2011): 521–542.

place for restrictive practices or for outdated methods on either side of industry.”<sup>34</sup> While Wilson made no direct references to how this coming “scientific revolution” would affect urban planning, the rejection of “outdated methods” jibed with modernist planners’ paeans to replacing “outworn” city centers and Victorian slums with high-speed urban motorways and prefabricated high-rise apartment blocks.<sup>35</sup> As Peter Mandler writes, the prevailing zeitgeist of the early sixties in Britain was decidedly unsentimental regarding historic industrial cities, which “were to be made ‘livable’ not by preserving the familiar (which was deemed grey and boring) but by projecting a vision of modern vitality.”<sup>36</sup> Townscapes built in the age of the horse and wagon, and adapted for the steam-powered Victorians, served as an inconvenient anachronism for the space age society of the 1960s. As the architect-planner Lionel Esher wrote in the *Times* in 1960, “smart typists and skilled young workers will not put up with Victorian by-law streets much longer.” The pressures for a radical infrastructural overhaul had reached a point of crisis, Esher continued, and the resultant tower blocks and motorways “will be visually disastrous if their siting and relationships are determined by utility and economics alone.” The solution, he concluded, was to channel more power to the professionally trained architect and planner, who would provide aesthetic discipline needed to channel the explosive pressures for urban growth.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Harold Wilson, *Purpose in Politics: Selected Speeches by Rt. Hon. Harold Wilson* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1964), 27.

<sup>35</sup> See Elaine Harwood, “White Light/White Heat”; Alan Powers, *Britain*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2007); Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London: Little, Brown, 2006). For a nuanced picture stressing the historically sensitive aspects of modernist planning, see Otto Saumarez Smith, “Graeme Shankland: A Sixties Architect-Planner and the Political Culture of the British Left,” *Architectural History* 57 (2014): 393–422.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Mandler, “New Towns for Old: The Fate of the Town Centre,” 221.

<sup>37</sup> Lionel Esher, “New Cities for Old,” *Times* (London), 14 June 1960, 13.

Esher's plug for more power to be given his profession reflected both self-interest and a wider public enthusiasm for renewing Britain's urban fabric.<sup>38</sup>

In this political climate, the necessity of concerted planning commanded a broad consensus. As Mandler notes, "politicians, developers and planners alike recognized that economic growth could no longer be managed by a piecemeal, private-sector approach." Massive traffic schemes and the expansion of office and shopping space demanded the coordinated efforts of planners' expertise and developers' capital—a marriage Mandler calls a "Faustian bargain" for planners eager to finally play a decisive role in urban design.<sup>39</sup> As a 1962 government study of urban redevelopment phrased it, "Private initiative must be harnessed to planned redevelopment, not allowed to dictate it."<sup>40</sup> It was a bargain that many planners were more than eager to accept, though. For ambitious planners of the generation that came of age during the war years, the ensuing two decades had often been marked as much by frustration as by hope. Despite being a hive of creativity—"it was easily the liveliest place in the UK, and to get in was quite difficult"—the LCC Architect's Department was an enormous organization in which it was hard to distinguish oneself, and opportunities for creative commissions in places like Coventry and the new towns were rare.<sup>41</sup> By the middle of the 1950s, junior architect-planners in the LCC like Graeme Shankland and Walter Bor were looking for a chance to gain creative freedom and leadership experience unattainable in the LCC—an ambition that both of them would see fulfilled in Liverpool in the early 1960s, Shankland by way of his appointment as the city's

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<sup>38</sup> For a sociological analysis of this broad yen for the new, see Christopher Booker, *The Neophiliacs: A Study of the Revolution in English Life in the Fifties and Sixties* (London: Collins, 1969). Peter Mandler also emphasizes the public support for urban modernism in the early 1960s. See Mandler, "New Towns for Old," 222-25.

<sup>39</sup> Mandler, "New Towns for Old," 220.

<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Planning Bulletin No. 1, Town Centres; Approach to Renewal* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1962), 1.

<sup>41</sup> The quote is from an interview between George Bowie and Miles Glendinning, 3 November 1987, quoted in Gold, *The Practice of Modernism*, 45. In 1956, the LCC Architect's Department employed 3,000 people, including 750 professional architects. See Gold, *The Practice of Modernism*, 44.

private architectural consultant and Bor as its chief planning officer.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the rise of a Labour council committed to modernization and government-led growth in Newcastle opened an opportunity for Wilfred Burns, a young planner who had spent the 1950s working under the established architect-planners Donald Gibson and Arthur Ling in the reconstruction of Coventry. When Newcastle established an independent City Planning Department, and made it the most powerful branch of the urban government, Burns used his appointment to apply his ideas on comprehensive urban renewal.<sup>43</sup>

But experts were not the sole engines driving urban renewal. As the next chapter argues, the early reception of the modernist redevelopment plans in Liverpool and Newcastle suggests that the idea of remaking the city had a broad range of support among the cities' residents, for a wide array of reasons.

### **Space Age Cities: Urban Renewal in Newcastle and Liverpool**

Newcastle residents who picked up the local newspaper on the way home from work on the evening of April 12, 1961, could be forgiven for thinking Yuri Gagarin's space flight somewhat small beer. The same day that the Russian cosmonaut orbited the earth to inaugurate the Space Age, people could read of a terrestrial space age much closer to home. "Space for EVERYONE in the Wonderful New Newcastle," ran the banner line of the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, above a cross-section of a future city precinct. The image showed a multi-level city, with pedestrian bridges spanning a sunken motorway to link up with a massive shopping structure boasting a tall parking garage and crowned with skyscrapers. The sub-heading mused

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<sup>42</sup> Interview between Walter Bor and Louise Brodie, 20 May, 1997. See also Gold, *The Practice of Modernism*, 47.

<sup>43</sup> Burns had just published a study of urban shopping centers the year before he came to Newcastle, and was nearing completion on an international study of urban renewal, which vigorously advocated state-led urban modernization projects. See Wilfred Burns, *British Shopping Centres: New Trends in Layout and Distribution* (London: L. Hill, 1959); Wilfred Burns, *New Towns for Old*.

over the possibility of rooftop helicopter pads, before describing the wonders of a car-free shopping precinct with “trees, flower bowls, sculpture, show cases, and fountains.”<sup>44</sup> Over the next few days, a media blitz continued to publicize the plan, as Newcastle’s two major newspapers were awash with articles, editorials, and letters discussing the future city.

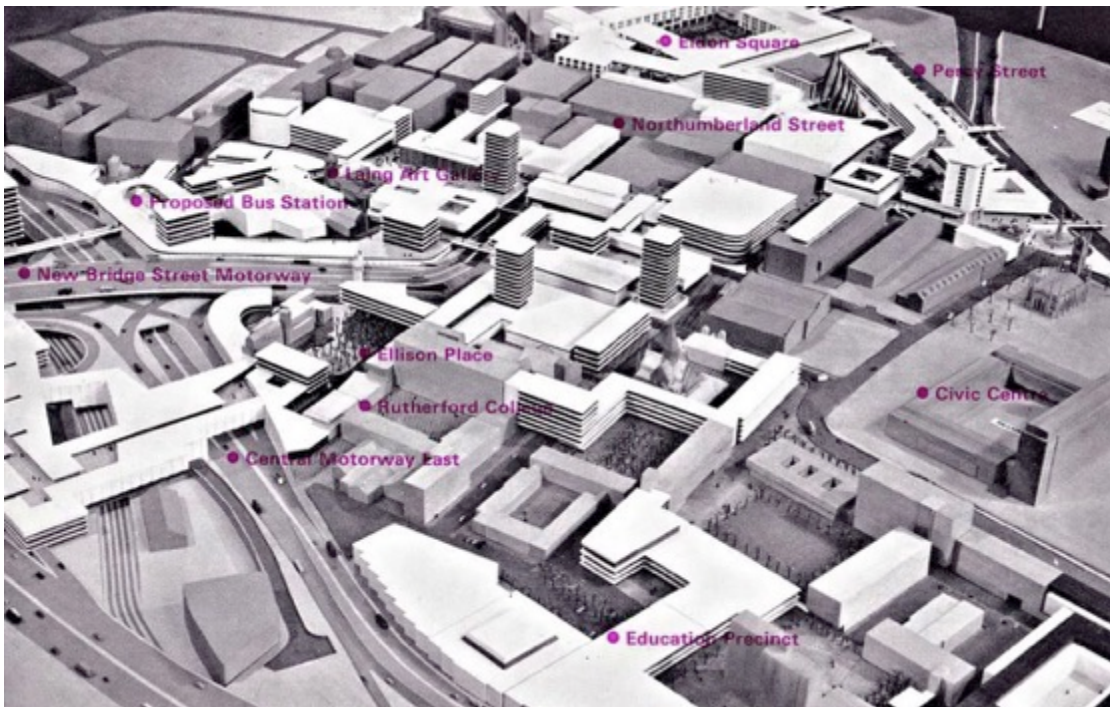
The newly released plans were the first fruits of a department that had come into being four months earlier, in November 1960. Newcastle’s City Planning Department, the first independent planning department in Britain, was set up under the direction of Wilfred Burns, a young planner and civil engineer who had recently taken part in the planning and rebuilding of bombed out shell of Coventry—the paradigmatic British redevelopment project of the early postwar period. During the 1950s, Coventry had been a test case for the coordinated reconstruction of an entire city center according to the modernist principles of the segregation of car and foot traffic, with a ring road circling the city and a new multi-level pedestrianized shopping center as the plan’s focal point.<sup>45</sup> T. Dan Smith, the charismatic chair of the City Planning Committee, had met Burns on an inspection tour of the planning work at Coventry. The two reconnected in 1960, when Smith hired a private plane and jetted around the country interviewing candidates to serve as Newcastle’s first Chief Planning Officer. After settling on Burns as the ideal candidate, Smith pushed his selection through the Newcastle Council.<sup>46</sup> Burns’s arrival in Newcastle signaled an embrace of the modernist principles displayed at Coventry, and a break with the cautious approach to planning that had dominated most British provincial cities since the end of the war.

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<sup>44</sup> *Evening Chronicle* (Newcastle), 12 April 1961, 8.

<sup>45</sup> John Holliday, “British City Centre Planning,” in John Holliday, ed., *City Centre Redevelopment: A Study of British City Centre Planning and Case Studies of Five English City Centres* (New York: Wiley, 1974), 17.

<sup>46</sup> Chris Foote Wood, *T. Dan Smith: "Voice of the North," Downfall of a Visionary* (Durham, UK: Northern Writers, 2010), 86.



Top: An aerial view of Newcastle, looking north from the river Tyne. The purple area was intended to be completely redeveloped, as illustrated in the model below.  
 Bottom: A model of Burns's plan for central Newcastle. The perspective looks westward from the newly built civic center (right) towards the planned Eldon Square shopping mall. The eastern arm of the planned motorway is at left. The white buildings indicate planned construction. Both photos are from Newcastle East Central Plan, a public informational booklet published by the Planning Department.

Newcastle had missed the nineteenth-century population explosion that had shaped Britain's western shipbuilding ports like Glasgow and Liverpool, and had escaped the Luftwaffe bombers. As a result, the city's basic structure in 1960 was essentially the same as it had been a hundred years earlier, without the challenge of slums and damaged property afflicting other large British cities.<sup>47</sup> Established as a fortified settlement on the Tyne's north bank at the river's earliest ford, the medieval town had clustered around the eponymous castle and cathedral. Following its early growth, the chief period of expansion was in the late Georgian and early Victorian period, when Richard Grainger, a local property developer, partnered with the architect John Dobson to construct a unified commercial core. Radiating northward and away from the medieval settlement on the Tyne, Grainger's Newcastle comprises three grand avenues flanked by handsome neoclassical stone buildings. The architectural critic Nikolaus Pevsner dubbed the gracefully curving Grey Street "one of the best streets in England," and Ian Nairn described walking around the area as "an ennobling experience.... The precise quality is grandeur without pomposity: everything serious but not lugubrious, everything formal and firmly urbane but not oppressive."<sup>48</sup>

Often compared with Edinburgh's New Town and Nash's Regent Street, Newcastle's townscape was a far remove from the brash Victorian Gothic Revival centers that graced much of England's industrial north. With the exception of railroad lines and the impressive arch of the Tyne Bridge, much of the city remained as Grainger had left it at the end of his work in 1840. For mid-twentieth-century commentators, the explosion of private cars was the biggest problem facing the city, threatening to overwhelm its classical dignity. With its swarms of traffic and parked cars, wrote one observer, "Newcastle looks like an old dowager stuck on a mad, raucous

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<sup>47</sup> Lionel Esher, *A Broken Wave*, 176.

<sup>48</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner quoted in John Pendlebury, "Alas Smith and Burns?" 118; Ian Nairn, *Britain's Changing Towns*. (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1967), 21.

fairground roundabout, losing her dignity fast, and waiting for a latter-day Grainger or Dobson to rescue her.”<sup>49</sup>

When the city council announced their decision to establish a powerful planning department with a remit to make Newcastle the “Brasilia of the North,” they were thus building on a precedent of nineteenth-century planning. Burns’s work was to be a modernist complement to Grainger’s neoclassical quarter. Whereas Grainger’s was a speculative development powered by private investments, modernist Newcastle would be driven by a strong local authority working as a proxy for the public. Brasilia would seem to offer a more fitting model to a new town than to a historically rich city, but that was beside the point for modernizing civic boosters like T. Dan Smith. The newly built Brazilian capital was a word to conjure with—built along CIAM principles by a socialist architect, Brasilia served as a symbol for the potential of built space to remake society in its image.<sup>50</sup> It was also a demonstration of the productive potential of modernist building techniques mixed with political will; through the partnership of Brazil’s modernizing president Juscelino Kubitschek and the architect Oscar Niemeyer (one of Brazil’s leading architects and an acolyte of Le Corbusier), the Brazilian capital was inaugurated just four after construction began.<sup>51</sup> “This Brasilia business isn’t just talk, you know,” boasted the newly appointed Principle City Officer. “The same ‘dreams to concrete’ vision is here.... Look there—those slots half-way up the sides of those new buildings. They’ll be doorways. The whole place

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<sup>49</sup> David Bean, “Bringing Plans to Newcastle,” *Time & Tide* 43 no. 8 (Feb. 1962): 22.

<sup>50</sup> Brazil’s model of state-directed developmentalism during Juscelino Kubitschek’s presidency would also have been attractive for Smith, who envisioned Newcastle as the capital of a northeast region regenerated by state investment in industry and the arts. See James Holston, *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasilia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

<sup>51</sup> Florian Urban, *Tower and Slab: Histories of Global Mass Housing* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2012), 79-80.

will be two-decker like Buchanan envisaged for the twenty-first century: only we'll have it by the 1980s.”<sup>52</sup>

T. Dan Smith, the son of a miner, an autodidact and a former Trotskyist, adopted “Brasilia of the North,” “British Brasilia,” and—bizarrely, given the relative ages of Newcastle and Brasilia—“New Brasilia” as slogans for his modernizing campaign. From his first job painting houses he had developed a deep fascination with architecture (and he claimed to have drawn up the first outline for the new city center himself).<sup>53</sup> He joined local politics with the goal of changing the city, “working with enlightened architects to create a really new community here.”<sup>54</sup> Experts fascinated him, and he was convinced that Newcastle needed to be designed by the best minds in Europe. Responding to criticism over the mounting costs, he remarked, “I appoint these men because the sort of city I want can’t be made by the sort of person I am.”<sup>55</sup> As one bemused journalist recalled, Smith had an immensely charming and dynamic personality, “but when you actually reviewed the interview recording, you realized there was not much there—it was hard to get more than two minutes out of it.”<sup>56</sup> His speeches and interviews played out in grand monologues, punctuated by almost offhand references to Brasilia, Milan, Venice, Florence, Athens, and Rome. These allusions to great capitals and city-states reflect Smith’s desire to link architecture with political power, a genuine appreciation for classical

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<sup>52</sup> John Pilger, “The Boom Cities: Newcastle & Co. Ltd.,” *Daily Mirror*, 17 April 1967, 13. The official, Frank Harris, had just been hired away from Ford to serve as the city’s “general manager.”

<sup>53</sup> “T. Dan Smith,” *Pacemakers* 5, Central Office of Information, September 1969. Film held at British Film Institute Archive, MI 1461/5. Smith’s planning pretensions invite comparisons (probably unwelcome for the former communist) with another famous partnership—Napoleon III and Georges Haussmann, who remade much of Paris during the 1850s and 1860s.

<sup>54</sup> “T. Dan Smith: The Organizer,” *Lifestory*, BBC Radio, 10 July 1997. Recording held in British Library, H9001/3.

<sup>55</sup> “T. Dan Smith,” *Pacemakers*. Two of Britain’s foremost architects, Basil Spence and Robert Matthew, designed high-profile buildings, and Arne Jacobsen designed a hotel that was never built. “I actually approached Corbusier,” Smith boasted, “and if he hadn’t been too old I’m quite certain he’d have been working here as well.”

<sup>56</sup> “T. Dan Smith: The Organizer.” Another acquaintance said “following [Smith’s] train of thought was like shaking hands with an octopus.” Graeme Rigby, “T. Dan Smith: North East Free Thinkers,” BBC Radio 3, 30 August 2010. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00nhmcf>.



“Venice of the North”: The northern portion of Newcastle's planned urban motorway system, which T. Dan Smith likened to Venice's canals. The western and eastern wings were to form a girdle around the city center, cutting it off from the residential fringes. Only the eastern portion was built. Newcastle Libraries.

civilization inherited from his parents, and some offbeat logical gymnastics, such as the equation of Venice’s canals with Newcastle’s motorways.<sup>57</sup> One friend recalled a typical conversation with him:

“Have you been to Venice, John?” “Yeah, I’ve been to Venice once.” “Well it’s got this tight ring of canals, doesn’t it?” “Yeah, it’s got canals.” “Well, that’s my Inner Motorway East.” I began to laugh, and then realized halfway through my laughter that he was totally serious.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Smith’s obsession with Brasilia is atypical, but his appreciation of classical art and culture reflects Jonathan Rose’s observations on working-class cultural ideals. Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>58</sup> “T. Dan Smith: The Organizer.”

Despite his idiosyncrasies, Smith's political star was on the rise in the early 1960s, and he intended to lift Newcastle's fortunes at the same time. Named "Man of the Year" by the *Architect's Journal* in 1961, "Planner of the Year" by the *Architectural Review* in 1962, and invited to take part in Colin Buchanan's investigation into urban traffic, he hoped to combine his political clout with Burns's professional expertise to make "the Newcastle of tomorrow part of the European scene."<sup>59</sup>

Wilfred Burns made an ideal partner, matching Smith in his zeal for urban modernization. He made no bones about his new department's ambitions in his first published report as Newcastle's Chief Planning Officer: the traffic boom (the extent of which he expected might triple in the near future) and the number of old buildings meant that the impending redevelopment would be "Central Area revolution rather than evolution."<sup>60</sup> Although Newcastle lacked the extensive bomb damage usually necessary for drastic urban change, Burns argued that the age of the city center justified a wholesale redevelopment campaign to build "a virtually new centre within a short period."<sup>61</sup> Future traffic projections and the motorways that would be needed to meet them were the pivots around which the entire plan turned. As Alison Ravetz notes, "much of the essence of town planning in the sixties was planning for traffic," and Newcastle was at the forefront of this trend, anticipating by two years the recommendations of Colin Buchanan's state-sponsored inquiry into urban traffic.<sup>62</sup> Cities could no longer simply

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<sup>59</sup> Smith was already looking forward to the implications of Britain's entry into the European Community—still a decade away. "We must see that Newcastle takes its place as a truly regional capital but within a wider European scene alongside Rome, Florence, Paris, Stockholm, Oslo, Rotterdam and Venice, and this one must realise can be nearer to us in time tomorrow than was London 15 years ago." T. Dan Smith, "Comments on Provincialism," *Northern Architect* 4, May 1962, 63.

<sup>60</sup> Wilfred Burns, "Central Area Redevelopment Proposals: First Report of the City Planning Officer," 24 March 1961, p. 3. Unpublished document held in Newcastle Local Studies Room, L352.7.

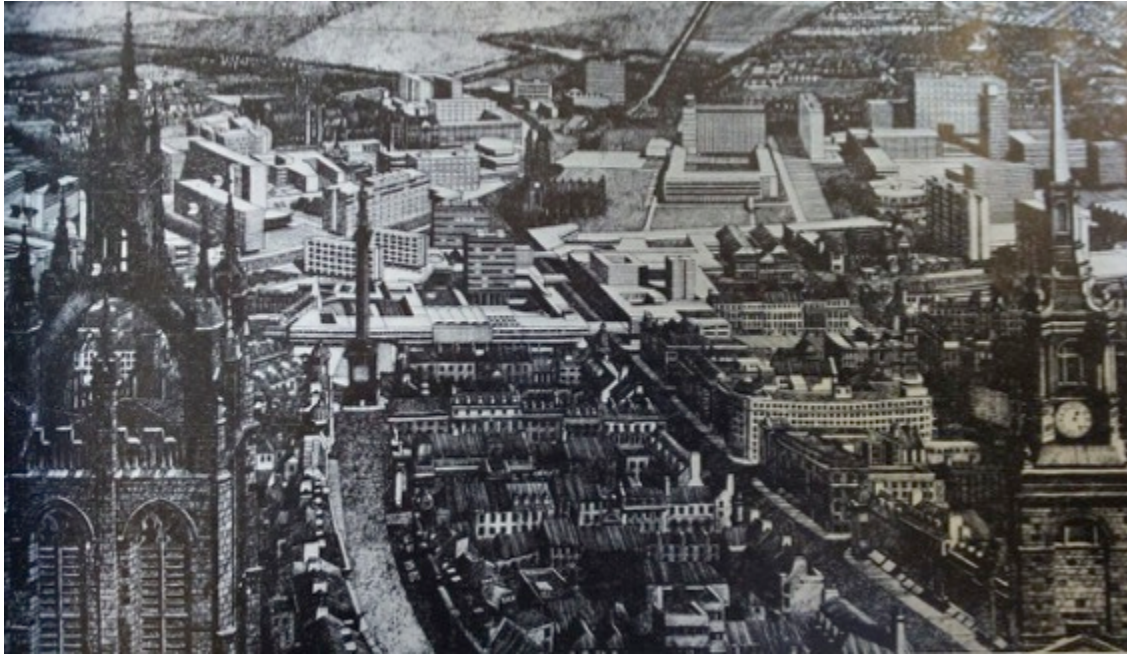
<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>62</sup> Ravetz, *The Government of Space*, 82.



[Wilfred Burns and T. Dan Smith posing with a model for Newcastle's planned redevelopment.](#)

spread out on a single plane, Burns contended, but must instead be stacked on several levels to allow free movement to both pedestrians and motorists—a concept that came to be known as “traffic architecture.” The bulk of the medieval town and Grainger addition would be preserved, and protected from superfluous traffic by a girdling motorway, but large areas of “outworn” housing and industrial buildings would make way for the new motorway system, elevated pedestrian plazas and walkways, a new polytechnical school, hotels, and towering office blocks.



A stylized drawing contrasting Newcastle's historical buildings with future additions from the Burns plan. The medieval cathedral and 17th-century All Saints Church dominate the foreground, while the perspective looks northward up the gentle curve of Grey Street toward the new Civic Centre and university precinct. Drawing by Gordon Cullen, in *Northern Architect* 3, March 1962.

While there were some objections regarding the fate of a few key buildings, these concerns were overwhelmingly drowned out in the initial approval for the plan.<sup>63</sup> Both parties in the Council supported the urban “revolution,” as did the city’s two major newspapers, the *Northern Architectural Association* (NAA), and the chamber of commerce.<sup>64</sup> How deep the planning enthusiasm actually reached among the general public is hard to determine. Both newspapers conducted interviews and reported an overwhelmingly favorable impression from respondents. A taxi driver called the plan “marvelous,” adding “anything that will get traffic moving is good.... I like the idea of multi-storey garages. They’ll keep parked cars off the

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<sup>63</sup> John Pendlebury, "Alas Smith and Burns?"

<sup>64</sup> “‘New City’ Plan Suits Newcastle Traders,” *Evening Chronicle* (Newcastle), 20 April 1961. After the plan’s publication, the journal for the NAA featured a bit of imaginative doggerel in which the narrator has a Dickensian encounter with the ghost of Thomas Grainger, the architect responsible for the city’s Victorian center. As man and ghost perambulate the city, Grainger is forced to admit that one of his most famous buildings, the Royal Arcade, was poorly placed and should be demolished to make way for a new road. He also discovers the marvels of Formica and jazz. “Arcadian Dream,” *Northern Architect* 1, November 1961, 15.



Bomb damage surrounding the Queen Victoria Monument, central Liverpool, 1944. Imperial War Museums, D5983. Public Domain.

streets.” For an engineer, the plan’s destructiveness was its main attraction: “It’s a grand scheme. Something really needs to be done. And we must be prepared to pay for it. Knock almost everything down, I say, and begin again.” A bus driver worried that the plans would never get off the page, while an off-license shop owner supported the plans but worried about the cost. A teacher praised it for attracting business, and a postman hailed it as “bold and modern and imaginative. It’s exciting for us all.”<sup>65</sup> In a letter to the *Evening Chronicle*, another woman celebrated the new blocks of flats and civic buildings already under construction, adding that the plans were “exciting and make the people of Newcastle feel that the City is taking its place as one of the more important in the country.”<sup>66</sup> While this is a small sample, filtered through the editorial vetting of two pro-growth, “establishment” newspapers, the impression given by these perspectives is of enthusiasm for the plan’s apparent break with the past. Rather than showing any concern for the historic city fabric, the most outspoken fear was that the plans wouldn’t be carried far enough.

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<sup>65</sup> “Enthusiasm High in Spite of Cost,” *The Journal* (Newcastle), 13 April 1961.

<sup>66</sup> “City Plans Exciting,” *Evening Chronicle* (Newcastle), 18 May 1961.

Newcastle had escaped war damage, but Liverpool had been less fortunate. The visible legacy of destruction left in the war's wake meant that the promise of dramatic changes was even more whole-heartedly embraced than Burns's plans for Newcastle. Because of its position as Britain's second most important port after London, and its siting as a window on the Atlantic, Liverpool was a special target for German bombers during the war.<sup>67</sup> A series of German bombing raids from August 1940 to June 1941 had caused extensive damage to the city center and the docks, and the rebuilding effort during the following two decades had been fitful. While some of the most important buildings were rebuilt behind their original facades, many bomb sites were cleared and replaced with open parking lots, giving the city a "honeycomb" appearance, as one observer complained.<sup>68</sup> The art critic John Willett commented that "no great city outside England, and few inside, have been so slow to set themselves straight after the war, and for a long while the effect on the citizens was, to say the least of it, disheartening. Decline breeds decline."<sup>69</sup> The *Times* offered a more vivid description: "For some 20 years, the centre of Liverpool has been like the belly of some mangy stuffed animal in a Victorian museum. Great bald patches caused by bombing serve as temporary car parks; beyond the centre the slums stretch away."<sup>70</sup> Added to the war damage was what one observer called the "cancer of 20,000 unfit dwellings in the centre of the city," with 33,000 housing applicants on the city's waiting list for housing—facing this situation, slums became the city's overriding concern.<sup>71</sup>

Bomb damage exacerbated an already dismal living situation for many Liverpudlians. When the sociologist Madeline Kerr undertook a study of a Liverpool slum, she described the

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<sup>67</sup> John Murden, 'City of Change and Challenge: Liverpool since 1945', in *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History*, ed. John Belchem (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), 393.

<sup>68</sup> "Vision on the Mersey," *Sunday Times* (London), 12 May 1963.

<sup>69</sup> John Willett, *Art in a City* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>70</sup> "Liverpool Tries to Catch Up 20 Years," *Times*, 6 April 1963, 9, quoted in Saumarez Smith, 'Graeme Shankland: A Sixties Architect-Planner and the Political Culture of the British Left'.

<sup>71</sup> See David Muchnick, *Urban Renewal in Liverpool*.

buildings as solidly built, but “derelict through lack of repair. There was much bomb damage in the area so here and there are gaps used by children as playgrounds.”<sup>72</sup> As a result, “the children are very prone to accidents. Their playgrounds are streets or bombed sites so that falling off walls, etc., is common.”<sup>73</sup> Inside many homes, several rooms were “out of use owing to damp, the ceiling having collapsed, and caused general disrepair. Few houses have electric light. Most have gas, though one or two still use oil lamps. Most, too, have only cold water taps.”<sup>74</sup>

Recognizing such slums as the city’s top priority (and a politically sensitive one), the city government had prioritized the construction of homes over all other types of building. In doing so, it was continuing Liverpool’s interwar emphasis on public housing projects. But while the earlier estates (which were inspired by the “walk-up flats” built by Vienna’s post-World War I social democratic government) were built in the city center, Liverpool’s 1950s construction focused on developments on the urban fringes, around large industrial estates such as Kirkby and Speke.<sup>75</sup> Rebuilding of housing in the city center was piecemeal, and, following a 1954 study trip to the USA, came chiefly in the form of scattered high-rise apartment buildings.<sup>76</sup>

By the end of the 1950s, critics were growing increasingly vocal about the council’s lethargic approach to the city center. Perhaps the noisiest advocate for urban redevelopment was the planning correspondent for the *Liverpool Daily Post*, George Eglin. Eglin wrote a series of reports that unfavorably contrasted Liverpool’s “backwards” approach to planning with cities that made planning a priority. Rotterdam, which had taken far greater damage than Liverpool during the war, had used destruction as a chance for rebirth, and was now, Eglin wrote, “a city

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<sup>72</sup> Madeline Kerr, *The People of Ship Street* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), 23.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>75</sup> Selina Todd, “Affluence, Class and Crown Street: Reinvestigating the Post-War Working Class,” *Contemporary British History* 22, no. 4 (2008): 501-518, at 508.

<sup>76</sup> Ronald Bradbury, *Liverpool Builds, 1945-65* (Liverpool: Public Relations Office, 1967), 42-43.

with room to breathe, where people can live, work and play in pleasant and efficient surroundings.” Liverpool, by contrast, was hampered by an “archaic, stultified approach to post-war civic problems.”<sup>77</sup> After a visit to Birmingham, Eglin praised the new Bull Ring Centre and the motorways that cut through city; the city had bought the land cheaply, and now “developers are almost tumbling over themselves to lease the sites becoming available” along the roads.<sup>78</sup> While Liverpool had been “sitting tight and thinking that nothing else mattered but building houses,” Eglin wrote, “Birmingham had been boldly and imaginatively planning the future.”<sup>79</sup> Contemplating Birmingham’s slum clearance schemes, new civic center, and its bracing flyovers and underpasses, Eglin asked his readers, “Wouldn’t we like to know what kind of magic wand is being waved in the background to make Birmingham the most progressive city in Britain?” The only magic, he continued, was a dynamic partnership between an ambitious government and private developers flush with cash.<sup>80</sup> A trip to Berlin offered similar marvels. Zipping around “the two Berlins—West and East—in my borrowed Volkswagen, I couldn’t help thinking that there must be advantages in defeat.” Eglin waxed lyrical over the West Berlin’s sixty-five miles of urban motorway, which “strides magnificently round the city, soaring in some places across stupendous concrete bridges and diving in others through miniatures of the Mersey Tunnel.” High-rise apartments designed by world-renowned architects lined the Tiergarten, leading Eglin to urge his readers to envision gleaming blocks of flats set in their own Sefton Park. Against the backdrop of the concrete motorways and modern high-rises, wrote Eglin, “a dazzling new city is

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<sup>77</sup> Quoted in David Kynaston, *Modernity Britain*, 46.

<sup>78</sup> George Eglin, “Birmingham Shows What Can be Done: The Plan, A Ring Road Built at a Profit,” *Liverpool Daily Post*, 2 March 1960.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in David Kynaston, *Modernity Britain*, 396.

<sup>80</sup> George Eglin, “Birmingham Races into the Future: Liverpool, Beware: A City Must Develop or Die,” *Liverpool Daily Post*, 4 March 1960.

rising at breakneck speed.”<sup>81</sup> Eglin’s stream of articles preached a pragmatic marriage of strong civic planning and private real estate finance. Even in a divided Berlin on the eve of partition, politics formed only a hazy backdrop to the heroic drama of urban renewal.

Eglin’s vision of Liverpool as a static city languishing in the dust of its British and European rivals struck a chord with many readers. One correspondent praised Eglin “for bringing to light the appalling apathy of the present City Council” toward attracting private developers. “I speak now as a young man in my early twenties when I say that I do not wish to be associated in the future with a city which I think misses the boat every time.” In spite of his conservative views, he felt the Council was “carrying tradition to far,” and advocated the replacement of “those Victorian monstrosities” lining Liverpool’s streets with “architecture worthy of Britain’s second port.”<sup>82</sup> Others chimed to support redevelopment. “Whole areas of the city” commented a reader, “comprising old decayed buildings and narrow streets, need sweeping away.” A visit to Plymouth, substantially rebuilt after the blitz, would, the writer concluded, “shame [the council] into quick action.”<sup>83</sup> Other writers accused the council of “quibbling” and “hedging” while the chances for action receded; a seventy-two year old man wrote that although he would not live to see the “transformation of the city... for those future Liverpool citizens we should do something now about it.”<sup>84</sup> While it is impossible to know how representative these views were, such letters indicate a substantial level of support for modernizing zealots like Eglin, as well anxieties over Liverpool’s relative decline among European cities.

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<sup>81</sup> George Eglin, “Birmingham’s New Look Has a Lesson for Everyone,” *Liverpool Daily Post*. Undated newspaper clipping circa May 1960, held in Liverpool Records Office.

<sup>82</sup> “Don’t Let’s Miss the Boat Again!” *Liverpool Echo*, 15 Aug 1961.

<sup>83</sup> “How to Redevelop a City Centre,” *Liverpool Echo*, 16 Aug 1961.

<sup>84</sup> Letters from Leonard H. Box, *Liverpool Echo*, 16 Aug 1961; “Liverpool 13,” *Liverpool Echo*, 21 Aug 1961; and “Liverpool at Heart,” *Liverpool Echo*, 24 Aug 1961.

Paradoxically, these concerns about Liverpool's urban decline came during a period of economic buoyancy that Merseyside enjoyed in common with much of Britain. While the region had suffered during the depression of the 1930s, by the 1950s the port had regained much of its share in Britain's global trade. The port was still the city's largest employer, and maritime work provided a steady and comfortable wage. John Cornelius later recalled the carefree lifestyle of sailors' families during the 1960s: returning to the city from time at sea, they would come "home like a conquering hero, laden with presents... African masks, bamboo whistles... Slamming taxi doors, dashing the driver a fiver. Very impressive and loads of money..."<sup>85</sup> A local historian even described Liverpool as a "boom-town" in 1957, and the global attention that the Mersey Beat attracted in the 1960s added to local optimism about the city's future.<sup>86</sup> This optimism over Liverpool's economic and cultural prospects bred embarrassment over the city's image, particularly as it appeared to visitors. As the city's first city planner confided decades later, "Liverpool had a very bad image" associated with decline, war damage, and "a bloody-minded" and strike-prone workforce.<sup>87</sup>

Eglin's vociferous drumbeat for investment in civic infrastructure rather than building homes drew on fears over Liverpool's image, and probably resonated most forcefully among the professional and middle classes for whom housing was not a pressing concern. But these groups formed the core of the Conservative council's political constituency, and the gathering opprobrium directed against the council's Conservative leadership meant that urban renewal was beginning to contend with housing as a politically decisive issue. Conservative councils were generally hesitant in their approach to central area redevelopment, since they drew on the support

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<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Murden, 'City of Change and Challenge,' 404.

<sup>86</sup> George Chandler, *Liverpool* (London: Batsford, 1957), quoted in Esher, *A Broken Wave*, 228.

<sup>87</sup> Interview between Walter Bor and Louise Brodie, 20 May, 1997.

of freeholding small business owners who would be affected by large urban planning schemes.<sup>88</sup> In Liverpool, the percolating anxiety over the city's aura of decline pushed the Conservatives into adopting an interventionist approach to planning.

The media criticism of Liverpool's planning stasis came to a head in autumn 1961, when one of Britain's most well known planners, the Liverpool University- educated Sir William Holford, told a London audience that Liverpool was "a mess.... It entertains development projects without knowing where they are going to fit in. Nobody knows the master plan."<sup>89</sup> The same day, Liverpudlians were assured that there was a coterie of politicians and academics "urgently" discussing the need for a master plan.<sup>90</sup> In February 1962 the council appointed Graeme Shankland as a private consultant to produce a master plan for the city. Shankland had spent the postwar years as a planner for the LCC—in charge of the redevelopment of the Elephant and Castle and South Bank— but had recently been disappointed by the council's rejection of his innovative plans for the new town of Hook, in Hampshire.<sup>91</sup> Shankland set to work on a series of reports on remaking the city center, and pushed for the creation of a permanent planning department like the one just formed in Newcastle to execute and expand on his work. Within a few months, Walter Bor, one of his colleagues from the LCC Architect's Department, took up the position of Chief Planning Officer.<sup>92</sup> Shankland and Bor were two of

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<sup>88</sup> Saumarez Smith, 'Graeme Shankland: A Sixties Architect-Planner and the Political Culture of the British Left', 403.

<sup>89</sup> "Nobody Knows the Master Plan," *Liverpool Daily Post*, 5 October 1961.

<sup>90</sup> "Master Plan for Liverpool: City Hold Talks with 'It's a Mess' Critic," *Liverpool Echo*, 5 October, 1961.

<sup>91</sup> Gold, *The Practice of Modernism*, 128.

<sup>92</sup> Bor's main competitor for the job was Wilfred Burns, who was prepared to leave his Newcastle appointment for Liverpool, which was a larger city and closer to London. Interview between Walter Bor and Louise Brodie, 20 May, 1997.



Shankland's three-dimensional plan for Liverpool. Liverpool Libraries.

the nation's foremost planners, and Bor soon attracted a large staff to begin work on a plan for the city center.<sup>93</sup> Ian Nairn described the optimism of the moment:

Modern architecture has a fighting chance, with Graeme Shankland as planning consultant and Walter Bor as city planning officer. The results could still be terrible, but at least the opportunity is there. And the city itself seems to have wakened out of a drugged sleep. Everyone knows the Mersey Beat, but this could not have been so successful if it had not been a symptom, drawing its vitality from some common resurgence.<sup>94</sup>

Shankland and Bor's plans reflected the buoyant mood. Shankland projected a population growth

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<sup>93</sup> One of Bor's conditions upon his hire was to expand the number of people dedicated to planning Liverpool from seven (of whom one was a qualified planner) to a department of roughly a hundred. Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Nairn, *Britain's Changing Towns*, 141.

of 400,000 in Liverpool's metropolitan area by 1981, as well as an expansion in incomes and leisure time. Economic growth and urban opportunities would also mean a tripling of cars on the city's roads over the same period, which would demand a dramatic expansion in road building and in parking facilities. Bor summarized his remit in simple terms that are familiar to post-Thatcher Britons, but were novel in the planning thought of the 1960s: his department's task was not just to guide development, but also to change the city's image and "create a climate which is friendly to investment."<sup>95</sup> But together with the expansive rhetoric of economic growth and image making, planners leaned on older paternalist notions of the expert's moral authority to remake the urban fabric.

### **From Danger to Delight: The Moral Authority of the Planner**

One of the main components of the modernist urbanism laid out by the Athens Charter was that cities needed to be rationalized. The various functions of the city—working, dwelling, leisure, and circulation—had to be disaggregated to allow it to run like a smoothly operating machine. This emphasis on logical order was, as the next chapter will examine, sharply attacked by modernist planning's critics by the end of the 1960s. Planners' obsession with function and order, wrote the anarchist Richard Sennett, had created sterile and dull cities bereft of the creative chaos so crucial to urban life.<sup>96</sup> Both critics like Sennett and the planners themselves described their work in terms of rationality. But British planners arguing for a mandate to reorder urban space also relied on existing discursive constructions of the city as a place of risk and danger, and explained their task in terms of moral authority.

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<sup>95</sup> Interview between Walter Bor and Louise Brodie, 20 May, 1997.

<sup>96</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder*.

Segregation—both vertical and horizontal—of pedestrian and vehicular traffic was a central piece of the postwar modernist city planning exemplified in Liverpool and Newcastle. Presenting his plans for Liverpool to his peers, Shankland emphasized that “the various networks involved (i.e. rail, road and pedestrian) should be separated physically as far as is necessary for the safe and convenient operation of each.”<sup>97</sup> For Burns’s team in Newcastle, segregation of cars and people was taken as a given, though the planners debated “whether the vehicles should be dropped to a basement level, whether the pedestrian should be lifted up onto a new ground level or whether vehicles should be on top of the pedestrians. The scheme eventually adopted a combination of the first two.”<sup>98</sup> This separation played a dual role in the minds of planners: most obviously, it offered safety to the pedestrian and streamlined movement for the motorist; yet at the same time, planners conceived of the “streets in the sky” as concrete catalysts for remaking the way people experienced the city.

For British urban planners, the decision to make the segregation of people and cars central to the redevelopment campaign seemed to offer a definitive solution to decades-long efforts to make city streets safe for walkers and drivers. Traffic safety certainly was not a new concern in the 1960s, but the sharp uptick in the number of vehicles on British streets in the years following World War II made the car an especially pressing threat for the character and safety of British cities. On the eve of the war in 1939, Britain had 3 million licensed motor vehicles. That number had tripled by 1960, when over 9 million vehicles were crowded onto Britain’s roads, with private cars seeing especially rapid growth in the late 1950s.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Graeme Shankland, "The Central Area of Liverpool: Extracts from the Report on the Draft City Centre Map," *The Town Planning Review* 35, no. 2 (1964): 105-132, at 123.

<sup>98</sup> Wilfred Burns, *Newcastle*, 27.

<sup>99</sup> Gunn, "The Buchanan Report, Environment and the Problem of Traffic in 1960s Britain," 523-24.



The "Safety First" Exhibition in Liverpool, 1947. The exhibition was held in Church street, a main shopping street that had been heavily bombed during the Blitz. Exhibit titles include "Pedestrians: Don't ask for trouble," "Parents: Train your children," and "Cyclists: Don't be too clever." Liverpool City Engineer, photo 8681.

The explosion in car use had a dramatic effect on the tissue of Britain's cities, which had been designed for walkers and animal-powered vehicles. The spatial distribution of urban buildings placed severe limits on the number of people and cars that could be accommodated, and journalists, officials, and advertisers portrayed city streets as zones of danger and chaos. An advertisement in the Liverpool magazine *Liverpolitan* in May 1945 likened the destruction wrought by the car to that of the war that had just ended. Whereas 317,960 soldiers had been killed in the first four years of the war, the advertisement claimed that cars had killed 588,000 during the same four years.<sup>100</sup> "The roads are deadly, especially for children." Readers were thus advised to subscribe (five shillings for an individual, seven shillings sixpence for a family) to the

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<sup>100</sup> The advertisement provided no basis for this claim. Total reported automobile fatalities in Britain in 1940 were only 8,609. Department of Transportation, *Road Casualties Great Britain 2006* (London: Stationary Office, 2007), 92.

Pedestrians' Mutual Guarantee Association, which would provide insurance in case of an accident.<sup>101</sup> In 1947, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents sponsored an itinerant "Safety First" exhibition that circulated around the country, instructing pedestrians (particularly parents) how to navigate the new hazards of urban traffic. Each exhibit contained stations showing "pedestrians' various bad faults on a screen at the press of a button," as well as a simulator to test drivers' reaction times.<sup>102</sup> By the early 1950s, branches of the Pedestrians' Association for Road Safety were established in cities across Britain, providing an influential lobby for speed restrictions, more crosswalks, and harsher penalties for careless drivers.<sup>103</sup>

The image of the city as a warzone, a place of risk and danger, could easily assume a distinctly moral tone, framed in terms of Christian ethics. In April 1955 the Pedestrians' Association for Road Safety held a conference in Bloomsbury on "Road Safety and the Churches." One of the participants, the Archbishop of York, wrote that the subject was "a matter which should concern every Christian, for we hold that the individual is of value." He pointed to the hypocrisy of denouncing totalitarian States' human rights records "while public opinion in our own country acquiesces so tamely in the killing and maiming, year by year, of so many of its individual citizens."<sup>104</sup> For Paul Ritter, a young Nottingham-based architect-planner who advocated tirelessly for vehicle-pedestrian segregation, the vulnerability of the old and young to traffic accidents was particularly appalling. He linked it to Britain's "arranging and mixing all kinds of traffic in an inefficient manner.... Society's attitude is contrary to Christian ethics, which teach special care for the weak and vulnerable."<sup>105</sup> Konrad Smigielski also appealed to

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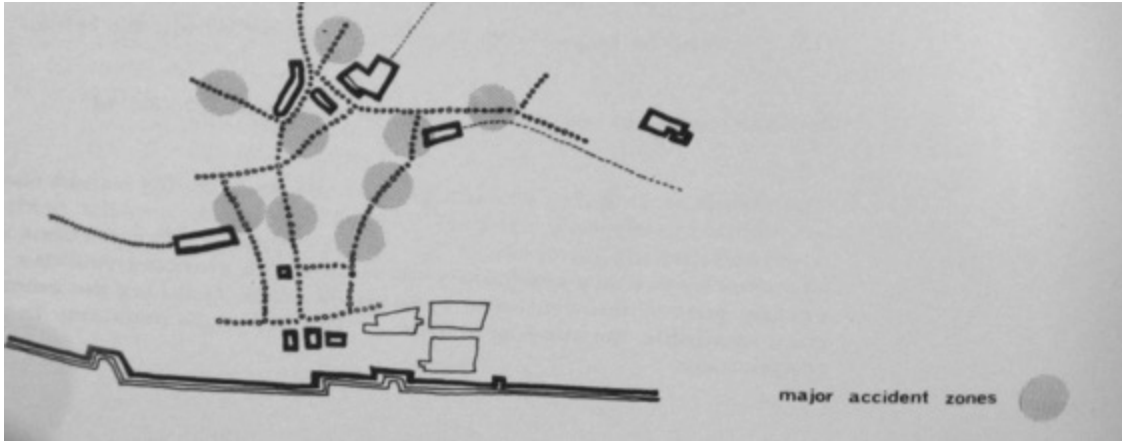
<sup>101</sup> "Pedestrians Mutual Guarantee," *The Liverpoolian*, May 1945.

<sup>102</sup> "Pedestrians' Errors," *Guardian*, 27 June 1947, 4.

<sup>103</sup> "Heavier Penalties on Drivers," *Guardian*, 18 Sept. 1956, 9; and "Road Casualties" *Evening Express* (Liverpool) 11 May 1954.

<sup>104</sup> "An Awakening of Conscience," *Guardian*, 22 Apr. 1955, 14.

<sup>105</sup> Paul Ritter, *Planning for Man and Motor* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1964), 16.



[A pedestrian-vehicle conflict map from Shankland's consulting reports. Consultant's Report No. 10, 1963, p 17. Liverpool Records Office, hq 711 SHA/1.](#)

morality in his 1964 plan for Leicester; pedestrians and cars were incompatible, and their conjunction was an “immoral mixture.”<sup>106</sup> Rigorous urban planning was not only a practical necessity, but also a moral imperative.

To gain control over the situation, British traffic engineers trotted out a succession of zoologically titled crosswalks—the zebra crossing, the panda crossing, the pelican crossing—but none were seen as definitive solutions, and some even added to the chaos. When the Conservative Minister of Transport Ernest Marples introduced the panda crossing in cities across Britain in 1962, he claimed it was “a new idea in traffic safety” that would supersede the zebra crossing’s simple white lines.<sup>107</sup> Pedestrians would now be able to push a button to prompt a series of flashing signals that would alert cars to their presence and allow them to cross in safety. Minutes after it was introduced in Liverpool, a lorry driver nearly lost control of his vehicle when he was thrown into confusion by the unexpected flashing amber and red lights and braked

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<sup>106</sup> W. K. Smigielski, *Leicester Traffic Plan* (Leicester, UK: City of Leicester, 1964), 77. Smigielski took the phrase from the Greek urbanist Constantine Doxiadis.

<sup>107</sup> “New Pedestrian Crossings Cause Chaos,” *BBC Online*, 2 April 2008. Republication of article from 2 April 1962. Accessed 10 Nov. 2016. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/2/newsid\\_2840000/2840919.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/2/newsid_2840000/2840919.stm). During his tenure as Minister of Transport, Marples was a strong advocate of state-led infrastructural projects, and commissioned the Buchanan Report on traffic. See Otto Saumarez Smith, “Central Government and Town-Centre Redevelopment in Britain,” 226.

violently on the rain-slick streets. “This thing is dangerous,” pronounced Raymond Webster, a 26 year-old Liverpool Judo instructor, while an elderly London woman was even more caustic: “That man Marples is up to too many tricks. It’s a harebrained scheme and most dangerous.” The confusion, coupled with mechanical failures, killed the panda crossing idea within a few years of its introduction.<sup>108</sup>

For the planners in Newcastle and Liverpool, the perception of the city as a site of danger provided a mandate for the comprehensive redevelopment of entire districts. Half-measures like crosswalks caused delays and frustration for drivers, while pedestrians often deliberately flouted them by jaywalking. Explaining the necessity for completely redeveloping the city center, a pamphlet published by Newcastle City Council’s planning committee described a city bursting at the seams with private, public, and commercial vehicles. “For the pedestrian, this conflict in the streets means danger, dirt, discomfort and noise. The city streets are no longer places in which to shop, to stroll, to talk and to look around and thus, imperceptibly, the delights of city life are being worn away.”<sup>109</sup> To illustrate the point, the booklet included photos of urban disorder along Northumberland Street, the city’s chief commercial street, which doubled as a portion of the A1, the primary traffic artery between London and Edinburgh. In the photo, cars weave to avoid jaywalking pedestrians while the sidewalk is a seething mass of humanity. Using an organic metaphor, the pamphlet’s author predicted that the congestion would soon cause “a complete functional failure of the city’s heart—unless we radically change its circulation system at the same time we renew its fabric.”<sup>110</sup> This would entail a total separation of traffic onto different

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<sup>108</sup> “Panda’s Debut Starts Row,” *Liverpool Daily Post*, 3 April 1962; “New Pedestrian Crossings Cause Chaos.”

<sup>109</sup> Newcastle upon Tyne City Council, “The City and Its Plans,” c. 1963. Held in Local Studies Collection, Newcastle Central Library, L352.7.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

levels, as the city compulsorily accrued the ownership of large swaths of land to redevelop in one continuous project.

The plans for Liverpool were inspired by identical logic. In his work as planning consultant for Liverpool, Graeme Shankland highlighted the problem of congestion in the city center throughout the day, as frustrated commuters and parked cars choked the city's narrow streets. The situation was exacerbated in shopping areas, where pedestrians overflowed from sidewalks into the streets. "With large numbers of vehicles and pedestrians wishing to use the central area, which is limited in size and capacity," Shankland wrote, "some discipline is clearly necessary to ensure that each function of the area can function adequately."<sup>111</sup> In the redesigned Liverpool, he told a *Guardian* reporter, "the network of arcades, precincts, alleys, and squares must make walking about the city safe and enjoyable." This relaxed environment would be a particular boon to commerce, as dangerous and noisy streets would be replaced with "covered arcades, water gardens, roof gardens, and terraces," bringing "the first taste of a new kind of shopping to Liverpool."<sup>112</sup> By the time the planners were finished, Shankland predicted, central Liverpool would form "the largest pedestrian precinct in Europe, outside Venice."<sup>113</sup> Like his professional colleagues in Newcastle, Shankland's talk of disciplining Liverpool's dirt and danger to make it a relaxing place to stroll and shop mixed notions of paternalistic authority with images of sunny plazas and commercial abundance. In their reversion to a paternalistic discourse of the expert's moral authority, Britain's postwar urbanism can be seen as a strand of

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<sup>111</sup> Graeme Shankland, "City and County Borough of Liverpool: Planning Consultant's Report No. 10, Draft City Centre Map," page 18. Held in Liverpool Records Office, hq 711 SHA/1.

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in "'Vast Renewal' Plan for City: Probably Second Greatest in the World," *The Guardian*, 26 November 1963, 20.

<sup>113</sup> Graeme Shankland, "City and County Borough of Liverpool: Planning Consultant's Report No. 3, Central Area Redevelopment Phase One," page 2. Held in Liverpool Records Office, hq 711 SHA/1.

“conservative modernity.”<sup>114</sup> But they tempered these dour authoritative appeals with positive visions of a bright space age future city.

### **Such Stuff as Dreams are Made on: Planning’s Material Culture**

Twinned with planners’ new authority to reconstruct the cityscape was a concern with eliciting a positive response from the “planned for.” As Newcastle’s Chief Planner, Wilfred Burns was an evangelist for the importance of publicity campaigns as an arm of planning. In his 1963 book, *New Towns for Old*, he wrote that for redevelopment to be successful, “every possible step must be taken to show the public what is happening, to reduce the usual opposition to the scheme, and to induce positive feeling—even though it is incomparably less than that bestowed on the local football team—that the scheme is worth doing.”<sup>115</sup> In Liverpool, Graeme Shankland and Walter Bor were just as direct—Shankland described his task as “helping Liverpool regain its self-confidence,” while for Bor planning meant creating an upbeat image for the city.<sup>116</sup> The main vehicles for affecting this shift in popular sentiments were exhibitions, publicity pamphlets, films, and public lectures, all designed to transmit the rarefied conclusions of maps, graphs and surveys to a lay audience.

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<sup>114</sup> See Jon Lawrence, “Paternalism, Class, and the British Path to Modernity,” in Simon Gunn and James Vernon, eds., *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity in Imperial Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 147-164.

<sup>115</sup> Wilfred Burns, *New Towns for Old*, 192.

<sup>116</sup> Graeme Shankland and Walter Bor, “Renaissance of a City: A Study in the Redevelopment of Liverpool,” *Journal of the Town Planning Institute* 51, no. 1 (Jan 1965): 20; Interview between Walter Bor and Louise Brody, 20 May, 1997. Planners, Bor argued, needed to go from “just painting maps” and development control to planning the economic and environmental regeneration of the city.

Exhibitions were essential for kindling public enthusiasm for the plans.<sup>117</sup> Newcastle's redevelopment campaign opened with a publicity blitz in the local newspapers and a month-long public exhibition describing the new plan. Children were encouraged to attend the exhibit to take in the experts' ideas, and then submit their own plans of urban transformation to the *Evening Chronicle*, with the chance to win five guineas.<sup>118</sup> Free bus tours circulated the city on Wednesdays and Saturdays during the exhibition, highlighting current trouble spots and future possibilities. An estimated thirty to forty thousand people attended the exhibition—mainly locals, but from as far afield as Moscow and Panama City.<sup>119</sup> When Shankland's plans for Liverpool were presented without the accompaniment of a public exhibition, on the other hand, a concerned Liverpudlian who "couldn't wait for the plans to be transformed into reality" wrote that his friends were dismissing the plans as "a pie in the sky," saying that they had "heard it all before." He urged the Council to dispel such doubts by staging a public exhibition featuring physical models.<sup>120</sup> While paper plans buttressed by months of research could be dismissed as empty promises, the tangibility of a three-dimensional model stood surety for the planners' good faith.

Attracting and maintaining public enthusiasm was a daunting prospect when the gap between a plan's conception and its implementation could be longer than a decade, and the urban models that formed the centerpiece of public exhibitions in both Newcastle and Liverpool often became visual proxies for concrete urban transformation. Architectural model-making was a

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<sup>117</sup> See Peter Larkham and Keith Lilley, "Exhibiting the City: Planning Ideas and Public Involvement in Wartime and Early Post-War Britain," *The Town Planning Review* 83, no. 6 (2012): 647–668; and Robert Freestone and Marco Amati, eds., *Exhibitions and the Development of Modern Planning Culture* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014).

<sup>118</sup> "A Chance for Young Planners," *Evening Chronicle* (Newcastle), 14 Apr. 1961. The scope granted these kids was a planner's fantasy: "We give you the power to uproot trees, to move buildings, to replan streets, to build new schools.... We are looking for bright and inventive ideas—not so much a beautifully written essay."

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> "Exhibition of City Models," *Liverpool Daily Post*, 1 Jan. 1963.



Burns's Model for Newcastle's redeveloped city center. The white buildings, made from polystyrene, represented the future buildings, while the dark wood buildings indicated historic structures. Newcastle Libraries.

booming business in postwar Britain—a consequence, one contemporary conjectured, of “the great explosion of commercial and local authority redevelopment which erupted during the ‘fifties.”<sup>121</sup> Typically, such models were ephemeral structures made from cardboard or balsa wood. Built to illustrate a commission or for a temporary exhibit, they would be whisked away and demolished when their purpose was complete. In Liverpool and Newcastle, where much of the urban fabric was slotted for wholesale redevelopment, the planning departments constructed more permanent structures. Rather than contracting the services of a private firm, the new city planning departments included small teams of model-makers tasked with building large-scale three-dimensional replicas of the cityscape, constantly updating them to reflect shifting plans. An 18-foot-square model of Liverpool's redevelopment was on display at the Walker Art Gallery

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<sup>121</sup> John Chisholm, “Rehearsals for Reality,” *The Architect and Building News* 2 (27 Feb. 1967): 24. See also Ray Pfaendler, “Architectural Models,” *Architectural Review* 140, no. 1 (July 1966): 68.



Shankland's model of central Liverpool, with a white finish drawing the eye toward proposed developments. Liverpool Libraries.

(the city's chief art museum) for five years during the mid-1960s, while a smaller replica traveled the country to publicize the planning schemes.<sup>122</sup> In Newcastle, the planning department rented a shop window in the city center for public relations work, and stocked it with models, plans, drawings, and charts.<sup>123</sup> Eventually, both models found permanent homes in the offices of their respective planning departments.<sup>124</sup>

The models were not simple facsimiles of the city. Rather, their material composition performed a narrative function that contrasted the shabby existing city with the bright urban future. In Newcastle, Burns's team explored the possibilities of new forms of plastic entering

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<sup>122</sup> "Exhibition Bird's-Eye View of New Liverpool," *Liverpool Daily Post*, 22 February 1964.

<sup>123</sup> Burns, *Newcastle*, 86.

<sup>124</sup> The Liverpool model sat in the Planning Department at Wilberforce house into the 1990s, while the Newcastle model remains on display at the Civic Centre.

the market, settling on expanded polystyrene (i.e. generic Styrofoam) as their material of choice. Initial urban models for departmental use would be quickly assembled from polystyrene, Burns explained, while the permanent model was “done in hardwood for ‘Preservation’ buildings and in a white polystyrene sheet used with cork in sandwich fashion for new buildings. This gives a crisp and lively finish,” he concluded, “and is reasonably easy to keep clean.”<sup>125</sup> Liverpool’s modeling team worked with different materials but relied on the same display technique to distinguish the inherited cityscape from the projected future. The buildings were crafted from balsa wood (the cheap, light, easily cut material used for model airplanes), with existing structures stained with a dark varnish and future buildings bleached white.<sup>126</sup> The motorway loop, meanwhile, was made from a sturdy white card stock.

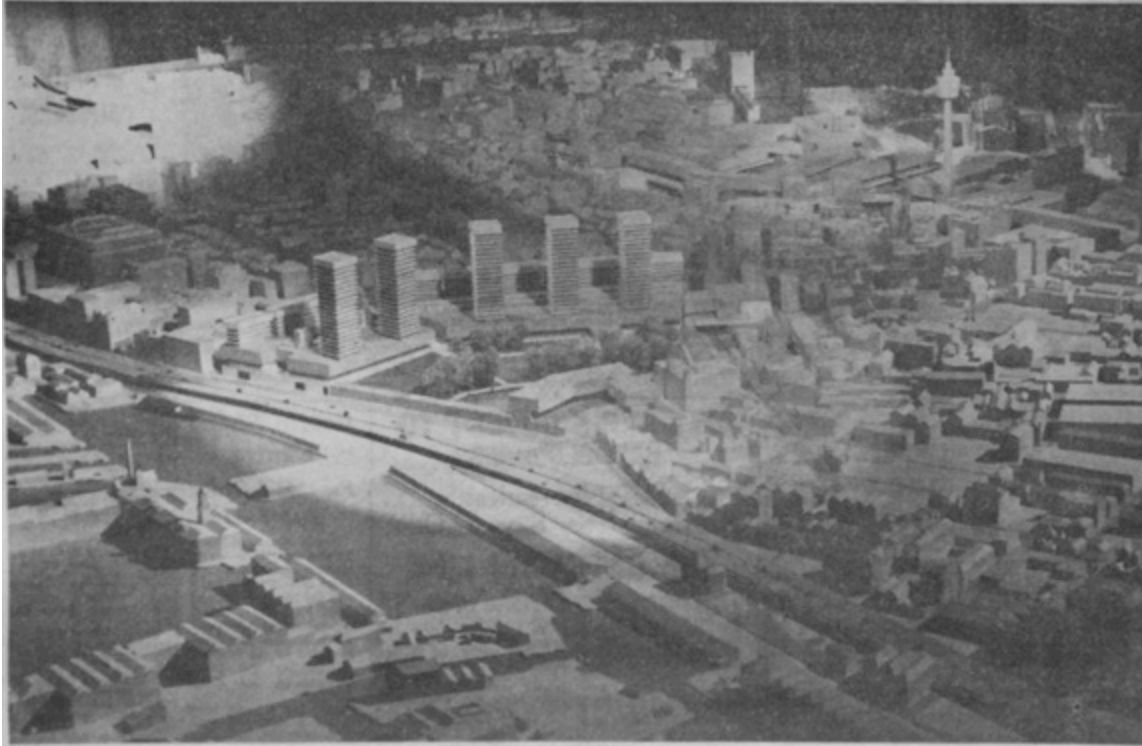
The “crisp and lively finish” of the foam-coated or white painted planned buildings marked them off as fundamentally distinct from the dark hulks of the existing industrial cityscape.<sup>127</sup> In doing so, the planners of the future city tapped into several layers of chromatic symbolism. The division between the dark past and the bright future had obvious local resonances in these northern cities, where the grand stone facades were caked with layers of black soot. For civic-minded residents in the 1960s, these buildings were an anachronistic

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<sup>125</sup> Burns, *Newcastle*, 86.

<sup>126</sup> Just as the destruction of World War II had provided the conditions for the massive replanning and reconstruction of European cities, it also provided germane soil for research in new materials. The Ecuadorian balsa wood industry took off during the war in response to British demand for the light wood for its aircraft, and the demand spread to other uses such as model making. The war was also a catalyst for the development of extruded polystyrene, which was commercially developed in the 1930s and 1940s by chemical companies like I.G. Farben in Germany and Dow Chemicals in the US as a replacement for scarce raw materials. On balsa wood, see Merna Irene Fletcher, “Balsa Industry of Ecuador,” *Economic Geography* 25, no. 1 (Jan 1949): 47-54; on polystyrene, see “Polystyrene,” *World Heritage Encyclopedia*, self-published on Project Gutenberg, <http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/Polystyrene>. Accessed 10 February 2017.

<sup>127</sup> While white may appear an obvious choice for representing new buildings, Burns emphasized that the actual buildings should be visually linked to the townscape: materials for new structures, he wrote, “will tend to be dark in colour—dark aggregate panels or dark bricks—with deliberate contrasts in appropriate positions of lighter materials.” Burns, *Newcastle*, 30.



Lighting for the Liverpool Planning Department's public exhibition was provided by Merseyside Electrical Lighting Services. The display used spotlights to draw viewers' attention to the zones that would be redeveloped. Liverpool Libraries.

disgrace redolent of Dickens's Coketown.<sup>128</sup> "What an awful sight it is for visitors emerging from Lime Street Station," one concerned Liverpoolian complained, "to be confronted with those black monstrosities of stone, not to mention the station itself."<sup>129</sup> Sir William Holford, one of the country's leading postwar planners, recalled the effect of Liverpool's cityscape on him when he arrived as a youth: "The building which terrified me most was St. Georges Hall because I had never before seen a building which was entirely black from floor to parapet."<sup>130</sup>

In addition to picking at these scabs of local discontent, the models' chromatic Manichaeism also continued an established motif of modern architectural design that associated

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<sup>128</sup> Minerva's owl flew at midnight for many Liverpoolians. Writing in the 1990s, the Liverpool historian Quentin Hughes looked back on the city's maligned dinginess regretfully, recalling a visit from an Italian professor. "He was impressed, and, after a while, he turned to me and asked, 'Do tell me, where do you get this wonderful black stone?' Well, of course, it is all gone now..." Quentin Hughes, *Seaport: Architecture and Townscape in Liverpool* (Liverpool: Bluecoat Press, [1964] 1993), 203.

<sup>129</sup> D. Shaw, "How to Redevelop a City Centre," *Liverpool Echo*, 16 August 1961.

<sup>130</sup> Quoted in "Plan for More than Traffic," *Liverpool Daily Post*, 12 May 1961.

white surfaces with cleanliness, transparency, honesty, and masculinity.<sup>131</sup> The archetypal modernist, the Swiss architect-planner Le Corbusier, urged his readers in 1925 to “imagine the results of the Law of Ripolin (whitewash). Every citizen is required to replace his hangings, his damasks, his wallpapers, his stencils, with a plain coat of white ripolin. *His home* is made clean. There are no more dirty, dark corners. *Everything is shown as it is.*”<sup>132</sup> This contrasting effect was particularly stark in Liverpool’s exhibit, which enlisted the services of the Merseyside Electrical Lighting Services Committee to dazzle visitors, who “saw lighting effects illuminating details of the model panorama and heard a tape-recorded commentary explaining the scheme.”<sup>133</sup> Photos of the spectacle published in local newspapers reproduced the scene for people who missed the physical exhibition, showing a cityscape where the thrusting contours of unbuilt high-rises and the hard ridges and shadows marking the sinuous curve of the future elevated motorway draw the gaze, while the existing city recedes into a hazy smudge beyond the lights. Even in crisper, evenly lighted photographs, the angles of the white future buildings show clear and stark, while the dark wood remains indistinct.<sup>134</sup>

It was through the mediation of such photographs, which were continually reproduced in newspapers, booklets, and plans, that most people would have encountered these models. Such doubly mediated perspectives on the future city allowed planning teams to choose the most favorable and arresting angle to present their plans for public inspection. Planners cottoned on to the publicity potential of such photographs as early as 1945, when the Modeling Unit of the

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<sup>131</sup> See Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995); and Jasmine Rault, "Fashioning Sapphic Architecture: Eileen Gray and Radclyffe Hall," in Ilya Parkins, Elizabeth M. Sheehan, and Rita Felski, eds., *Cultures of Femininity in Modern Fashion* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2011), 19-44.

<sup>132</sup> Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today*, trans. James I. Dunnett (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, [1925] 1987), 188. Emphasis in original.

<sup>133</sup> “New Light on the Liverpool of Tomorrow,” *Liverpool Echo*, 24 Sept 1964.

<sup>134</sup> As the film critic Richard Dyer notes in a different context, photographic lighting practices were developed “in relation to the white face, which results in the technicist ideology that one sometimes hears of it being ‘more difficult’ to photograph black people.” Richard Dyer, “White,” *Screen* 29, no. 4 (1988): 44-65.



Liverpool's planning team poses with the city model for the local newspaper. Such photos projected an image of authority and conveyed the point that the committee controlled their city's future. Walter Bor is second from left, and Graeme Shankland is on the right. Liverpool Libraries.

Ministry of Town and Country Planning showed “how the camera can pick out and throw into relief separately points of special interest; give added realism by excluding disproportionate or irrelevant surroundings; record the incidence of light and shadow; and, by reproduction and display, multiply the audience to which the model can appeal.”<sup>135</sup> Posing next to urban models

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<sup>135</sup> Quoted in Peter Larkham and Keith Lilley, “Townscape and Scenography: Conceptualizing and Communicating the New Urban Landscape in British Post-War Planning,” in John Pendlebury, Erdem Erten, and Peter Larkham, eds., *Alternative Visions of Post-War Reconstruction: Creating the Modern Townscape* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 115.

also became a common way for planners and planning committees to communicate their grasp of the miniaturized future.

Models were an expensive, labor-intensive, and usually static form of communication. Written and photographic communication was less visually gripping for the layperson, but far easier to diffuse through the urban population. Both Liverpool's and Newcastle's planning departments went to great lengths to publicize their projects. In Liverpool, each of Shankland's eleven reports on city center redevelopment was bound and sold to the general public, and they were popular enough to prompt the city to produce reprint editions. They were not necessarily cheap, either: while the slim volume, "Provisional Comprehensive Development Area: Proposals and Interim Planning Standards," sold for a meager six shillings, the hefty "Draft City Centre Map" went for a cool £1 and 18s.<sup>136</sup> The best-selling report was the motorway study, which sold 266 copies in spite of its £1 4s 6d price tag.<sup>137</sup> These are not huge numbers, but the sales figures are startling considering that they were bureaucratic reports with very little attention to production value. They were printed on sturdy uncoated paper, with a solid serif font, fold out maps, and some contained rough perspective drawings by the architectural artist Gordon Cullen. A more colorful and artfully arranged "layman's guide" to Shankland's plans hit the shelves of local bookstalls in early 1964.<sup>138</sup>

In Newcastle, Burns was an avid evangelist for public relations. Planning material for public consumption "should be as simple as possible," he wrote in his 1963 urban renewal textbook, *New Towns for Old*. "People reading them are not technical experts capable of

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<sup>136</sup> Translated to 2005 currency and adjusted for inflation, the price is equivalent to £29.07, according to the UK National Archives' online currency converter. See <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/default0.asp#mid>. Accessed 12 Feb 2017.

<sup>137</sup> "Selling Well," *Liverpool Daily Post*, 23 June 1964. Orders came in from as far afield as Venezuela, Japan, and Norway.

<sup>138</sup> "Liverpudlians May Get Their Say in the City's Plans," *Liverpool Daily Post*, 16 Dec. 1963.

understanding legal, planning, or valuation jargon, and they may not be capable of assimilating other than the simplest of words.” He also advocated for a liberal use of photos and perspective drawings.<sup>139</sup> Initially, Newcastle’s planning department outsourced its publicity work to public relations companies, which designed accessible informational pamphlets. The first of these pamphlets was freely distributed to residents of the Sandyford area, a neighborhood comprising mainly working-class terraces that was to be cleared for a new polytechnic college campus. In marked contrast to similar literature churned out by the department in later years, “The New Education Precinct and You” contained no images or eye-catching graphics. With the exception of a few cheaply produced maps, the booklet contained only text offering platitudes on the importance of technical education for Britain’s and Newcastle’s future (small comfort to the people who would soon be displaced), and information on how the clearance project would affect property owners.<sup>140</sup>

The spare nature of this booklet is in sharp contrast to publicity produced later in Burns’s tenure, when the department began conducting its own public relations. A pamphlet published in 1966 illustrates the shift away from the early brochure’s desultory gestures toward the public good. “East Central Redevelopment” described the planned transformation of Newcastle’s eastern core around a high-speed motorway crisscrossed by high-level walkways and underpasses. This was a far more controversial and far-reaching project than the polytechnic, and Burns’s team worked to convey an impression of futuristic excitement rather than disruption, noise, and inconvenience. Printed on semi-gloss stock with a magenta cover design, the booklet is immediately eye-catching.<sup>141</sup> Whereas “The New Education Precinct” sported a small serif

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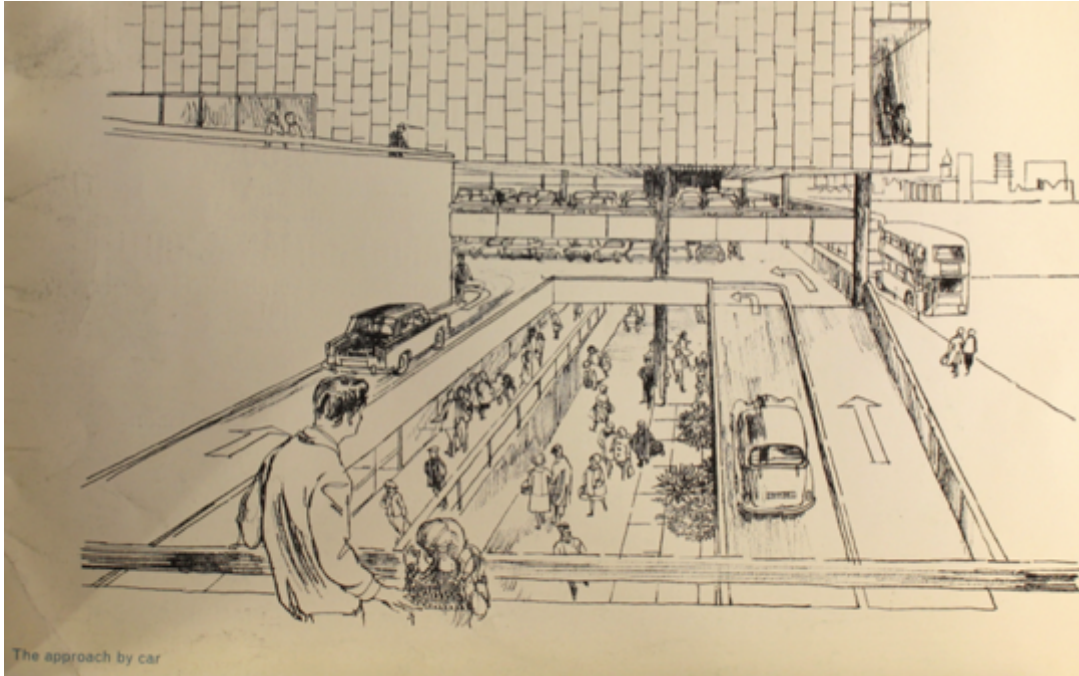
<sup>139</sup> Wilfred Burns, *New Towns for Old*, 191.

<sup>140</sup> “The New Education Precinct and You,” City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne, March 1961.

<sup>141</sup> “East Central Redevelopment,” Newcastle City Planning Department, n.d. (c. 1966).



Cover and part of the pedestrian map for "East Central Redevelopment." The elaborate design is typical of planning literature produced at the height of Burns's tenure in Newcastle. Newcastle Libraries.



Traffic as urban spectacle: a perspective drawing of pedestrians watching cars at St. John's Precinct, Liverpool. Liverpool Libraries.

font, this later booklet was dressed in a sleek sans serif Univers type, with bold snappy headings like “New Life for the City” and “An Exciting Prospect.” The choice of Univers, a font created in 1957 by the Swiss modernist designer Adrian Frutiger, broke with the staid bureaucratic typography used in the earlier pamphlet. In the approving words of a university branding guide, Univers “communicates a sense of modernity, high technology and efficiency”—a perfect complement to the hard concrete lines of Newcastle’s planned motorway.<sup>142</sup> Maps, photographs, and diagrams were integrated throughout the pamphlet’s text, while magenta lines marking pedestrian pathways vectored across the pages.

That Newcastle’s planners should seek to convey the urban motorway system poised to rip through the city’s historic fabric as “an exciting prospect” may appear more than a little disingenuous, but Burns, like his counterparts in Liverpool, fervently believed that proper

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<sup>142</sup> “Print Media Guidelines,” The California State University Branding Standards Guide. <https://www.calstate.edu/brand/printguidelines/univers.shtml>. Accessed February 15 2017.

planning could allow urban motorways to become an emotionally fulfilling aspect of city life. In a 1963 address to the Town Planning Institute, Burns elaborated this principle:

The city centre satisfies what appears to be an almost universal interest in movement. Every time I have traveled on the M1 or Doncaster by-pass, people have been watching traffic from the overbridges. Television viewing gains much of its fascination from movement rather than content. We cannot dismiss the fact that traffic movement is an important element in this satisfaction today, and if we dismiss the motor vehicle from the shopping centre scene we must find alternative movements—in water, birds, or animals, sculptures and detailing of buildings—to take its place.<sup>143</sup>

Elsewhere, Burns extolled the elevated motorway's potential as "an important piece of civic design; a complex interchange might, in an appropriate design setting, be a source of great excitement and vitality" for pedestrians.<sup>144</sup> The planners were not alone in their motorway fever—the Newcastle Labour Party cruised to victory in the 1962 elections with the slogan "The Motorway City." One counselor later mocked one of his colleagues for "telling us what beautiful things motorways were. That Newcastle would spend hours gazing up at the Central Motorway East and marveling at it."<sup>145</sup> Burns's team hoped that motorway's kinetic energy would be amplified, meanwhile, by the "bold and virile" texturing of the new buildings around it.<sup>146</sup>

Shankland's plan for Liverpool reflected a similar confidence in the potential of the well-designed motorway to rejuvenate urban life. While Newcastle's motorway would alternately soar over neighborhoods and plunge underground, the entire Liverpool Inner Motorway was to be elevated, girdling and defining the city's central core. Introducing his designs for the motorway in 1962, Shankland contended that introduced into a city, "the motorway becomes an

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<sup>143</sup> Burns, "Planning Approach to Traffic Movement," Town Planning Institute Engineering for Traffic Conference, July 1963. Text clipping held at Local Studies Room, Newcastle upon Tyne City Library.

<sup>144</sup> Burns and D.T. Bradshaw, "Report to Town Improvement and Streets Committee and Town Planning Committee on The Central Motorway East: Environmental Problems," Newcastle upon Tyne, 1966, p. 4. Local Studies Room, Newcastle, L352.7 N536N.

<sup>145</sup> Newcastle City Council Proceedings, 6 Nov. 1974.

<sup>146</sup> Burns, *City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne Development Plan Review* (Newcastle: Newcastle upon Tyne City Council, 1963), 74.

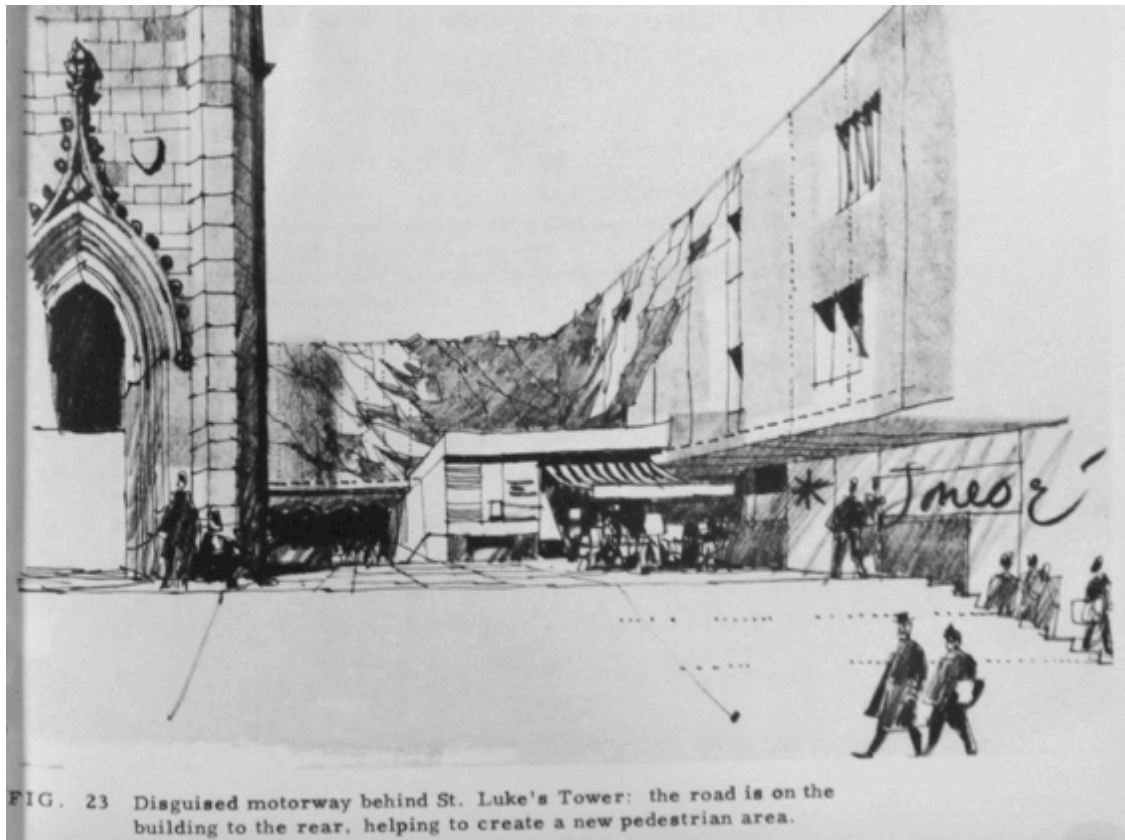


FIG. 23 Disguised motorway behind St. Luke's Tower: the road is on the building to the rear, helping to create a new pedestrian area.

One of Gordon Cullen's illustrations for the Shankland Plan for Liverpool's Motorway system, with a road running on top of rear building. Liverpool Libraries.

architectural object, of great significance in its own right." It had the potential for destruction, as seen in the building of railroads a century before and American motorways in the preceding decades, but it could also "be an object of beauty and magnificence in itself. The views from it can reveal the city in quite a new way. Driving on it, through the city, can be not just a convenience but a new and rewarding experience..."<sup>147</sup> Wherever possible, the road would become part of the built environment, often running on top of buildings (and occasionally through them), with warehousing and shopping facilities built underneath. Shankland's paean's

<sup>147</sup> Shankland, "Liverpool Planning Consultants Report No. 7: Central Area Roads: Inner Motorway System," Liverpool, 1962, p. 18. Liverpool Records Room, hq711 SHA. A journalist parroted this sentiment in describing two flyovers planned for the city center, writing, "they will become an engineering feat and as much of a talking point for the man in the street as the Beacon." "When the Traffic Has Flown," *Liverpool Daily Post*, 20 June 1967. "The Beacon" referred to St. John's Beacon, the towering centerpiece of the city's new central shopping precinct.

to the motorway's visual possibilities ignored traffic's full sensual impact—missing from the report is any discussion of the roar of engines and horns, the smell of exhaust, or the feeling of vibrating concrete. As a contemporary pointed out, the road 's elevation was “certainly going to cause a great deal of noise” and disruption to the urban environment.<sup>148</sup>

The report on the motorway was the most popular of Shankland's eleven reports, perhaps because it contained a number of illustrations by the well-known artist Gordon Cullen. By the early 1960s Cullen had become an established figure among British architects for his work as art editor of *The Architectural Review*, where he had advocated humanistic planning principles that stressed the importance of the pedestrian's view of urban space. His concept of “serial vision” used perspective drawings to evaluate modern town planning as it appeared to a layperson traversing the cityscape. His work on Shankland's Liverpool plans is remarkable for his application of this aesthetic theory to the driver rather than to the pedestrian, providing readers with a tangible perspective of how the motorway could open up thrilling new ways to experience the city.<sup>149</sup> Writing of the drawings, Cullen observed,

Effects noticed by the pedestrian are lost on the motorist and conversely effects that the pedestrian would never notice become coherent and exciting when seen at forty miles an hour. Thus the almost magical soaring effect of a tower out of the horizon as we drive up an incline. Effects are measured in miles and not in yards. For instance the whole of the leg from the Anglican Cathedral to the Pierhead is dominated by the group of buildings on the Pierhead, and drama can be extracted from this

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<sup>148</sup> “The Liverpool Look,” *New Society*, 9 Jan. 1964.

<sup>149</sup> For the fullest exploration of serial vision, see Gordon Cullen, *Townscape* (London: Architectural Press, 1961). Cullen had drawn “serial vision” from the driver's perspective a few times in the 1950s in his collaboration with the architectural critic Ian Nairn, but usually as a negative illustration of poor road planning's destruction of the historical townscape. The only Cullen drawing I have been able to find celebrating the urban drivers' viewpoint is a perspective drawing of “Motopia,” an unbuilt city designed by the Glass Age Development Committee as part of a 1959 advertising campaign for Pilkington Brothers Glass Company. The designs—which, like the Shankland Plan, featured rooftop roads—were published as advertisements in the October and November 1959 editions of *The Architectural Review*. Burns also acknowledged Motopia as a design inspiration. See Wilfred Burns, *New Towns for Old*, 200.



Cullen's "Serial View" Drawings of the Liverpool Motorway. The drawings allowed Liverpudlians to imagine themselves racing through the city along the new Inner Motorway system. Liverpool Libraries.



[Cullen's Liverpool in the \*Liverpool Daily Post\*.](#)

situation. The distant view is withdrawn and then revealed at close quarters with great impact.<sup>150</sup>

Cullen's drawings, presented in the vertical format of a filmstrip, invite the reader to take a spin on the motorway, heading north along the waterfront. Liverpool, past and future, unfolds in new perspectives on either side, glimpsed between the motorway's enclosing architecture. These drawings were reproduced on several occasions for local and national news articles on the Shankland Plan, and became part of the plan's imaginative apparatus.<sup>151</sup>

In Cullen's drawings, the "magical soaring effect" of Liverpool's future skyline seemed easily within reach. Planning-driven redevelopment had peaked in influence by 1965, though, and during the following years its momentum would falter. Over the next decade, economic shocks, popular protests against slum clearance and motorway construction, organized

<sup>150</sup> Gordon Cullen, "Liverpool Notebook," *The Architectural Review* 153 (April 1965), 286.

<sup>151</sup> See, for example, "Vision on the Mersey," *The Sunday Times* (London), 12 May 1963; "Into the Next Century," *Liverpool Daily Post*, 8 Dec. 1964; "Shankland Plans a 40-Acre Precinct for the Pedestrian," *Liverpool Daily Post*, 22 Sept. 1962.

conservationist groups, and changes in the planning discipline, prompted a shift from comprehensive redevelopment to urban rehabilitation and public transport.<sup>152</sup> Even when modernist planning was at its brief mid-1960s zenith, though, its advocates fretted over the brittleness of their new influence. The emotional appeal of the planning “atmosphere” was an attempt to gain converts for the planners’ version of the urban future without having to stage a referendum on every proposal.

How successful were planners at engaging their publics? As the opening quote indicates, the “stuff” of planning could have a strong affective impact, particularly on children. Walter Bor underlined the importance of instilling planning enthusiasm in school-aged children, and students were often a captive audience when they were bussed into exhibitions on field trips.<sup>153</sup> Models, bus rides, and perspective drawings offered new ways of seeing and apprehending the city, inviting people to take a planners’ eye view of the urban fabric.<sup>154</sup> Correspondence to the local press shows that the planners’ modernization schemes tapped into many citizens’ anxieties that their city was out of step with the times; a common fear was not that the planners would demolish beloved buildings, but that the schemes would not be executed.

Such letters can only convey a partial, pointillist picture of how most urban residents received the redevelopment projects, though. Writing to a newspaper demands free time and a confidence in publicly expressing one’s views. Newspaper editors also served as gatekeepers of public discourse, and it should be no surprise that published letters reflected the pro-development sentiments of papers like the *Newcastle Journal* and the *Liverpool Daily Post*. Contemporary

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<sup>152</sup> See Otto Saumarez Smith, "The Inner City Crisis"; Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal*; John Pendlebury, "Alas Smith and Burns?"; and Meredith Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest, 1945-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>153</sup> George Eglin, "Blueprint for the New City Takes Shape," *Liverpool Daily Press*, 22 July 1963. *Rates for the Job*, a 1966 promotional film produced by Liverpool’s Public Relations department, opens with one such school trip to a planning exhibition. Film held at North West Film Archive, Manchester, no. 6986.

<sup>154</sup> Peter Shapely, "Civic Pride and Redevelopment in the Post-War British City," *Urban History* 39, no. 2 (2012): 310–328.

photos of Liverpool's exhibition show a mixed audience at exhibitions in terms of age and gender, though the preponderance of suits and ties hint at a mainly middle-class (and white) attendance.

Criticism that did emerge against urban renewal was scattered and desultory while the plans were being hatched during the first half of the decade. Newcastle's 1961 exhibition, which attracted an impressive 30-40,000 attendees and received mostly glowing reviews, raised the ire of one "ex-City Father." "I went to bless but returned to curse," he wrote to the *Newcastle Journal*:

Lamentable would, I think, be the proper epithet to apply to this so-called display. It consists principally of a higgidly piggidly array of pictures intended, presumably to emphasize the squalor of bygone days. If the cost really was £12,000, as reported, then the expenditure has indeed been in vain. One can find little to praise, but much to criticise. For example, in the model room the exhibits are so far from the viewer that it is almost impossible to study them. One was even the wrong way round. Then there are two harrowing pictures of the Jarrow marchers. What connection these have with the future of Newcastle it is difficult to conjecture. Possibly they are intended as subtle Socialist propaganda for the forthcoming elections on May 11. Pictures of the Tolpuddle Martyrs would be equally appropriate.<sup>155</sup>

While the material design of the exhibition figured in this critique, the display's alleged function as Labour propaganda was likely the man's occasion for writing.<sup>156</sup>

Nor did the male-dominated culture of planning go unchallenged. When a committee of "nineteen wise men" was selected to help guide Liverpool's planning schemes, an anonymous critic questioned the *Echo* whether the future Liverpool was to be "a man's city." "Surely it is important," the writer continued, "that the woman's point of view should be put.... The difficulty will not be in finding a suitable spokeswoman or spokeswomen but in selecting from the number

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<sup>155</sup> "A Backward Look at a Forward Display," *The Journal* (Newcastle), 18 Apr. 1961.

<sup>156</sup> Like housing, planning was intensely political, and the letter echoes council spats over which party deserved credit for the plan. "Storm in the City Council," *The Journal* (Newcastle), 18 Apr. 1961.

who are eminently suited for this role.”<sup>157</sup> While not critical of the plans themselves, this critic highlighted planning’s blinkered perspective. In Newcastle, a *Daily Mirror* reporter visiting the city for a 1967 feature on Britain’s “Boom Cities” noted a strong generational divide between submissive “Florries” (a reference to the wife of the domineering comic-strip character Andy Capp) over forty years of age, and the younger generation of women who demanded that a revolution in gender roles accompany the city’s modernization. Sandra Good, a twenty-two year-old Newcastle dressmaker, told a reporter that she and her fiancé were determined to forge an equal partnership. “We are equal. We have planned our home together, bought things together, we make decisions together. I don’t want to dominate him, but I don’t intend to put up with the antiquated notion that the male must dominate the female.”<sup>158</sup> The reporter found similar sentiments from every woman in her teens or twenties that she spoke to, and proclaimed a coming “revolution of the young Florries” in Andy Capp land.

Demographic shifts underline the disconnect between the planners’ gendered ideals and the reality. Even while roughly half of British women aged 15-59 had entered the workforce (with Dame Evelyn Sharp as Permanent Secretary of Housing and Local Government), planners continued to base assumptions on the male head of household and the “housewife.”<sup>159</sup> In a 1966 survey of inner Liverpool, for instance, questions regarding residents’ attitudes towards the present and future urban environment were addressed to housewives, “since they are generally the people most closely affected by the home and its immediate district.” Questions regarding willingness to relocate beyond the city were directed at men. The division was rooted in the assumption that traditional gender roles would remain steady, despite the survey’s

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<sup>157</sup> “A Man’s City?” *Liverpool Echo*, 26 Nov. 1962.

<sup>158</sup> Marjorie Proops, “To Me, This is the Boomiest: The Fall of the Last Outpost of Male Domination,” *Daily Mirror*, 17 April 1967, 15.

<sup>159</sup> Statistics from T.J. Hatton, “Women’s Work in Britain, 1911-1971: A Regional Perspective,” quoted in Callum G. Brown and W. Hamish Fraser, *Britain since 1707: A Concise History* (London: Routledge, 2010), 609.



Cover of a Newcastle planning pamphlet, undated, c.1965. The sole female figure represents leisure. Newcastle Libraries.

acknowledgement that the male workforce had contracted while the percentage of employed women had steadily grown.<sup>160</sup> As the cover design for the Newcastle planning pamphlet pictured below demonstrates, publicity images perpetuated the assumption of male labor and female leisure.

It could be argued that planners' vision of the future cityscape also had a gendered dimension. Peter Shapely has noted that civic redevelopment campaigns, with their hyperbolic emphasis on having the first, newest, biggest, and boldest designs veered toward posturing machismo.<sup>161</sup> Cullen's paeans to the thrill of racing through the city along the motorway's concrete arteries and Burns's references to the "excitement and vitality" glimpses of speeding

<sup>160</sup> Employment percentages were 80% for men and 45% for women. Francis Amos, *Social Survey: A Study of the Inner Areas of Liverpool*. Study published by Liverpool Planning Office. Liverpool Record Room, hq 711 CIT.

<sup>161</sup> Shapely, "Civic Pride and Redevelopment in the Post-War British City," 325.

cars could add to urban life both had an air of machismo as well. These images reached back to the thrusting modernism of the Futurists and Vorticists earlier in the century; they also prefigured the priapic urban fantasies undergirding J. G. Ballard's 1970s novels like *Crash* and *Concrete Island* and the hit gangster film *Get Carter*, which was set in the emerging modernist Newcastle cityscape.

There was a danger, too, of excitement for the plan and excitement for the wooden model becoming entangled. A contemporary critic noted this danger:

The overwhelming effect of the Plan—as presenting in the form of impressive looking documents, diagrams, and three dimensional models—tends to reduce most people to a state of uncomprehending admiration for the sheer technical expertise which has gone into the whole operation. There is a very real danger that the quality of the model-making is likely to make a bigger impact than the planning proposals which are being portrayed.<sup>162</sup>

In 1962, before a pint of concrete had been poured to build the new Liverpool, a local professor enthused that Shankland had shown that “the dreams of yesterday can become a reality today, converting the drab chaos of Liverpool into sparkling order.”<sup>163</sup> The “reality” he described did indeed appear to sparkle, but it was made from whitewashed balsa wood, not from brick and concrete.

### Conclusion

“In the city of Newcastle 25 years from now, people will be walking about the streets as though they were on holiday.”<sup>164</sup> The speaker was T. Dan Smith, the charismatic head of Newcastle's ruling Labour Party, and chair of the City Planning Committee. His bold prediction, which served as the opening for a 1964 BBC documentary, was not prophesying the weekly

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<sup>162</sup> James Hunter, “The Liverpool City Plan: A Dissident View,” *Architecture North West* 18, August 1966, 7.

<sup>163</sup> Robert Gardner-Medwin, quoted in “Students Have Dream Plan of New Liverpool,” *Liverpool Daily Post*, 2 Dec. 1962.

<sup>164</sup> “Rape of Utopia: Jam Tomorrow,” production script. Held in BBC Written Archives Centre, Reading, UK. 865/6774-5.

deluge of stag parties drawn by twenty-first-century Newcastle's reputation as a party city, but to a transformation in the city's character—from a shabby, dark, and dour industrial town to a bright, modern, and happy metropolis.<sup>165</sup> Newcastle, the show's viewers were told, was on the front line in a broad campaign to reimagine city space. Underway, according to the program's narrator, John Donat, was a new stage in the chronicle of modern Britain: "In the thirties the worker won the right to a fair deal. In the forties we won the war. In the fifties we won the welfare state. But now we have a new battle of Britain—a battle for Britain—and the city is on the front line." Urban renewal, in this story, played out as part of an ongoing, and distinctly British, social revolution. Underlining modernism's yoking of urban and human transformation, Donat continued: "But how can we get human values into a welfare state cut price environment? The ground the bulldozers and demolition men are laying must be rebuilt in a new vision of what we want to be ourselves."<sup>166</sup> Here was a pithy distillation of urban modernism's ambitions—the architect-planner would design an environment fit for the wants and needs of modern Britons; at the same time, it would serve as a transformative space, allowing citizens to become the future selves toward which they aspired.

It was late in the autumn of 1964, and the BBC's two-part television documentary, "The Rape of Utopia," threw itself enthusiastically behind the nascent "comprehensive redevelopment" campaigns that were beginning to restructure cities across Britain's industrial heartland. The first episode, "The Disenchanted City" narrated the growth of Britain's "great black cities," which, springing up around the mills and factories of the Industrial Revolution, had

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<sup>165</sup> The program's producer, John Read, saw Smith's line as the show's focal point, writing, "we are only just beginning to edit the material now, but I think your statement about "people in Newcastle in twenty-five years' time walking about as though they were on holiday" is going to be a key statement in the film. It often came to my mind in the course of a couple weeks I have just had in the Soviet Union, ostensibly as a film delegate, but in fact keeping my eyes open all the time looking at the cities of Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev—pretty grim architecture, but the people there certainly do walk about their cities in that frame of mind." Letter from John Read to T. Dan Smith, 12 June 1964.

<sup>166</sup> "Rape of Utopia: Jam Tomorrow," production script.

caused “beauty and order” to “vanish from the world.” The program’s gendered imagery argued that undisciplined industrialism had violated a bucolic (and feminine) British countryside. In the second program, “Jam Tomorrow,” a heroic rescuer was proposed in the modern (and masculine) architect-planner, who would heal division between art and industry—the “tragic schizophrenia” of the Victorian period—and reconcile Britain’s cities with the motor age.<sup>167</sup> For the program’s creators, pre-industrial Britain was an idyll in which “there was nothing ugly.” Only imaginative modernist planners, like knights on a Grail quest, could renew the urban wasteland.

“The Rape of Utopia’s” presentation of Britain’s modernist revolution struck an awkward balance between historical inevitability and vital urgency. While Donat’s narrative plugged the urban renewal programs just getting underway into a continuum of British social progress, it was imbued with a shrill anxiety over the perils of delay: “Whether we like it or not, the shape of the future is being decided now. At the centre of the urban crisis is the motor car—forcing us to take drastic action.” A series of sound bites from planners underscored this urgency. “We’re not moving fast enough,” opined Newcastle’s chief planner, Wilfred Burns: “we’re twenty-five years behind events. I think we need to re-invent the city.” Roy Gazzard, designer of the new town of Killingworth just to Newcastle’s north, concurred: “There are thirty-six building years left to the 21<sup>st</sup> century—one generation in which to recreate the world around us.” According to Lewis Womersley of Sheffield, “too much of the industrial north looks like hell, and we’ve to build ten times as fast if we’re to have any real impact.” Graeme Shankland, the planning consultant in charge of remaking central Liverpool, was the least sanguine: “The problem is that as a nation we’re not yet bloody well organized to do this job. We’ve got a glimpse of what’s possible, but

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<sup>167</sup> Untitled production script for “The Rape of Utopia.” Held in the BBC Written Archives Centre, Reading, UK. T32/1, 805/1.

we haven't yet got either the powers, the will or the machinery."<sup>168</sup> These perspectives are worth quoting at length because they provide a glimpse into the blend of confidence and anxiety that animated the urban renewal initiatives rolled out across cities in Britain's industrial north during the 1960s—confidence that history and progress were on the modernists' side, and anxiety that delays and obstruction might scupper even the best of plans. Here, neatly packaged for a national television audience rather than a coterie of professionals, was a planners' manifesto for Britain's urban future.

When this BBC program aired in 1964, Britain's rising cohort of modernist planners could imagine that they were riding a powerful tide that would empower them, as Burns put it, "to re-invent the city." Backed by pro-growth councils like those of 1960s Liverpool and Newcastle, dramatic changes were indeed possible, though the planners' power was rarely as far-reaching as they hoped or as their critics claimed.<sup>169</sup> Yet even at urban modernism's mid-1960s zenith, British cities' planning regimes rested on an unsteady footing. Planners felt constrained to secure at least the illusion of a public consensus, and sought to gain this end by arousing an array of emotions in their publics, from fear, shame, and disgust at the existing order to excitement, pride, and anticipation for the space age future. As this chapter has argued, these appeals had mixed success; while many people were enraptured by the promises of a revitalized cityscape, others remained skeptical of the plans' political and gendered dimensions.

The cultural landscape a decade later was starkly different. The planners featured in "The Rape of Utopia" postured as paladins of a new heroic push that would rescue Britain's towns and countryside from uncontrolled development. By the middle of the 1970s, an increasingly powerful preservation movement portrayed the planners themselves as Britain's pillagers. In the

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> See Peter Mandler, "New Towns for Old," 226-27.

foreword to *The Rape of Britain*, a 1975 book that catalogued the “ravishing of our fine cities,” the poet John Betjeman lambasted the developers, political “yes-men,” and architects he felt were “to blame for the rape of Britain.” He trained his ire on the cultural trappings of modernist planning discussed in this chapter:

In my mind’s ear I can hear the smooth tones of the committee man explaining why the roads must go where they do regardless of the humble old town they bisect. In my mind’s eye I can see the swish perspective tricked up by the architect’s firm to dazzle the local councilors. I see the tailored models walking past the plate glass, bent forward against a strong breeze. Round the corner I see senior citizens and youth representatives sipping Cinzano under a striped umbrella in the hot sunshine which always lends a Costa Brava look to architectural drawings. I hear words like “complex,” “conurbation,” “precinct,” “pedestrianisation” and that other couple of words that mean total destruction, “comprehensive development.” Places cease to have names, they become areas with a number. Houses become housing, human scale is abandoned.<sup>170</sup>

As in the BBC program, the *Rape of Utopia*’s authors employed the gendered and violent image of rape to describe the condition of Britain’s built environment, but modern architects had gone from heroic figures to villains.

The book’s publication coincided with European Architectural Heritage Year, a campaign sponsored by the Council of Europe to make the European public “aware of the dangers which threaten the monuments they often take for granted,” and advocate historical preservation.<sup>171</sup> It also dovetailed with a broader cultural moment in which the desirability of unfettered economic and urban growth was challenged by a burgeoning ecological movement.<sup>172</sup> The 1960s modernists saw their role as to direct and channel urban growth, but they did not doubt its benevolence; indeed, they based their plans on the assumption that the economic boom

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<sup>170</sup> John Betjeman, foreword to Colin Amery and Dan Cruickshank, *The Rape of Britain* (London: Elek Books, 1975), 7.

<sup>171</sup> See Elaine Harwood and Alan Powers, eds., *The Heroic Period of Conservation: Twentieth Century Architecture* 7 (2004).

<sup>172</sup> See Meredith Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain*; Donella H. Meadows, et. al., *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome’s Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

of the 1950s and 1960s would continue. By the early seventies, this was no longer the case—small was now beautiful, as the British economist E.F. Schumacher proclaimed in the title of his popular 1973 book.<sup>173</sup> But *pace* the architectural historian Charles Jencks, modernist architecture did not die in 1972.<sup>174</sup> As chapter 3 will show, the seventies would witness a recalibration of modernist planning, as planners pioneered new methods that linked the “small is beautiful” ethos to the modernist ideal of planning as means to advance social welfare. The paternalist figure of the master planner was irreparably diminished, but this opened opportunities for a broader range of actors to shape Britain’s urban space.

Despite T. Dan Smith’s rhetorical flourishes that imagined modernist Newcastle as a Brasilia of the North, the municipal planners who tried to adapt Britain’s cities to the age of the motorcar were constrained by the patterns of the historical cityscape. This inherited landscape of streets, homes, and lives could not be freely molded to match the planners’ wooden models, however powerful the planning department. Just five miles north of Newcastle’s center, though, a new town was taking shape over Northumbria’s fields and disused coal pits. In his plans to make Killingworth Township both a “compassionate community” rooted in Christian ethics and a “new technopolis” showcasing cutting-edge modernist architecture, Roy Gazzard had a much freer hand than his counterparts in Newcastle or Liverpool. As the next chapter shows, Gazzard shared his colleagues’ ideas that built forms could reshape the way people thought, felt, and formed relationships. His conceptions of how to form urban communities came not from the latest ideas in postwar British sociology, however, but rather in his experience as a social engineer in colonial Uganda. In Gazzard’s work at Killingworth, colonial expertise formed the

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<sup>173</sup> E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics As If People Mattered* (London: Blond & Briggs, 1973).

<sup>174</sup> Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1984), 9.

foundation for a new community designed to meet the challenges and transformations attending northern England's industrial decline.

## Chapter Two: A Social Engineer in the Colonial Circuit: Roy Gazzard and the Making of Killingworth Township

It's hard to get to Killingworth by accident. Slotted between the two principal motorways leading out of Newcastle, the town is most directly approached through a maze of county roads punctuated by roundabouts. Motorists arriving via Southgate road pass a series of empty gray office buildings set on flat, sparsely treed moorlands, which abruptly give way to an expanse of water on either side as the road becomes a narrow causeway. Low brick houses appear off to the left, balanced by a bland office park on the right. Another roundabout: to the left and right snake West Bailey and East Bailey, looping roads that girdle the town center, while due north is a squat, nondescript specimen of suburban shopping mall architecture—the Killingworth Centre, its brick-and-plaster bulk set in an asphalt lake of parking lots. Southgate continues through the roundabout, only to dead-end into the rear of the mall, at which point drivers are forced to execute an awkward three-point turn and head back to the roundabout.

A visitor returning to the town after a thirty-year absence would be baffled—not much remains of the original town. Gone is the hulking central “citadel” that once straddled the town’s main north-south axis. Gone too are the soaring concrete towers linked by elevated walkways that Pevsner’s *Buildings of England* guide described as resembling “nothing so much as a set from Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*.”<sup>1</sup> A *New Statesman* article from 1975 gushed that the town “comes as a sudden-future shock,” while a 1970 *Guardian* report had enthused that Killingworth “catches the imagination” and “exudes an overwhelming sense of place which is unique among new urban developments in the North-east.”<sup>2</sup> Imagination and a sense of place are the antithesis

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<sup>1</sup> John Grundy et al., *Northumberland* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 361-62.

<sup>2</sup> Bel Mooney, “Going Up in the World,” *New Statesman*, 3 January 1975, 7-8; John Ardill, “Killingworth New Town,” *Guardian* (Manchester), 4 March 1970.

of 21<sup>st</sup>-century Killingworth. Yet in the void between Southgate's abrupt terminus and the beginning of Northgate just north of the mall hover the ghosts of a "space age" city designed to reverse what its designer saw as the centrifugal trajectory of contemporary British social life. A "modern castle town" conceived as an experiment in social engineering as much as in innovative architecture, Killingworth is a largely forgotten piece of the history of postwar British planning and design, its central core razed and rebuilt less than two decades after its creation.

The best way to get to Killingworth might be by way of Uganda. Roy Gazzard, the town's chief architect and designer, thought so. Citing his experience as a "social engineer" in Uganda during the 1950s, Gazzard argued that new towns could provide a lesson for Britain as it entered the 1970s. Killingworth was "making the first tentative steps in social engineering," claimed Gazzard, and its example would serve as a test case for designing cohesive communities in an increasingly multicultural nation: "What better laboratory for an experiment in racial integration could there be than the nascent community of a new town?"<sup>3</sup> A bizarre statement, that, since Killingworth's population was to comprise chiefly white working-class residents "decanted" from Newcastle's overcrowded peripheries in slum clearance campaigns. But Gazzard was quite serious in his claims, and used his connections in Kampala to recruit Ugandan planners for his design and development team at Killingworth.<sup>4</sup> Its "castle" design notwithstanding, international visitors likened Killingworth to the built environment of Tunis and Japan, and locals informally dubbed one housing area "Gazzard's wog village."<sup>5</sup> This stridently local new town, with its overt references to medieval Northumbria, was crosshatched with colonial and global flows of people and ideas.

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<sup>3</sup> Roy Gazzard, "Technical Paper: Northern New Towns in the Regional Context," convention of the Concrete Society, Newcastle, April 1969. Roy Gazzard Papers, Durham University Special Collections, GAZ/D14.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Roy Gazzard to Abraham Waligo, Ugandan Minister of Housing and Urban Development, 26 January 1981. Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/B2.

<sup>5</sup> John Ardagh, *A Tale of Five Cities*, 220.

How those flows shaped Gazzard's design for Killingworth is the subject of this article. Drawing on Gazzard's written plans, professional talks, letters, and interviews, I show how Gazzard's colonial experience furnished him with planning principles that would guide his work in Britain during the 1960s. These principles took two main forms. The first of these was Gazzard's conception of the architect-planner's role as that of a social engineer whose mandate was to shepherd psychologically vulnerable urban populations through the traumas that attended social and economic change. He formulated this philosophy in response to anxieties over the management of urban growth in late colonial Uganda, but he later would contend that the same principle held true as a guide to planning communities in the deindustrializing north of England. The second strand of influence was subtler. Working in the colonial context instilled in Gazzard a mystical conception of the local: only designs attuned to the history, culture, people, and landscape in which they were set could create a lasting and humane urban community. Just as the contraction of Britain's empire sparked a turn towards exploring the national and the local among modernist writers, Gazzard's urban modernism increasingly embraced the specific cultural contours that bounded each place.<sup>6</sup> The blend of the modern and the medieval at Killingworth is best understood as part of this process of imperial crisis and contraction.

Killingworth fits awkwardly in the historiography of Britain's new town movement, which was an unprecedented campaign to design and build self-contained towns on greenfield sites around the country.<sup>7</sup> Stretching from the mid-1940s to the end of the 1970s, the official New Town program's lifespan paralleled that of the British welfare state, and is usually narrated

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<sup>6</sup> On the literary recuperation of English identity in the late colonial period, see Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004); and Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Note on style: I capitalize "new town" in reference to the official British New Towns program initiated in 1946 and to all the towns built under that legislation. I keep the term in lower case when I refer to new towns as a concept or to new towns not built under the 1946 act (e.g. Killingworth, which was a locally-funded new town).

according to similar themes—optimism in social progress, a naïve faith in the power of state planning, and mounting disenchantment. The story unfolds in a particularly British register: rooted in the Garden City movement in the late Victorian period, it played out as a domestic battle between visionary planners and small-minded politicians and landowners; the island story is only interrupted with an occasional detour to the United States or Europe.<sup>8</sup> Missing from this narrative is the formative role that international and colonial experiences had on the designers of individual new towns.<sup>9</sup> In a broader sense, what part did former colonial urbanists have in crafting the space of multicultural Britain?

Gazzard's work in Uganda played out in the context of Britain's "second colonial occupation" in Africa—the period between the Second World War and decolonization in the 1960s when indirect rule, a form of governance that relied heavily on the authority of local chiefs, gave way both to heightened intervention and investment by the colonial state in local intermediaries. Central to this project was the management of Africa's expanding urban populations by an array of experts—anthropologists, sociologists, engineers, and planners—in order to smoothly integrate the Empire's African subjects into the political and economic structures of the colonial state.<sup>10</sup> The newly credentialed architect-planner Roy Gazzard was one of these experts, and his colonial experience was the crucible for his design philosophy. Gazzard's long career highlights the complicated colonial and post-colonial relays that shaped the development of one British new town. Killingworth is idiosyncratic; architectural critic

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Dennis Hardy, *From Garden Cities to New Towns: Campaigning for Town and Country Planning, 1899-1946*, (London: E. & F. N. Spon, 1991); Anthony Alexander, *Britain's New Towns: Garden Cities to Sustainable Communities* (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> A recent study that succeeds in linking decolonization and new town administration is Ruth Craggs and Hannah Neate, "Post-Colonial Careering and Urban Policy Mobility."

<sup>10</sup> The concept of the "second colonial occupation" comes from D. A. Low and J. M. Lonsdale, "Towards the New Order: 1945-1963," in D. A. Low and Alison Smith eds., *History of East Africa*, vol. III (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 12-16. See also Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Owen Hatherly describes it as “a deeply strange place.”<sup>11</sup> It is that, but its example nonetheless challenges insular British narratives of the new town movement. In Gazzard’s case, Killingworth was but one node of a career that spanned three continents over the course of four decades. Placing Gazzard and Killingworth in their international context reveals the overlapping and interpenetrating influences that shaped colonial and metropolitan planning at the tail end of the British Empire. Gazzard’s intellectual biography also provides insight into how “universal” planning concepts like community, place, and space took on different inflections as they passed from the metropole to the colony and back again.<sup>12</sup>

Because Gazzard’s papers make few explicit comparisons between his work in Uganda and his later designs at Killingworth, identifying the colonial influence on his career rests partly on speculation. Gazzard’s work in Uganda made runnels that guided his later approach to planning. So too, however, did his professional contacts, his observations of contemporary town design, his reading in postwar planning theory, and his Christian beliefs. All of these lines of influence were simultaneously shaping his approach to Killingworth. But the colonial runnel proved especially powerful in the context of the new town. The lessons Gazzard learned while guiding development in late-colonial Uganda weighed heavily on his work as the self-titled “Director of Development” at Killingworth. Building new settlements for “detrribalizing” Africans provided Gazzard with a conceptual and architectural vocabulary for shaping working-class-communities in the de-industrializing north of England. The role of the “social engineer” in both contexts, Gazzard contended, was to find symbolic spatial forms that would suture the

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<sup>11</sup> Hatherley, *A Guide to the New Ruins of Britain* (London: Verso, 2010), 170.

<sup>12</sup> This article adds to a growing literature on transnational planning history. See Patsy Healey and Robert Upton, eds., *Crossing Borders: International Exchange and Planning Practices*; Joe Nasr and Mercedes Volait, eds., *Urbanism: Imported or Exported? Native Aspirations and Foreign Plans*, (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Academy, 2003); Jiat-Hwee Chang, *A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture: Colonial Networks, Nature and Technoscience* (London: Routledge, 2016); and Duanfang Lu, ed., *Third World Modernism: Architecture, Development and Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011).

social, psychic, and spiritual wounds exposed by the erosion of “traditional” authority—be it the “tribe,” the factory, or the coal pit. This discussion will be far more concerned with the planner’s vision of Killingworth than with the lived reality of the built town. As Guy Ortolano has demonstrated, plans—even abortive or unrealized ones—are a useful lens for recovering and analyzing the “assumptions and ambitions” of a historical moment.<sup>13</sup>

Analyzing Gazzard’s extensive writings on the planning philosophy behind Killingworth complicates the opposition between “tradition” and “modernism” in British urban design.<sup>14</sup> John R. Gold describes a broad planning consensus in the early postwar period that linked modernism in architecture and urban design to social and political progress.<sup>15</sup> Writing of urban planning in the 1960s, Simon Gunn contends that it was based on a “meliorist belief that planning by experts could engineer into place a bright new world of convenience, efficiency, and plenty.”<sup>16</sup> The early 1960s were by all accounts the high point of this optimism in the power of rational planning and new technology, and nowhere was it more apparent than in the new towns of that decade. As Mark Clapson writes, the plans for sixties new towns “reflected something of the zeitgeist of that decade, namely the love of the new, and the ostensible abandonment of old-fashioned ways of doing things, both of which fused with a renewed impulse to modernize the built environment, and a desire to embrace the expanding range of choice and freedoms that accompanied

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<sup>13</sup> Guy Ortolano, “Planning the Urban Future in 1960s Britain,” 482. See also Saumarez Smith, “Graeme Shankland.”

<sup>14</sup> The rhetorical opposition between the “modern” and the “traditional” has a fraught history, and wherever possible I have tried to avoid the term “modernity.” I use the term “modern” and “modernism” to refer to a specific movement in architecture and planning whose tenets were elaborated at the CIAM conferences of the interwar period; occasionally, I use it as a synonym for the clunky term “cutting edge.” On the conceptual use and misuse of “modernity” in relation to African history, see Lynn M. Thomas, “Modernity’s Failings, Political Claims, and Intermediate Concepts”, *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011): 727–740; and Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), chapter 5.

<sup>15</sup> John R. Gold, *The Practice of Modernism*, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Simon Gunn, “The Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism, 868-69.

increasing affluence and consumption.”<sup>17</sup> These recent historical evaluations underline modernist planning’s futurist, technophilic bent.

Where scholars have emphasized the historically sensitive, conservationist strands of modern planning, such deviations are usually portrayed as concessions made in spite of the modernist project.<sup>18</sup> Yet Gazzard’s plans for Killingworth exhibit a Janus-faced modernism in which the unabashedly futuristic building designs were marbled with a romantic vision of the mythic power of historical forms to provide social meaning and psychological security for the individual subject. Here, the yen for the new was intertwined with an urge to preserve local historical sites—or, where they were missing, create them. This impulse went beyond a simple concern for conserving “heritage.”<sup>19</sup>

Killingworth’s design would have a religious as well as a psychological impact. Modern planners, Gazzard maintained, had “measured everything—except the spiritual quality of the new town environment.”<sup>20</sup> Under Gazzard’s leadership, the Killingworth Development Group met for weekly prayer meetings attended by “all the social engineers.”<sup>21</sup> A devout Anglican, Gazzard sought to integrate an ecumenical Christian ethos into the fibers of the new town—a spiritual counter to the “purely physical” and “materialistic” approach of the welfare state. This would take architectural form in the “Citadel”—a gargantuan multilevel building that combined commercial and administrative spaces with health clinics and an ecumenical worship center. Killingworth, as Gazzard was fond of repeating, would cater to the “whole man health,” an

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<sup>17</sup> Mark Clapson, “Introduction” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation, *The Plan for Milton Keynes* (London: Routledge, 2014), 3.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, John Pendlebury, “Alas Smith and Burns?” Two recent successful attempts to place modernism and conservation in the same optic are Otto Saumarez Smith, “Graeme Shankland: A Sixties Architect-Planner”; and Simon Gunn, “The Buchanan Report, Environment and the Problem of Traffic in 1960s Britain.”

<sup>19</sup> For the history of historical preservation in 1960s and 1970s Britain, see Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London: Methuen London, 1987); and Michael Hunter, ed., *Preserving the Past: The Rise of Heritage in Modern Britain* (Stroud, UK: Alan Sutton, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> James Dolan, “A Planner turns Don,” *Evening Chronicle* (Newcastle), 7 September 1970, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Taylor, “Sparkling Skyline for a New Town,” *Sunday Times* (London), 15 December 1968.



Model of Killingworth from the east, with Citadel surrounded by deck housing. The lake is on the right. Newcastle Libraries.

approach that encompassed hearts, souls, and minds as opposed to the welfare state's lopsided emphasis on physical well being.<sup>22</sup>

### **Revamping the New Towns**

Killingworth's origins lie in a historical moment during which politicians and urban experts were rethinking the form and scope of Britain's new towns. The first generation of British new towns, established between 1946 and 1950, were intended in classic Garden City fashion to eliminate

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<sup>22</sup> The medical concept of "whole person health" grew out of the context of postwar colonial development. See Rebecca C. Hughes, "Science in the Hands of Love': British Evangelical Missionaries and Colonial Development in Africa, c. 1940–60," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, no. 5 (2013): 823–842.



**Harlow New Town Plan: Strict Zoning with Neighborhood Units.**

overcrowding in working-class areas of Britain’s major cities. London was naturally the prime focus—eight of the fourteen Mark I new towns, and all of the first four, were built in the South East with the intention of dispersing the capital’s population.<sup>23</sup> The new towns of the 1940s had been constructed according to the Garden City ideals of low-rise development and low housing densities. Strict functional zoning was a paramount concern, with the result that each town featured a commercial core surrounded by residential neighborhoods while industry was relegated to the peripheries.<sup>24</sup>

An economic recession in the late 1940s and opposition from the resurgent Conservative Party meant that the burst of new town building ground to a halt by 1950. During the following decade, population dispersal was mainly undertaken through the Expanded Towns Program, a

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Saint, “The New Towns,” in Boris Ford, ed., *The Cambridge Cultural History of Britain, Vol. 9: Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 148.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Hall and Colin Ward, *Sociable Cities: The Legacy of Ebenezer Howard* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 56.

policy introduced under the 1952 Town Development Act. This was a far more restricted and localized undertaking. The New Towns Act had provided state funding for new towns through the creation of Development Corporations, which were empowered to buy land at agricultural values and reinvest the profits accrued through leasing the land after the town was constructed. The new towns built under the 1952 act had far more limited resources, funded as they were by local authorities without the expansive purview of the Development Corporations.<sup>25</sup>

An unexpected population boom at the end of the 1950s coincided with the expansion of slum clearance programs in Britain's provincial cities. Fearing that cities like Birmingham, Liverpool, and Newcastle would begin sprawling out into the countryside, MacMillan's government acknowledged the limitations of the Expanded Towns Program and revived the state-driven new towns program. The second round of new town building that kicked off in the 1960s had a much more provincial emphasis than the first; in addition to relieving urban populations, these Mark II new towns were also to form attractive counters in the industrial north to London's continuing population bloat. While only one official new town had been designated in the 1950s—Cumbernauld outside of Glasgow—the 1960s saw a spate of new town building, principally in northern England and Scotland.

A further feature that separated these towns from their Mark I counterparts was in their design. The new towns of the 1960s had a far more compact and urban appearance. This design shift was partly a response to criticisms of the dull design of early new towns like Stevenage and Harlow. The *Architectural Review* leveled a broadside against the new towns' "prairie planning," while the American urbanist Mumford Lewis (an inveterate advocate of dispersal) observed: "Because the new planners are mainly in revolt against congestion and squalor, rather than in

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<sup>25</sup> Anthony Alexander, *Britain's New Towns*, 28.

love with urban order and cooperation, the New Towns do not yet reveal what the modern city should be.”<sup>26</sup>

New towns were not only boring to look at, their critics maintained—they were also boring to live in, fertile soil for the “New Town Blues” phenomenon, which was widely-publicized in national newspapers. Introducing the New Towns Act in 1946, Lewis Silkin, the Minister of Town and Country Planning, wrote that “the building of a new town is not merely a great task of physical construction, it is also a great adventure in social construction.”<sup>27</sup> As the Mark I New Towns neared completion in the early 1960s, this second task appeared in danger of failing. A 1961 government report remarked on the isolation and loneliness experienced by many new town residents, and doubted “whether the neighbourliness and intimacy typical of urban life at its best” could ever be achieved with the generous housing layouts promoted by garden city enthusiasts.<sup>28</sup> These dispiriting findings coincided with several influential studies underlining the warmth and communal solidarity of the working-class slums that many of the new town residents were leaving.<sup>29</sup>

Killingworth was conceived in this intellectual climate. In his designs, Roy Gazzard deliberately broke from the mold the Mark I new towns had established, turning instead to the examples of two more recent designs—Cumbernauld new town outside of Glasgow (designated in 1955) and the unrealized scheme for Hook New Town in Hampshire (a private initiative by the London County Council, planned between 1958 and 1960). Hook and Cumbernauld diverged radically from the dispersed, Arts and Crafts model of the early new towns in favor of

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in David Kynaston, *Family Britain, 1951-1957* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), 345.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in John Grindrod, *Concretopia: A Journey around the Rebuilding of Postwar Britain* (Brecon, UK: Old Street Publishing, 2013), 57.

<sup>28</sup> “Doubts About Neighbourliness in New Towns,” *Guardian*, Aug. 4, 1961, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*; Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London*; Madeline Kerr, *The People of Ship Street*.

compactness and a hard-edged, urban aesthetic offered by modernist multi-story central areas. Both town centers were conceived as vertically segregated megastructures, with ground level car parks and service areas giving way to shopping and leisure facilities above, all crowned by dwellings to provide a constant sense of life and activity in the core.<sup>30</sup> These new town models were enormously influential in the early 1960s, and Killingworth's designer embraced the concept of dense modernist urbanity without reservation. But intertwined with these recent British inspirations were ideas drawn from Gazzard's colonial experience in the 1950s. While modernist megastructures provided inspiring architectural forms to imitate, Gazzard's experience as a "social engineer" in Uganda provided the young planner with the social philosophy animating those designs.

### **Colonial Prelude: Social Engineering in Jinja, Uganda**

Many years later, Roy Gazzard liked to recall the afternoons he spent drifting through the streets of London with his grandfather as they followed the course of the city's sewers. The poet in him saw these outings as the source of his interest in engineering and urban design. His maternal grandfather was a sanitation engineer, and he found in the young Gazzard an enthusiastic pupil. "I became aware of the architecture of sewers," and would spend hours tracing "secret rivers" like the Fleet and Tyburn. If his mother's family provided him with his love for urban space, he attributed a similar formative connection to his father's side. While his father was an accountant, several previous generations had been journeyman inkmakers for the

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<sup>30</sup> John R Gold, *The Practice of Modernism*, 146-47.

Stephens Ink company; they “possessed the formula for and stirred the vats” for the firm, “thus helping to make possible the documents and literature of Victorian Britain and the Empire.”<sup>31</sup>

Tracing Gazzard’s career as an urban planner for the empire to these nuggets of family history is of course simplistic, but it underlines the enthusiasm for history and myth that formed a central part of his worldview. This trait would remain central to his understanding of architecture and urban design throughout his career, dictating how he approached urban planning projects in Uganda, Britain, and Oman. History provided the lens through which he viewed urban problems, though how he used this history would shift fundamentally over his career, morphing from an early emphasis on the universalist implications of British urban growth to a later emphasis upon the importance of difference, and of the mystical power of local place.

Born in 1923, Gazzard received a diploma in architecture on the eve of World War II and then served in the war first as an engineer, and later as a glider pilot. When the fighting stopped, he found a position with military intelligence in the British occupation of Jerusalem, where he narrowly escaped the bombing of the King David hotel by militant Zionists after an anonymous phone call warned him not to take his usual morning coffee at the hotel.<sup>32</sup> In Jerusalem, he became acquainted with Henry Kendall, the architect responsible for the Jerusalem City Plan of 1944. Kendall’s conservation efforts in the Old City made a particular impression on the younger architect:

It was due to Kendall that development was thrown back to reveal a walled city and on his recommendation developers within the city received a government subsidy for buildings roofed and walled in stone. Within a very short time the incongruous iron pitched roofs were rapidly being replaced with stone domes and as might be expected the visual impact of the Holy City was greatly improved and when later Kendall later [*sic*]

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<sup>31</sup> These biographical details taken from “The Man Who Built 3 Towns Looks at Ours,” *Sunderland Echo*, July 25, 1986. Clipping held in Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/A1.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

suggested that I should join him in Uganda and help establish a planning department there I gladly agreed and joined him.<sup>33</sup>

Kendall served as an early model of the authoritative town planner, impressing Gazzard with his use of his bureaucratic influence to break down political and commercial opposition to his preservation efforts.

Gazzard returned to London after demobilization. There he enrolled at the Architectural Association in London for his professional training, studying under the modernist German-Jewish émigré Arthur Korn.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, Kendall was appointed chief planner for Uganda, and arranged for Gazzard to serve as his assistant. Gazzard arrived in Uganda in 1949, and took charge of planning the region east of the Nile, a region that encompassed the rapidly expanding urban centers of Mbale, Tororo, and Jinja, Uganda's second largest city and Gazzard's home for the next four years.<sup>35</sup>

Just twenty-six years old when he arrived in Jinja, Gazzard immersed himself in the town's social and cultural life. Unsurprisingly, his role as a British-born administrator launched him into the elite sphere of expatriate society, and his calendar was punctuated by banquets and tea parties, as well as work with academics at the East African Institute of Social Research in Kampala.<sup>36</sup> Yet he also forged broader social ties in the community. He was deeply involved with the local churches (his twin daughters were baptized in Jinja), served on the governing board of missionary-run Busoga College at Mwiri, lent money to several of his African

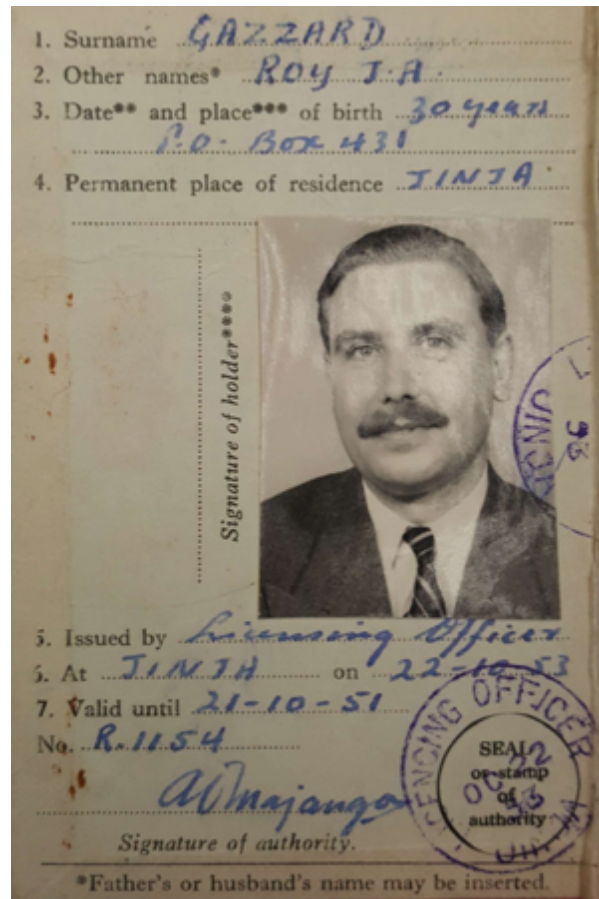
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<sup>33</sup> Gazzard, "The Jinja Township," 15. Undated manuscript (c. 1972), Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/B4.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>36</sup> Gazzard's papers contain an invitation to an exclusive garden party with the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh on their 1954 tour of the Commonwealth, references to joining Jinja's sailing club, photographs of a Victorian costume party attended by other expatriates, and numerous social invitations. He also played the part of a rapacious property developer in a local production of R.C. Sheriff's play *Badger's Green*. He cited his work with the sociologists Cyril and Rhona Sofer as instrumental in shaping his approach to planning in Uganda. *Ibid.*, 33.



Roy Gazzard, age 30, photographed for his Ugandan driver's license in 1953. Roy Gazzard Papers.

subordinates, and godfathered an African girl.<sup>37</sup> These informal contacts would tether him to Uganda long after his colonial service had ended.

Jinja played a particularly formative role in Gazzard's development as a "social engineer." Gazzard's chief task was to formulate a plan for the city, which was in the midst of a period of infrastructural expansion and population growth. Between 1948 and 1951, Jinja's population more than doubled; what had been a tidy settlement of 8,400 ballooned to 20,800.<sup>38</sup> The Nile bisected Jinja as it flowed north out of Lake Victoria, separating the mainly African

<sup>37</sup> See letter from Roy Gazzard to Gordon Cook, 1 August 1978. Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/B5. Several letters requesting loans from Gazzard are in GAZ/B1. While Gazzard's response is not in available, his retaining of the letters would indicate that he lent the money.

<sup>38</sup> Cyril Sofer and Rhona Sofer, *Jinja Transformed: A Social Survey of a Multi-Racial Township* (Kampala: East African Institute of Social Research, 1955), 15.

neighborhoods to the west from the city's administrative and commercial core clustered on the eastern bank. This area comprised an ethnically diverse population, with African and European settlements abutting a primarily Asian town center.<sup>39</sup> For planners working for the colonial government, Jinja's multiracial composition was problematic, since it obstructed the formation of the cohesive "neighborhood units" that dominated planning orthodoxy. As Kendall lamented, Jinja's ethnic enclaves led to an "absence of community structure," as residents identified with their own particular group rather than the city as a whole.<sup>40</sup>

The peri-urban settlements of African workers on Jinja's western fringe were particularly concerning for colonial authorities. According to a sociological study carried out during Gazzard's tenure, the "villages" that had sprung up within the city's boundaries were "as 'under-developed' as if they were deep in the rural countryside. There are paths instead of made-up roads. Weeds and grass run wild between the houses. There are no refuse disposal, drainage or sanitary services. None of these areas has a supply of electricity and only a few have a piped supply of water in the vicinity."<sup>41</sup> Describing rudimentary infrastructure and a dearth of sanitation, another report lamented that the "dense fringe of huts" girdling the core was "a menace to the health of the town."<sup>42</sup> These anxieties were exacerbated by the recent memory of episodes of urban violence that had broken out in Britain's Caribbean colonies during the late

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<sup>39</sup> Gazzard, "Jinja Township." According to Gazzard's 1952 estimates, the town held 14,900 Africans; 5,100 Asians; and 800 Europeans. By 1955 these numbers had jumped to 21,000, 7,500, and 1,500—an indication of Jinja's dynamism during this period.

<sup>40</sup> Henry Kendall, *Town Planning in Uganda: A Brief Description of the Efforts Made by Government to Control Development of Urban Areas from 1915 to 1955* (London: Crown Agents for Oversea Governments and Administrations, 1955), 45.

<sup>41</sup> Sofer and Sofer, *Jinja Transformed*, 57.

<sup>42</sup> M. J. B. Molohan, *Detribalization* (Dar es Salaam: Government Printer, 1957), 19.

1930s. Riots in Trinidad over urban housing conditions had prompted a drive to institute planning reform throughout the colonies in order to provide political stability.<sup>43</sup>

Added to these concerns with the physical environment was another threat, less tangible but just as disturbing for colonial administrators—the specter of “detrribalization.” This was an explicitly social concern that focused on the traumas attendant on Africans’ transition from a “primitive” existence rooted in the communal structures of family and “tribe,” to a “modern” individualistic society brought by European colonialism. The boom cities of sub-Saharan Africa were ground zero for this threat, with the slums of Johannesburg and Nairobi serving as signifiers for the urban pathologies of rootlessness, crime, and social disintegration.

These concerns took on an acute political urgency during the early 1950s, as the Mau Mau uprising shook the colonial regime in Kenya, sparking a massive counter-insurgency campaign. The slums girdling Nairobi provided fertile conditions for recruiting Mau Mau fighters, and colonial experts framed the rebellion in terms of “border unrest within the African soul, on its psychic frontier between tradition and modernity, community and society, past tribe and future nation.”<sup>44</sup> Mau Mau’s effects radiated well beyond Kenya—in preparation for the queen’s 1954 visit to neighboring Uganda, Roy Gazzard organized a clearance campaign against a population of squatters living adjacent to Jinja’s airfield. Their presence, he felt, offered an opening for Mau Mau infiltrators.<sup>45</sup>

Gazzard’s position as planner placed him in the center of colonial debates over how to best ease Africans into modern urban life. Jinja’s population boom that came with developmentalist projects like the Owen Falls Dam (1949-1954) provided the impetus for

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<sup>43</sup> See Robert Home, "Transferring British Planning Law to the Colonies: The Case of the 1938 Trinidad Town and Regional Planning Ordinance," *Third World Planning Review* 15, no. 4 (1993): 397–410.

<sup>44</sup> John Lonsdale, "Mau Maus of the Mind: Making Mau Mau and Remaking Kenya," *Journal of African History* 31, no. 3 (1990): 393-421, at 405.

<sup>45</sup> Gazzard, "Jinja Township," 18.

experiments in planning and housing schemes.<sup>46</sup> As a key site of industrial development, Jinja was freighted with optimism and anxiety for British observers: “Jinja,” the liberal journalist Vernon Bartlett wrote in the *Daily Chronicle* in 1950, “may develop into a second Johannesburg, devoid of any moral standards to replace the moral discipline it has destroyed. With the right sort of planning and control it may become the most hopeful place in Africa.”<sup>47</sup>

Amoral chaos or hope through management and control—Bartlett’s comments offer a pithy summary of the prospect of African urbanization from the perspective of the postwar colonial elite. The role of planner as social engineer, which Gazzard unfashionably insisted upon in his work in Killingworth, was well within planning orthodoxy in the colonial setting. Here, in the context of his first urban planning position, Gazzard formulated pieces of a romantic urban design philosophy that he would retain throughout his international career, built on an ethnographic connection between people and their surroundings.

One of the most formative influences on Gazzard’s understanding of Ugandan social structures was the work of the East African Institute for Social Research (EAISR), a consortium of anthropologists and sociologists based at Makerere College in Kampala. The EAISR had been established in the late 1940s as part of the drive for colonial reform based on the twin goals of “modernization” and “development.” Composed chiefly of British Academics, the institute worked closely with colonial administrators in British East Africa to guide development and

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<sup>46</sup> Jinja’s Walukuba Housing Estate, on which construction began in 1950, was the largest colonial housing estate in East Africa. See Andrew Byerley, “Mind the Gap! Seeking Stability Beyond the ‘Tribal’ Threshold in Late-Colonial Uganda: The Role of Urban Housing Policy, 1945–1960,” *African Studies* 68, no. 3 (2009): 429-464, at 442.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Sofer and Sofer, *Jinja Transformed*, 1. Roy Gazzard used the same quote to conclude his long-term plan for the city. See Gazzard, “Jinja—A 25 Year Plan for Steady, Balanced Development,” *East African Trade and Industry* 1, no. 7 (September 1954): 40.

welfare policies.<sup>48</sup> Gazzard assisted with a study of Jinja undertaken under the aegis of the EAISR and directed by Cyril and Rhona Sofer, two young British sociologists. Looking back decades later, Gazzard observed that, “more than anything else, the presence of these two people transformed my own attitude and approach to the problem of people in planning and brought my thinking into line with the Protectorate’s own emerging policy on African housing and community development.”<sup>49</sup>

The main point that Gazzard took from the Sofers’ work was that Jinja’s problems would not be solved by racial integration of the African, Asian, and European populations. The study described Jinja as an “Asian town” with African and European visitors. The correct approach to the problem of the “detrribalized” and unsettled African population was not to meld it with the commercial core, but rather to take advantage of “a unique opportunity for ‘town and country’ planning” and allow “small-scale African farming” within the urban boundaries.<sup>50</sup> By providing the African population with an environment conducive to permanent settlement rather than transitory industrial labor, Jinja’s planners would reestablish the “traditional” familial and communal bonds needed to counter the worrying effects of the modern urban environment. Rather than attempting to assimilate the diverse elements of the population into a cohesive whole governed by universalist principles, Jinja’s administrators stressed the importance of ethnic difference and separate urban spheres.

Gazzard took the Sofers’ conclusions as a planning imperative: “The underlying problem was, in fact, not racial integration but the technique for creating well-rooted stable African

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<sup>48</sup> David Mills, “How Not to be a ‘Government House Pet’: Audrey Richards and the East African Institute for Social Research,” in Mwenda Ntarangwi, David Mills, and Mustafa H. M. Babiker, eds., *African Anthropologies: History, Critique, and Practice* (London: Zed Books, 2006), 76-98.

<sup>49</sup> Gazzard, “Jinja Township,” 33. The Sofer’s study was published in 1955 as *Jinja Transformed*.

<sup>50</sup> Sofer and Sofer, *Jinja Transformed*, 115-16.

townships within an urban environment.”<sup>51</sup> Gazzard’s response to Jinja’s needs was colored by garden city principles and presupposed a universal process of modernization in which Britain’s Industrial Revolution held up a distant mirror for the African present. In a policy paper on building standards for African housing, he expounded on the parallels between the experience of Victorian cities and those of postwar Africa: “It was the same problem of a multitude of peasants turned artisan, moving out of the countryside into the new conurbations.” Unless Africa learned from the British experience through vigorous planning, “the industrialisation of Uganda will be virtually impossible. The land will be blighted by a rash of shantytowns and burdened with disaffection. Slum housing will give way to slum living and ultimately slum thinking. It will be the environment of poverty.”<sup>52</sup> The challenge for Gazzard’s planning team, then, was one shared by colonial authorities across Britain’s African colonies—they had to “combine retaining the communal glue that ‘tribalism’ had provided in the past with a more productive economy.”<sup>53</sup> For Gazzard, this could best be accomplished by importing the Western concept of the “neighborhood unit” to Uganda, as a way to “plan in” a new form of sociability.

The “neighborhood” option was just one of several possible paths Jinja’s planners considered. When Gazzard arrived in Jinja, he inherited responsibility for the massive half-completed Walakuba Housing Estate designed by the German architect-planner Ernst May. This project was designed to maximize African workers’ productivity by housing them close to their places of work, and, its advocates hoped, would serve as a model form of workers’ housing to be emulated by private companies.<sup>54</sup> The estate’s design centered on an elliptical “village green”

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<sup>51</sup> Gazzard, “Jinja Township,” 33.

<sup>52</sup> Gazzard, *The Specification of Structural Standards in African Housing* (Jinja, Uganda: Provincial Planning Office, 1953), 2. Held in Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/B7/7.

<sup>53</sup> Paul Kelemen, “Planning for Africa: The British Labour Party’s Colonial Development Policy, 1920–1964,” *Journal of Agrarian Change* 7, no. 1 (2007): 88.

<sup>54</sup> Byerley, “Mind the Gap!” 443.

that housed an administrative building, a canteen, and two shops, with housing laid out along the perimeter. The dwellings were grouped in clusters of 40 or 50 houses, and each cluster had at its center a communal sanitary block.<sup>55</sup> The aim of the design was to provide community feeling while also establishing a regimented and clean living environment that would offer an attractive alternative to the unregulated peri-urban slums. The project failed to spark a large-scale shift in housing policy, as, even at a subsidized rate, its rents were still much higher than rooms in one of Jinja's "dormitory slums."<sup>56</sup> Gazzard was skeptical of the unfinished project's value. In addition to its relatively high rents, he cited less tangible concerns: "one would not have been happy at the thought of one's own servants living there and the environment had much of the formal atmosphere on a military cantonment rather than the informality of an African village."<sup>57</sup> The meaning of the reference to "one's own servants" is left unstated, but it implies that in the architect's mind, the estate's spatial arrangement had an adverse effect on its dwellers' disciplinary habits or productivity.<sup>58</sup>

At the opposite pole to the modernist housing estate was a housing policy mooted by the planning team that left African workers in place. "This approach," Gazzard commented, "represented a perpetuation of the tribal way of life and thus presented few unfamiliar problems to Government." It would provide "the best of two worlds" for all involved, since it would preserve "traditional" sanctions and was a cheap solution to the "housing problem" in African cities. While Jinja's planners were drawn to this segregationist solution, they shied away from its attendant difficulties, which involved upgrading and re-aligning existing railroads, and extended

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<sup>55</sup> Gazzard, "Jinja Township," 33.

<sup>56</sup> Byerley, "Mind the Gap!" 443.

<sup>57</sup> Gazzard, "Jinja Township," 34.

<sup>58</sup> Gazzard's comment also prefigures an infamous statement made in the 1960 obscenity trial involving Penguin Books' publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. During the trial, the prosecutor demanded, "Is it a book that you would even wish your wife or your servants to read?" As Jon Lawrence points out, the trial was a landmark in challenging the tradition of paternal authority in England. Jon Lawrence, "Paternalism, Class, and the British Path to Modernity," 156.

working day for commuting workers, and the establishment of new African towns in some places.<sup>59</sup> It was thus for chiefly practical reasons, rather than for any ideological qualms, that Gazzard's team abandoned the idea of housing Africans in separate rural areas.

The eventual solution that Gazzard advocated in his 1952 plan for Jinja was to divide the African population into discrete "neighborhoods" of roughly 10,000 residents that would form the basis of a new communal life. The idea of the "neighborhood unit" was well established in planning thought by the 1950s. Its roots were in pre-World War I America, but the concept had been taken up by British planners and integrated into the garden city movement as a way to encourage close-knit sociability amid the conditions of modern urban life.<sup>60</sup> From Britain, it had spread to the colonies during the 1940s and 1950s via paladins of "tropical architecture" like Robert Gardner-Medwin, Otto Koenigsberger, Maxwell Fry, and Jane Drew. These itinerant experts advocated the neighborhood as a "modern" form universally suited to foster healthy individuals and cohesive communities.<sup>61</sup>

For Gazzard, the idea of African neighborhoods offered a chance to salvage the cohesive communal glue of the "tribe" while integrating the African population into an industrial urban setting. "Tribal sanctions are already disappearing," he observed, "and in their place new standards of discipline have to be developed." In terms reflecting British garden city ideals, Gazzard argued that the new neighborhoods would offer "an improved environment comparable in amenity to that enjoyed in the countryside," as well as an opportunity for Africans to become "acculturated." This would eventually allow "the African to take his place as a citizen together with Asians and Europeans in the multi-racial population groups elsewhere in the town." The

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<sup>59</sup> Gazzard, *The Specification of Structural Standards in African Housing*, 5.

<sup>60</sup> Donald Leslie Johnson, "Origin of the Neighbourhood Unit," *Planning Perspectives* 17, no. 3 (2002): 241.

<sup>61</sup> Sanjeev Vidyarthi, "Reimagining the American Neighbourhood Unit for India," in Healey and Upton, *Crossing Borders*, 73-93.

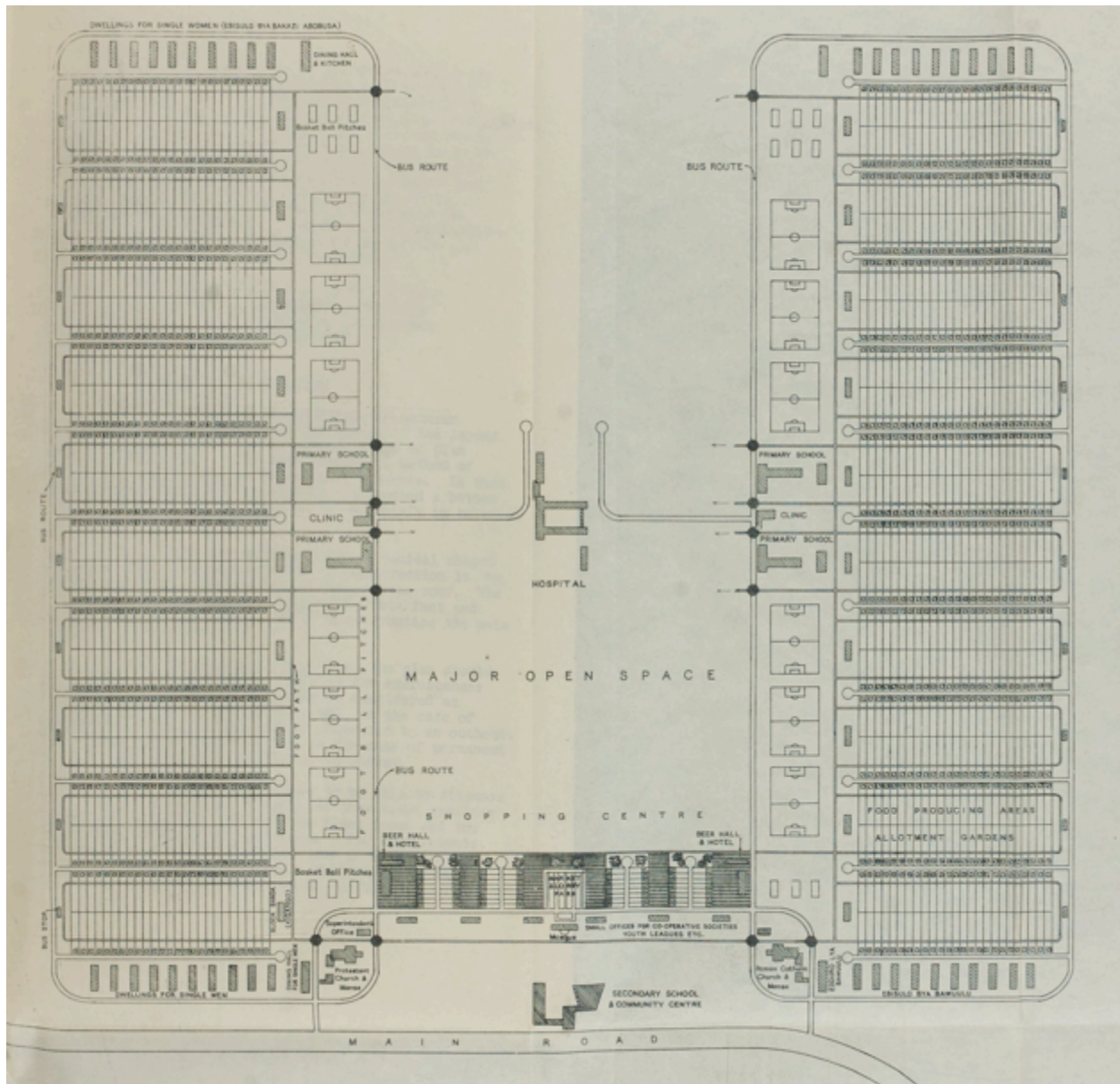
planned neighborhood, Gazzard concluded approvingly, would be a petri dish for a new African culture that would “not be the image of the European, but probably a veneer of basically Western culture with vestigial tribal features. The introduction to this culture will be in the Neighbourhood followed by observation and imitation of the European, in the home, in the streets, and at work.”<sup>62</sup> Each neighborhood unit’s operation and design followed Gazzard’s emphasis on “tribal” communal solidarity wedded to social and economic meliorism. Two European superintendents would oversee each unit, working closely with African assistants, who in turn would maintain links with elected headmen. This philosophy fit perfectly with the policy of the Uganda Protectorate in the early 1950s, as colonial administrators searched for new forms of African “community” to replace the bonds of the “tribe.”<sup>63</sup> Like new towns such as Harlow, Basildon, and Crawley, whose foundations were beginning to pepper the countryside of southeast England in the decade following the 1946 New Towns Act, Jinja’s neighborhoods would be grouped around a carefully planned array of industrial and social services. As the image above shows, the neighborhood was laid out on rationalized lines, with strict zoning and transportation requirements. Each would host five schools (four primary and one secondary), medical services (one hospital and two clinics), places of worship (two churches and a mosque), shopping facilities, beer halls, police and postal offices, and a rigid separation of pedestrians and vehicles. “Impressive vistas and grandiose or curvaceous layouts” were to be shunned in favor of an intimate, small-scale environment scaled to “the individual and walking distance.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Gazzard, *The Specification of Structural Standards in African Housing* (Jinja, Uganda: Provincial Planning Office, 1953), 7. Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/B7/7.

<sup>63</sup> Andrew Byerley, "Mind the Gap!" 444.

<sup>64</sup> Gazzard, *The Specification of Structural Standards in African Housing*, 8. An unstated benefit of this small-scale design is the lack of large gathering places for anti-colonial demonstrations.



Roy Gizzard's plan for an African neighborhood in his 1952 Jinja Plan. *The Specification of Structural Standards in African Housing*. Roy Gizzard Papers.

Whereas Jinja's "aimless black ring" fostered administrative chaos and moral and social disintegration, the neighborhoods would be built around the wholesome and stable institution of the nuclear family.<sup>65</sup> Citing the Sofer study's finding that Jinja's African population comprised mainly men who left their wives in the countryside Gizzard argued that the path to stability was

<sup>65</sup> The phrase "aimless black ring" comes from Gizzard, "Jinja Township," 33.

through providing conditions favorable to family life. The bulk of the dwellings would be detached single-family homes with a private allotment garden—intended both to provide an occupation for wives brought in from the country and to maintain what Gazzard saw as Africans’ primal bond with the soil. Single men and women would be cordoned off in gender-specific hostel blocks “away from the family areas.”<sup>66</sup> The net effect of this spatial configuration, Gazzard hoped, would be to establish a stable social structure in which such disruptive practices as beer-making and prostitution were, if not eliminated, at least quarantined from the family areas.

The final element in the plan called for the design of social spaces that would foster a vital sense of community. A “palaver ground” adjacent to the market hall would host informal encounters and gossip. This central gathering place would have a small-scale complement next to each group of houses, whose occupants would be encouraged to erect a *banda* (an open hut or shed) or a *kigango* (a wooden statue traditionally erected to honor the dead).<sup>67</sup> Serving both a political and a social function, this “centre of interest” would serve as a focus of “discussion and group activity and the election of their tribesmen and representatives. This arrangement would have a valuable social stimulus providing some link with African customs and traditions and a unifying factor in the Africans’ rapid urbanisation.”<sup>68</sup> These local meeting points would serve as counters to the corrosive effects of modern urban life, providing residents (who would be grouped according to income level and “tribal affinity”) with a shared symbolic gathering place. This final insistence upon the power of local tradition—of grounded *place* rather than abstract, Euclidian *space*—was in tension with Gazzard’s universalist view of modernization and

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<sup>66</sup> Gazzard, *The Specification of Structural Standards in African Housing*, 8.

<sup>67</sup> The definition of the Swahili term *kigango* is drawn from N. W. Sobania, *Culture and Customs of Kenya* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), 94-95.

<sup>68</sup> *The Specification of Structural Standards in African Housing*, 7.

industrial development, as well as with his attempt to import the Western concept of the neighborhood unit to East Africa.

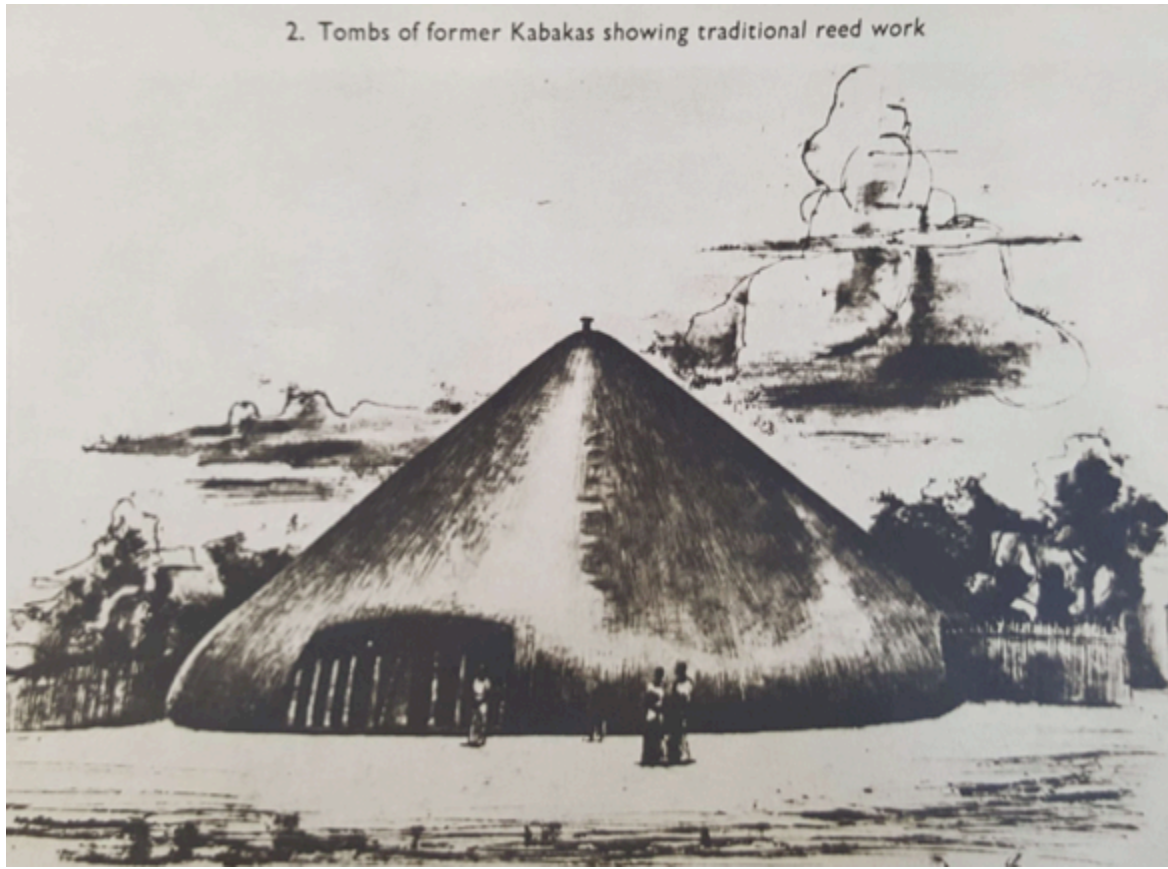
These neighborhood designs reflected Gazzard's universalist view of modernization and industrial development. Western spatial forms would lubricate the African passage to the industrial future, allowing Africans to evade such ills as urban anomie and slum living.<sup>69</sup> During his tenure in Uganda, Gazzard's emphasis was on the universal rather than the particular, space over place. He did not value local symbolic forms as intrinsically important, but as a stabilizing mechanism that would stave off the ill effects of "detrribalizing" modernity. When he returned to England and wrote retrospectively on his time in Uganda, though, these emphases flipped, and he spoke regretfully of having "introduced the village architecture of Sussex into Africa" and that he had "tried to build Welwyn Garden City in Kampala."<sup>70</sup> The best approach to attain stable African communities, he now argued, was not to copy the forms of successful European cities and buildings, but rather to replicate the spatial contours of "traditional" African dwellings in a modern urban environment.

Between writing plans for African neighborhoods early in 1953, and returning to England in 1954, Gazzard's design philosophy underwent a seismic shift that played out against a dramatically changing political backdrop. The foundation of the Uganda National Congress in 1952 marked the beginning of African nationalist politics in the Protectorate; whereas earlier African political movements had aimed to improve the conditions of the colonial *status quo*, the

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>70</sup> "The Man Who Built 3 Towns Looks at Ours," *Sunderland Echo*, 25 July 1986; "Not to Worry, Roy's Got His Worry Beads," *Northern Echo* (Darlington), undated clipping, Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/A1.



Places of “permanence and security,” part I: a drawing of Baganda Tombs, Roy Gazzard Papers.

new party’s goal was complete independence.<sup>71</sup> By the end of the decade, Uganda had three nationalist parties advocating self-rule, and Ghana’s break from Britain in 1957 provided a model of African nationalist development free from colonial rule. Within this new political context, Gazzard renounced his advocacy of normative Western forms. “My interests,” Gazzard later wrote in an unpublished account of his time in Jinja, increasingly “turned to how and where Africans built in the countryside and the comprehension which they had for their clan and its place. African dynamism is to a very large extent rooted in the soil, the harbinger of fertility.”<sup>72</sup> The designer’s role, he now argued, was to discover the essence of the local building traditions, and to recover their “sculpturesque” qualities to reproduce their psychic impact.

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<sup>71</sup> G.W. Kanyeihamba, *Constitutional and Political History of Uganda* (Oxford: LawAfrica Publishing Ltd, 2010), 33.

<sup>72</sup> Gazzard, “Jinja Township,” 38.

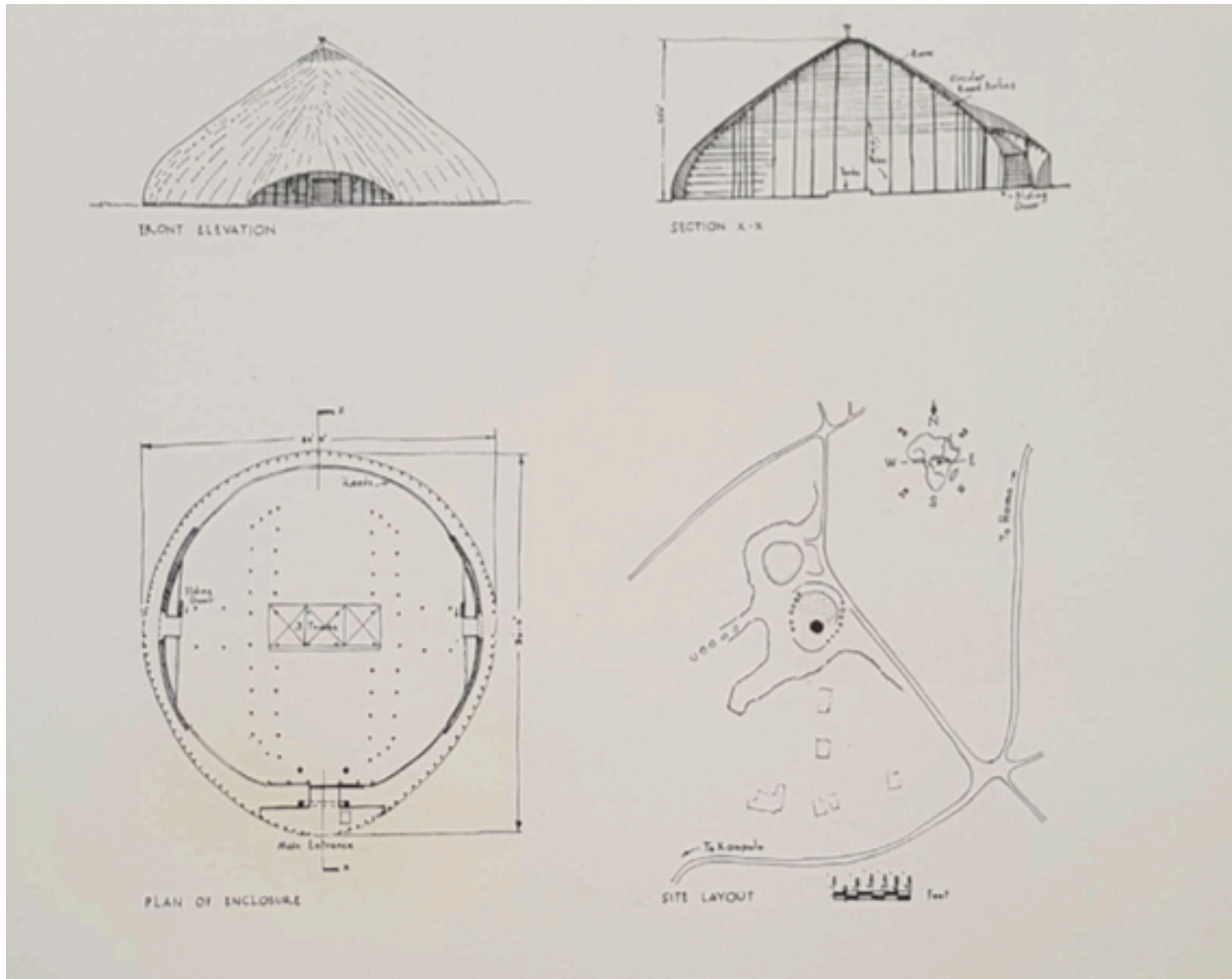
But as his reference to “African dynamism” indicates, Gazzard’s vision of what constituted “traditional” African architecture was refracted through a mystical and romantic lens. “When the sophisticated rhythms of African drumming were converted into mathematical formulae,” he argued, “they precisely coincided with the curves of local buildings.”<sup>73</sup> In a 1960 lecture, he described this discovery as an epiphany: while researching the royal tombs of the Baganda near Kampala towards the end of his tenure in Uganda, he visited an “old Chief” who, over glasses of orange juice, described how the Bagandan royal huts were constructed. The old man’s description, wrote Gazzard, awakened him to the possibilities in a culture where “craftsmanship of any kind was at a premium.”

These fascinating and beautiful huts are much more elaborate than the elementary beehive huts of rough grass construction and were obviously buildings of considerable monumentality and significance. Internally, they present a unique and ingenious solution to the problem of enclosing space using exponential or logarithmic curves, which is the stylistic, almost classical, tradition of African work. The dynamism which is the fundamental quality of all African sculpture is expressive of the principle of growth and increase symbolising the imminent energy which Africans believe carries a spirit force from the tomb to the universe.

While the vernacular building tradition around Jinja had left him cold, this conversation showed him the “curious illogical sophistication” of the Baganda rulers. His papers contain both perspective drawings and schematic plans of the huts, indicating that he took the mathematical details of their construction very seriously. “There is promise for architecture in Africa if traditional work of this description can be developed into new three-dimensional forms of enclosure using modern materials and techniques.” African architects needed to abandon their

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<sup>73</sup> “The Man Who Built 3 Towns Looks at Ours,” *Sunderland Echo*, 25 July 1986. Here Gazzard directly echoes his more well known contemporary Jane Drew, who also connected West African drumming rhythms to a place-specific architecture. See Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, “Modernism in Late Imperial British West Africa: The Work of Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, 1946-56,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 65, no. 2 (2006): 193.



Diagrams of Baganda Tombs, Roy Gazzard Papers.

“slavish adherence to alien two-dimensional linear and rectangular culture from which we ourselves are seeking to escape,” and rediscover “the truly African sculpturesque tradition which should be the inspiration for the nascent architects of that continent.”<sup>74</sup>

Here, Gazzard eschewed the existing vernacular tradition of building in the Busoga countryside around Jinja in favor of the “high” art of a past civilization.<sup>75</sup> These forms offered a

<sup>74</sup> Gazzard, “The Royal Enclosures of the Baganda,” journal article from 1960 published in “G.B.” No further publication information. Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/B3.

<sup>75</sup> In another article, he wrote that “the recession of an earlier and more advanced civilisation may perhaps be imagined in the sophisticated mannerisms of the people and the subtle patterns of their drum rhythms.” Gazzard, “Architecture in the Tropics: A Representative Selection of the Buildings of Uganda,” undated and unpaginated article written during Gazzard’s tenure in Uganda, held in the Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/B4.

smooth, mythical evocation of “African” symbolism that elided the colonial interlude and any reference to modern nationalism. His emphasis on the mystical energy rooted in the built forms of precolonial Buganda foreshadowed his later design of Killingworth Township, where he would evoke the form of the Northumbrian castle town—not as historical pastiche, but as a psychologically necessary bonding agent between people and place. Gazzard’s experience in Jinja became particularly valuable in retrospect, and he returned to it repeatedly in his writings during the following decades. As Britain’s colonial holdings dissolved and planning in the newly independent Commonwealth nations became competitive commissions rather than imperial service, Gazzard increasingly emphasized the importance of difference and particularity. Place, not space, dominated his discussions of his Uganda experience.

Jinja offered Gazzard an ideal laboratory to ply his trade as a “social engineer,” free of the more restrictive conditions confronting planners back in Britain. The links between colonialism and urban modernism have been extensively documented. Paul Rabinow’s characterization of Europe’s colonies as “laboratories of modernity” emphasizes the expanded scope for creativity experienced by colonial architects and administrators stifled by inertia in the metropole.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, Gwendolyn Wright argues that experiments in planning colonial cities offered French planners a chance to work out some of the political, social, and aesthetic problems they confronted back in France.<sup>77</sup> The German architect Ernst May, whom Gazzard befriended while in Uganda, wrote of the African landscape as a “tabula rasa” on which there

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Busoga was a precolonial kingdom east of the Nile in Uganda, while Buganda (the site of the present-day capital Kampala) bordered it on the Nile’s west bank). The Basoga and Baganda are the people living in these regions.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Rabinow, *French Modern*. For a study with similar aims, see Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>77</sup> Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 2.

was no trace of human civilization; it offered the creative genius free reign to “not only design a region on paper, but to organically shape everything down to its smallest detail.”<sup>78</sup>

The planning situation confronting Gazzard in eastern Uganda was of course far from May’s *tabula rasa*, and implementing colonial plans involved contestation and compromise.<sup>79</sup> Yet Jinja did afford the untested young architect an opportunity he almost certainly would not have had in Britain—the chance to formulate urban policies ranging from sweeping structure plans for new communities composed of tens of thousands of people to the minute details of individual homes.<sup>80</sup> As for many of his peers, colonial service gave Gazzard a crucial starting point as a planner, and he parlayed his experience into a long career as an expert—in new town planning, in “social engineering” for communities in social and economic transition, and in the academic discipline of geography.<sup>81</sup>

When his contract expired and he turned his attention to securing work as an architect-planner in Britain, Gazzard received a glowing recommendation from Henry Kendall, who commented particularly on the younger man’s “drive and enthusiasm” in carrying out his duties.<sup>82</sup> This trait translated well into his work at Killingworth, where he would get a second shot at social engineering for a community in transition. Northumberland, he thought, “was very

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<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Kai Gutschow, “Das Neue Afrika: Ernst May’s 1947 Kampala Plan as Cultural Program,” in Fassil Demissie, ed., *Colonial Architecture and Urbanism in Africa: Intertwined and Contested Histories* (Farnham, Surrey, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).

<sup>79</sup> See Tim Livsey, “‘Suitable Lodgings for Students’: Modern Space, Colonial Development and Decolonization in Nigeria,” *Urban History* 41, no. 4 (2014): 664–685; and Stephan F. Miescher, “Building the City of the Future: Visions and Experiences of Modernity in Ghana’s Akasombo Township,” *The Journal of African History* 53, no. 3 (2012): 367–390.

<sup>80</sup> As Rhodri Liscombe observes, this relative freedom allowed late colonial architects to refine and experiment with modernist ideas hatched in Europe. See Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, “Modernism in Late Imperial British West Africa,” 188.

<sup>81</sup> For recent discussions of “postcolonial careering,” see Iain Jackson, “Tropical Architecture and the West Indies: From Military Advances and Tropical Medicine, to Robert Gardner-Medwin and the Networks of Tropical Modernism,” *The Journal of Architecture* 18, no. 2 (2013): 167–195; and Craggs and Neate, “Post-colonial Careering and Urban Policy Mobility.”

<sup>82</sup> Letter of recommendation from Henry Kendall, 17 June 1954. Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/A3.

much like Africa—a frontier region, a place of challenge.”<sup>83</sup> As this analogy indicates, colonial structures of thought did not simply dissipate when the empire’s political sinews were severed, and the new town environment offered an attractive outlet to redirect colonial expertise.<sup>84</sup> In Gazzard’s case, colonial experience provided a creative reservoir to draw upon in designing a new town in Northumbria’s derelict post-industrial landscape.

### **Among the Bankers**

Between Jinja and Killingworth lay an interval of nearly a decade, though. The Britain to which Gazzard returned in 1954 offered diminished opportunities for ambitious urban planners. Whereas the 1946 New Towns Act and the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act had set urban planning at the center of postwar reconstruction, the Conservative election victory in 1951 signaled a turn toward private initiative and a *laissez-fair* approach to development.<sup>85</sup> Fourteen new towns were established in the half-decade following the war’s end, but only one (Cumbernauld New Town near Glasgow) in all of the 1950s. It was, one architect-planner opined, “one of the dimmest decades in our architectural history.”<sup>86</sup> Fittingly, in this context of property speculation and the scaling back of public sector planning, Gazzard found a job as the lead architect for the Midlands section of Barclay’s Bank in Birmingham. His role would involve designing bank buildings (drive-through architecture particularly intrigued him), and also to help

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<sup>83</sup> Dolan, “A Planner Turns Don,” 6.

<sup>84</sup> For a discussion of the attractions of new town work for former colonial administrators, see Craggs and Neate, “Post-colonial Careerism and Urban Policy Mobility.”

<sup>85</sup> For a succinct overview of postwar British urban planning, see Peter Mandler, “New Towns for Old: The Fate of the Town Centre.” A classic treatment of the wave of private building during the 1950s is Oliver Marriott, *The Property Boom*.

<sup>86</sup> Lionel Esher, *A Broken Wave*, 59.

the bank take advantage of the opportunities provided by Birmingham's urban renewal program. Gazzard accepted the position and remained at the bank until 1960.<sup>87</sup>

Working as a bank architect in Birmingham was not what Gazzard's wanted to be doing for the rest of his life. It is likely that he missed the opportunities for experimentation and adventure that his colonial post had offered. He approached the *Architectural Press* with the idea of writing a book on the design of modern banks, but was rebuffed—there was little demand for the subject.<sup>88</sup> Even as he pursued his work at the bank, he followed Birmingham's urban renewal campaign closely, drawing comparisons to his experience in Jinja. The symbiotic relationship between ambitious public works campaigns and cash-flush property developers transforming 1950s Birmingham was “strangely comparable,” he thought, to the booming industrial expansion he had witnessed in Jinja.<sup>89</sup> The comparison indicates that Uganda remained present in his mind, as do the numerous clippings of Uganda's move toward independence contained in his papers.<sup>90</sup> Also, it was towards the end of his tenure at Barclay's that he presented his paper on “The Royal Tombs of the Baganda,” an essay that shows him not only recalling his African experience but also reformulating it.<sup>91</sup> Gazzard's four-year stint in Uganda distinguishes him from his many contemporaries who dedicated much of their lives to “imperial careering.”<sup>92</sup> Yet his persistent recourse to his colonial experience as a site of comparison and inspiration suggests that it played an enormous role in shaping his professional identity.

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<sup>87</sup> Gazzard, “Birmingham: Twentieth-Century City,” 4. Roy Gazzard Papers, undated typescript (c. 1985), GAZ/E9.

<sup>88</sup> Letter from Raymond Philip to Roy Gazzard, 31 March 1958. Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/A9.

<sup>89</sup> Gazzard, “Birmingham: Twentieth-Century City,” 5.

<sup>90</sup> The collection contains a thick folder of newspaper clippings on Uganda during and after independence, up into the 1980s. See Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/B3.

<sup>91</sup> The paper was published in 1960, but Gazzard writes that the inspiration for writing it came to him at a 1959 conference on African craftsmanship.

<sup>92</sup> See David Lambert and Alan Lester, *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careerings in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Birmingham grated on Gazzard. He never been there before taking up the job, and “found the place name and environmental prospect unappealing.” Comparing the city to the cars it produced—“a vehicle for profit, privilege, and pleasure”—he speculated that Birmingham was in danger of becoming a “consumer durable.” “In the context of consumer choice,” he asked, “is it a city in which people will want to live if other options remain open?”<sup>93</sup> In 1960, Gazzard made his own choice clear and took a position as Chief Architect-Planner for the Peterlee New Town Development Corporation, and settled in nearby Durham.

Peterlee was part of the initial wave of postwar new town construction, and thus well advanced by the time Gazzard began working there in 1960. Also sited in northeast England, it had some similarities with Killingworth, designed as it was to offer a hub of new industry in a region devastated by the decline in the coal mining industry. The town has a fascinating design history in its own right: its original planner was Berthold Lubetkin, one of Britain’s foremost modernists and a disciple of Le Corbusier. Drastically departing from the dispersed neighborhood concept of many of the other early new towns, Lubetkin’s 1948 design for Peterlee had envisioned a tight-knit central core formed by a series of geometrically arranged high-rise buildings. The town as constructed was far more conventional—a series of delays and opposition to Lubetkin’s plan led to his frustrated resignation in 1950, and by the time Gazzard arrived in 1960, the nearly completed townscape resembled its new town counterparts in most respects.<sup>94</sup> Lubetkin’s plan probably looked to Gazzard like a missed opportunity, since he later cited its

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<sup>93</sup> Gazzard, “Birmingham: Twentieth-Century City,” 35.

<sup>94</sup> On the architectural structure of Peterlee, see John Allen, “Lubetkin and Peterlee,” in Thomas Dekker, ed., *The Modern City Revisited* (London: E. & F. N. Spon, 2000), 113-19; for the political aspects of the plan, see Gazzard, “New-Town Initiatives in the North East of England,” in Richard Chapman, *Public Policy Studies: The North East of England* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), 80- 96. Much of the opposition came from the National Coal Board, which opposed Lubetkin’s designs on the grounds that they prevented access to a substantial subterranean trove of unharvested coal. In the straitened circumstances of austerity-era Britain, the coal faction won out, and Lubetkin abandoned architecture to take up farming in Gloucester.

compact structure as a key inspiration for his work at Killingworth.<sup>95</sup> Despite his title as Chief Architect, Gazzard had few outlets for creative design in Peterlee, and he stayed a scant two years. When the Northumberland County Council approached him with an opportunity to design a town from scratch, he readily accepted, taking a position at Killingworth in 1962.

### **Social Engineering Comes Home**

Over the summer of 1969, Yorkshire Television aired a series called “I Am an Engineer,” intending to show teenagers “the fascination of engineering.” Those profiled were mainly drawn from the ranks of mechanical and civil engineers, but the fifth episode shifted gears, focusing on “Roy Gazzard, Social Engineer.” The program emphasized that designing cities was not simply a labor in physical engineering but also a massive social design project, exemplified at Killingworth, a town Gazzard was designing just north of Newcastle. After cataloguing the new town’s key structures, from the modernist Gas Council Research Station, to the “castle formation” of the city’s core, attention shifted to Killingworth’s social design: “The most striking thing about Killingworth is not its Civic Trust awards or architectural prizes, but its social philosophy.” Gazzard’s interest, viewers learned, was not in the form of towns but in the way they feel—their “sense of community” and the way people lived in them.

At Killingworth, a voiceover explained, Gazzard had founded an ecumenical Christian council to serve as “an instrument of compassion;” from the beginning, they would work beside the city administrators and health workers to provide for “whole man health.” Amid Britain’s “foot-loose mobile society,” it was essential to “develop a community with roots. The spiritual quality of the environment has to be analysed and whatever may be required to establish new

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<sup>95</sup> Gazzard, “Six New Towns of Northumbria.”

traditions and the continuity from past to future has to be preserved.”<sup>96</sup> For Gazzard, the “spiritual quality” in this case was an explicitly Christian one, and Killingworth’s design called for the sacred and secular to be intertwined in *Communicare*—a social services center housed at the heart of the Citadel. Although it was to be a small city of only 20,000 Gazzard saw Killingworth as something far more significant—it would be a community grounded in Christian ethics, and the fulfillment of his “Christian calling.”<sup>97</sup>

The program concluded with a turn to the future: in the final thirty years of the century, Gazzard predicted, Britain’s population would annually increase by the equivalent of a city the size of Leeds,<sup>98</sup> and more than half of that new population would live in completely new communities that would have to be constructed specifically for them:

This is a re-settlement programme equal in magnitude to any which has been carried out in Israel, India or Africa yet community development techniques have not yet been developed which will ensure the success of the operation and no forum exists in which social engineers can discuss the problem or equip themselves by study or qualification to deal with it.

This ominous set of comparisons invoking Britain’s need for social engineers underlined the importance of Gazzard’s international experience visiting Jewish co-operative settlements during his postwar service in Palestine and designing “multi-racial townships” in Uganda.<sup>99</sup> It was now time for planners to put their skills to use back home in order to guide Britain into the twenty-first century. The conclusion had jarring implications: future population pressures would be so pronounced that Britain ought to follow examples of “re-settlement” abroad. While the

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<sup>96</sup> The program’s content is described in two documents: the draft of a script sent to Graham Watts at Yorkshire Television, January 1969, GAZ/D9; and “Roy Gazzard: Social Engineer,” GAZ/A1.

<sup>97</sup> Finances and General Purposes Committees meetings minutes, Brunswick Christian Council, 3 November 1966, Tyne and Wear Archives, MC.NC18/5.

<sup>98</sup> The archival program file provides no source for this statistic. It is substantially higher than the contemporary population prediction that the sociologist Mark Abrams provided for the Town and Country Planning in October 1968. Abrams predicted that Britain’s population would grow by nearly 5.5 million in 15 years—an annual rate of 366,000. Leeds’ population, according to the 1971 census, was 494,000. See Terence Bendixson, “Running out of Countryside by 1983?” *Guardian*, 25 October 1968, 5.

<sup>99</sup> Draft script sent to Graham Watts, GAZ/D9.

references to massive population exchanges in Israel, India and Africa go unexplored, their connotations were hardly democratic, and implied the necessity of coercive force.<sup>100</sup>

The essentials of Killingworth's planning principles appear in this brief youth television program. The first of these was an emphasis on continuity with the local past by tapping into historical imagery, iconography, and the spatial distribution Northumbrian castle towns. These connections with the medieval past would be recurrent themes in Gazzard's description of his work and in the town's promotional literature. Secondly, the town was conceived as a riposte to Britain's postwar welfare state, which Gazzard accused of neglecting Britons' spiritual needs. Killingworth would cater to people in their totality rather than solely focusing on their material well-being. Finally, it was to be a city based on imperial knowledge, building on Gazzard's experience in planning for diverse and uprooted populations.

### **Engineering a Castle Town**

By the time the television segment aired, construction at Killingworth was just getting underway after a decade of preparation and planning. Gazzard designed Killingworth as an architectural totality—each part of the city would combine to impact the inhabitant at a visceral level. The “township's”—Gazzard's team eschewed the title “new town” because of its “association with immaturity”—spatial configuration would resonate with the mystical properties of the local landscape and the cultural sensibilities of its people.<sup>101</sup> As we have seen, Gazzard formulated this design philosophy—pivoting away from “universal” European planning models towards the vernacular building styles of the defunct Buganda kingdom—in the context

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<sup>100</sup> Apartheid and the postwar partitions of Palestine and India as instances of “resettlement” would have been apparent; two months after the broadcast, Uganda would launch its first large resettlement campaign against its Asian population.

<sup>101</sup> Gazzard, “Six New Towns of Northumbria,” Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/E15, unpaginated book manuscript, written in 1972 for Charles Knight, but never published.

of the faltering of colonial development in Uganda and the rise of African nationalism. His work in the sixties would increasingly emphasize the importance of place and local tradition in urban planning.

Gazzard's plan for Killingworth, begun in 1963, envisioned a comprehensive physical design complemented by a spiritual component that would be achieved through a union of Christian ethics and the secular institutions of the local state. These components can be seen in Killingworth's "castle town" elements—Gazzard's chief architectural contribution to the city—and in the institutional vehicle through which Christianity would infuse the new town: the "Communicare experiment." Within two decades, Killingworth itself was a failed experiment: Gazzard's castle townscape was razed in the 1980s, and only the "moat" remains. Communicare is likewise defunct, and its physical home has been replaced by a parking lot. Killingworth has now been a typical British suburb longer than it was a modernist showpiece, and analyzing its vanished core is an exercise in archaeology.

Killingworth is unusual among Britain's new towns in that a local authority rather than the central government sponsored it.<sup>102</sup> In August 1959 the Northumberland County Planning Department received government approval to establish a new town just north of Newcastle.<sup>103</sup> The town was to be a "growth point" that would receive industry and people pushed out of congested areas of Tyneside by the ambitious slum clearance and urban renewal projects initiated by T. Dan Smith's Labour-led Newcastle City Council.<sup>104</sup> The Northumberland County

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<sup>102</sup> The planned but unbuilt town of Hook in Hampshire is the most famous example of a new town funded by a local authority; initiated by the LCC in the late 1950s, the plan was shelved after opposition from the Conservative national government and Hampshire County Council. Cramlington, built contemporaneously with Killingworth and also sponsored by the NCC, is the only other local new town to be built. On Hook, see Gold, *The Practice of Modernism*, 151-155.

<sup>103</sup> Statutory approval was necessary to declare the site a Comprehensive Development Area and allow the county to proceed with a Compulsory Purchase Order covering 700 acres of land. See Gazzard, "An Introduction to the Killingworth Planning Proposals," *Northern Architect* 10, May/June 1963, 209.

<sup>104</sup> Gazzard, "Killingworth Township," *Northern Architect* 12, Sept./Oct. 1963, 257.

Council (NCC) invoked the 1952 Town Development Act, which provided for rural councils bordering large cities to serve as “receiving authorities” in partnership with a nearby urban “exporting authority.” The most tangible effect of Killingworth’s status as a county-sponsored new town was that its planners lacked the extensive resources of the official new towns with their state-funded development corporations.

Killingworth reflected this difference in its modest size: while Cumbernauld New Town had a target population of 50,000, Runcorn of 90,000, and Milton Keynes of 250,000, Killingworth was to house a paltry 20,000 souls. Its siting was not particularly auspicious. Part of the appeal of the area was that the land had been scarred and used up by the coal industry, providing a cheap and readily available tract of land that could be repurposed for new industry and dwellings. The County Council’s ambitions were thus both to revive a devastated natural landscape as well as to fill a social need with new employment and housing. Professionals in new industries like petroleum research would rub shoulders with unskilled former mine workers, who could find a job in one of the town’s planned warehouses. This “model town’s” careful mix of council housing and owner-occupied homes would “encourage integration” and ease the region’s depressed industrial communities into a post-industrial future.<sup>105</sup> “The class war must be seen to have been won,” a Northumberland housing committee member said of the area’s redevelopment.<sup>106</sup>

The village of Killingworth was so miniscule that Whitehall opposed the invocation of the Expanded Towns Act, proposing instead that people from Newcastle’s densely packed districts be “decanted” to out-of-town housing estates. With existing new towns in northeast

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<sup>105</sup> Ardagh, *Tale of Five Cities*, 219.

<sup>106</sup> Gazzard, “Six New Towns of Northumbria.”



Developing the frontier: Killingworth Development Group offices, early 1960s. Newcastle Libraries.

England at Peterlee and Newton Aycliffe (both in County Durham), the central government contended that a further new town was unnecessary. Leery of further urban sprawl on the county's southern boundary, the NCC "decided they would go it alone" without relying on funding from Whitehall, and became the first local authority outside of London to sponsor a new town development plan.<sup>107</sup> Funding for the town was cobbled together from a hodgepodge of sources: the NCC, the Longbenton Urban District Council, and Newcastle City Council provided the bulk of the funds, while Whitehall provided basic infrastructure.<sup>108</sup> Once the new town had received government approval the NCC moved to appoint a Coordinating Architect-Planner to produce a design for the town. Their final choice was Roy Gazzard, who was then in his second year as Chief Architect at Peterlee. Gazzard accepted, and submitted his initial plans to the NCC in April 1963. He chose the title of "Director of Development" rather than architect-planner, regarding the former as more suited to his holistic approach to social engineering. While Gazzard's papers provide no background on the details of his recruitment, he was likely seen as

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<sup>107</sup> Interview between Paul Barnard and Roy Gazzard, January 1988. Quoted in Paul Barnard, "The Demolition of Killingworth Towers," 19. Unpublished student thesis, Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/D19.

<sup>108</sup> Gazzard, "New-Town Initiatives in the North East of England," in Richard Chapman, *Public Policy Studies*, 89. Gazzard attributed Killingworth's inception to its champion in the local government, the NCC Planning Officer, J.B. Ross, who "had to convince people at all levels in government that his ideas were sound."

an ideal candidate for designing the new town based on his experience at Peterlee and in the parallel “frontier” environment in the empire.<sup>109</sup>

The environs of the future town encouraged such comparisons. Aerial photographs of the Killingworth site in the early 1960s show a landscape of open moorland punctuated by scattered waste dumps and occasional ponds where coal mining had caused the ground to settle. The first edition of the new town’s handbook, directed towards prospective residents, opened with a downbeat tour of the land. Development would progress on an “unsightly area of land” that had “been reduced by mineral exploitation to the level of a semi-rural slum with slag heaps and flooding” resulting in “an overpowering atmosphere of dereliction and depression.”<sup>110</sup> The new town was an ecological rescue project as well as an exercise in urban development and job creation. The Development Group’s first design project reflected this goal of transforming the land itself from an industrial area to a postindustrial city focused on leisure and the creation of white-collar jobs.<sup>111</sup> The Northern Gas Board headquarters, a sleek modernist building designed by the Newcastle firm Ryder and Yates, provided the town’s first 400 jobs, and signaled a shift to a local economy based on service and research work. An abandoned mineshaft just north of the building was the next target for development; the subsided ground around it was flooded to form an artificial lake planned as the chief leisure site for the town’s population.<sup>112</sup>

Seeing the site as an equally important avenue for “the social engineering of the whole

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<sup>109</sup> As Ruth Craggs and Hannah Neate have shown, former colonial administrators often persuasively linked their careers in colonial development to the challenge of developing a new town. See Craggs and Neate, “Post-colonial Careerism and Urban Policy Mobility,” 50.

<sup>110</sup> Northumberland County Council, *Killingworth Township Handbook* (Gloucester, UK: British Publishing Co., 1965), 5.

<sup>111</sup> As a locally financed new town with no government-sponsored development corporation, Killingworth’s development was directed by an informal team comprising a staff of 50 architects, engineers, and surveyors.

<sup>112</sup> The recycling of waste sites or materials into leisure centers was a common practice in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s—examples include artificial ski slopes made from soil excavated for urban motorways that sprouted on Newcastle Moor and in Kirkby, and the “adventure playgrounds” made from repurposed construction materials that popped up across the country on empty urban lots.

township as it was a civil engineering operation,” Gazzard fastened on the lake as a community lodestone—it would serve as both a therapeutic social gathering site and a source of symbolic meaning.<sup>113</sup> The former emphasis grew out of a widespread concern among planners about the implications of affluence and increased leisure time.<sup>114</sup> Even as Harold Macmillan assured the British public that they had “never had it so good,” sociological studies produced during the late 1950s stoked anxieties over the fracturing of communal solidarities and a retreat to the private home, particularly among the working classes.<sup>115</sup> The majority of this hand-wringing was directed at the effect affluence would have on working-class morality—as Kingsley Amis remarked caustically in 1962, “This island is now full of voices announcing with an air of discovery that people do football pools and watch television and go dancing.”<sup>116</sup> Killingworth was constructed on the assumption that Britain’s postwar growth would continue. As a publicity brochure by the town’s Development Group put it, Killingworth would cater to an affluent population with wide-ranging recreational interests and ample leisure time.<sup>117</sup> The lake would provide a year-round recreational setting, and ensure a communal outlet to compete with television’s anti-social pull.<sup>118</sup>

Just as crucial for Gazzard, though, was the lake’s symbolic function. Most of Britain’s

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<sup>113</sup> Gazzard, “Six New Towns of Northumbria.”

<sup>114</sup> For a planning-oriented discussion of leisure, see Michael Dower, “Fourth Wave: The Challenge of Leisure. A Civic Trust Survey,” *Architects’ Journal* 121 (20 January 1965): 122–90. Classic studies on the “age of leisure” more broadly include Max Kaplan, *Leisure in America: A Social Inquiry* (New York: Wiley, 1960); and Kenneth Roberts, *Leisure* (Harlow: Longman, 1970).

<sup>115</sup> See, for instance, Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London*. The ITV soap opera *Coronation Street*, which began in 1960, valorized these vanishing communities even as its popularity rested on a homebound television audience.

<sup>116</sup> Kingsley Amis, “Martians Bearing Bursaries,” *Spectator* (April 27, 1962): 554.

<sup>117</sup> Finances and General Purposes Committees meetings minutes, Brunswick Christian Council, 3 November 1966, Tyne and Wear Archives, MC.NC18/5.

<sup>118</sup> The extent of Gazzard’s social vision for the lake is described in a bizarre passage of his “Six New Towns of Northumbria” manuscript. In addition to fishing, he wrote, “the lake is used for a wide range of activities, including sailing, swimming ... skating, curling, model yachting and the therapeutic value it has for people who throw sticks for dogs in it, throw stones in it, wade in it, or just sit and stare at it.... Someone even committed suicide in it but there are no recorded accidents of any kind. What began as a civil engineering concept has finally become social engineering.”

first wave of new towns had failed, he believed, because of their planners' emphasis on space over place; relying on abstract conceptions of urban design, planners had created non-descript agglomerations of streets and buildings that called to mind Gertrude Stein's reputed description of Oakland: "when you get there, there is no there, there."<sup>119</sup> Planning was as much a spiritual process as a technical one, and effective urban designer had to provide "a place anchor which links it securely with the ambience or ethos of place....It is this quality that is absent from much of twentieth-century place-making."<sup>120</sup> Killingworth's two principal place-markers would be the lake and the citadel. As he had done in his later discussions of Ugandan architecture, Gazzard sought inspiration in the spatial distributions of exemplary local architecture from the past, and found it in the design of Durham and in Northumbria's medieval castles. Admiring Durham's compact structure, which had sprouted organically along a narrow peninsular formed by the River Wear, Gazzard intended Killingworth's lake to have a similar shaping effect. It would "read as a river threading its way between buildings and separating the areas of the town where people work to the south west from those around the centre where they live," and when approached from the south, would give visitors the sensation of crossing a castle moat.<sup>121</sup> The lake's impact would resonate in an affective, subliminal register, creating the impression of transition from the formless space of Newcastle's suburban sprawl to a bounded, well-defined place.

The lake's dual role as leisure magnet and symbolic "moat" rooting the town in the historical Northumbrian landscape underlines the dual nature of Gazzard's design philosophy—Killingworth was intended to transcend Britain's postwar moment to link a mythic medieval past

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<sup>119</sup> Quoted in Asa Briggs, "The Sense of Place" *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs, Vol 1: Words, Numbers, Places, People* (Brighton, UK: Harvester Press, 1985), 91.

<sup>120</sup> Gazzard, "Six New Towns of Northumbria."

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.



**Model of Killingworth Township, facing north. The "walled town" effect was to be achieved through progressively higher building levels from the modest lakeshore housing on the fringe to the skyscrapers of the Citadel in the center. Newcastle Libraries.**

with an equally mythic “space-age” future. This ambivalence is reflected in the above image of Gazzard’s architectural model for the town, which features a motorway-cum-drawbridge spanning the lake. Cars crossing the bridge share the road with a monorail, that staple of space age urban designs of the early 1960s; for all his backward-looking references to fortified castle towns, Gazzard drew from the same imaginative reservoir as as Buchanan’s discussion monorails and jetpacks in *Traffic in Towns*, Fred Pooley’s initial “monorail city” plans for what eventually became Milton Keynes, Arthur Ling’s early plans for Runcorn New Town, Montreal’s Expo 67, and Archigram’s whimsical “Plug-In City” concept.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> See Ministry of Transport, *Traffic in Towns: A Study of the Long Term Problems of Traffic in Urban Areas*, (London, 1963), 24-25; on Pooley's plans for a monorail city, see Guy Ortolano, "Planning the Urban Future in 1960s Britain"; Arthur G. Ling, *Runcorn New Town: Master Plan* (Runcorn, UK: Runcorn Development Corporation, 1967); on the architecture of the Montreal Expo, see Douglas Murphy, *Last Futures: Nature, Technology and the End of Architecture* (New York: Verso, 2016), chapter 1; on the intellectual context for the Archigram Group, see Simon Sadler, *Archigram: Architecture Without Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press,

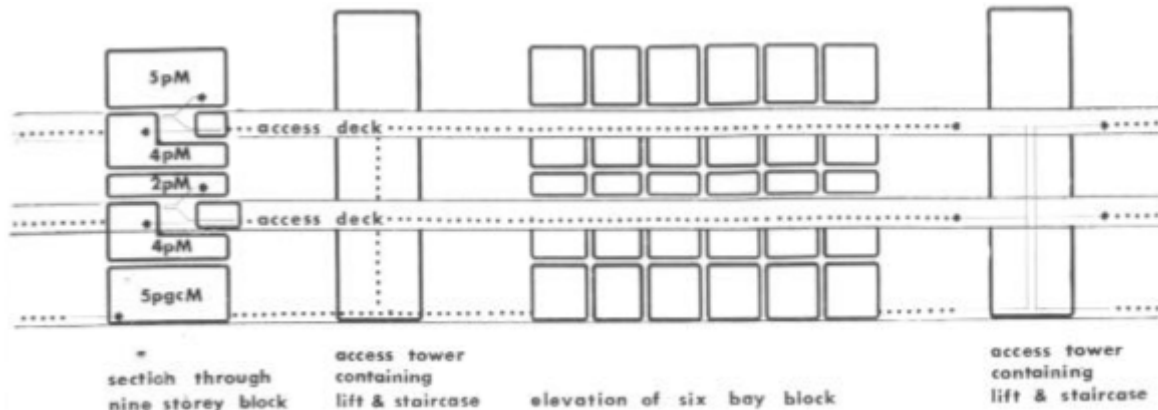


Diagram of typical deck access tower block. *Deck Housing at Killingworth. Newcastle Libraries.*

The structure of the town was equally poised between the futuristic and the historicist. The four cardinal streets were Southgate, Northgate, East Bailey, and West Bailey. The “Baileys”—references to the outer walls of a medieval castle—looped around the town’s center, while Southgate plunged under the central megastructure “as if through a gateway,” to emerge as Northgate. The buildings would rise gradually toward the center. The courtyards of low-rise housing just within the baileys were labeled “Garths”, and these gave way to the appropriately named “Killingworth Towers,” concrete slab blocks that adjoined the central citadel. The buildings in the Garths were arranged in a “haphazard and informal medieval manner,” with an equally asymmetrical pattern of windows, and linked to other courts by “a hemmed in pedestrian system of narrow chares inspired by Newcastle’s ancient confused riverside.”<sup>123</sup>

The Towers, which had by the early 1980s become Killingworth’s most notorious

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2005), chapter 2. Gazzard apparently jettisoned the monorail idea early on, since it never recurred in his writings on the town, and would have been unsustainable for a town of 20,000; it may have been an intended link to a contemporaneous linear city concept he was designing as editor of the journal *Northern Architect*.

<sup>123</sup> Gazzard, “Six New Towns of Northumbria.” To prevent residents from missing the design’s historical allusions, and in keeping with his “masculine” castle town design, Gazzard insisted that the Garths be numbered “like streets in a village rather than named after butterflies as in suburban estates.” Ironically, when Gazzard’s contributions to Killingworth were expunged in the 1990s, the remaining Garths in West Bailey were renamed; courts like “Garth 4” and “Garth 9” became “Dove Close,” “Chaffinch Way,” and “Laburnum Court.” Gazzard’s spare, box-like houses were also given pitched roofs.

<sup>123</sup> Killingworth Development Group, *Deck Housing at Killingworth*, 1.

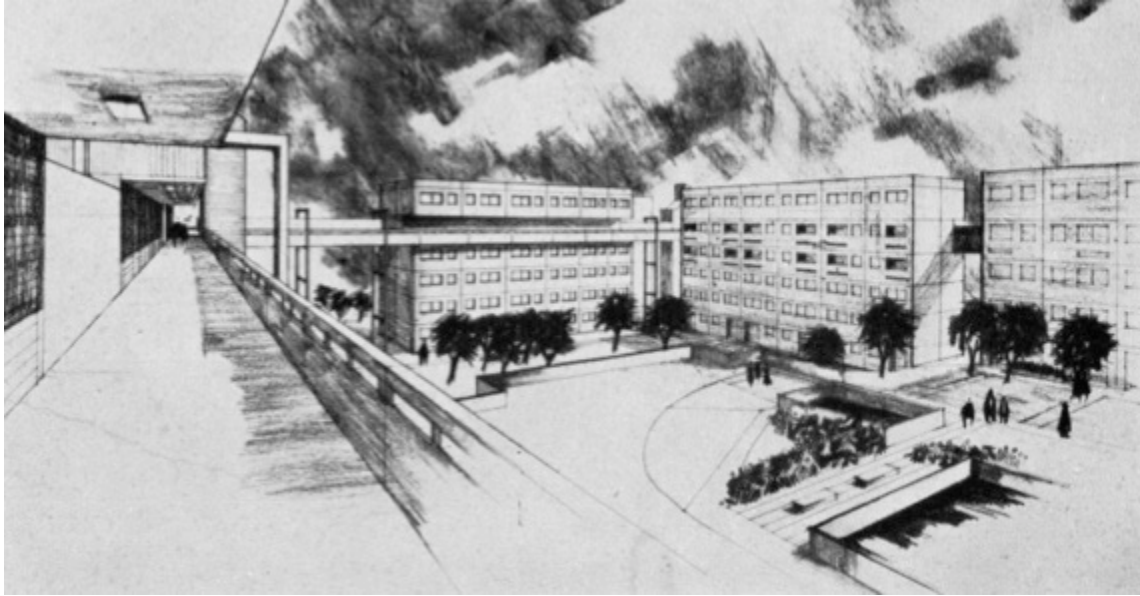


Floor plan for a 5 person deck access house in the Towers. *Deck Housing at Killingworth*. Newcastle Libraries.

landmark, were 6-to-10 story deck-access maisonettes connected by “streets in the sky.” The design drew heavily on the example of Britain’s most well known modernist housing project, Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith’s Park Hill Estate in Sheffield. Like Park Hill, the Towers’ design was intended to replicate the conditions of Britain’s terraced working-class housing, with their tight-knit bonds of conviviality. Prospective tenants were assured that they were moving into a “vertical village.” The deck-access design would prevent the isolation intrinsic to conventional tower blocks, as the “high level streets or decks will encourage the growth of a community without reducing the privacy which everyone wants to enjoy within his own home.” Perched high above vehicular traffic, neighbors “can meet and talk, or watch children playing in the public gardens below.”<sup>124</sup> The original design called for a total of 1454 high-rise dwellings to be built on both sides of the Citadel, but only the 740 on the west side ever materialized; the eastern housing was built after the end of Gazzard’s tenure, and followed more conventional housing layouts.

Unsurprisingly, Killingworth’s Development Group dialed back the allusions to medieval

<sup>124</sup> Killingworth Development Group, *Deck Housing at Killingworth*, 1.



**The image of a convivial environment: a concept drawing of several of the Killingworth Towers seen from a "street in the sky." Newcastle Libraries.**

castles in the promotional literature for the housing developments, opting instead for an emphasis on the homes' modern conveniences. Floor plans showed a generous layout, contrasting sharply with the traditional "Tyneside flats" that many residents were coming from; whereas the bulk of local working-class housing was exceptionally small and overcrowded, and often lacked indoor plumbing, Killingworth's apartments were equipped with a "day room" and "evening room," Formica kitchens, gas heating, and were wired for television.<sup>125</sup> For residents arriving from Victorian-era houses, such modern amenities were a significant draw. A 1969 survey confirmed this largely positive attitude, noting, "residents generally liked their houses. The least critical were those who come from condemned or overcrowded housing."<sup>126</sup> As one mother of six put it, she moved from her neighborhood on the western fringe of Newcastle "because she liked the

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<sup>125</sup> On the housing conditions in Tyneside during the first half of the twentieth century, see F. M. L. Thompson, *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 450-54. Of one Newcastle slum, the planner Wilfred Burns wrote: "Most of the dwellings lack the full range of modern amenities such as private bathrooms, toilets and hot water supply. Many families live in over-crowded conditions." See Newcastle Town Planning Committee, *Rye Hill Area Revitalisation*, 1966, 3.

<sup>126</sup> Juliet Taylor, "Report of a Survey on Community Attitudes in Killingworth Township," 3. Unpublished student thesis, Hull University. Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/D7.

idea of a house no one had lived in before, because it seemed a step up from that slum.”<sup>127</sup>

While the promotional literature played up the Towers’ cutting-edge design and modern amenities, Gazzard’s own ruminations were, typically, spiced with a *mélange* of historical references to the medieval past and paeans to social engineering. Slum clearance programs that bulldozed neighborhoods and “decanted” the residents to high-rise towers, wrote Gazzard, often overlooked the thick networks of “social interdependence and mutual aid” animating working-class streets. Such ties “sprang naturally from a people made gregarious in their adversity and by their architecture.”<sup>128</sup> Sheffield’s Park Hill had shown that “the desirable qualities of the old way can be recast in modern terms, in fact must be recast if the threads of man’s development in relation to his environment is to be preserved intact.”<sup>129</sup> In terms redolent of his colonial attempts to retain “tribal bonds” in Uganda’s urbanizing society, Gazzard argued for the importance of blending the bonds of working class “community” with the individual’s need for privacy. Each courtyard would give the sense of “shelter and enclosure” for which Gazzard believed Northumbrians intrinsically yearned, and would facilitate relaxing communal activities like “gossiping and strolling.” Unlike most postwar housing estates, a “Baroque sinuousness” would supplant “the tyranny of framed facades, right angles and slab blocks.” Gently curved surfaces would evoke the best specimens of the English townscape, such as Oxford High Street and the terraces in Bath and Regent’s Park.<sup>130</sup> From a distance, the Towers, each named after a Northumbrian castle, would give the impression of a continuous curtain wall enclosing the central Citadel.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Mooney, “Going Up in the World, 7.

<sup>128</sup> Gazzard, “Killingworth Interim Housing Report,” 7 December 1965. Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/D12.

<sup>129</sup> Gazzard, “Housing Report,” 1 May 1965. Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/D12.

<sup>130</sup> Gazzard, “Killingworth Interim Housing Report.”

<sup>131</sup> While Gazzard insisted that the “secure” layout was not claustrophobic or disorienting, the need for maps on the estate’s cast-iron drain covers suggests otherwise.

The Citadel's design reflected the blend of futurism and archaism that animated the entire town plan. For inspiration, Gazzard drew on the compact medieval form of Durham as well as the megastructural center of Cumbernauld New Town and Bertolt Lubetkin's unbuilt plans for Peterlee. Residents perusing the town handbook they were given with the keys to their home would read, "The intention has been to create an acceptable environment for a 'space age' community more affluent than previous generations and more critical of the quality of its built environment." Rather than the scattered array of individual buildings that formed the center of most new towns, Killingworth would center on "one huge space" partitioned by decks and screen walls, all forming a cohesive whole "in the form of a complex, sophisticated modern equivalent of the Greek Agora."<sup>132</sup>

As in Cumbernauld's central megastructure and much of the "traffic architecture" of the period, the design was based on the principle of separation between cars and people. The north-south axis would form the town's spine, with the Citadel built over it. Car traffic would be canalized along access ways beneath the center to convenient parking garages, while pedestrians, funneled in from the housing areas along elevated walkways, would dominate the second level, with its grocery stores, shopping arcades, and "gossiping grounds." Crowning the structure would be an open deck upon which would be built offices, community services, and high-rise apartments.

As in the Development Group's promotional literature on the Towers, the "space age" technological aspects of the town center were foregrounded in the town handbook rather than its symbolic allusions to the local past. In his writings and lectures, though, Gazzard emphasized the importance of historically laden forms in imparting symbolic meaning and psychological consolation for the town's residents. "The walled town is comprehended by ordinary people in

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<sup>132</sup> *Killingworth Township Handbook*, 14.



Places of “permanence and security,” part II: the Killingworth Citadel “dominating the landscape” in 1983. In the foreground are the “low bastion” of the shopping mall, and a “street in the sky” leading to the Towers. Deterioration is already evident in the missing sign letters, though the child on roller skates looks happy enough. Photo by Stephen Brain.

Northumbria for the strength and security it represents. Certainly in Northumbria people know and love their castle towns and it seemed logical to communicate the planning concept to ordinary people in this idiom.”<sup>133</sup> How did Gazzard “communicate” his medieval vision? Unlike the ornate historicism of design projects like Vienna’s Ringstrasse or Disneyland, Killingworth’s designer embraced the clean, functional lines of architectural modernism, relying on the subliminal power of massed geometric forms to pluck viewers’ affective chords. For Ugandans, Gazzard had contended that the circle filled this need; in the English north, he held, psychic wholeness came through the sheer, blocky, dour mass of the castle.

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<sup>133</sup> Gazzard, “Six New Towns of Northumbria.”

Killingworth's town center was therefore to resemble a keep "dominating the landscape."<sup>134</sup> The sleek glass office block rising above the entire edifice was conceived as a modern incarnation of Castle Rushen on the Isle of Man, with the Woolco shopping center below serving as a "low bastion." The Communicare Centre and administrative buildings in the town's southeast corner formed "the castle's east demesne."<sup>135</sup> The rough concrete cherished by Brutalist architects for its honesty and raw intensity fit perfectly into Gazzard's vision for a town in the "masculine north-country tradition with sheerline detailing. Tone values will be black, white and grey with colour limited to small areas at the human level." Together with the "fortified sites" of Northumberland, Gazzard's design team emulated "the rock group of Cathedral, Castle and Monastery above the Wear at Durham."<sup>136</sup> For Gazzard, Durham was "one of the most civilised places on earth" and "all that a town ought to be."<sup>137</sup> It was the intimately connected nature of the cathedral town's "rock group" that most appealed to Gazzard, and just as Durham had succeeded in spatially marrying the sacred and the profane, Killingworth's Citadel was planned to provide a Christian foundation for the town.

### **A Heavenly City Made Concrete**

Gazzard hoped that just as medieval builders had fused the holy and the secular into a close embrace at Durham, he could achieve a similar union in Killingworth's modernist design. Seen in its broader cultural context, the foundation of a government sponsored Christian community during the early 1960s strikes a discordant note. As Callum Brown argues, Killingworth's inception came during a period of unprecedented contraction; indeed, by 1963,

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<sup>134</sup> Gazzard, "Killingworth Township," *Northern Architect* 12 (September/October 1963), 260.

<sup>135</sup> Gazzard, "New-Town Initiatives in the North East of England," 90.

<sup>136</sup> Gazzard, "Killingworth Township," 261.

<sup>137</sup> Dolan, "A Planner Turns Don," 6; Gazzard, "Six New Towns of Northumbria."

when Gazzard arrived at Killingworth, “all indices of religiosity in Britain... entered free fall.”<sup>138</sup> While religious observance in the main Christian denominations surged during the 1950s, Britons in the 1960s were abandoning not just formal denominational affiliation, but the Christian faith itself.<sup>139</sup> As the town was taking shape in the 1960s, then, Gazzard’s goal of designing Killingworth as a “compassionate community” fully integrated with the Christian Church went decisively against the grain of British culture. This oppositional stance explains much about the polarized response to the town’s architecture in its early years, and perhaps also provides insight into its failings.

The central piece of the planned integration of secular and sacred in the Citadel was *Communicare*, a social care strategy intended to “meet the ‘whole man health’ of the individual, his physical and spiritual needs.”<sup>140</sup> In the early stages of planning, Gazzard prevailed upon local leaders from the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Catholic Churches to form an interdenominational Christian Council to act as the Christian presence in the town. Rather than having several small church buildings on individual plots of land, he argued, the Christian church would be better represented as a single ecumenical body. Making a virtue of necessity, the Killingworth Development Group partnered with the Christian Council to replace the social development services found in more generously funded official new towns with a voluntary organization rooted in the Christian laity. Killingworth’s status as a new town with a totally designed environment was as promising for spiritual engineering as it was for social engineering.

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<sup>138</sup> Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 188-92.

<sup>139</sup> Grace Davie provides an opposing perspective of postwar British Christianity by contending that British faith increasingly meant “believing without belonging.” “Spirituality” remained strong, while formal affiliation with Christian denominations withered. For a dedicated Christians in the early 1960s, though, such a qualification would have been small comfort. See Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), chapter 4.

<sup>140</sup> Finances and General Purposes Committees meetings minutes, Brunswick Christian Council, Nov. 3, 1966, Tyne and Wear Archives, MC.NC18/5.

For its advocates, Killingworth's "Communicare Experiment" reached far beyond Tyneside: "Can we match in human terms the efforts the planners have made in Concrete?... If we can show that Communicare works here, this will have important consequences not only for Killingworth but for the Christian Church, town planning and people generally."<sup>141</sup>

Communicare's modest start belied such universalist ambitions. For the first seven years of its existence, the KCC rented a four bedroom house in Garth 4, part of the low-rise housing to the west of the Towers, to serve as their headquarters. Under the coordination of a lay Warden, the house served as a counseling center, surgery, welfare clinic, and worship sanctuary.<sup>142</sup> More than a link between residents and God, the Warden served as "a means of communication, so often lacking between official planners and those for whom they plan." Because Gazzard and the rest of the planning team lived outside of the town, the Communicare house served as an information hub, exhibiting town maps and outlines of the town plan.<sup>143</sup> This ad-hoc approach was by most accounts quite successful; even critical reviews of the town pointed to Communicare as a bright spot, and it drew in a range of interested visitors, including clergy from other British new towns, a party of French sociologists, and an Australian engineer.<sup>144</sup>

Gazzard and his colleagues grounded their philosophy of "whole man health" in a critique of postwar British society and the welfare state. A positive aspect of Killingworth's lack of central government funds was that the planning team could contrast their project with the official new towns program, the ostensible shortcomings of which were widely reported in the national press. While experts contested or qualified the myth of a "new town blues" neurosis, the

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<sup>141</sup> Killingworth, Christian Council, "For Heaven's Sake, We Need Space." Brochure held in Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/D10.

<sup>142</sup> Northumberland County Council, *Killingworth Township Handbook*, undated second edition, held in Tyne and Wear Archives, PA 539.

<sup>143</sup> Dennis Pain, "Communicare Concept," 1970. Held in the Local Studies Room, Newcastle City Library.

<sup>144</sup> "New Town Wins Fame," *Platform* (Killingworth), December, 1974). Newspaper clipping held in Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/D17.

abiding popular image of new towns as sanitary but socially isolated ghettos provided a useful contrast to Killingworth's "compassionate community."<sup>145</sup> New towns, a *Communicare* brochure contended, provided "the ideal soil in which to breed depression, loneliness, and boredom," while Gazzard lamented their failure to "resist the erosion of spiritual values."<sup>146</sup>

The isolating conditions of new towns were just a microcosm of a larger malady affecting postwar Britain—the trend "towards isolation and individualism" and an "increase in materialistic self-interest and a lack of concern for those in need, such as elderly relatives or the sick in body and mind."<sup>147</sup> Channeling what Chris Harris describes as a broad sense of "a sea change taking place in social life which involved loss as well as gain," *Communicare*'s advocates blamed Britain's welfare state for the loss of extended family networks that had supported vulnerable groups in the past.<sup>148</sup> Mutual responsibility in a strong family environment had given way to a fragmented society in which the sick and elderly were "locked up and ignored" or passed between various health experts "like a badly addressed envelope."<sup>149</sup>

Gazzard's critique of the postwar Britain's social fragmentation drew on a long tradition of romantic thought that contrasted rational, calculating modern society with the warm, organic

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<sup>145</sup> For contemporary contestations of the "new town blues" myth, see J. B. Cullingworth, "Creating a Society from Scratch," *The Glasgow Herald*, Jan. 11, 1967, 8; Edward Hare and George Shaw, *Mental Health on a New Housing Estate: A Comparative Study of Health in Two Districts of Croydon* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); and S. D. Coleman, *Mental Health and Social Adjustment in a New Town*, (Glasgow: n.p., 1966). The social historian Mark Clapson also challenges the myth in *Invincible Green Suburbs, Brave New Towns: Social Change and Urban Dispersal in Post-War England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), chapter 5.

<sup>146</sup> Killingworth, Christian Council, "For Heaven's Sake, We Need Space"; Gazzard, "Technical Paper: Northern New Towns in the Regional Context," paper given at second annual convention of the Concrete Society, Newcastle, April 1969. Held in Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/D14.

<sup>147</sup> Pain, "Communicare Concept."

<sup>148</sup> Chris Harris, "The Family in Post-War Britain," in James Obelkevich and Peter Catterall, eds., *Understanding Post-War British Society* (London: Routledge, 1994), 50-51. According to Harris, in the mid-1960s "the myth of a *pre-industrial* past, characterized by the formation of extended family groups, served to explain what was felt to be wrong with the family *now*, namely its isolation, its closure and its emotionally suffocation nature.

<sup>149</sup> Gazzard, "The Killingworth *Communicare* Experiment," March 22, 1968. Held in Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/D10.

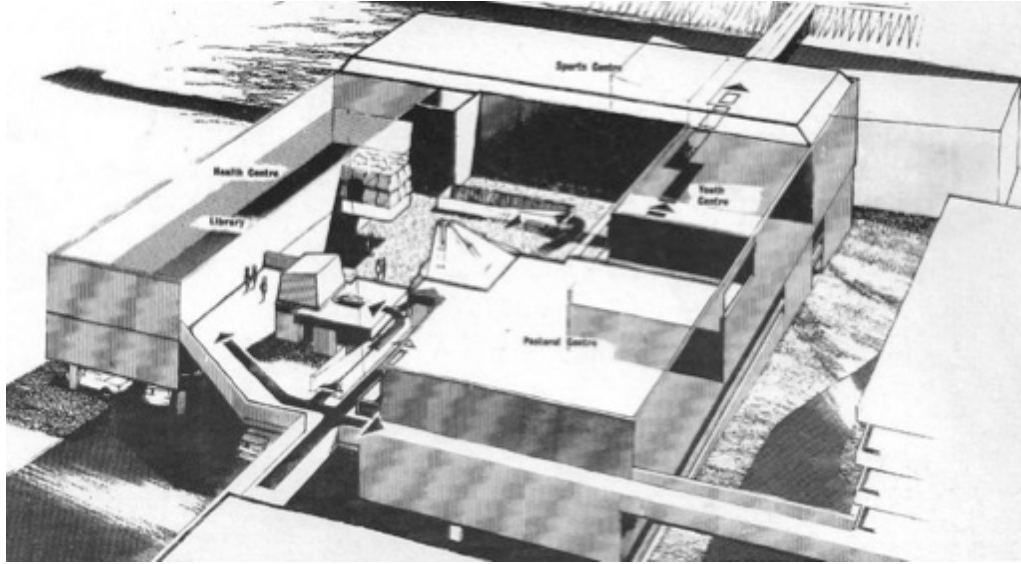
bonds of a vanished community.<sup>150</sup> But these thoughts took on a sharp critical edge in the immediate context of the late 1960s. Just as the concrete mass of the Killingworth Citadel was taking shape out of the moorland and Killingworth Christian Council was circulating fundraising appeals for a permanent building, British newspapers featured a slew of stories on a crisis in Britain's social welfare system. The occasion for the criticism was the release of the Seebohm Report in July 1968. After a two-year investigation into Britain's social services, a committee chaired by Frederic Seebohm announced that the welfare state was failing to help the nation's most vulnerable groups: "The widespread belief that we have community care of the mentally disturbed is, for many parts of the country, still a sad illusion, and judging by published plans will remain so for years ahead."<sup>151</sup> Citing an overemphasis on medical treatment at the expense of preventative social care, the report recommended an overhaul of the healthcare system in which the fragmented social service departments in each local authority would be centralized and brought under one roof. The world was entering an "age of anxiety" whose acid currents could corrode both social bonds and the psychic carapace of the individual. As an article reporting on the increase in mental illness in the West argued, "modern technological civilisation, dependent on growth and rapid change, might have been expressly designed to subject its citizens to acute psychological stresses. While many may be challenged and stimulated, the vulnerable are more at risk."<sup>152</sup> This dissatisfaction with the late modern civilization dovetailed with a more specific feminist critique of psychiatry that was emerging at the same, which linked Britain's mental

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<sup>150</sup> The distinction between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society) is chiefly associated with the late nineteenth-century German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, but it also runs through discussions of modernity by his more famous contemporaries, Max Weber and Georg Simmel. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); Harry Liebersohn, *Fate and Utopia in German Sociology, 1870-1923* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1988).

<sup>151</sup> Quoted in Peter Bartlett and David Wright, *Outside the Walls of the Asylum: The History of Care in the Community 1750-2000* (London: Athlone Press, 1999), 213.

<sup>152</sup> John Davy and Christine Doyle, "Coping with the Age of Anxiety," *The Observer* Aug. 18, 1968, 7.



**“Whole man health:” Design for the Communicare Center in the Citadel. Flanking the quadrangle are a library, sports center, health center, and pastoral center. Newcastle Libraries.**

health system women’s continued role of dependency in the family.<sup>153</sup>

Killingworth’s Communicare project provided a specifically Christian solution to this nationwide reevaluation of welfare practices. The welfare state, Communicare advocates contended, was one dimension of a sick “materialistic society” and was “aimed at meeting only the physical needs of the population.”<sup>154</sup> This oppositional rhetoric was a genuine reflection of Gazzard’s philosophy, but framing the Killingworth plan in terms of a moral crusade also had tangible benefits for Gazzard’s team of “social engineers” and the embattled Church.

The partnership provided Killingworth’s cash-strapped designers with an extra funding line for the building of the Citadel. Gazzard was adamant that the town center be planned as an integrated totality, and he had secured the cooperation of Costain Property Development to build the commercial sector and its surrounding roads and pedestrian routes according to his broad

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<sup>153</sup> Mathew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 279-281.

<sup>154</sup> Pain, “Communicare Concept.”

plans.<sup>155</sup> The administrative and social service section of the Citadel, however, relied on state funding. Lacking the more generous government cash flows enjoyed by official new towns, Gazzard harnessed the crusading enthusiasm Killingworth engendered to get voluntary overtime work from his associates and funds from Christian supporters.<sup>156</sup> The latter was especially important as the public section of the Citadel took shape in the early seventies.

Gazzard's plans envisaged a permanent location for *Communicare* in the town center, where it would serve as a community resource center that housed a health clinic, a social services office, sports facilities, a library, and a nondenominational pastoral center and sanctuary. While the County Council committed funds for administration offices and health clinics, the KCC had to turn to a popular appeal to raise the money necessary for the worship facilities. Under the patronage of Hugh Percy, the Duke of Northumberland, the KCC circulated a glossy fundraising pamphlet to the members of local churches. Killingworth was an attempt to "build in one generation a community spirit on a Christian foundation," wrote the Duke, and it aimed to retain "those values which throughout the ages have guided the lives of Englishmen everywhere and nowhere more so than in this county of Northumberland." This historic partnership between church and state was "of national significance," the pamphlet continued, but it "needs your help." Parishioners were encouraged to fill out a deed of covenant contained in a pocket at the back of the pamphlet—by giving just fifty pence per month, "the ordinary working man can, at little cost to himself, make a substantial contribution."<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> County of Northumberland, "Development of the Town Centre for the Township of Killingworth," Feb. 8, 1967. Held in Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/D11. The developers would lease the land from the County for 99 years, but would keep most of the profits from commercial rents. Gazzard later noted sourly that Costain refused to use the "Citadel" moniker for the complex, opting instead for the more prosaic "Killingworth Centre." Gazzard, "Six New Towns of Northumbria."

<sup>156</sup> Gazzard, "Communicare Centre," Nov. 11, 1965. Report held in Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/D10.

<sup>157</sup> Killingworth Christian Council, "For Heaven's Sake, We Need Space."

For the Christian church, which across all denominations was hemorrhaging adherents in the sixties, Killingworth's integration of sacred and secular space offered a chance for continued relevance in the everyday lives of Britons. Relevance was an important concern for clerics, and the image of the "trendy vicar" desperately seeking to remain culturally relevant was an easy target of satire for British writers and television producers.<sup>158</sup> Killingworth offered relevance without capitulating to contemporary cultural trends. In the design for the Killingworth Communicare center, the church was "the only building running the whole depth and height of the Centre, thereby signifying the spiritual involvement of Christians in the every day life of their fellow men."<sup>159</sup> Sited along the town's elevated pedestrian arteries, the ecumenical church would again play a natural role in residents' routines. Gazzard envisaged "a book shop, counseling rooms, committee room and 'worshipping space', so that the housewife will find it as easy to 'drop in' for prayer, as for coffee."<sup>160</sup>

The gendered nature of Gazzard's comment is hardly shocking, since it reflected broader cultural assumptions in the 1960s that linked men with organized work (the office or the factory) and women with the home, the neighborhood social network, and the shopping center.<sup>161</sup> Richard Hoggart described sharp gender divisions in working-class districts during the 1950s: wives' social lives played out "over the washing-line, at the corner-shop, visiting relatives at a moderate distance occasionally, and perhaps now and again going with her husband to his pub or club. He has his pub or club, his work, his football matches."<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Sandbrook, *White Heat*, 433.

<sup>159</sup> Killingworth Christian Council, "For Heaven's Sake, We Need Space."

<sup>160</sup> Finances and General Purposes Committees meetings minutes, Brunswick Christian Council, Nov. 3, 1966, Tyne and Wear Archives, MC.NC18/5.

<sup>161</sup> See Claire Langhamer, "The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2 (2005): 341–62; Wendy Webster, *Imagining Home: Gender, 'Race,' and National Identity, 1945–64*, Women's History (London: University College London Press, 1998); Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918–1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>162</sup> Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, 35.

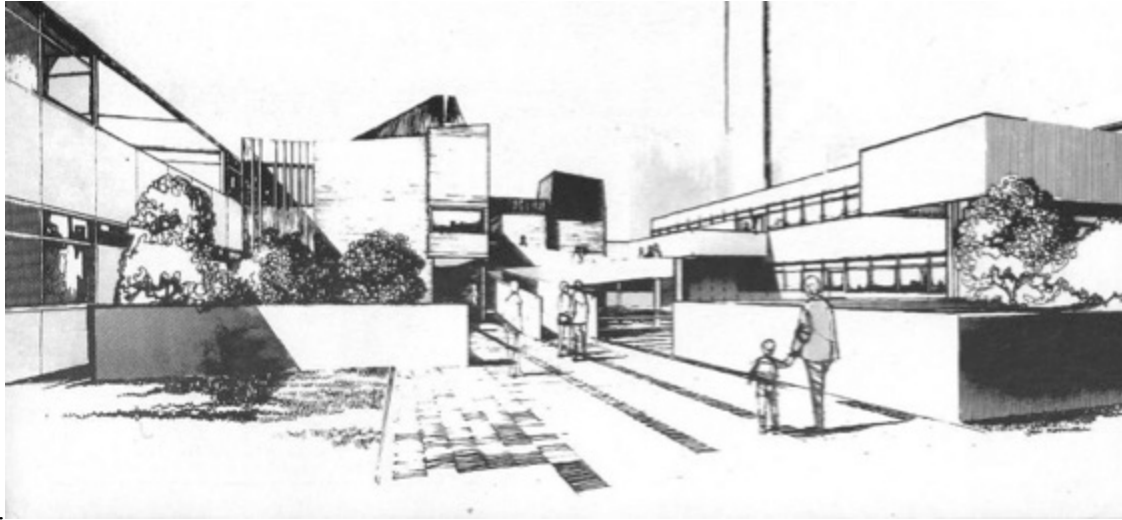
Communicare was rooted in these gendered assumptions. It was the housewife and her children that were expected to be the main target of Communicare's attention. The images that peppered the fundraising pamphlet underline this point: the images bordering the center page are split between the recipients of care on the left and the Communicare staff on the right. A photo of children at an adventure playground set against the imposing backdrop of the Towers gives way to another of mothers pushing prams, guiding young children bundled against the northern wind. The collage on the right is an essay in contrast—Communicare's governing board is a chiefly male domain steered by white-haired men. Pipes, tweed jackets, and clerical collars convey an air of pastoral care and patriarchal wisdom. Combined with the opening message from the Duke of Northumberland, the overall effect is to emphasize the paternalist current in this exercise in social and spiritual engineering.

Women were indeed the most probable visitors Killingworth's new Christian center. As Callum Brown argues, the surge in church attendance in 1950s Britain had rested on a link between piety and femininity that had remained strong throughout the early postwar period. The "extremely vigorous representation of the respectable wife, mother and young girl" remained strong in the early postwar period, Brown argues, and notions of propriety drew many men to follow their wives into church pews. By the late 1960s, though, wide cracks were opening in these cultural ideals. In conjunction with a raft of "permissive" laws relating to marriage, sex and birth control, British women "secularized the construction of their identity."<sup>163</sup>

While feminism was still far from being a mainstream movement in the 1960s, its increasing cultural impact in the following decades drove a deeper wedge between Killingworth's experiment in spiritual engineering and the lived reality of most of the young families housed in its new concrete tower blocks. As Dominic Sandbrook observes, the sixties

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<sup>163</sup> Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 191-92.



**Concept drawing for Communicare Centre. The continuous line formed by the precinct's sacred and secular space embraces the woman and child in the foreground. The genders of the background figures are indistinct. Newcastle Libraries.**

witnessed a quiet gender revolution the impact of which remained unremarked until later:

A girl of sixteen in 1970 was far more likely to remain in education than a similar sixteen year-old in 1956. She was more likely to pursue her own intellectual and cultural interests for as long as she wanted, to have children when and if she wanted, and, above all, to choose whether she remained at home as a housewife or pursued her own career.<sup>164</sup>

Although most British women did not identify with the organized feminist movement, a slow cultural revolution was underway by the early 1970s where women were more ready to assert their rights as autonomous individuals in control of their own lives.<sup>165</sup>

Within the cultural context of the fragmenting of secular paternal authority and new challenges to the church's relevance in Britons' everyday lives, the Communicare experiment in social and spiritual engineering appears doomed from the start.<sup>166</sup> But it is more complicated than that. Gazzard's vision of a revived Christian community taking root in the new town's frontier conditions did not take shape. Much like planners attempts to re-engineer "traditional"

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<sup>164</sup> Sandbrook, *White Heat*, 664.

<sup>165</sup> See Emily Robinson et. al., "Telling Stories about Post-War Britain," 289-296.

<sup>166</sup> For a discussion of the crisis of secular forms of paternal authority in the 1960s, see Jon Lawrence, "Paternalism, Class, and the British Path to Modernity."

working class communities, Gazzard's spiritual engineering swam against a powerful cultural tide. But, as we will see when we return to Killingworth in chapter four, people forged their own interpretations of community that were lasting and deeply meaningful, although they bore little resemblance to outsiders' notions of homogenous and recognizable social identities.

Gazzard's overt claims to be engineering a Christian society are also striking when viewed against the conventional narrative of new town construction. For planning historians, the new towns form a high point of technocratic discourse and state legislation regarding land use and decentralization, while social and cultural historians focus on their association with upward mobility and affluence, and their successes or failings in fulfilling these expectations.<sup>167</sup> Both narratives emphasize the secular, rationalist, forward-looking nature of the new towns project, and their place as "emblems of post-war modernity."<sup>168</sup> Gazzard's plan for Killingworth thus appears as a bizarre anachronism harking back to a vanished Christian past.

Killingworth further complicates the received view of modernist planning in general. Since the late 1960s, critics on both the right and left have characterized urban planners as arrogant technocrats—James Scott's eggheaded priests of high modernism, driven by "a rejection of the past as a model to improve upon and a desire to make a completely fresh start." For Scott, the archetypal modernist planner is Le Corbusier, whose "repudiation of tradition, history, and received taste" provide an ideal type for the ambitions of the profession as a whole.<sup>169</sup> Killingworth's design, by contrast, showcased a modernism that looked to the past as much as to the future for inspiration. In Killingworth, past forms offered the promise of

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<sup>167</sup> On the institutional approach, see Gordon Cherry, *The Evolution of British Town Planning*; and Dennis Hardy, *From New Towns to Green Politics: Campaigning for Town and Country Planning, 1946-1990*, (London: E. & F. N. Spon, 1991). For a social history perspective, see Mark Clapson, *Invincible Green Suburbs, Brave New Towns*.

<sup>168</sup> Sandbrook, *White Heat*, 177.

<sup>169</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 115-17. Other notable critics include Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*; and Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder*.

psychological comfort for the individual and spiritual revival on a socio-cultural level. If moats and castles formed the new town's warp, futuristic space age design was the weft. Cutting-edge building designs, spacious and well-appointed kitchens, and an emphasis on leisure promised a thrilling replacement for the drabness and drudgery of the Victorian cityscape. The parallel threads of futurism and historicism blur the opposition between historicism and modernism in postwar urban design—an overweening confidence in technological and social engineering could coexist with a severe unease about Britain's social trajectory and a desire to recover a mythic pre-industrial cultural totality. For Gazzard, this twinning of arrogance and anxiety grew directly from his colonial experience, which formed a crucible for his philosophy of urban design.

### Conclusion

“By stepping back into the past, Killingworth is making strides into the future.” Surprisingly, this praise for Roy Gazzard's creation was not directed at the new town's medieval inspiration. Rather, the “past” to which this *Financial Times* article on Killingworth was referring was much more recent—it was Uganda in the 1950s. “The elemental conditions of the African environment,” the article continued,

can bring home very forcefully the nature of the need to live in communities as a defense against a hostile world. Our technological world is no less hostile or elemental than the African one. Only appearances are different. In part, Killingworth is an expression of this knowledge and the experience acquired by its chief architect. Northumberland was perhaps a very appropriate place for Mr. Gazzard to superimpose, architecturally, the wisdom of the primitive on to present day technological sophistication. The North has a long industrial history. Its social structure tends toward the feudal. Its land resembles Africa—there is a striking similarity between the Cheviot Hills and the Northern Transvaal, the Vumba or the Highlands of East and Central Africa.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> James Nicholson, “A Successful Stride into the Future,” *Financial Times*, 13 December 1968, 25.

In this snapshot of Killingworth, time and space flatten, fold, and reform like an origami figure. Gazzard, the article contended, had “superimposed the wisdom of the primitive” on the industrial townscape of northern England. Turning the industrial-era pit head into a post-industrial leisure lake would break the social, psychological, “even spiritual” problems that Gazzard believed were unique to “the environment of the old industrial communities.” Such communities “were, and to some extent still are, prisoners of the pit head, steel works or shipyard. The place of work at the end of the street became the citadel of the community.” With the decline of the industries that shaped their existence, such communities needed new symbols of “permanence and security.”<sup>171</sup> For “detrribalizing” Africans in Uganda, Gazzard had offered first the modern neighborhood, then pre-colonial Baganda’s logarithmic curves. He gave the working-class population of Northern England a moat and a concrete citadel.

This article has argued that Gazzard’s attempt to channel his colonial experience into Killingworth’s design grew partly from a jaundiced reading of contemporary history—only the firm hand of social engineers could amend the traumas that modern time wrought. Political and socio-economic shifts were eroding “traditional” forms of authority, whether based in the Ugandan “tribe” or the Northumberland factory. The architect-planner’s task was to repair the resulting social and psychological wounds through creating place-specific symbols that would provide consolation amid rapid social change. But Gazzard’s case also reflects broader trends in twentieth-century English culture. One of the most fertile impacts colonial studies and postcolonial scholarship have had on British historiography is their recognition that colonialism was a two-way process, the forms and logic of which were imprinted on the colonists as well as the colonized. Rather than a distant process that played out “over there” for centuries before gracefully fading away, colonialism shaped British society and Britons’ self-understanding, and

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

the loss of the empire had an equally profound impact. While Paul Gilroy characterizes this effect as a deep, if sublimated, feeling of loss leading to melancholia, Jed Esty emphasizes how decolonization could make space for a recuperative project that undertook “a basic repair or reintegration of English culture itself.”<sup>172</sup> As the empire waned and English culture “became minor,” Esty contends, English modernist writers abandoned the sweeping internationalism of High Modernism for an extended rumination on the particularities of English (as opposed to British) culture. Paralleling this literary process was a broad “repatriation” of imperial anthropology to the metropole, exemplified by Margaret Mead’s studies of British and American culture and Mass Observation’s investigations into the everyday life of the English working classes.<sup>173</sup>

Gazzard’s transition from a colonial to a postcolonial architect also underwent an inward turn. In the decade separating Gazzard’s work in Jinja and his arrival at Killingworth, a decade in which Britain’s African colonies rapidly peeled away, he eschewed his initial focus on replicating Western—and, by implication, normative—new town forms and instead valorized the specificities of place. Each place, according to Gazzard, was circumscribed by unique historical, mythical, and spiritual forces that the urban designer must divine and channel into the cityscape. Paradoxically, Gazzard’s experience as a self-described designer of “multi-racial new towns” in Uganda prompted a concern with the local and particular rather than the international and universal. His time working in the empire instilled in him the belief that urban design could only be successful if it tapped into the spiritual and psychological needs of its users. Just as Bedouins

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<sup>172</sup> Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Multiculture or Postcolonial Melancholia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004); Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, 7.

<sup>173</sup> For a discussion of anthropology’s disciplinary evolution, see George Marcus and Michael Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); for closer historical accounts see Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire*; and Peter Mandler, *Return from the Natives: How Margaret Mead Won the Second World War and Lost the Cold War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

identified a place by the taste of its water, Gazzard argued, town planners had to “see places as an organic cycle of change and renewal, and not as the frozen assets of an almighty master plan because in the hearts and minds of men there is always a plan of one kind or another. The essence of the creative decision is the action which translates those plans into reality.” Regretting his early attempts to import English ideas to a Ugandan context, Gazzard saw his work in Killingworth as an endeavor in “place-making”—in connecting his “body, mind, and spirit” with the Northumbrian people, landscape, and culture to transform abstract “space” into a solid, living, “place.”<sup>174</sup>

This phenomenological turn in Gazzard’s thought mirrors a broader reaction against high modernism in trans-Atlantic urban design, exemplified by thinkers like Kevin Lynch, Jane Jacobs, Ian Nairn, Gordon Cullen, and William H. Whyte.<sup>175</sup> Gazzard’s return to Britain from Uganda played out against this broader intellectual ferment, and it is hard to disentangle the influence of these western debates from his direct colonial experience.<sup>176</sup> In his view, though, there was an unbroken chain linking his career in Jinja to his work in Killingworth; he intended to write individual monographs on both places, and “then perhaps to link them in a narrative style publication,” but of these only a rough manuscript on Jinja ever materialized.<sup>177</sup>

When Uganda emerged from civil war in 1979, Gazzard, then a professor of Geography at Durham University, persistently lobbied the British Overseas Development Administration for funding to volunteer in rebuilding the nation’s civil war-ravaged cities. “It would give me great

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<sup>174</sup> Gazzard, “Six New Towns of Northumbria.” The reference to Bedouin navigation by taste recurs in several of Gazzard’s manuscripts. He likely picked up this information during his service in Palestine, where he “spent furloughs living with Bedouins... and acquired his affection for Arabs.” See “The Man Who Built 3 Towns Looks at Ours,” *Sunderland Echo*, 25 July 1986. Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/A1.

<sup>175</sup> See Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal*, ch. 3.

<sup>176</sup> His lecture describing his “road to Damascus” experience at the Bagandan tombs dates from 1960. The reaction against high modernism was still marginal at this point, but he certainly would have been aware of it.

<sup>177</sup> Letter from Gazzard to Graham Willis, 12 June 1986. Roy Gazzard Papers GAZ/G1. He also intended to write a third monograph on his later work in Sur, Oman.

pleasure,” he wrote, “to be able to renew my association with Uganda, where my children were born and for which my wife and I retain such happy memories.”<sup>178</sup> These efforts were rebuffed, but in a sense Gazzard’s association with Uganda had never ruptured. From his musings on local spatial symbolism to the personnel of his design team at Killingworth, the colonial circuit animating Gazzard’s work never fully closed until the wrecking balls pulverized his concrete citadel.

Gazzard’s enthusiasm for social engineering brushed increasingly against the grain of British culture by the late 1960s. As he expounded to television audiences on the planners’ role in directing Britain’s imminent urban “re-settlement programs,” many of his colleagues were exploring ways to democratize urban planning. One of the pioneers of this new “community architecture” was Ralph Erskine, another British planner with an international career who had met Gazzard while designing a small settlement of private houses along Killingworth’s lakeshore. When he finished working at Killingworth in 1968, Erskine began planning a massive slum clearance program in Newcastle’s Byker neighborhood. At Byker, though, resettlement was not intended to be a grand social engineering project, but instead a much gentler process in which the community would be kept together while their neighborhood was gradually rebuilt around them. The next chapter delves into the context, tensions, and contradictions of this new direction in urban planning.

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<sup>178</sup> Letter from Roy Gazzard to Abraham Waligo, 26 January 1981. Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/B2. He also wrote a series of letters in 1978 volunteering to help restore buildings for the Anglican Church of Uganda.

### **Chapter 3: Common People Like You: Urban Renewal and the Politics of the Ordinary in Late Modern Britain**

*I feel a sort of ownership. I'm becoming part of [Byker's] story.*  
—Gaby Kitoko, 2011

*Bitter hard it is to write the history of remainders.*  
—Charles Tilly, 1969

Ethel Latimer was not young anymore. She liked her new home, but it had come “too late” for her to feel that she could fully settle in and enjoy the house, and too late to erase the frightening memories of the last years in her old home. Her friend Jean Hutchison, also 70 years old, agreed: “It put 10 years on me... people said I didn’t look happy when I was given my new keys, and it was true. But how could I look happy after all that mental strain? I couldn’t concentrate on anything.” For a few years, Latimer was not even sure she would live to see her new home. It was 1981, and both women were featuring in a BBC documentary about living through a slum clearance campaign that had reshaped their neighborhood beginning in the late 1960s. They had just moved into new council houses in Byker, a neighborhood on Newcastle’s eastern fringe. True to the council’s promise to salvage the Byker community as they razed and rebuilt the old neighborhood, the women had been rehoused next to each other as they had requested. Many of their friends, though, were now scattered to other parts of the city, driven away by the dirt, noise, and uncertainty that attended rebuilding, or enticed by the offer of a new council home available in a different neighborhood. Latimer and Hutchison were split on the virtues of the new Byker. “I’d go back to the old Byker tomorrow,” Hutchison averred, over her friend’s skeptical protest. “Yes I would. I would if Byker could be the way it used to be.” Latimer was guarded in her praise of the modern Byker that “the foreigners go mad about,” but

she liked her new home, and was glad that the planners had preserved the old pubs and shops in the new development.<sup>1</sup>

Latimer, Hutchison, and their neighbors had been promised that their tight-knit community would not be dispersed during the neighborhood's reconstruction. But only a third of the 1968 population remained in Byker when the dust cleared in 1982, and by the mid-1990s it was widely written off as a crime-ridden "sink estate" worthy of demolition. The last decade and a half have seen yet another change in fortunes, as new infrastructural investment and an ethnically diverse influx of new arrivals have brought renewed public attention to the estate. Byker's trajectory—from a shabby but proud working-class district in the 1960s, to a "community architecture" showpiece in the 1970s, to an example of urban blight in the late 1980s and 1990s (when deindustrialization led to an unemployment rate of close to 30%) to a cosmopolitan regeneration project in the last decade—is a tortuous path. The neighborhood's fortunes reflect rapidly shifting perspectives on class, urban space, and modern planning in late twentieth-century Britain. Conceived in the sixties and born in the seventies, the redeveloped Byker embodies the hopes, challenges, frustrations, and political contradictions of the terminal years of Britain's welfare state and its aftermath.

The two women's disagreement over the new Byker's merits was typical. From its inception as an architectural prestige project in 1968, the Byker housing estate invited controversy. In a 1976 review written halfway through the renewal process, the urban historian Alison Ravetz praised the new Byker's as "in every sense humane: it creates a place to be homesick for, a place to come home to."<sup>2</sup> Writing in *The New Statesman*, the architectural historian Andrew Saint was even more fulsome, dubbing Byker "the most spectacular and

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<sup>1</sup> Sue Hercombe, "Cameras Return to a Changing World," *Newcastle Journal*, 22 July 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Alison Ravetz, "Housing at Byker, Newcastle upon Tyne: Appraisal," *The Architects' Journal* 15, 163 (14 April 1976): 731-742, at 742.

unequivocally successful British housing development of recent times. . . . Mention socialism, and [Byker's architects] will grow glassy-eyed and look the other way; but at Byker, they have created the most practical socialism we have had in housing in many years."<sup>3</sup> His reference to Byker's practical socialism celebrated the architect's close collaboration with the neighborhood's working-class residents. The urban sociologist Peter Malpass reached the opposite conclusion, arguing in 1980 that Byker had failed to live up to its architects' goals of integrating ordinary people into the planning of their new homes. Far from creating socialism, he argued, Byker had reinforced established political hierarchies by simply using participation exercises as a way to sideline dissent.<sup>4</sup> More than three decades after its completion, Byker continues to divide critical opinion.<sup>5</sup>

There is nothing unusual about modernist architecture inciting controversy; people disagree about buildings, and in Britain the lines of the battle between modernists and their critics were firmly drawn by the early 1960s. But as the examples above show, the debates surrounding Byker have always been about more than just the relative merits of brick and asbestos, or of pitched and flat roofs. At Byker, several competing narratives of British history collided. The plans for the new Byker were conceived at a point of intense anxiety over the disappearance of "traditional" working class communities, which many commentators fretted were breaking apart under the combined impact of slum clearance projects, affluence, and mass

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Saint, "The Byker Street Irregulars," *New Statesman*, 20 May 1977, 687.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Malpass, "The Architect and the Community," *Housing* 16, 1 (January, 1980): 2-5, at 3.

<sup>5</sup> Two recent assessments by leftist public intellectuals highlight this divide. For a positive treatment, see Owen Hatherley, *Guide to the New Ruins of Britain*, 168-170. For a negative view, see Anna Minton, "Byker Wall: Newcastle's Noble Failure of an Estate," *The Guardian*, 21 May 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/may/21/byker-wall-newcastles-noble-failure-of-an-estate-a-history-of-cities-in-50-buildings-day-41>. The nearly 200 comments responding to Minton's article exemplify the estate's divisiveness.

media.<sup>6</sup> But what was the best way to preserve that community, and what aspects of working-class life were worth preserving? The divergent conceptions of Byker each grew from different, but often overlapping, answers to these questions. The planning project at Byker evoked such extreme and polarized responses—hope, excitement, disappointment, and anger—because its protagonists tapped into compelling cultural narratives of political participation, community, and the desires of ordinary British people.<sup>7</sup>

The chapter centers on the two most well-known protagonists in Byker's redevelopment: its Anglo-Swedish architect-planner Ralph Erskine, and Sirkka-Liisa Kontinen, a Finnish photographer who moved to Byker just as the project was getting underway and documented the lives of the people living in the demolition zone. While both Erskine's urban designs and Kontinen's artwork claimed to speak for their ordinary working-class subjects against paternalistic and elitist state authorities, they cherished conflicting notions of how those ordinary subjects fit into 1970s British society. The divisions between them reveal wider splits in the British and European left. Erskine, a socialist and pacifist who had left Britain for Sweden on the eve of the Second World War, advocated a sensitive and gradual perfecting of British society through careful consultation with populations usually excluded from the planning process. For Erskine, progress through modernization was possible, desirable, and it was the ethical responsibility of the state to provide it. Coming to Britain from Finland just in time for the student protests of 1968 in London, Sirkka-Liisa Kontinen advocated a much different conception of modernization projects. Her photographs show a vision of progress as catastrophe,

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<sup>6</sup> The rise of popular sociology was one of the driving forces beyond this concern, exemplified most saliently in Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London*; and Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*. For recent historical accounts of the context behind these debates, see Selina Todd, *The People*, 236-46; and Jon Lawrence, "Inventing the 'Traditional Working Class': A Re-Analysis of Interview Notes from Young and Willmott's *Family and Kinship in East London*," *The Historical Journal* 59, 2 (March 2016): 567-593.

<sup>7</sup> For a theoretical discussion of how urban planning relies on narrative and storytelling, see Barbara Eckstein and James A. Throgmorton, eds., *Story and Sustainability: Planning, Practice and Possibility for American Cities* (Boston: MIT Press, 2003). For an early critical account, see John Gower Davies, *The Evangelistic Bureaucrat*.

of urban renewal as a form of class warfare. In these clashing visions, Byker's built space crystalized utopian hopes and apocalyptic dread of urban planning's possibilities.

The chapter also examines the experience of the ordinary people so central to these outsiders' visions of Byker. What did community mean to them? How did people navigate the often-disorienting transition from the old Byker to the new? Taking a long view of Byker's transformation over half a century provides the chance to break from what the historian Jon Lawrence, describing social histories of postwar slum clearance, calls the "cataclysmic model of social and cultural change."<sup>8</sup> Tracing Byker people's stories across the apparent fault lines of demolition, then rebuilding, and the economic and social traumas of the 1980s and 1990s allows us to see how identities and networks were adapted and remade across strikingly different historical conditions.<sup>9</sup> Examining life on the estate beyond the immediate ruptures of resettlement and adjustment also provides a view of how people could come to view their unfamiliar new surroundings in the same way they saw their old neighborhood: as a home and a community. At a historical moment when many of Britain's most famous modernist council estates are being demolished or sold off to private developers for refurbishing and gentrification, grasping people's often complex relations with estates like Byker has more than just academic value.<sup>10</sup> As the final section of the chapter argues, new social constellations and forms of belonging that have emerged in recent years challenge the environmental determinism of modern Byker's critics.

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<sup>8</sup> Jon Lawrence, "Inventing the 'Traditional Working Class,'" 573.

<sup>9</sup> Recent studies that take a similar long view include Ben Jones, *The Working Class in Mid Twentieth-Century England*; Stefan Ramsden, "Remaking Working-Class Community;" and Todd, *The People*.

<sup>10</sup> See Michael Romyn, "The Heygate"; and Ben Campkin, *Remaking London: Decline and Regeneration in Urban Culture* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2013).

## From Slum Clearance to Community Architecture

From Cruddas Park to Rye Hill  
We are determined, we have the will  
That horrid slums we shall erase  
With surgeon's knife and then replace.<sup>11</sup>

T. Dan Smith's work building the Brasilia of the North left him little time for writing poetry, which is a mercy. But this sliver of doggerel (which continues for seventy-eight more lines) does help to reveal the self-conception of Newcastle's modernizers in the early sixties. Smith's "we" did not refer to the Council, nor to its Labour leaders, nor to Smith himself—he remained too much a Trotskyist to adopt that royal tic—rather, he believed he was enunciating the general will, the *zeitgeist* of sixties Newcastle. Smith's Labour party took control of the Council with a political platform of planning-led urban renewal. Remaking the civic space of the city's core with motorways, new shopping centers, and multilevel walkways formed one piece of this campaign; it was complemented by a drive to remake domestic space through slum clearance and industrialized housing. By the mid-1960s, huge tower blocks reared up around the edges of Newcastle, from Cruddas Park in the west to Shieldfield in the east.

Newcastle's was just part of a nation-wide effort to identify "outworn" housing and replace it with new homes that conformed to statutory building standards. In 1960, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government established guidelines demanding that all local authorities draw up slum clearance plans.<sup>12</sup> Both parties embraced the housing "numbers game." During Keith Joseph's tenure of Minister of Housing for the Conservative government in the early 1960s, nation-wide home building goals were set at 300,000 per year in 1962, and then raised to 400,000 the following year. When Labour took control in 1964, the goal was raised to half a million new homes per year by 1970. "We'll make housing the most popular thing this

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<sup>11</sup> T. Dan Smith, *An Autobiography* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Oriel Press, 1970), 62.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Malpass and Alan Murie, *Housing Policy and Practice* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 125.



Kendal Street in Snow. Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, *Byker*.

government does,” Harold Wilson told Richard Crossman, his Minister of Housing, in 1965. “We won’t build another single mile of road if a cut-back is necessary to get that half-million houses a year.”<sup>13</sup> Local authorities were equally attuned to the political dividends that new homes offered.

Compared to Liverpool, where a third of the housing stock (92,000 homes) was condemned as obsolete, Newcastle’s housing clearance program was modest. Nevertheless, 88,000 dwellings were judged to have inadequate plumbing, and roughly 25,000 were deemed “unfit by civilized criteria for long-term rehabilitation and would have to be cleared or replaced.”<sup>14</sup> Much of the offending housing was concentrated in the dense Victorian terraces immediately surrounding the city center. Byker was one such neighborhood, with 2,300 houses

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in John R. Gold, *The Practice of Modernism*, 169.

<sup>14</sup> Lionel Esher, *A Broken Wave*, 178.

designated as obsolete in 1960 (out of Byker's 6,300 homes).<sup>15</sup> In the old Byker, parallel rows of two-story brick terraced housing ran southward down the steep slopes of the river valley toward the Tyne. Of greenery there was little, and many homes lacked indoor toilets or hot water. Nonetheless, Byker's "community spirit" captured attention even during the city's modernizing heyday. In one of his first reports as Newcastle City Planning Officer, Wilfred Burns described Byker as "an old established neighbourhood with strong local loyalties."<sup>16</sup> When Burns's planning team began their ambitious renewal plan in 1961, they rejected a piecemeal approach of partial clearance or selective rehabilitation; instead, the plan proposed to raze and rebuild the entire area, and to route a new motorway along Byker's northern edge. Byker was to be completely remade by 1981.

No specific provisions were made for the future form of Byker in Burns's plan, apart from a commitment to reducing the area's population density: whereas the existing Byker comprised 17,450 souls, the population of the redeveloped neighborhood would be 11,600. By 1967, clearance was already underway, with 5,000 people dispersed into council housing around the city. As Peter Malpass and Alan Murie argued in their early study of Byker's redevelopment, this disconnect between slum clearance and any kind of positive rebuilding program sparked a strategic reaction among Byker's residents.<sup>17</sup> The experience of gradual attrition impelled Byker's leaders—"an informal grouping of community-based professionals, social workers, and clergy"—to present Byker to the Newcastle Council as a uniquely cohesive community that should be kept together at all costs.<sup>18</sup> Their efforts were successful—even as the Council

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<sup>15</sup> Malpass and Murie, *Housing Policy and Practice*, 125-126.

<sup>16</sup> City and Council of Newcastle upon Tyne, "The Internal Community Pattern of the City: City Planning Officer's Report," 18 December 1961. Held in Newcastle Local Studies Room.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Drage, "Byker: Surprising the Colleagues for 35 Years—A Social History of Ralph Erskine's Byker," *Twentieth Century Architecture* 9 (2008): 148-162, at 149.

approved plans to demolish and rebuild the entire district, they promised that the community would be retained—this would be a gentle modernization guided by the ideals of participation and democratic consultation. In 1967, a Conservative candidate won a Council seat for Byker Ward—a seemingly improbable prospect in this traditional Labour bastion—by running on a platform of “Byker for Byker people.”<sup>19</sup> Bonds of feeling between people and place that had built up over decades would remain unbroken, the city leadership promised. But the Council’s commitment to maintaining Byker as a community came late in the planning process, and was superimposed on sedimented layers of policy that emphasized public health and infrastructural modernization. These earlier concerns would continually take precedent during the ensuing redevelopment

Most of Byker’s residents were in favor of the plan to clear and rebuild the neighborhood.<sup>20</sup> By the end of the sixties, though, the notion that modern flats could be a panacea for urban social ills had few defenders, and most Byker residents wanted new houses on the small scale of their old homes.<sup>21</sup> Press coverage of the vandalism and social isolation that bedeviled postwar housing estates—often composed of people “decanted” from inner-city slums—took much of the luster from the modernist ideal of urban renewal. Beginning in the late 1950s, sociologists had documented slum clearance programs’ corrosive effects on urban social structures, and by the time Byker’s redevelopment was set in motion in 1968 many politicians and planners were seeking a more sensitive approach to urban renewal.<sup>22</sup> Under T. Dan Smith’s leadership, Newcastle had positioned itself as a pioneer of expert-led urban modernism in

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<sup>19</sup> Peter Malpass and Alan Murie, *Housing Policy and Practice*, 127.

<sup>20</sup> W. Hampton and I. Walkland, “Byker Community Development Project,” (Newcastle: Newcastle upon Tyne Council for Voluntary Service, 1980), 9. For a dissenting view, see Sirkka-Liisa Kontinen, *Byker* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1985).

<sup>21</sup> Interview between Ralph Erskine and Jill Lever, 23 Jan. 1997, tape 2A.

<sup>22</sup> The key sociological text was Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London*. Also important were ethnographical studies that revealed the complex social bonds that flourished in slum neighborhoods. See, for example, Madeline Kerr, *The People of Ship Street*.

Britain, forging a new townscape according to the dictates of technocratic studies such as the Parker Morris Report for housing and the Buchanan Report for urban motor traffic. At the end of the decade, with Smith and Burns both departed for new posts at the regional and national level, the city's pioneering ethos would be realigned toward the latest frontier in urban planning thought: actively involving the public in the planning process. Just as the high-speed motorways and elevated concrete walkways signified the arrival of a newly empowered planning profession, Byker showcased planning's softer, more democratic face.

Three key government documents signaled the arrival of a new kind of planning: the 1968 Town and Country Planning Act, the 1969 "People and Planning: Report of the Committee on Public Participation in Planning" (colloquially known as the Skeffington Report), and the 1969 Housing Act. The 1968 Act sought to remedy the top-down nature of the postwar planning system (established in 1947, this system only allowed public comment once plans were completed) by allowing public participation throughout the planning process. This Act expressed larger cultural currents (voiced most prominently by a trans-Atlantic wave of student protests in 1968) that pressed for the dispersal of government authority and participatory democracy. Tony Benn, the Labour Minister of Technology, took this impulse to its furthest extent in his proposal that citizens could shape government strategy from the comfort of their living rooms: special television broadcasts on public policy would feature the option of having viewers adding their opinions by pressing buttons at home.<sup>23</sup> This vision of democracy's high-tech future never materialized, but it highlights the attempts to wed technological efficiency to democratic participation at the end of the sixties.

The Skeffington Committee was tasked with examining how the ideals embodied in the 1968 Act might be implemented—to "consider and report on the best methods, including

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen Ward, *Planning and Urban Change*, 123.

publicity, of securing the participation of the public at the formative stage in the making of development plans for their area.”<sup>24</sup> The report defined participation as an active and engaged process, which “involves doing as well as talking and there will be full participation only when the public are able to take an active part throughout the plan-making process.”<sup>25</sup> While the Skeffington Report remained ambivalent on how much authority experts should concede to the public (with ultimate authority still resting with the local planning authority), it provided an official blessing for a more broad-based kind of planning.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the Housing Act of 1969 placed an emphasis on rehabilitation of old buildings over clearance and redevelopment and, most importantly, gave residents of urban areas the scope to band together and submit their own plan for developing their neighborhood with government funds.

These shifts in planning philosophy and practice coincided with a nationwide retreat from large-scale housing projects. The expansive housing drives marking the early years of Wilson’s government came unhinged after 1966 as a result of austerity programs that withheld from local governments the central subsidies necessary for constructing council housing. Added to this was a public rejection of industrialized building techniques following the explosion and partial collapse at London’s Ronan Point estate in 1968.<sup>27</sup> In Newcastle, where the Labour party’s legitimacy had been tied to the city’s centralized slum clearance and modernization drive, the sea change in public opinion was reflected in a Conservative victory in 1968. The new leader of the Council, Arthur Grey, saw the proposed Byker redevelopment as a public relations opportunity

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<sup>24</sup> The Skeffington Committee, *People and Planning: Report of the Committee on Public Participation in Planning* (London: Routledge, 2013), 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> On the Skeffington Report’s contradictions, see Peter Shapely, "Planning, Housing and Participation in Britain, 1968–1976," *Planning Perspectives* 26, no. 1 (2011): 75–90; and Nigel Taylor, *Urban Planning Theory since 1945* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 87–88.

<sup>27</sup> John Davis, "Community and the Labour Left in 1970s London," in Chris Williams and Andrew Edwards, eds., *The Art of the Possible: Politics and Governance in Modern British History, 1885–1997: Essays in Memory of Duncan Tanner* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 207–223, at 211.

for his party.<sup>28</sup> By proceeding with the redevelopment plans along the lines of Skeffington's recommendations, the Conservatives planned to demonstrate their commitment to the latest democratic trends in planning as well as a break from Labour's legacy of heavy-handed urban renewal.

### **Social Engineering and a Bit of Poetry**

A key political aim for the Conservatives was to encourage more private initiative in architecture and planning, so rather than working through the City Architect's office, Grey and his colleagues began looking for a private practice to carry out Byker's redevelopment. Grey ended up enlisting the Anglo-Swedish architect Ralph Erskine, whom he had encountered during the latter's time designing lakeside housing for the nearby new town of Killingworth, beginning in 1967-68. Erskine's appeal lay partly in his international pedigree. He had spent the years during and after World War II working in Sweden, where his practice was headquartered. Since the 1940s, Sweden had been "the exemplar of what a welfare state could achieve," while at the same time being a "humane and pragmatic departure from Le Corbusier's brutalism."<sup>29</sup> By the 1960s, Erskine had an international reputation as Sweden's leading architect for public housing.<sup>30</sup> Scandinavia held a particular luster in Newcastle, evidenced by the faux-Norse design of the new Civic Centre (officially opened in 1968 by the King of Norway), the ferry routes crossing the North Sea, and exhibitions throughout the decade advertising Scandinavian-made goods (Britain and Sweden had the two largest economies of the European Free Trade

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<sup>28</sup> Interview between Ralph Erskine and Jill Lever, 24 Jan. 1997, tape 5B.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Carolin, "Sense, Sensibility, and Tower Blocks: The Swedish Influence on Post-War Housing in Britain," *Twentieth Century Architecture* 9 (2008): 97-112, at 99; and Natasha Vall, "Social Engineering and Participation in Anglo-Swedish Housing 1945-1976: Ralph Erskine's Vernacular Plan," *Planning Perspectives* 28, no. 2 (2013): 223-245, at 226.

<sup>30</sup> Colin Amery, "Housing, Byker, Newcastle upon Tyne," *Architectural Review* 156 (Dec. 1974), 358-362, at 359.

Association partner states). In Newcastle, Erskine later commented, “Scandinavian was a good thing, and that I was an English Scandinavian wasn’t a bad thing either.”<sup>31</sup>

Together with the British architects Peter and Alison Smithson, Erskine was a member of Team 10, a group of modernists who had broken from the modernist orthodoxy at the 1953 International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM) meeting. The new group criticized CIAM’s overly mechanistic and technical approach, advocating instead “a more comprehensive grasp of the social and cultural realities of the city.”<sup>32</sup> By the 1960s, with CIAM dissolved, Team 10 was the leading international platform of modern architects.<sup>33</sup> Erskine maintained CIAM’s commitment to functionalism, but stressed that housing should be conceived as “architecture with a small A”—well designed, but “friendly and speak to people in an intimate way... [it] has very little to do with monumentality.”<sup>34</sup> His designs at Killingworth were private lakeside housing in a modest vernacular style. With their bright colors and bespoke details, Erskine’s buildings stood out from the concrete monumentality of Roy Gazzard’s town center. Erskine’s blending of modernist functionalism with an attention to local detail and human scale likely promised a way for Grey to distance the Byker project from the recent Labour past without abandoning the city’s commitment to modernism. Erskine’s appointment, Peter Malpass commented, “represented a new start, a new hope, and a demonstration that only the best would satisfy the council in Byker.”<sup>35</sup>

When Grey approached Erskine for the commission in September 1968, the City Architect’s office had already drawn up plans for Byker. As Erskine later recalled, the initial

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<sup>31</sup> Interview between Ralph Erskine and Jill Lever, 24 Jan. 1997, tape 5B.

<sup>32</sup> Volker M. Welter, “In-Between Space and Society: On Some British Roots of Team 10’s Urban Thought in the 1950s,” in Max Risselada and Dirk van den Heuvel, eds., *Team 10: 1953-81, In Search of a Utopia of the Present* (Rotterdam: NAI, 2005), 258.

<sup>33</sup> Jos Bosman, “Team 10 Out of CIAM,” in *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>34</sup> Interview between Ralph Erskine and Jill Lever, 23 Jan. 1997, tape 2A.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Malpass, “The Architect and the Community,” 4.

design envisioned a solid wall along the north of the development to block the noise of the planned motorway. Behind the wall, there would be

blocks of flats zigzagging everywhere; you know, Corbusian stuff. And I thought, oh for heaven's sake. I know the English a bit, and I thought most English people are keen on having their own house, aren't they?... And, you know, flats are not the favorite way of living. But these, of course, were lower class and it was council housing, so the fashion for architects was to put blocks of flats zigzagging everywhere.<sup>36</sup>

Erskine deferred accepting the Byker commission for a month during which two of his employees (one of whom was his daughter, Jane, an interior architect) canvassed the people of Byker to ascertain their wishes for the area's future. "My clients are the people down there," Erskine told Grey. His architectural approach distinguished the "sponsor client" from the "user client." While the sponsor controlled the money and land for building, it was the buildings' users—the home dweller, the factory worker, the student—for whom the architect must ultimately design. "The highest priority clients are those with less resources, who are less strong, because the rich can always buy architects."<sup>37</sup> From the outset, then, Erskine approached his work in Byker with an overt commitment to incorporating the demands of Byker's working-class residents (though how accurately he represented these demands is a question we will turn to in a later section). In doing so, he opposed his familiarity with residents' needs to the dogmatic planning ideas of the government experts.<sup>38</sup>

As Erskine had contended, his clients overwhelmingly desired single-family houses, like those in which they had always lived. They also, naturally, were deeply wary of the prospect of having their neighborhood of nearly 20,000 people cleared away wholesale. Such a massive redevelopment operation, the largest in Newcastle outside of the city center, would doubtless

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<sup>36</sup> Interview between Ralph Erskine and Jill Lever, 24 Jan. 1997, tape 5B.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Erskine's claim to "know the English a bit" implies a division between the knowledge gained through familiarity, and the abstract knowledge gained through studying ideal population densities and the latest building techniques. A parallel might be the French distinction between *connaître* and *savoir*.

take at least a decade to complete. What would happen to the Bykerites between the demolition and reconstruction? Could links between people and place endure such a protracted upheaval?

When Erskine returned to Grey and the Council leadership after his investigations, he submitted a proposal encapsulating the community's demands in a six-point plan of intent:

- a) To prepare a project for planning and building a complete and integrated environment for living in its widest sense, at the lowest possible cost to the residents, and in intimate contact and collaboration with them;
- b) to maintain, as far as possible, valued traditions and characteristics of the neighbourhood itself and its relationship with the surrounding areas;
- c) to re-house those already resident in Byker, without breaking family ties and other valued associations or patterns of life;
- d) to exploit the physical character of the site...
- e) to provide character and a complete system of pedestrian routes within each phase;
- f) to provide a recognisable physical form, i.e. a specific 'local' individuality to each group of houses, and to make it easy for the residents to find their way through each phase.<sup>39</sup>

The majority of the new Byker was to be terraced low-rise housing, with the exception of a winding "wall" of single-aspect high-rise flats that would form an acoustic barrier between the houses and the planned motorway. The wall was one of the firm design requirements that the Newcastle authorities placed on Erskine from the beginning; but as we will see, the resulting structure fit with Erskine's earlier work and thought. Finally, to mitigate the psychic and social strains of the clearance process, Erskine proposed a "rolling program" of clearance and rebuilding. Demolition would proceed in small chunks, with groups of roughly 250 homes being demolished at a time. That way, the majority of the residents would be able to move directly from their old homes into new buildings nearby, without an extended period of removal to temporary housing.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ralph Erskine, "Summary of Architectural and Planning Aspects of the Byker Redevelopment." Unpaginated typescript held in Newcastle Central Library Local Studies Room.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. Clearance areas were reduced from between 1,000 and 1,500 dwellings to groups of 250. The first people to be cleared, from the Wall and motorway area, were excluded from the rolling program and rehoused elsewhere in the city.

The Newcastle council approved Erskine's appointment in the spring of 1969 and work commenced with the Wall and a small pilot project at the south end of the slope.<sup>41</sup> Although it housed only a tenth of the new Byker's population, the Wall dominated contemporary and subsequent discussions of the project. It is hard to ignore. Snaking along the northern heights of the development in an undulating ribbon, its elevation varies from five to eight stories. At close to a mile and a half in length, it was the longest housing project in Europe when it was built.<sup>42</sup> Visitors approaching from the north are met with the imposing sight of a winding brick façade, its colorful brickwork and small windows doing little to break up its monotonous aspect. This exterior face was Erskine's response to the problem of the planned (but never built) motorway—the Wall's housing would all be single-aspect: they opened to the south, and were designed to have their kitchens and bathrooms abutting the clamor and concrete to the north. Passing through one of the Wall's entryways as through the gate in a medieval walled town, a decidedly different perspective opens up: the dazzling white surface of the upper floors is splashed with bright shades of red, blue, and green, while seemingly haphazard wooden balconies and access decks cling precariously to its vertical mass. Sporadic acetylene-blue fins capping each stairway extend from the roof, making it a landmark visible from points across the city. Its asymmetrical unpredictability makes a stark contrast to the harsh concrete of the prevailing Brutalist aesthetic.<sup>43</sup> "At Byker," wrote Reyner Banham in an early assessment, "it looks as if a tidal wave of sheddery and pergolation had broken over the lower terraces and splashed as far up the Wall as it could reach, leaving balconies and flower boxes and pigeon lofts

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<sup>41</sup> Henceforth references to the Byker Wall will be capitalized, as it was the official title given to the housing project.

<sup>42</sup> Reyner Banham, "The Great Wall of Tyne," *New Society*, 6 February 1975, 330.

<sup>43</sup> As with most of Erskine's work, these fins fused form with function, housing the motors for the building's lifts.



Map of the Byker redevelopment, with the Byker Wall running along the northern perimeter. From Peter Blundell Jones and Eamonn Cannliffe, *Modern Architecture through Case Studies, 1945-1990*.

clinging insecurely all over the façade.”<sup>44</sup> As well as serving as a barrier to motorway noise, recalled one of the project architects, the Wall “was all about the idea of placing people in the light and sun, and offering them some of the most spectacular views in urban Britain – the Tyne, its bridges and cityscape.”<sup>45</sup> Benches were built into the Wall along these corridors in an attempt to replicate the sociability of the old Byker, where people would sit on their stoops on warm days.<sup>46</sup> According to most early accounts, the Wall’s inhabitants—mainly elderly, and no

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Tony McGuirk, "Back to Byker," *Architects' Journal* 231, no. 11 (25 March 2010): 41–45.

<sup>46</sup> Roger Fenn, "The New Byker," 1987, p. 2. Typescript in clippings book *Byker: Miscellaneous Articles*, held in Local Studies Room, Newcastle Library.



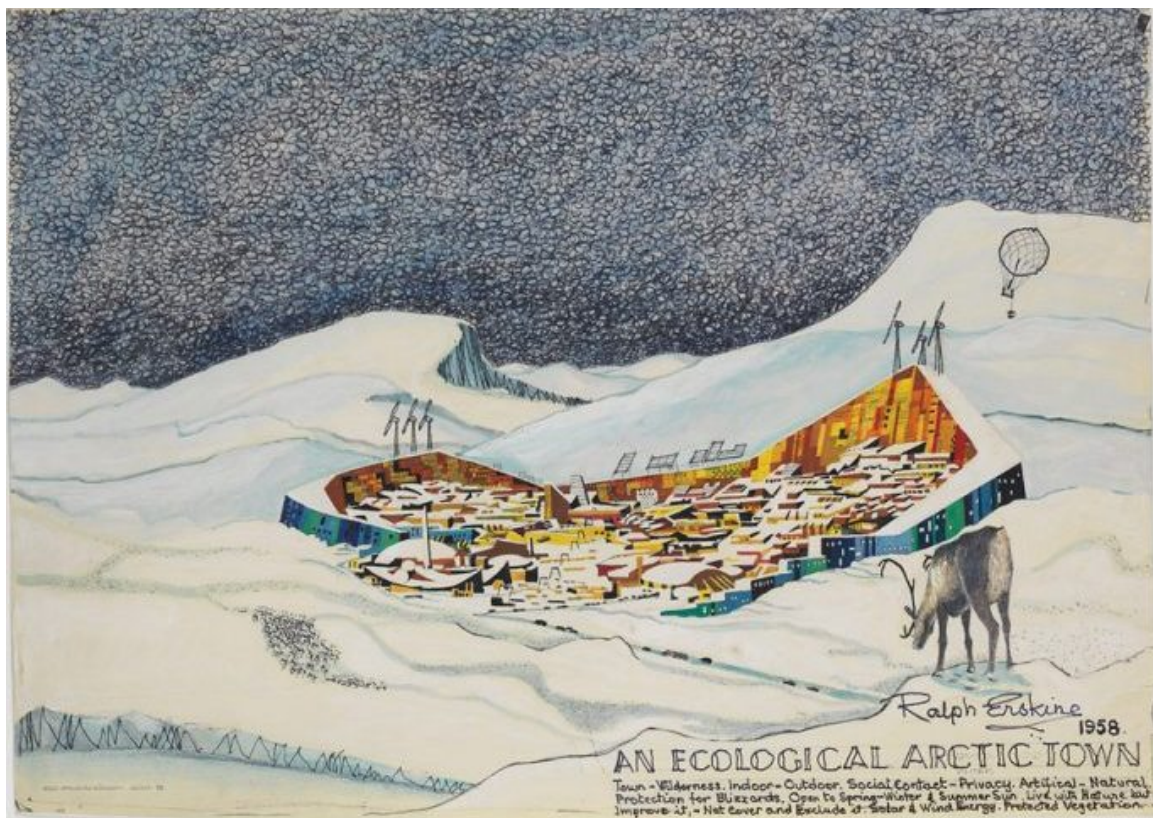
The Byker Wall under construction, c. 1970. "Byker Lives" project.



The wall's northern façade, just after completion. "Byker Lives" project.

families with children—generally enjoyed their new homes. A retired sheet-metal worker showed a visiting journalist his home’s view over the Tyne valley to Newcastle’s bridges and skyline: “It’s better than Blackpool illuminations at night.”<sup>47</sup> Others dubbed the sunny southern-facing flats their “Costa Brava.”<sup>48</sup> While the analogy is dubious, it indicates the feeling among Bykerites that their new surroundings had effected a break in time and space; the rebuilding of the neighborhood had split them off from the damp, dour, and coal-blackened industrial cityscape, and also promised a new everyday closer to the leisure resorts of the Mediterranean coast than to the workaday life of the shipyards, homemaking routines, or the dole.

One of the first parts of the new Byker to be built, the Wall was also the only housing from which resident participation was excluded. The nature of the building was too “complex,”



Erskine's design for an Arctic New Town, 1958.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in David Guyon, “My Idea of Home,” *Ideal Home* (March 1976).

<sup>48</sup> Alison Ravetz, “Housing at Byker,” 738.

Erskine maintained, to allow for any design input from its users.<sup>49</sup> “Working-class culture in England is strong on personal contacts and group loyalties,” he wrote in a different context, “but not so strong on abstract thinking.”<sup>50</sup> One might contend that the nature of large-scale building requires a prohibitive degree of training and expertise regardless of class and nationality. Yet Erskine’s comment also illuminates the hybrid nature of Byker’s design; as Natasha Vall observes, the new Byker rested as much on modernist notions of top-down expertise and social engineering as it did on the democratic ideals of the community architecture movement.<sup>51</sup> While the latter movement’s advocates portrayed Byker as a kindred project, much of Erskine’s work there grew from his modernist convictions and his own earlier international career working in Scandinavia and in designing an arctic settlement in Canada.<sup>52</sup>

The Byker Wall exemplifies this point. In the first instance it was a practical response to the Council’s requirement of a motorway barrier. Also, though, it provided a chance for Erskine to incorporate some of the ideals formulated by the architectural modernist group Team 10. A main Team 10 precept was that architects take into account the specificities of local “place”—of people’s attachment to local history, geography, and culture—as opposed to the abstract Cartesian “space” of international modernism.<sup>53</sup> Erskine envisioned the Wall as a “place marker” that would, as one of his associates put it, create an “intensified edge” to distinguish Byker from the surrounding neighborhoods; passing through the Wall’s portals, one would feel a sense of

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<sup>49</sup> Erskine, “Summary of Architectural and Planning Aspects of the Byker Redevelopment.”

<sup>50</sup> Ralph Erskine, “Designing between Client and Users,” in C. Richard Hatch, ed., *The Scope of Social Architecture* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1984).

<sup>51</sup> See Vall, “Social Engineering and Participation in Anglo-Swedish Housing 1945–1976.”

<sup>52</sup> Books placing Byker under the Community Architecture umbrella include Nick Wates and Charles Knevitt, *Community Architecture: How People Are Creating Their Own Environment* (London: Penguin, 1987); and José Ospina, *Housing Ourselves* (London: H Shipman, 1987).

<sup>53</sup> Lionel Esher, *The Broken Wave*, 60-61.

arrival in a unique and bounded place.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, the Wall continued Erskine's preoccupation with blending architecture and ecology. Since the 1950s, the notion of architectural "micro-climates" had intrigued him. In a 1959 presentation for the CIAM congress at Otterlo in the Netherlands, Erskine presented his ideas for creating a modernist "Sub-Arctic Habitat"—creative design, he believed could be instrumental in softening the frigid conditions of northern regions.<sup>55</sup> The Byker Wall served this role for the community, providing a shield against the bracing winds coming off the North Sea. Erskine's vision of creating a protected Byker "microclimate" fused with his notions of "place" and architectural whimsy, exemplifying his view that the architect must be "a builder, a technician, a social engineer and 'a bit of a poet.'" <sup>56</sup> Among architects and urbanists, Erskine's design for Byker was mainly greeted with enthusiasm. One reviewer described Byker as "an incredible achievement," while another rhapsodized that "Byker is emerging from slumland into one of the most progressive, humane and attractive housing developments ever sponsored by a local authority in this country, a view held as much by the residents as by housing and architectural specialists."<sup>57</sup> Whether the latter view accurately represented the tenants' views was not as self-evident as the author suggested, but his statement highlights Byker's penchant for attracting superlatives. If Erskine's design for Byker drew glowing reviews from specialists, his methods of experimenting with tenant participation received an equal amount of attention. This time, though the response was rather more ambivalent.

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<sup>54</sup> McGuirk, "Back to Byker," 42. For a comparable and contemporary example, see the discussion of Gazzard's work in Killingworth, with its place-marking "moat" in chapter 2.

<sup>55</sup> Dennis Sharp, "Ralph Erskine: Architect and Urban Planner," *The Independent*, 21 March 2005.

<sup>56</sup> Stephen Gardiner, "The Changing Face of Britain," *The Observer*, 15 June 1975, 15.

<sup>57</sup> David Dunster, "Walled Town," *Progressive Architecture* 61, 8 (Aug. 1975): 68-73, at 70; and David Guyon, "My Idea of Home."

## The Place of the Ordinary, part I: The Funeral Parlor

If the Wall was chiefly a modernist social engineering project, the small pilot project launched in 1970 was the only part of the rebuilding project that formally incorporated user participation at the design stage. This experimental section of low-rise housing, built in the south-west corner of the development at the bottom of the slope, gave the architects the chance to work closely with the community and apply the lessons they learned (some salutary, some cautionary) to the rest of the project.<sup>58</sup> The ideal was to reimagine the architect-client relationship, creating a continual feedback loop in which Byker residents could play an active role in shaping their new homes and neighborhoods.

During the pilot project, the architects had to overcome the engrained skepticism toward the political establishment. At the first meeting with tenant groups, “the disbelief that the intentions of the ‘authorities’ were genuine was obvious among the tenants designate.” One wary tenant (out of 32 total) dropped out of the program immediately, and it was only after several meetings where the architects made clear that they “wanted the tenants to take plans home and make suggestions and amendments,” that they started to gain people’s confidence.<sup>59</sup> After a series of meetings discussing the height of kitchen work surfaces, room layouts, brick colors and roofing materials, the contractors broke ground in fall 1970. People took such a keen interest in their future homes that the contractors requested that access to the building site be curtailed to one official “open house” on a Sunday in April 1971. As an outside assessment concluded,

The event was an enormous success, grandparents, uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces all turned out—making a grand total in excess of 100 people wandering around on the site. However, the Assistant Director of Housing, vowing to himself that regrettably he could never sanction such a happening again, spent the afternoon uncomfortably aware of the inadequacies of insurance cover (as grandparents escorted their young grandchildren up

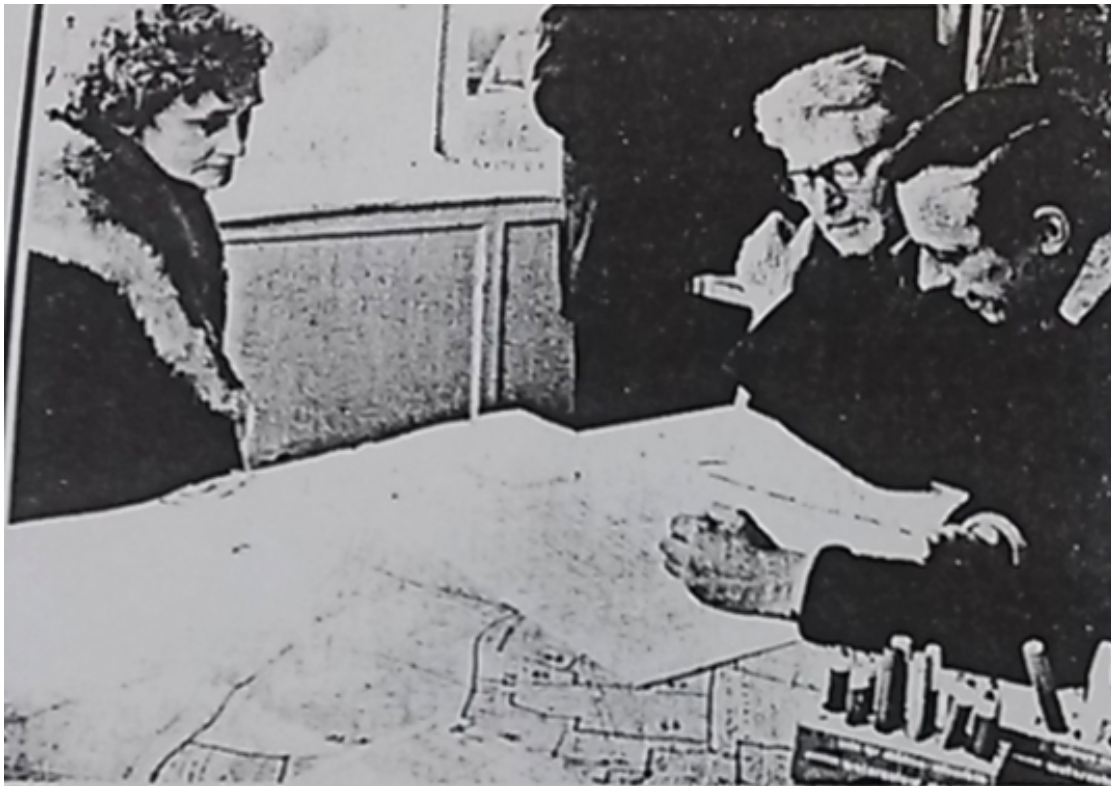
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<sup>58</sup> Caroline Purches, "Tenant Involvement in the Design Process," *Housing Review*, October 1975, 135.

<sup>59</sup> Newcastle Architecture Workshop, “Housing in Byker.” Unpaginated and undated (c. 1974) booklet, Local Studies Room, Newcastle Library.

ladders and across joists) realising that the whole exercise was perched precariously on the edge of possible disaster should there have been an accident. However, nothing untoward happened and the day proved most satisfactory in all other respects.<sup>60</sup>

While the pilot project was the most intensive period of formal participation, the architects tried other methods to break down the barriers between them and their “user clients.” To that end, homes were allocated at least six months before completion, so that people living in Byker’s condemned housing could follow the progress of their future home as it was going up. Also, throughout the redevelopment process council officials trekked to Byker for public informational meetings and housing allocation sessions that would normally have taken place at the Newcastle Civic Center. It was a move based on Erskine’s principle that “the strong people in a democratic



Vernon Gracie (right) consulting with prospective tenants. From cuttings book, Newcastle Library.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.



**Inside the Walls: Erskine's office looking out on the new Byker. The Wall looms in the background, while new low-rise housing faces the office windows across an expanse of topsoil. Byker Lives project.**

society should go to the weak people, and not the other way around.”<sup>61</sup> It was a striking reversal of the established way of involving the public in Newcastle. As Jon Davies described them, Newcastle’s usual procedures forced tenants to run a bureaucratic gauntlet before their ideas could be heard, resulting in a feeling of powerlessness and alienation; some tenants had no idea where the Civic Centre was.<sup>62</sup> Whether Erskine’s approach to soliciting tenant participation was a stride toward democracy or another way of sidelining dissent, though, became a persistent line of criticism.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Interview between Ralph Erskine and Jill Lever, 24 Jan. 1997, tape 6A.

<sup>62</sup> Davies, *The Evangelistic Bureaucrat*, 59.

<sup>63</sup> See Peter Malpass, “Who Benefits from Public Participation? The Byker Experience,” *Community Action* 55 (Jan. 1978), 33-35; and Natasha Vall, “Social Engineering and Participation in Anglo-Swedish Housing.”



A photo of the exterior of Erskine's office in the disused funeral parlor, with a map of the redevelopment plans facing the street. "Byker Lives" project.

But perhaps the most important aspect of the attempt to democratize planning at Byker was the decision to set the architects' office in the midst of the demolition zone. Aiming to foster collaboration and an atmosphere of trust, Erskine's lead associate, Vernon Gracie, set up shop in a former Byker funeral parlor. He lived in the flat above the office during the early years of the project, and then relocated to a flat in the Wall after he married the firm's social administrator later in the decade. The office was cramped quarters, comprising two rooms where, as a junior member of the team later recalled, "creature comforts were minimal and we shared the dust, noise and mud (and burglaries) of the demolition and redevelopment with the residents."<sup>64</sup> In spite of these inconveniences, the architects' onsite presence was a huge boon to their image,

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<sup>64</sup> Michael Drage, "Byker: Surprising the Colleagues for 35 Years," 152.



Erskine consulting with Byker kids, early 1970s. Photo by Bengt Ahlqvist.

lending weight to their claim to be breaking down the hierarchies between experts and ordinary people.

Hoping to maintain open communications with the community and to “demystify” the role of the architects, the office had an open-door policy, and residents were welcome to drop in with complaints or suggestions at any time.<sup>65</sup> During regular evening meetings held in the architects’ office, people “could swap to be nearer to friends and had plenty of time to quiz the architects about details of the houses being offered.”<sup>66</sup> Many residents took their roles as design partners very seriously—from the internal layout to the amount of cupboard spaces and window sizes, Bykerites worked with the architects to personalize their new homes.<sup>67</sup> But more often Erskine’s office became, as the architectural critic Rayner Banham observed, “an unofficial

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<sup>65</sup> Purches, “Tenant Involvement in the Design Process,” 135.

<sup>66</sup> Drage, “Building Byker” in Anna Flowers and Vanessa Histon, eds., *All Right Now! 1970s Newcastle* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Newcastle Libraries, 2011).

<sup>67</sup> Yukio Futagawa and Mats Egelius, *Ralph Erskine: Byker Redevelopment, Byker Area of Newcastle upon Tyne, England, 1969-82*, *Global Architecture* 55 (Tokyo, Japan: ADAEdita Tokyo, 1980), unpaginated.

Citizen's Advice Bureau, in which architecture or design was hardly ever mentioned."<sup>68</sup> The razing and rebuilding of Byker stretched on for more than a decade, during which the architects' office became a familiar and accessible proxy for the city's often-distant administrative authorities. Erskine recalled the chaotic ambience fostered by the office's open-door policy:

People, kids, the chief planner—they all come in and out. We often took in kids who had been “chucked out” from home and it was raining. ... And you could walk out on site and talk to people and contractors. We exhibited plans, drawings, and models in the window—but also local notices. “Anyone lost a tricycle? Ask the architect.”... Much less important was the RIBA sign-plate.<sup>69</sup>

Children seem to have been particularly drawn to the paraphernalia of the office, and, according to Erskine, they formed a beachhead for building relationships with the broader community. The office was strewn with pencils, crayons, and paper that the architects used to execute their plans,<sup>70</sup> recalled Erskine:

and all children love that, so in they'd stream and the whole of our wall was covered with sketches, and they drew Byker, and so on, and I remember one we got a photo of said ‘come to Byker for your holiday,’ and so on and so forth, and it was a very nice relationship, and then it was a hell of a game throwing them out after an hour, and they were hiding under tables.... And then of course the parents came, so we got that contact as well.<sup>71</sup>

A notebook that the architects kept describing snippets of the office's comings-and-goings in May 1974, when the redevelopment was well underway, captures this atmosphere, as the architects' office became a communal telephone booth, a washroom, a place for therapy (aided by sherry), and a hideout for young “Thomas Something”, who proved “difficult to throw

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<sup>68</sup> Banham, "The Great Wall of Tyne," 331.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in C. Richard Hatch, “Byker, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK,” in Hatch, ed., *The Scope of Social Architecture*, 186. “Guinea pigs” refers to the presence of several of the rodents in the architects' office as an ironic commentary on the experimental position of both the architects and their clients.

<sup>70</sup> These tools of the trade abounded, as all image work was done by hand, often in an accessible and colorful style, “in pencil on home-made plywood drawing boards propped up on bricks.” See Drage, “Byker: Surprising the Colleagues for 35 Years,” 152.

<sup>71</sup> Interview between Ralph Erskine and Jill Lever, 24 Jan. 1997, tape 6A.

Daybook Record				
Time	Name or Description	Reason for Visit	Action	Comment
8:50	Mrs. Smith	Asked for sand from sandbox for grandchildren to play with	Got some	
11:30	Mrs. Spraggon	Reported gas leak at Mrs. Smith's Cerville Road	Phoned Gas Board	
12:45	Billy Bucket	Came for matches	Got them	
5:30	Thomas Something	Playing "hide and seek" wanted to hide here	Hit under table	Difficult to throw out
11:20	Man from first handover	Wanted his fence altered as rubbish blows under it	Said we'd think about it	
11:30	Mr. Campbell	To murder Arne because of trowel	Arne was not in unfortunately	
2:45	Mrs. Smith	Lady had fallen in Gordon Road, broken wrist and shock	Called ambulance, came after five minutes	
3:00	Mrs. Rogerson and friend	She wanted some grass seed	Got some in a very nice paper bag	Will come back with bag later
6:10	Eddie	To wash	Washed	
7:10	Mrs. Wann	Upset—kids broke window—news of move too much, broke down	Sherry and a chat	
9:15	Two men (NEEB?)	Said they had a cooker to fix in Shipley Place	Told them Shipley Place not yet built	They left in a confused state
10:00	Ian Muckle, Action Centre	To call meeting about Shipley Rise play area	Roger, Caroline discussed	Arranged for another tenants' meeting
10:10	Tenant, Gordon Road	Collected the key from Action Centre		Very happy man

Participation in action--architects' daybook, May 1974. From Alison Ravetz, "Housing at Byker."

out."<sup>72</sup> A satirical play published in *Byker Phoenix*, the community newspaper, in spring 1976 had an architects' meeting unceremoniously interrupted by a "tenants' revolt." "Enter: 73 prams, 307½ tenants, 1 million (or thereabouts) dogs and a bloke pushing a barrow full of scrap."<sup>73</sup>

It is easy to romanticize the experiment with democratizing architecture in Byker, and some of the recollections likely took on a rosy tint for architects who saw their time in Byker as the highlight of their careers.<sup>74</sup> Contemporary surveys and the testimony in the local newspaper, however, show that residents' responses to the Byker experiment were mixed. Much of the

<sup>72</sup> Ravetz, "Housing at Byker," 741.

<sup>73</sup> Gerry Kemp, "The Erskines," *Byker Phoenix* 08 (Spring 1976): 23. Kemp was a junior architect in Erskine's practice.

<sup>74</sup> This could be especially true for the architects who started their careers at Byker. For example, Per Hederus and Arne Nilsson, junior members of Erskine's team from Sweden, wrote that they "had maybe our most

anecdotal evidence suggests a rapport between the community and the architects. That the Bykerite's relationship with the architects broke the relational mold between distant expert and passive client is indicated by the community's habit of referring to them as "our architects."<sup>75</sup> When Vernon Gracie, Erskine's partner and lead onsite architect, married Caroline Purches, the firm's social administrator, the *Byker Phoenix* ran a celebratory note and wished the newly-weds "health and happiness on behalf of all their many friends and acquaintances in Byker."<sup>76</sup> In March 1980, as redevelopment was nearing completion, a representative of a Byker tenants association wrote to *Byker Phoenix* complaining that he had been to a liaison meeting where "the Architects were not praised at all for any of their work. I have talked to a lot of people in the new Byker who are very pleased with it." The writer concluded that he hoped he was speaking "for a lot of other people" when he expressed his thanks to Erskine's team.<sup>77</sup>

Just as common, though, were the residents' public expressions of frustration. Initially, residents' concerns revolved around the extended process of demolition and rehousing, with the attendant problems of vandalism, noise, and generalized anxiety. One woman voiced the fear of living in an increasingly abandoned demolition zone: "I'd see kids and ragmen walking backwards and forwards to see if there was anyone in the house. If they could get into one loft they could go all the way along the street in the roofs. I could hear people in our loft, it was really horrible."<sup>78</sup> The destruction of familiar landmarks could have a marked impact on peoples' nerves and emotions. According to a local study on the social effects of the redevelopment project, one woman who had spent months waiting to be rehoused went out for her usual

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exciting time in our professional lives 40 years ago with the design of the new Byker. For this reason, revisiting Byker has for us always been emotionally exciting, resulting in a range of mixed feelings." See Per Hederus and Arne Nilsson, "Byker Revisited," in John Pendlebury, ed., *Changing Byker* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Newcastle University School of Architecture, Planning, and Landscape, 2010).

<sup>75</sup> Diana Rowntree, "Byker," *Architectural Design* (June 1975), 334-339, at 334.

<sup>76</sup> "Balloon Goes up at the Court of King Erskine," *Byker Phoenix* 10 (Summer 1976): 4.

<sup>77</sup> "A Word of Thanks," *Byker Phoenix* 38 (March 1980): 14.

<sup>78</sup> Gardiner, "The Changing Face of Britain," 14.

shopping trip, and “found herself running terrified down the street and crying. She had been passing the Co-op which she had known all her life and as she passed, part of it was being pulled down by workmen; as it fell she panicked and ran.”<sup>79</sup> Her mental and physical condition improved quickly as soon as she was rehoused, the report concluded.<sup>80</sup> This was far from a unique experience, the same study argued: “If (*sic*) often seems that all the women in Byker take pills ‘for my nerves’, but we have no hard evidence on this. What we do have are a number of detailed accounts of how strong, healthy people are brought down by the pressures of the redevelopment process.”<sup>81</sup> Whilst alienation and social disruption were the dominant themes of the study, the authors singled out Erskine’s team as an anodyne presence whose work among the community kept people from feeling “as if they are of no importance.”<sup>82</sup>

This last point highlights the affective value of the architects’ decision to set up shop in Byker. By sharing the experience of life in a construction zone—with its sensations of coughing up dust, flinching as brick walls were smashed, of squelching across muddy building sites under the gunmetal sky of a Newcastle winter dusk—Erskine’s team forged a sense of comity between planner and plannee. The bits of everyday life, like craft supplies for children, consoling glasses of sherry, or the use of a communal telephone, linked the experts to the Byker residents in mundane but meaningful ways. Casual interactions over time created a bond that may have been as significant as the formal exercises of participatory planning in giving residents a feeling that they had a stake in the new development.<sup>83</sup> In a cultural context where working-class identity

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<sup>79</sup> Tony Hills, ed., *The Social Consequences of Redevelopment*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Byker Action Centre and the Family Advice Centre, 1973), 11. Report held in Local Studies Room, Newcastle Library.

<sup>80</sup> There is no evidence for whether the woman agreed with this evaluation.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>83</sup> This is not possible to scientifically measure, but a common observation through the 1990s was that Byker was remarkably free of vandalism or graffiti compared to similar estates. To urbanists, this suggested that people felt a personal connection toward the estate.

was based on ideas of “ordinariness,” Erskine and his colleagues cultivated and publicized their easy connection with the modest daily concerns of their clients.<sup>84</sup>

But the architects were not the only outsiders in Byker. Just as the building contractors were erecting the Wall’s concrete frame, Amber, a collective of photographers and filmmakers settled in Byker, intent on documenting the community’s way of life before it vanished. Like Erskine, Amber fastened onto the paraphernalia of everyday life to position themselves as representatives of ordinary Britons against the arrogance of the interventionist state. In their art, though, Erskine and his associates were lumped with the modernizing mandarins in Newcastle’s Civic Center.

### **The Place of the Ordinary, part II: The Hair Salon**

Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen arrived in Newcastle fresh from a London film school and determined to “leave the commonplace.” She was, as she later admitted, “an obstinate dreamer,” wracked by anxiety that “life was passing me by.”<sup>85</sup> It was 1970, and Byker was still a terraced grid, with the skeletal frame of the Wall the only sign of the changes to come. Combing the city for an affordable place to live, Konttinen remarked that she “discovered Byker just by walking around.”<sup>86</sup> Under the weak sunlight of a late fall morning, the young Finnish woman strolled into Byker like an explorer coming upon a civilization facing extinction.

Walking down Janet Street on that soft Saturday morning in late autumn, I was put under a spell. That spell was to last ten years; after which there were no women to stand in the doorways and no dogs to doze on the pavements, and no streets to run down the steep hill. Unhurried Saturday shoppers in Raby Street. Bursts of merriment outside the

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<sup>84</sup> For a discussion of the class-based definition of “ordinariness” in the 1960s and 1970s see Mike Savage, “Working-Class Identities in the 1960s: Revisiting the Affluent Worker Study,” *Sociology* 39 (2005): 929-46.

<sup>85</sup> Konttinen, *Byker*, 5. “Life” is capitalized in original.

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in David Whetstone, “The fabulous photography of Journal Culture Awards winner Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen,” *Newcastle Chronicle*, 5 May 2016, <http://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/whats-on/arts-culture-news/fabulous-photography-journal-culture-awards-11285233>.

grocer's shop and in the butcher's queue. The baker's tray cooling off by the door, beside the bacon and the buns. Frankie Laine reaching out to a passing audience from a wind-up gramophone outside Henry's Square Deal Store: 'East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet', and then, with the same resounding confidence: 'Love is a Golden Ring...'”<sup>87</sup>

Konttinen's evocative description of Byker's street life is reminiscent of Jane Jacobs's famous description of the spontaneous “sidewalk ballet” of New York's West Village neighborhood. And like Jacobs, Konttinen fiercely defended the grubby vitality of the industrial city from the experts' attempts at urban renewal. Byker, she contended, was “the last city community in Newcastle.... The old-fashioned ways of life, still represented by porkshops, pawnbrokers, numerous junkshops and people with unchanging fashions, seem to retain an element of human warmth and compassion which is disappearing.”<sup>88</sup> Ironically for someone hell-bent on escaping the “commonplace,” Konttinen dedicated the next decade to capturing through photography the everyday lives of Bykerites as their streets were pulled down around them. As Konttinen's photographs began to draw international attention, her project provided a downbeat counterpoint to the fanfare surrounding Erskine's community-focused architecture.

Konttinen arrived in Newcastle as part of a collective of artists working in film and photography whose goal was to document the culture of Britain's residual working-class communities before they vanished. The Amber collective formed in London in 1968 at the Regent Street Polytechnic, against the backdrop of transnational student unrest (one of their first films followed working-class youths who had taken part in the Grosvenor Square riots protesting the Vietnam War).<sup>89</sup> Aside from Konttinen, the other four founding members of the group were

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<sup>87</sup> Konttinen, *Byker*, 5.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in “Byker: Exhibition of Photographs by Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen and Geoff Waters, June-July 1972.” Brochure held in Local Studies Room, Newcastle Library.

<sup>89</sup> Amber was (and remains) based on a socialist model wherein all of the group's earnings (even those garnered through individuals' outside work) are divided equally among the members. In 1970, each member's wages were about £5 a week, but rent in Byker was 75p a fortnight, so it was not a great hardship. See “Amber:

all students from urban British working-class families (one from the Newcastle area). From London, the group relocated to Newcastle in 1969. There were several reasons for the move: the collective intended to develop a close relationship with the people and culture of a region outside of London, and Tyneside's strong regional identity and industrial history made it a logical choice. The group's commitment to celebrating working-class culture derived from a concern that their education had divided them from their roots. As Murray Martin, one of Amber's founders, recounted:

The function of education is to design the clever people away from their background. My parents felt I was 'better than them' because I went to university—by definition, the ambition was to become at least middle class. That was the idea of success, and even when I was a kid, in a staunch Labour family, you were expected to vote Tory once you were educated.<sup>90</sup>

Martin's work with Amber bucked that expectation: "We wanted to reconnect, living and working in those communities and putting something back in."<sup>91</sup> Moving into an empty warehouse on Newcastle's quayside, Amber's members began building links with the broader community. "What Amber offered was a total life philosophy," Konttinen later recalled, "making our work about where we lived, and working collectively."<sup>92</sup> Their projects, they hoped, would grow organically from the creative relationships they established with the area's working-class people.<sup>93</sup>

It was Byker's "spirited and interesting" social life that first attracted Konttinen when she stumbled onto the neighborhood in 1970. She moved into the top-floor flat of a terraced house

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Interview with Murray Martin," in Margaret Dickerson, ed., *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945-90* (London: BFI, 1999), 250.

<sup>90</sup> Murray Martin, quoted in Neil Young, "Forever Amber: An Interview with Ellin Hare and Murray Martin of the Amber Film Collective," *Critical Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (December 2001): 68.

<sup>91</sup> Quoted in Simon Hattenstone, "I Once Put Our Entire Grant on a Horse," *The Guardian*, 8 June 2001: B2.

<sup>92</sup> Edward Welch, "Interview with Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen," *Source* 61 (Winter 2009): 13.

<sup>93</sup> Konttinen, *Byker*, 6.



**Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen. Mrs. Potter, Mason Street, 1975. Konttinen's photographs captured the pain and disorientation that redevelopment brought for many Byker residents. Creative Commons.**

and casually began photographing her new surroundings while doing odd freelance jobs. “I roamed around the streets by day and hung about by night,” she later wrote, “chasing my heartbeats, stumbling in and out of other people’s lives; striving to share my excitement through photographs where words would fail me.”<sup>94</sup> It was only after settling in Byker that she learned of the demolition plans in store for the area. The news provided her with a sense of urgency; rather than documenting a culture in slow dissolution, her photographs were capturing a social world slated to be razed and remade. Aided by a grant from the Northern Arts Council, Konttinen set up a studio in a disused hair salon (provided rent-free by the Newcastle council), and began

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

inviting passers-by to pose for a portrait.<sup>95</sup> She gave her subjects free copies of her portraits, and also collected their old photos and stories, creating an archive of old Byker even as it was pulled down around her. Taking out an ad in the community newspaper, she announced her project to compile her Byker photos into a book, and solicited “tales, memories, and views on Byker,” providing her address and telephone number so that she could “come by for a chat.”<sup>96</sup> By the mid-1970s, she abandoned her makeshift studio and began photographing people in their own surroundings, on the streets and at home.

Her status as a foreigner, she later remarked, made people less guarded toward her; she could “be nosy, and be forgiven.”<sup>97</sup> Like Ralph Erskine and his architectural colleagues, though, Konttinen had to overcome the community’s ingrained suspicion. “In a place like Byker,” she told an interviewer, “there haven’t (sic) been any other photographers before I went there and many people thought I was sent by the Social Security.... they hadn’t heard of photographers going around on arts grants and happily snapping away.”<sup>98</sup> Konttinen’s project rested, then, on her status as someone who was both part of the community and an unthreatening outsider.<sup>99</sup>

Konttinen’s twelve-year sojourn in Byker ended in 1982, when the last of the old terraces were demolished. By that time she had taken thousands of photographs, and, she wrote, “had grown to be a part of my street, and the community.”<sup>100</sup> From the images she had compiled since arriving in Byker, she assembled a touring exhibition (the first exhibition of British photographs

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<sup>95</sup> Konttinen later noted that the Newcastle Council regretted their largess because her public criticism of Byker’s redevelopment. See Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen interview with Murray Martin, *Creative Camera* No. 227 (November 1983): 1154-63, at 1160.

<sup>96</sup> *Byker Phoenix* 17 (November 1977), 6.

<sup>97</sup> Konttinen, *Byker*, 6.

<sup>98</sup> Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen interview with Murray Martin, 1160.

<sup>99</sup> Konttinen’s experience as a Byker outsider parallels Bill Brandt’s interwar work documenting London’s working-class culture and Roger Mayne’s experience photographing London’s Southam Street in the 1950s. See David Mellor, “Brandt’s Phantasms,” in Mark Haworth-Booth and David Mellor, *Bill Brandt Behind the Camera* (New York: Aperture, 1985), 71-97; and Stephen Brooke, “Revisiting Southam Street.”

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. Over the last years of her project, Konttinen had to commute to Byker to photograph her subjects, since her rented flat was demolished in 1976.

in China since the Cultural Revolution), published a book, and produced a film (shown on BBC's Channel 4 and distributed as a home video). The project celebrates the vanished Byker, and characterizes Erskine's project as a forceful imposition of the "modern" on ordinary residents unable to speak for themselves. This interpretation comes through with particular force in the film, which opens with a shot of old Byker's terraced roofs, accompanied by a voiceover reading from Wilfred Burns's *New Towns for Old*, which was published while he was Newcastle's chief planner:

In a huge city, it is a fairly common observation that the dwellers in a slum are almost a separate race of people, with different values, aspirations, and ways of living. One result of slum clearance is that a considerable movement of people takes place over long distances with devastating effects on the social groupings built up over the years. But, one might argue, this is a good thing when we are dealing with people who have no initiative or civic pride. The task, surely, is to break up such groupings, even though the people seem to be satisfied with their miserable environment, and seem to enjoy an extrovert social life in their locality.<sup>101</sup>

While Konttinen's photographs celebrate Byker's "extrovert social life," the film's composition rests on a sharp contrast between the old urban space and the new. Speaking of the film in an interview, Konttinen pointed out the strengths of film as a medium for communicating a message: "There is a limit to photography and words, that's why I ended up making a film about Byker because I felt there were many things which couldn't be done without the music and without the sound of voices and the further step of juxtaposing what was gone in the community with what has replaced it."<sup>102</sup> The majority of the film is composed of Konttinen's black and white photographs, coupled with audio recordings of locals' memories. From the film's static, photographic composition emerges a feeling of stillness that anchors the community of memory

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<sup>101</sup> *Byker*, directed by Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, *Amber Films*, 1983.

<sup>102</sup> Interview between Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen and Murray Martin, *Creative Camera*, 1160.



**Capturing community: old Byker's Shipley Street Baths. A still from Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen's film *Byker*.** against the centrifugal pressures of redevelopment and modernization.<sup>103</sup> In the few instances where movement and color are introduced, the effect is purposefully jarring, a visual analogue to Bykerites' experience of slum clearance.

The most forceful use of these contrasts, which occurs towards the beginning of the film, expresses Konttinen's damning indictment of outside experts' dismissive condescension toward the real needs of working-class people and communities. A grainy black and white film segment draws the viewer into Byker's tight social world, where five women socialize while cleaning their linen at Byker's Shipley Street wash rooms. High-level perspectives of the women moving

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<sup>103</sup> This point is also made in Annabelle Honess Roe, "Spatial Contestation and Loss of Place in Amber's Byker," *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 4, no. 2 (November 2007): 307–21.



*After community: inside a modern laundrette. A still from Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen's film *Byker*.*

around the small room are interspersed with close-ups of the women, joking, smoking cigarettes, and keeping up a stream of banter while they go about their daily routines. The soft lighting coupled with the women's easy familiarity creates an intimacy that pulls in the viewer. It is a nostalgic glimpse into the social world of a fast-fading working-class culture.

The scene change comes abruptly. In place of the softly lit, dingy surroundings of the washroom, is the sterile, rectilinear space of a modern laundrette, illuminated by parallel strips of exposed fluorescent bulbs. The effect of the change is jarring, like waking up with a head-splitting hangover. The linoleum and tiles are spotless but soulless, and the women using the machines look vacant too, as they sit in a row of back-to-back chairs, waiting for the coin-operated machines to finish their automated cycles. Everything has a subtle green tint. As the

camera pans across the women's faces, a voiceover begins to read one of the stories from Konttinen's book. The speaker is a Byker woman describing the birth of her second baby just after World War II. Since the child would never stop crying, the woman took it to a doctor. "The trouble with you women, you always think there's something wrong with a baby that cries, take him home, he's fine." A month passed, during which she took the child back to the doctor three more times. Then the baby was quiet through the night, and when the woman went to check on him, he was dead.

It was my twentieth birthday a fortnight before. Oh, it was terrible... terrible. The doctor came—the same one—and this Scottish woman who lived in our house, she gave him a right mouthful, but he didn't care. Later on he said he'd never seen the baby before, but his bill arrived all right: fifteen shillings. Five shillings a time you had to pay if you didn't belong to a club.<sup>104</sup>

She was told that there would have to be a post mortem, and she arranged for a funeral that Saturday. "All the women brought us flowers, everybody was there—and then they tell'd us they hadn't done the post mortem yet. That was the worst part of it. I had to spend the whole weekend in a house full of wreaths—he was buried on the Monday." The scene ends abruptly, moving back to Konttinen's photographs.

Like the rest of the film, this sequence conveys a sense of loss, particularly among Byker's women. The tangible loss of a child is spliced with the generalized loss of the shared place of the washhouse and the loss of community. In the parallel stories, visual and spoken, what unfolds is the smothering effect of paternalistic authority as it steamrolls commonplace wisdom—the wisdom of a mother who knows when something is wrong with her baby, of women for whom the companionship of the wash-house is more valuable than the hygienic efficiency of the coin-operated launderette. *Byker* is a celebration of a particular place, with its webs of community and understanding, against meddling outsiders' notions of progress.

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<sup>104</sup> Konttinen, *Byker*, 26.

For a project so concerned with the erasure of a specific place, though, the decision to film several sequences outside of Byker was an odd one. The most affecting scene, set in the launderette, was actually filmed in North Shields, a town at the mouth of the Tyne River, several miles to the east of Byker. Just as the film took small artistic licenses with the story's setting, it also set itself in opposition not to the project's architects—Erskine and his team—but to Wilfred Burns, who had left Newcastle to work for the Department of the Environment before the work on Byker began.<sup>105</sup> Yet these details were perhaps immaterial since, as Konttinen later stated, *Byker* was about more than Byker—it was a story about what she saw as the deliberate demoralization and erasure of working-class culture in postwar Britain. “Renewal” projects like Byker were a form of class cleansing:

For [Newcastle's leaders] the working class culture is an eyesore, it always has been, and that's why it has so quickly disappeared up here. They are trying to turn Newcastle into another plastic city with a docile workforce which will attract big business from the south. I think it is almost as simple as that and they see the working class culture as being a real embarrassment. If I might be even more cynical maybe they even see that encouragement of the working class spirit as something detrimental to the possibility of the working class people being used as a malleable labour force for big business. I mean, it doesn't do them any good for working-class people to be that united. I feel that it is all down to the syndrome of divide and rule.<sup>106</sup>

Both the architectural project and the artistic critique of that project, then, targeted Newcastle's 1960s planning regime. Whereas T. Dan Smith and Burns had invoked a collective (presumably male) “we” endowed with the authority to clear away slums and break up recalcitrant communities, Erskine and Konttinen based the legitimacy of their projects on their intimate knowledge of the wants and needs of ordinary people as individuals.

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<sup>105</sup> By the 1970s, even urban planners had moved away from Burns's authoritative approach, towards a form of planning based more on managing and facilitating agreed-upon public goals. For a theoretical discussion of this change, see Nigel Taylor, “Anglo-American Town Planning Theory Since 1945.”

<sup>106</sup> Interview between Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen and Murray Martin, *Creative Camera*, 1160.

That Erskine's and Konttinen's competing visions of Byker evoked an enthusiastic public response—with their projects attracting press coverage on both sides of the Atlantic—points to their topicality.<sup>107</sup> Byker's decade-long redevelopment played out against a political landscape in which notions of authenticity, individualism, and ordinariness became central political rallying points across the political spectrum. These ideas could take a conservative tinge in the idea of the “silent majority” whose material interests were betrayed, and moral values scorned, by out-of-touch elites.<sup>108</sup> A similar trend could be seen on the political left. As Mike Savage has shown in a study on survey data from the period, for British workers “class was often associated with personal characteristics such as being ordinary, natural and authentic.”<sup>109</sup> Where before the 1970s collective politics were the avenue for advancing working-class interests, this period marked a turn towards solutions centered on the ordinary individual, the family, and the home.<sup>110</sup> Appeals to everyday wisdom also became a staple of political discourse, in the form of the political anecdote as a rhetorical strategy.<sup>111</sup> Both Erskine, with his folksy designs based on consultation (however limited in practice) with his working-class “user clients,” and Konttinen,

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<sup>107</sup> Konttinen's work was featured in the *New York Times*, and the *Sun* approached her to pose as a Page 3 model—an invitation she declined. See “Photographer Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen's Best Shot, *The Guardian*, 12 Aug. 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/aug/12/photography-sirkka-liisa-konttinen>.

<sup>108</sup> See Amy C. Whipple, “Speaking for Whom? The 1971 Festival of Light and the Search for the ‘Silent Majority,’” *Contemporary British History* 24 (2010), 319–39; and Camila Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For a transatlantic comparison, see Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

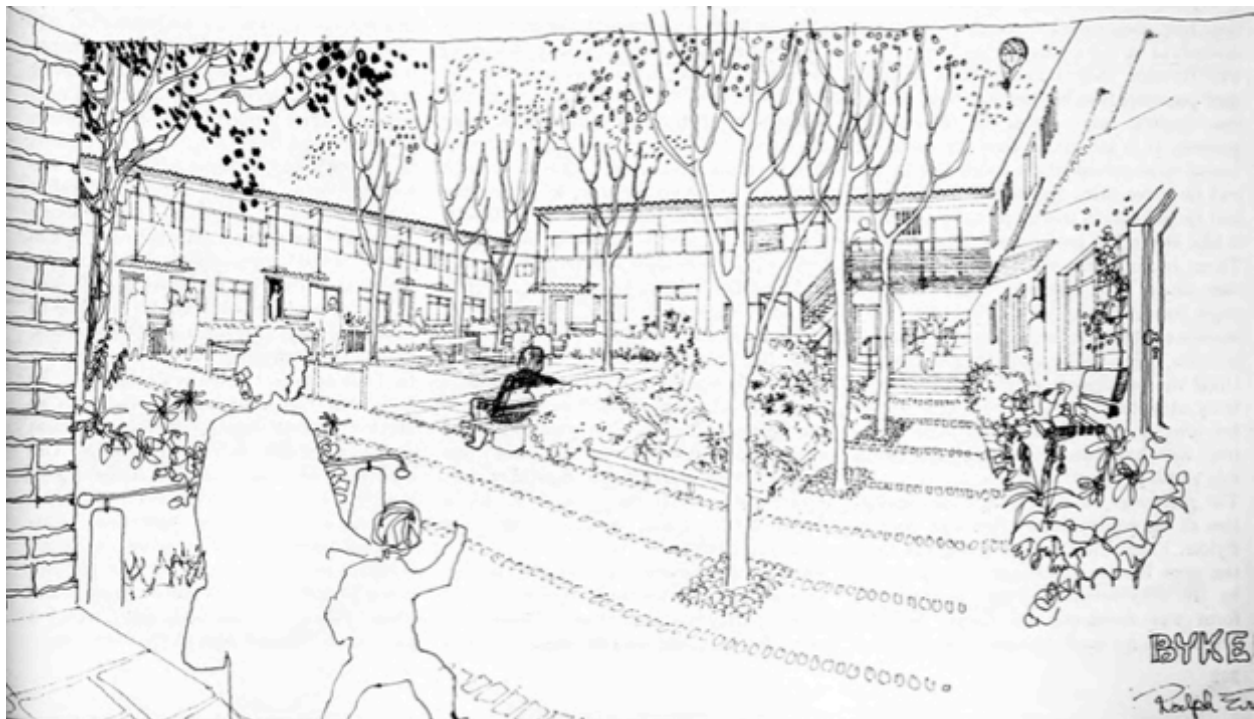
<sup>109</sup> Mike Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain Since 1940: The Politics of Method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 221.

<sup>110</sup> Jon Lawrence and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, “Thatcher and the Decline of Class Politics,” in Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders, eds., *Making Thatcher's Britain*, 132–147, at 139. See also Mike Savage, “Sociology, Class and Male Manual Work Cultures,” in John McIlroy, Alan Campbell, and Nina Fishman, eds., *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, vol. II: The High Tide of Trade Unionism, 1964–79* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1999), 23–43; and Emily Robinson et al., “Telling Stories about Post-War Britain,” 278.

<sup>111</sup> Judi Atkins and Alan Finlayson, “‘... A 40-Year-Old Black Man Made the Point to Me:’ Everyday Knowledge and the Performance of Leadership in Contemporary British Politics,” *Political Studies* 61 (2013), 161–77.

with her evocative portraits of the last holdouts of a doomed culture, resonated with these broad cultural trends.

In the divergent narratives of Byker and *Byker* one can also see the fissiparous state of the British left in this period. Erskine's socialism was a *mélange* of his parents' Fabian leanings, his early Quaker education, and his experience designing housing for a Swedish government intent on building a "new, juster, and more humane society."<sup>112</sup> Despite his suspicion of heavy-handed urban restructuring schemes, he nonetheless never questioned the legitimacy of the state's involvement in improving people's homes and neighborhoods. For Erskine, progress towards a society less riven by class differences was possible and desirable. His trademark image, a hot-air



Ralph Erskine, perspective drawing of a Byker courtyard. The balloon at the top right was his artistic trademark.

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<sup>112</sup> Ralph Erskine, "Democratic Architecture—The Universal and Useful Art: Projects and Reflections," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 130, 5314 (Sept. 1982), pp. 642-659. Erskine's family and educational background, see Egelius, *Ralph Erskine*.

balloon that he included in most of his drawings and emblazoned on the side of his Byker office, symbolized this aspirational and progressive dimension of his thought. However much his methods differed from 1960s Labour modernizers like Wilfred Burns and T. Dan Smith (or Tony Crosland and Harold Wilson at the national level), he shared their fundamental premise: that through careful planning, British cities and society could be perfected.

For Konttinen, state-led interventions in working-class neighborhoods were nothing short of catastrophic. As we have seen, she viewed urban renewal as a form of class warfare. Her film and photographs showed the emergence of a new kind of poverty, more devastating in some ways than the grinding material poverty of the 1930s. This new poverty, she maintained,

is more to do with spiritual poverty and the poverty of not having those relationships to enrich your life. The communities have gone, the way people related to each other has definitely gone, not only because of new town planning, but because of new aspirations that people have been fed from the official sources.<sup>113</sup>

However noble their intentions, Konttinen argued, urban modernization campaigns conducted by elite outsiders discredited and demoralized their working-class subjects by targeting their homes and neighborhoods as problems that needed to be fixed. What was lost was any sense of the positive value that people found in their crowded homes and streets.

Both of these competing visions of Byker claimed to be speaking for Byker's residents. Erskine always maintained that despite his initial intention of keeping the old Byker street pattern, when he interviewed residents he found that "they did not share our or other outsiders' interest in the existing houses and streets.... They rejected the old houses and all they stood for, and were confident that we could give them far better new

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<sup>113</sup> Interview between Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen and Murray Martin, *Creative Camera*, 1160.

homes and surroundings.”<sup>114</sup> Based on the years she spent living among the community, Konttinen contested this account in her book, claiming that the majority of residents wanted to keep their houses, with the addition of “a bath and hot water.”<sup>115</sup> Whose interpretation was accurate is beyond this study’s scope. How people express such desires can depend on the way the questions are posed, and at what stage in the building process. It is very likely that many people who favored the idea of completely rebuilt homes before work began in 1969 had changed their minds after spending much of a decade in a construction zone.

What is clear is that redevelopment had an uneven impact. As evidence from the community newspaper and people’s later recollections show, redevelopment brought excitement and new opportunities for some people in Byker, while sowing little but isolation, frustration, and despair for many others.<sup>116</sup> Which of these feelings dominated public perceptions of Byker, however, fluctuated over the decades following its completion.

### **The Sense of an Ending**

In the year after people began moving into the Wall, a minor fracas unfolded in the pages of Byker’s community newspaper over the definition of private and community space. The nub of the controversy was one woman’s claim that the access deck immediately outside of her new apartment in the Wall was her private property. The paper’s housing writer dubbed the woman “Queenie” (after the title character of a popular sitcom) and castigated her for her “pompous”

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<sup>114</sup> Erskine, “Byker, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK,” in Hatch, *The Scope of Social Architecture*, 186. The initial survey conducted by the city supported this view, showing that 80% of the residents wanted their homes to be replaced. See Ravetz, “Housing at Byker,” 739.

<sup>115</sup> Konttinen, *Byker*, 8.

<sup>116</sup> These reactions could often diverge across generational lines. As Ben Jones shows in his study of slum clearance projects in Brighton, younger families were more likely to be thrilled by the promise of the modern, while older residents tended to be more likely to cling to the memories of their old communities. Jones, *The Working Class in Mid Twentieth-Century England*, 108.

and antisocial attitude. “Come, come, dear resident,” he wrote, “we don’t prevent you walking down Raby Street, Norfolk Square, Shipley Rise etc. How can you adopt this attitude?”<sup>117</sup> A later issue featured “Queenie’s” reply, in which she defended her and her neighbors’ right to privacy. Byker’s “streets in the sky” were not literal streets, she contended, but akin to private gardens and front doors. “I respect other people’s privacy. I wouldn’t think of going into anyone’s garden and spoiling it or taking a basket of washing down to hang on their line and say I have the right to do what I like and I speak for the residents of both 3 and 6 floors.” After her letter, the paper’s editors intervened: “Everyone is entitled to his/her own opinion—this matter so far as the *Phoenix* is concerned is now finished.”<sup>118</sup> The *Phoenix* may have quashed the debate, but this seemingly petty row highlights the disconnect that could separate outsiders’ notions of what “community” meant and what those living in Byker actually wanted. “Community” dominated discussions of Byker in its early years, but it was a protean term open to a range of interpretations. As this section shows, though, the tone of loss and social breakdown that had characterized Konttinen’s work became increasingly dominant in the years after Byker’s completion.

A sense of the wide variety of responses to Byker from the residents themselves emerges in the pages of the *Byker Phoenix*, the community paper. Founded in 1975 as a means to “build up again the social relations that existed in the past” and foster a “revitalized community spirit,” the paper featured a wide range of topics: advice on securing welfare benefits, family planning, housekeeping and gardening tips (the latter especially helpful as greenery was a novelty for most Bykerites), kids’ poetry, debates over local issues, and stories about the old Byker.<sup>119</sup> Perhaps as

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<sup>117</sup> Man in the Wall, “Queenies Castle,” *Byker Phoenix*, issue 1 (n.d., c. spring 1975), 12.

<sup>118</sup> “Queenies Reply,” *Byker Phoenix* 10 (n.d., c. summer 1976), 3.

<sup>119</sup> Joe Keith, “Editorial,” *Byker Phoenix* 3 (n.d., c. summer 1975), 1.

an editorial tactic, the paper's evaluation of the new Byker was generally very balanced, with neither positive nor negative views dominating its pages.

On the whole, comments on Byker's structural aspects were quite positive. While an early assessment of the Wall mentioned the minor "teething" issues that were still being worked out, the writer found that most people were very happy, and were "happy and satisfied with their new homes."<sup>120</sup> A later qualitative survey of 176 households confirmed this impression, showing that 65% of the sample was pleased with the new development when they first moved in, while another 13% grew to like it after settling in.<sup>121</sup> Tenants generally took pride in their new homes, and many basked in Byker's status as a site of pilgrimage for architectural enthusiasts from around the world. Even "Queenie" welcomed students and tourists to her access deck, and the *Phoenix* featured a touching letter from a Japanese architect to a Mr. and Mrs. Bell, who had invited him into their flat to look around. He enclosed a photo of his family and offered to return the favor if they ever visited Japan.<sup>122</sup> This pride in the new Byker seems to have been very widespread, and was even the occasion for arguments over whose turn it was for the privilege of exhibiting their home to the coachloads of visitors that passed through.<sup>123</sup>

Beyond the design of their homes, residents' assessment of Byker's public spaces was also quite positive. The most commonly praised aspect of the new Byker was the greenery. The estate's landscaping had been meticulously planned so that mature trees and shrubs blended with the new buildings to prevent the sterile, "prairie" sensation common in many postwar housing estates. Salvaged architectural and sculptural pieces of the old Byker stippled the new

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<sup>120</sup> "Housing," *Byker Phoenix* 1 (n.d., c. spring 1975), 10. The most common "teething" problem seems to have been leaky roofs, which later became a persistent complaint from people frustrated at the glacial pace of council repair orders.

<sup>121</sup> "Byker's View of Byker," *Byker Phoenix* 11 (March 1977), 19.

<sup>122</sup> Hajime Yokoboki, "Letter from Japan," *Byker Phoenix* 26 (Dec. 1978), 13.

<sup>123</sup> Mats Egelius, "The Byker Wall," *Architectural Design* 47, 11-12 (Dec. 1977): 837.



Landscaping at the new Byker was designed to create an informal “village” feel.

development, so that the new shaded gently into the familiar. All of the low-rise housing had gardening space, and the architect’s office sold plants at a discount and offered gardening advice.<sup>124</sup> Several tenants’ letters to the *Phoenix* commented on “pleasant appearance” that greenery and flowers lent to the new estate, and remarked on tenants’ enthusiastic do-it-yourself approach to gardening. Alison Ravetz reported that by 1976, Byker had “a flourishing Leek Club and those who have not gardened before are rising to the occasion magnificently.”<sup>125</sup> But while the architects were keen to encourage people to take a hand in shaping their private gardens, some green thumbs were overzealous, trimming or felling trees in public areas that blocked their view or dripped sap on their car.<sup>126</sup> The *Phoenix* published a plea from Erskine’s office that

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<sup>124</sup> Sarah Glynn, “Good Homes: Lessons in Successful Public Housing from Newcastle’s Byker Estate,” unpublished paper given at Birbeck College, November 2011, 4.

<sup>125</sup> Ravetz, “Housing at Byker,” 738.

<sup>126</sup> Robin Abrams, “Byker Revisited,” *Built Environment* 29, 2 (2003): 117-31, at 122.



**Selected historical buildings and pieces of statuary were integrated into the new Byker** people refrain from removing shrubs or cutting down trees: “As these are plants which are specially chosen for their site, would anyone that has a problem please call in and see the Architects before taking any action.”<sup>127</sup> Another correspondent praised Byker’s houses, but pointed out that gardens could actually be a burden for elderly tenants: “they give them all gardens but what can some do when they’ve got arthritis? I think I’ll just make a grassy lawn. I’m quite happy here now, but it was a pull to come out of there.”<sup>128</sup>

While the general outlook toward Byker’s physical design was chiefly enthusiastic, people’s assessment of social life in the new estate were more likely to strike a minor key. One of the *Phoenix’s* stated goals was to serve as a repository of people’s memories of the old neighborhood, forming an informal archive that would ensure continuity between the old

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<sup>127</sup> “Architects Plea: Save Our Trees and Shrubs,” *Byker Phoenix* 14 (June 1977), 13.

<sup>128</sup> Sarah Hindmarsh, “The End of Raby Street,” *Byker Phoenix* 39 (April 1980), 19.

community and the new. Whether intentionally or not, many of the stories people submitted about the old Byker formed an implicit contrast in which the new estate appeared less friendly. One woman's contrast of the two Bykers illustrates the lure of nostalgia: after enthusiastically relating ancestral stories she had discovered in a chest of papers, she reflected on her childhood, when she viewed bathrooms, hot water, central heating and gardens as "pure unadulterated luxury, bestowed only on the rich... They were not the Good Old Days, they were the Bad Old Days, though we were happy enough and had good friends and neighbors."<sup>129</sup> This frank assessment of the new neighborhood as superior focused only on physical improvements—the bulk of the article's attention was on the warm social life of the "bad old days." For many readers, the nostalgia was grating: one editorial announced that there had been a number of complaints that the paper was "too obsessed with the old Byker," and solicited contributions about the challenges and successes of life on the new estate.<sup>130</sup>

While the variety of contributions prevented any single theme from dominating the *Byker Phoenix*, one of the most common—and certainly the most affecting—notes was distress at the erosion of accustomed support networks. Often this theme came in general laments at the lack of "community spirit" in the new Byker. A letter from "Publican" in January 1976 announced that the writer planned to move away, since Byker's physical changes "seems to me as if it altered too the minds and hearts of some of the people." In old Byker, the writer contended, "if ever anyone needed help there was help in abundance and ever open doors.... It was accomplished in the community spirit which seems to be failing today. I am not saying that good neighbourliness [*sic*] is dead but it does have to be sought for in this present day."<sup>131</sup> This echoed a leitmotif in

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<sup>129</sup> Ethel Welch, "Byker, Old and New," *Byker Phoenix* 11 (March 1977), 8.

<sup>130</sup> Editorial, *Byker Phoenix* 21 (May 1978), 2.

<sup>131</sup> Letter to *Byker Phoenix* 6 (January, 1976), 23. The letter was balanced by an epistolary riposte in the following issue telling Publican to "be tough and stick it out."

Konttinen's conversations with Bykerites who spoke of a qualitative shift in people's relations with each other. As one woman put it, "now you don't care if your neighbor looks at ye. She might have fifty watches and she'll not give you the time."<sup>132</sup>

An appeal in the same issue of the *Phoenix* as "Publican's" letter put a more pointed meaning on the "death of community" theme. Under the bold heading "PEOPLE DIE OF COLD," readers were informed that elderly people were particularly vulnerable to hypothermia in the winter weather. "It was rare in old Byker because people knew their neighbours well. In new Byker not everyone yet knows who their neighbours are or haven't established a good enough relationship for them to know when things aren't right." Modern Byker's central heating was prone to break down, the article warned, so people had to be vigilant for signs—mail not collected, milk left on the stoop—that their neighbors were in trouble: "You knock and keep on knocking."<sup>133</sup> This appeal brings into stark relief the real stakes that the loss of communal ties could have for Byker's most vulnerable residents. The spatial dimensions of the Wall also threatened people's dignity in death. One woman's coffin would not fit in the lift, so it had to be carried vertically down the narrow stairway—"her last journey," a friend remarked, "and she still couldn't rest her poor feet."<sup>134</sup> More than sepia-tinted nostalgia for a lost golden age, then, slum clearance brought with it the fear of growing old and dying unmarked and unmourned.

By the early 1980s, the *Byker Phoenix's* editorial tone took on an increasingly negative hue. After noting that the number of volunteers running the paper had dwindled to four people, one editorial lamented: "Is this really the great community spirit we keep hearing of?"<sup>135</sup> A few issues later, the editor wrote that he was "both angry and sad at the apathy that exists" toward

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<sup>132</sup> Konttinen, *Byker*, 39.

<sup>133</sup> "People Die of Cold," *Byker Phoenix*, issue 6 (January, 1976), 11.

<sup>134</sup> Quoted in Konttinen, *Byker*, 113.

<sup>135</sup> Editorial, *Byker Phoenix* 39 (April 1980), 2.

supporting the newspaper.<sup>136</sup> The *Phoenix* staggered on for a few months, propped up by a £400 arts grant, and then unceremoniously folded.

Numbers provide one simple explanation for why many peoples' view of Byker soured. Despite the politicians' promise of "Byker for Byker people," only a minority of the original residents remained in Byker when the dust settled in the early 1980s. One reason behind this dramatic culling came down to space: since one of the problems with the old Byker was overcrowding, the Council's original design brief had envisioned a population density that could only accommodate about half the original community. This fundamental design principle was not communicated to the residents, though, and provided an unwelcome jolt when it was revealed in the local press.<sup>137</sup> Some residents suspected external meddling was breaking the community apart. When it was announced that the charity Shelter had reserved some Byker houses to accommodate homeless families from around the city, the *Phoenix* received several letters demanding to know whether this would supplant people from the original community (readers were assured that these fears were unfounded).<sup>138</sup> Only about a third of the 12,000 people living in Byker in 1968 remained in the area by 1975, midway through the renewal project. As one critic acerbically remarked, "one can only speculate about what would have happened if the council had not been pursuing a policy of retaining the community."<sup>139</sup>

Beyond the housing shortfall, economic pressures provided further disruption to the new neighborhood. Before it went under, one of the *Phoenix's* final issues commemorated the launching of the last ship to be built at the Walker Shipyards, where many of the neighborhood's

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<sup>136</sup> Peter Thomsen, "A Word from Our Sponsor," *Byker Phoenix* 43 (n.d., c. fall 1980), 2.

<sup>137</sup> Abrams, "Byker Revisited," 122.

<sup>138</sup> "Your Questions?" *Byker Phoenix* 3 (n.d., c. summer 1975), 7.

<sup>139</sup> Malpass, "The Architect and the Community," 3.

men worked.<sup>140</sup> The article gave no further comments, but the closure augured a rough beginning for the new Byker. More closures followed in the 1980s, as the shipping and heavy industry jobs that supported much of the community evaporated. By the middle of the decade, a report from the local Advice Centre recorded a 30% unemployment rate, and noted an increasing number of dissolving marriages.<sup>141</sup> These local shifts followed changes at the national level, where Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government severely cut public spending by local councils, financially penalizing those that it believed overspent on public services. In response, the Newcastle Council cut back on maintenance of Byker's lush landscaping (which even from the start had been perceived as a burden) as well as routine structural maintenance.<sup>142</sup> As they slashed municipal spending, the Thatcher government also vigorously promoted home ownership, legislated the sale of council housing, and reduced the available pool of social housing. A small number of Byker residents took the chance to buy their homes, but most tenants lacked the resources to do so. The most tangible impact of Thatcherism was to widen the economic and social distance separating the relatively well off from those without steady employment or hope, for whom subsidized housing was the only available recourse.<sup>143</sup>

Even to Byker's most enthusiastic supporters, the estate appeared to be in dire straits by the 1990s. Robin Abrams, an architectural researcher, visited Byker several times in the 1980s and was convinced that for people concerned with mass housing design, "Byker truly appeared to represent a new age of successful, sensitive community design."<sup>144</sup> When she returned in the 1990s, an elderly woman took her aside and stated, "you architects think this is such a great

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<sup>140</sup> "Last Ship from Walker," *Byker Phoenix* 39, 2.

<sup>141</sup> Byker Advice and Resource Centre Annual Report, 1985-86, cited in Glynn, "Good Homes," 6.

<sup>142</sup> Ben Farmer, "Client, Community and Climate: Byker—A Case Study," in Ben Farmer and Hentie Louw, eds., *Companion to Contemporary Architectural Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 130-136, at 131.

<sup>143</sup> For a discussion of the broader cultural impact of the Thatcherite (and later New Labour) approach to housing, see James Meek, *Private Island: Why Britain Now Belongs to Someone Else* (London: Verso, 2014), ch. 6.

<sup>144</sup> Abrams, *Byker Revisited*, 124.

place to take pictures, but you should hear what it is like to live here.” The woman then proceeded to lay out a nightmarish litany of complaints about heating bills, broken pipes, and teenagers setting fire to the shrubbery. On the same visit, Abrams was pelted by rocks thrown by boys hiding in one of the Wall’s stairways.<sup>145</sup> Around the same time, throughout the fall of 1993, Anthony Kennedy, a fourteen year-old burglar whom the national press christened the “Rat Boy,” brought more unwanted attention to Byker. The boy was linked to 55 criminal offences, and got his nickname by hiding in the labyrinthine heating ducts of the Wall. In a series of lurid stories about the boy’s exploits, the tabloid press constructed an image of Byker as emblematic of the collapse of the working-class family, social disintegration, and the pathologies of Britain’s welfare system.<sup>146</sup> After Abrams’s final visit to Byker in 2001, she wrote that the entire estate “projected an image of desolation and despair.... Byker has fared no better than the Brutalist schemes of the 1960s.”<sup>147</sup>

Little more than a decade after the estate’s completion, Byker appeared destined to become yet another piece of urban blight where modernism’s utopian ambitions slid into dystopian reality. The niggling complaints about long waits for basic repairs raised in the pages of the *Phoenix* in the 1970s had, by Abrams’s final visit, spiraled into a Kafkaesque picture of a sclerotic and apathetic estate management and a community on the verge of collapse. Abrams blamed Erskine’s “utopian” plans and the “rigidity of his preconceived vision for the community” for Byker’s apparent demise.<sup>148</sup> Surprisingly, in her condemnation of Erskine’s “utopianism,” she gave no attention to the role of Thatcherite politics or regional unemployment

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid. Influenced by the methods of the British “Defensible Space” theorist Alice Coleman, Abrams identified a number of signs (e.g. litter, closed blinds, fire alarms) that the estate was socially dysfunctional.

<sup>146</sup> For a discussion of the press coverage of the “Rat Boy,” see Robert Collier, *Masculinities, Crime and Criminology: Men, Heterosexuality and the Criminal(ised) Other* (London: Sage, 1998), 91-98.

<sup>147</sup> Abrams, *Byker Revisited*, 127.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

in Byker's decline. As chapter 4 will argue, such spatially determinist explanations can say little about why housing estates like Byker have gone through cycles of decline and renewal. One Byker resident was less mincing than Abrams, saying in 2003: 'I'd give anything to have old Byker back, me.... Designer got lots of awards; if you ask me, he wants shooting in the head.'<sup>149</sup>

### **After Community, Community**

The police arrived before dawn. There were eight of them, beating on the house's door. "We were in bed," Gerel recounted. "*Everything is finished, you are leaving now!* I realised they were acting on orders so there was no point in resisting. They handcuffed me, in my underpants. They handcuffed Ariunaa with the baby and took her upstairs. I heard them screaming, but they told me it was none of my business." Gerel is Mongolian; Ariunaa and their three children are citizens of no state. Ariunaa was born in Inner Mongolia to parents who wanted a son and kept her hidden from state authorities while they flouted the Chinese government's policy limiting the Mongolian population to two children. Her parents shuttled her to a family across the border, and she grew up with neither Mongolian nor Chinese citizenship, a condition passed on to her children. "Officially they do not exist," said Gerel. "If we are sent back to Mongolia, we don't know what will happen." When they arrived in Britain as refugees, Gerel and Ariunaa had been settled in Byker. As they sat in Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre that day in 2005, it looked as though their asylum petitions had failed, and that they would soon be deported.<sup>150</sup>

Back in Byker, meanwhile, the family's friends scrambled to block the deportation measures. Gerel's lawyer and his Baptist support group made calls to the Home Office in London. After getting word of the raid, another friend, Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, spent the day on

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<sup>149</sup> Quoted in Konttinen, *Byker Revisited: Portrait of a Community* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Northumbria University Press, 2009), 10.

<sup>150</sup> Konttinen, *Byker Revisited*, 155-56.

the phone—with the regional Home Office, the Refugee Council in London, the Home Office in London, and the local MP. When Konttinen returned to Byker after two decades away in order to document the fate of the modernized neighborhood, she had been immediately drawn to the young family; now she joined the effort to block their deportation. Late in the evening, the MP called her to tell her that the appeals had worked, and that the family would return to Byker while the case was under review. Finally, months later, Ariunaa’s application for asylum as a stateless person was granted. They could begin to feel settled in Byker. “We are part of our community — more like a family, really — at our Baptist church group,” commented Gerel. “When we arrived in Byker, children were throwing eggs at us. Now they are having children themselves, and their children regard us as locals: *the Mongolians were here first.*”<sup>151</sup>

“Community” and Byker were synonymous in Newcastle for most of the twentieth century. But that community is not Gerel’s community; that Byker is not his Byker. The place is different, and so are the people. The Byker of 1968 was socially homogenous—the people were white, working-class, and spoke in the lilting Geordie accent that outsiders to the Northeast find charming and often frustratingly incomprehensible. Twenty-first-century Byker is still mainly working-class, though most of the manufacturing jobs are long gone, and people are more likely to work at the local Morrisons supermarket than in heavy industry. From the narrow footpaths and courtyards one can hear people conversing in around thirty different languages.<sup>152</sup> Byker-born Geordies live cheek by jowl with neighbors from Mongolia, North Korea, Nigeria, Somalia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Iraq, and Syria. The migration flows leading into Byker chart a global history of humanitarian crises, wars, famines, and civil conflicts since the 1990s.

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 160. Italics in original.

<sup>152</sup> Konttinen, *Byker Revisited*, 8.



Tengis, *Born in Byker*, 2007. Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, *Byker Revisited*. Gerel and Ariunaa's youngest son posing in their Byker apartment. Creative Commons.

When Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen returned to Byker in 2003, it looked so different that she felt she “might as well be on the moon.” Lost, she wandered into a community center. To her surprise, the photographs she had taken of Byker three decades before and left as an exhibition were still on the walls. The tutor for asylum seekers greeted her, and told her that she used Konttinen’s art to introduce newcomers to Byker. She confided, “I recently screened your film to three women from the African continent, who have a serious attitude problem: they are all highly educated and they are in deep culture shock, finding Byker full of riffraff. Your film demonstrates there was a solid community here.”<sup>153</sup> Invited by the community center’s project

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.



*Byker Revisited*. Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, 2009. Creative Commons.

manager to return with her camera, Konttinen joined a Refugee Support Group and began a new project to document life in twenty-first-century Byker through photographs.

During her first project, she had hoped to document the community before it vanished. This time, she saw her role as a more active one. As she visited each home for a portrait sitting, she brought prints of other photos with her, and, through the pictures, introduced people to neighbors they had never met. Her goal was to create “a virtual community through these portraits.”<sup>154</sup> But as her experience with Gerel and Ariunaa shows, she found herself part of more than a “virtual” community. In *Byker Revisited*, on which Konttinen began working at the same

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<sup>154</sup>“Photographer Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen's Best Shot,” *The Guardian*.

time Robin Abrams published her study of the decline of the estate, deprivation and suffering are matched by resilience and vibrant human connections. One woman who Konttinen met had returned to Byker after decades away to care for her mother. When her mother died, she took in a Latvian refugee family and was working to find them a permanent home. Their children, the woman told Konttinen, “have become my substitute grandchildren. I want to get to know my neighbours in this section of the Wall. I want to create my own little family, be part of my own little community.”<sup>155</sup> By the time Konttinen finished her project, “as the first time, I find Byker has worked its way into me.”<sup>156</sup> She concluded *Byker Revisited* by observing, “perhaps there can be no closure on Byker. One ending is always just another beginning.”<sup>157</sup>

In a sense, at the same time Konttinen was wrapping up her return to Byker in 2007, the area was getting a concrete new beginning. Following a Newcastle Council vote to demolish one particularly troubled section of Byker’s housing in 1999, an architect living on the estate had launched a grassroots campaign to have the buildings listed for conservation, and in 2007 they were given a Grade II\* heritage listing.<sup>158</sup> In its citation accompanying the award, English Heritage praised the estate for its “‘groundbreaking design ... influential across Europe,’ and its ‘pioneering ... approach to public participation.’”<sup>159</sup> As Sarah Glynn points out, by linking Byker’s conservation status so closely to Erskine’s original vision of working with the residents, the listing ensured that Byker would avoid the fate of other “‘iconic’” modernist estates whose market-oriented refurbishment had driven out the original owners.<sup>160</sup> The estate’s ownership has since been transferred from the unresponsive arms’ length management organization to which

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<sup>155</sup> Konttinen, *Byker Revisited*, 181.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>158</sup>This classification, the second highest in the British heritage system, is reserved for buildings or districts that are deemed “particularly important...of more than special interest.” Special permission has to be received before any major alterations can be made.

<sup>159</sup> Quoted in Minton, “Byker Wall: Newcastle's Noble Failure of an Estate.”

<sup>160</sup> Glynn, “Good Homes,” 8.

Newcastle outsourced all its social housing to a non-profit group called Byker Community Trust.<sup>161</sup> The trust's mission is "to secure for the Byker Estate high quality sustainable housing and services, where people want to live and work with a sense of pride in their homes and communities."<sup>162</sup> In this long process of preserving the new Byker and securing stable sources of funding and responsible management, the heroic (and sanitized) narrative of Erskine's role in consulting and preserving the Byker community has provided a usable myth. It is a foundation story through which to plan the future.

Just as the narrative of Erskine's design offers a usable past for the people and institutions that hope to repair its material, administrative and social fabric, Byker's recent past also provides meaning at the individual level. When Gaby Kitoko, a medical student from Congo who had been accused of spying for the United Nations and tortured, fled to Britain seeking asylum in 2000, he was sent from London to Byker.<sup>163</sup> One of the first refugees to live in Newcastle's housing estates (according to Caroline Moorehead, he was among the first Africans ever seen in Byker), and finding himself in an environment he knew nothing about, he began to research Byker's history. He came across photos of Byker in the 1970s, in the midst of demolition. It came as a shock: "I had no idea it looked like that," he said in a 2011 interview. But learning of Byker's past has made him feel able to contribute to and build on Byker's history. He established an advice center for Africans, helping people from the Congo, Angola, Zimbabwe, and Rwanda settle into their unfamiliar surroundings.<sup>164</sup> Through his work there, he

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid. Arms' length management organizations have since come under scrutiny after the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire.

<sup>162</sup> "Statement of Governance Principles for Byker Community Trust," Byker Community Trust. <https://bykercommunitytrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Statement-of-Governance-Principles-for-Byker-Community-Trust.pdf>

<sup>163</sup> Biographical details taken from Caroline Moorehead, *Human Cargo: A Journey among Refugees* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2005), 129.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 130.

told his interviewer, he is “part of building change.... I feel a sort of ownership, to become part of [Byker’s] story.”<sup>165</sup>

That story is unfinished, but what Byker’s history does show is both the resilience and fragility of communities. The vision of retaining Byker’s original community was a failure, and that failure often had catastrophic human consequences. For many elderly people like Ethel Latimer’s friend Jean, the transition to the new Byker was disorienting and shattering, as relationships built over a lifetime were severed in the space of a few years.

But looking at Byker in a perspective that continues through apparent apocalypses like the physical splitting of the community in the 1970s or the economic catastrophes of the 1980s also shows nuances and continuities. When people chose to leave Byker, they did so for a variety of reasons. Some were drawn away by the offer of a more desirable council home in another part of the city, some were driven away by the annoyances of living amid wreckage for several years, some moved for the reasons people usually move—a new job, the loss of a job, or to be closer to family.<sup>166</sup> The Newcastle Council, Ralph Erskine, and Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen all viewed Byker as a socially homogenous and stable community of ordinary people that should be preserved, but that vision did not always conform to how people in Byker saw themselves and each other. Within Byker, and along each street, there were social and spatial hierarchies that were not apparent to outsiders.<sup>167</sup>

Even what constituted the “community” was not a straightforward issue. According to one resident, that few of Byker’s original people remained was not bad or unexpected. In her view, all Byker parents aspired for their children to have better opportunities and be able to leave

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<sup>165</sup>Bykerfest interview with Gaby Kitoko, 2011. <http://bykerlives.com/byker-fest-interviews-gaby/>.

<sup>166</sup> “Byker’s view of Byker,” *Byker Phoenix* 11, 19.

<sup>167</sup> Abrams, “Byker Revisited,” 122. For example, houses toward the top of the street were seen as “better,” a distinction that carried over into the new estate.

Byker. As Robin Abrams writes, “the concept of ‘Byker for Byker People’ meant the existing adult generations and, conceptually, their ancestors—not necessarily their children. Thus one of the main premises upon which the community was designed, to keep it intact, was, in fact, not a value that was shared by the entire community.”<sup>168</sup> With the rise of the Thatcher government and its stigmatization of those who relied on council housing, this aspirational trend propelling young people out of Byker could only have strengthened in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>169</sup> The ideal of preserving in amber a chiefly renting community was probably doomed from the beginning. Erskine’s success was to ease the trauma of change for many residents, and to create a beautiful and unique neighborhood in which new forms of community could—with proper maintenance and administration—begin to build strong and lasting connections with their neighbors and built surroundings.

A final story underlines the value of taking a long view of “community” in modern Britain. When Byker was awarded the “Best Neighborhood in the UK” award by the Academy of Urbanism in November 2017 for its work in involving tenants closely in “revitalizing” the estate, a local newspaper interviewed residents for their stories of life on the estate. One of those interviewed was Marion Naughton, a 78-year-old woman who was born and raised in Byker and now lives in the Wall. Naughton recalled growing up in old Byker, where “every neighbour was ‘aunty’ or ‘uncle’, regardless of whether or not you were related.” She left Byker just after construction began in the early 1970s, thinking that the “community feeling” would not outlast the old houses. After her losing son and husband in the mid-1990s, she returned to the neighborhood, moving into a flat in the Wall. “I felt as if I was back home, for all I had been

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 128. Amber had partially been founded as a direct reaction to this perspective in their parents’ generation, but ironically there was no discussion of such aspirations in Konttinen’s Byker work.

<sup>169</sup> See Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: An Intimate History*; and Owen Jones, *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class* (London: Verso, 2011).

away a long while everybody that I knew from old Byker would stop to speak to me, everybody was really kind. I was on my own, but I was quite content, because being back here I was back among friends.”<sup>170</sup> Naughton’s experience, and the history of Byker more broadly, highlight the mutability of modern urban communities. Even the most humane urban restructuring plans can easily bend, bruise, and break the bonds between people and place. But focusing on discrete catastrophes can obscure the continuities of these relationships as they are renegotiated and given new meaning.

Byker’s unique history as a pioneering project in planning from below, combined with its accessible and colorful design, allowed it to survive a broad cultural reaction against modernist housing estates that took place during the 1980s and ‘90s. As Owen Hatherley observes, if “‘Rat Boy,’ the miscreant youth who transformed Byker’s manifold ducts and decks into escape chutes, had hailed from an estate clad in concrete rather than polychrome brick and painted wood, there would have been calls for the whole place to be dynamited.”<sup>171</sup> Naughton returned to Byker and reestablished connections with her old neighbors, but former residents seeking to return to modernist estates like Roy Gazzard’s Killingworth Towers or the Southgate estate in Runcorn New Town near Liverpool (both built at the same time as Byker) would be disappointed—both were demolished in the late 1980s. When a woman who had spent her childhood on Southgate before her family moved away got back in touch with her old friends in 2015 via a Facebook group dedicated to Runcorn’s local history, she was shocked to see a twenty-five-year-old photo of her former estate standing half demolished. “Oh no has it really been knocked down?” she asked on the online group’s message board. “I only noticed the group

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<sup>170</sup> Hannah Graham, “Life on the Byker Wall Estate: What It's Really Like to Live in 'Best Neighbourhood in UK,’” *Chronicle Live* (Newcastle), 11 Nov. 2017. <https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/life-byker-wall-estate-what-13888970>

<sup>171</sup> Owen Hatherley, *A Guide to the New Ruins of Britain*, 169.

on Thursday and it has been great looking at old photos, but it is very sad now knowing it has all gone & i could never visit again.”<sup>172</sup> This woman’s mixture of nostalgia and regret is far from unique. The following chapter examines the brief history of Southgate and Killingworth Towers, exploring how former residents’ memories of living on the estates continue to shape their legacy long after their demolition.

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<sup>172</sup> L. E. comment on “Growing up in Southgate/Hallwood Park in the 70’s, 80’s, and 90’s,” *Facebook* community page, 22 Dec. 2015.

## Chapter Four: Love in the Ruins: Tower Blocks and Their Afterlives

*We found you hiding we found you lying  
Choking on the dirt and sand  
Your former glories and all the stories  
Dragged and washed with eager hands  
But, oh oh your city lies in dust, my friend  
Oh oh your city lies in dust, my friend  
Your city lies in dust*

—Siouxsie and the Banshees, “Cities in Dust,” 1985

*Economics is the method. The object is to change the heart and soul.*

—Margaret Thatcher, Interview with the *Sunday Times*, 1981

### Stop Me If You Think You’ve Heard This One Before

Ann Evans watched the Nibbler chew through the walls of her home. The Nibbler—a dainty name for a machine designed to pulverize blocks of houses—cleared the way, with bulldozers trailing in its wake. “It’s heartbreaking,” Evens told a local journalist. “I had seven happy years in that house. It’s so upsetting to watch it get knocked down. I never really expected it to come to this. It’s very sad.”<sup>1</sup> Her neighbor, the chairman of the local primary school, was livid and “pig sick” that residents were being summarily cleared from their homes. “How can they break up people’s lives?.... There is a great community spirit here, but this is going to destroy all that.”<sup>2</sup> “It’s the land value they’re after,” another man fumed. “What’s going to happen to the school, the church, the pub? What’s going to happen to the people? People like me? I’m a pensioner. I don’t want compensation. All I want to do is keep my flat.” This is “not social engineering, but social demolition,” a local Baptist pastor complained.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Carla Flynn, “Dust to Dust,” *Runcorn World*, 3 August 1990, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> “Southgate Demolition,” *Weekly News*, 23 February 1989, p.23. Clipping held in Halton Lea Library, Runcorn.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Gimson, “Mischiefs in Legoland,” *The Independent*, 6 March 1989, p. 21.

This is an old story. You can visualize the scene because it is stamped on our collective consciousness: the destruction of the old neighborhood, the rending of communal bonds in the name of progress.<sup>4</sup> That the local authorities took the high-handed decision to raze Ann Evans's neighborhood without consulting the residents should not have been surprising. Merseyside was no stranger to slum clearances in the decades after the Second World War, with 43% (88,000) of Liverpool's houses earmarked for replacement by the early 1960s.<sup>5</sup>

But this time was different. It was 1990, and the "slum" was Southgate, a modernist estate in Runcorn New Town, just up the Mersey from Liverpool. Its designer was James Stirling, Britain's most famous architect, and it had been completed only twelve years earlier. The frustration and anger that Southgate's residents expressed reflected the pessimism of the moment: while the mid-century slum clearance drives had optimistically touted the state's ability to remedy the injustices of the housing conditions created by unchecked urban growth, the demolition of estates like Southgate was an explicit disavowal of that principle.

"Legoland," the residents dubbed it, partly for the startling splashes of blue, yellow, green, and orange plastic siding that relieved the estate's gray concrete expanses, partly for the buildings' chunky, cubic profile. Not a bad nickname, depending on one's appreciation of the building toy; certainly better than "Clockwork Killy," "Colditz," or "Alcatraz," common epithets for Roy Gazzard's social housing blocks at the new town of Killingworth, near Newcastle. In 1989, when the Warrington and Runcorn Development Corporation was winding up its role in guiding the new town's development, it chose to demolish Southgate rather than to invest in

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London*; Herbert Gans, *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian Americans* (New York: The Free Press, 1962); Gans, *People and Plans: Essays on Urban Problems and Solutions* (New York: Basic Books, 1968); Norman Dennis, *People and Planning: The Sociology of Housing in Sunderland* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970); Jon Gower Davies, *The Evangelistic Bureaucrat*; Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*.

<sup>5</sup> Jim Yelling, "The Incidence of Slum Clearance in England and Wales, 1955-85," *Urban History* 27, 2 (2000): 234-254, at 244.

regenerating the estate, which had gained a reputation for crime and social and economic deprivation. Better that the Development Corporation cut their losses by razing the buildings and selling the land to speculators, a spokesman argued, than that they “spend millions of pounds on what will always be an unsatisfactory estate.” Southgate would be replaced with “the kind of homes people would like to live in.”<sup>6</sup>

But what kind of homes did people want? To the Development Corporation the answer was obvious: ordinary people wanted small houses with pitched roofs and private gardens. By the late 1980s, the unsuitability of modernist housing was a journalistic commonplace. Because arrogant experts had imposed slick modernist housing on an unwilling populace from above, the inevitable result was alienation, vandalism, and crime, since people had no sense of ownership of or responsibility for their homes.<sup>7</sup> The plan to raze Southgate ran into a snag, though: the majority of the residents liked their homes and wanted to stay, calling the plans to demolish their homes not just misguided, but also “wicked.”<sup>8</sup> Southgate’s tenants had worked out an alternative plan with a local housing association to revitalize the estate (part of the plan involved replacing the colorful plastic with a more staid brick facing) rather than tear it down, contending that their homes were well built but had declined through a careless management and allocations policy, combined with a lack of maintenance. The Development Corporation dismissed these efforts, and the wrecking crews descended on Southgate in August 1990.

The demolition of Southgate was a piece of a larger and ongoing process of correcting the putative mistakes of the 1960s and 1970s through “regeneration.” While there had been vocal and growing criticism of slum clearance and urban renewal since the mid-1960s in Britain (as

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Martin Pawley, “The Fall of Legoland,” *The Guardian*, 3 April 1989, 38.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Martin Pawley, “The People’s Revolt Against Modernism,” *The Guardian*, 13 January 1986, p. 11; and David Coleman, “It’s Hell for Tenants in the Bureaucrats’ Utopia,” *The Observer*, 28 April 1985, p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> Deyan Sudjic, “Does This Estate have to Die?” *The Times*, 6 March 1989.

chapter 3 shows), it was in the 1980s that these criticisms entered the political and cultural establishment and became a major piece of government policy. This new and forceful rejection of estates like Southgate had a dual emphasis. One prong of the assault attacked the architecture of Britain's large council estates as soulless, inhumane, and conducive to crime, vandalism, and other forms of "anti-social" behavior. Some critics rightly denounced the poor design and shoddy workmanship of many tower blocks, which a succession of governments had subsidized to be built quickly and cheaply.<sup>9</sup> For others, the cancer reached to modernist design itself—its open spaces, overhead walkways, and blurred division between the public and private realms bred social malaise.<sup>10</sup>

Coinciding with this architectural critique of council housing was a concurrent assault from the New Right on the very principle of the state's involvement in the housing sector. Here too, there were separate critiques under the New Right umbrella, reflecting both the neoliberal concern with market efficiency and the neoconservative attention to moral guidelines and political principles.<sup>11</sup> Thatcher adopted both strands selectively, working them into a politically successful populist program that valorized home ownership and provided the more well-off council tenants with the chance to buy their homes at steep discounts. She adopted the neoconservative critique by claiming council housing fostered dependency and undermined self-help on the individual level.<sup>12</sup> As Robert Saunders notes, her understanding of British economic history "was almost entirely psychological, founded upon a collapse of personal responsibility

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<sup>9</sup> Examples of this strain include Gavin Stamp's "Nooks & Corners" column in *Private Eye* and Martin Pawley's work as *Guardian* architecture correspondent.

<sup>10</sup> The chief representatives of this transatlantic movement are Oscar Newman *Defensible Space: Crime Prevention through Urban Design* (New York: MacMillan, 1972); and Alice Coleman, *Utopia on Trial*.

<sup>11</sup> Ian Cole and Robert Furbey, *The Eclipse of Council Housing* (London: Routledge, 1994), 191-192.

<sup>12</sup> Margaret Thatcher, "Speech at Edgbaston: Our Human Stock is Threatened," 19 Oct. 1974. <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/101830>

and the corrosive moral effects of socialism.”<sup>13</sup> In common with neoliberal theorists, she took the view that council housing thwarted consumers’ ability to choose their housing and adapt it to their desires for self-expression.<sup>14</sup> Thatcher’s 1980 Right to Buy legislation provided the statutory sinews that would empower these ideas to undermine the foundations of public housing in Britain. The combined architectural and ideological assault on council housing fueled a wave of “demolition fiestas” across Britain, in which tower blocks were demolished and replaced with conventional low-rise housing to be sold by private developers or rented by non-state actors like housing associations.<sup>15</sup>

This chapter examines the brief lives and longer afterlives of two modernist estates that were built in British new towns in the 1970s and demolished scarcely a decade later: Southgate in Runcorn and Killingworth Towers. As chapter 2 discussed, a wave of “Mark II” new towns were designated in the 1960s as part of Britain’s urban renewal efforts. The designers of these towns responded to criticism of the early new towns’ dispersed “prairie planning” atmosphere by focusing on higher residential densities and compact, recognizable town centers. Conceived in the 1960s during the apex of modernist planning, this generation of new towns was executed during the more uncertain conditions of the 1970s.

After examining their designers’ plans and the context in which Southgate and Killingworth Towers were built I turn to tenants’ experiences moving into their new homes. Did the reality of life in the new estates match residents’ hopes and expectations? I contend that

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Saunders, “Crisis? What Crisis? Thatcherism and the Seventies,” in Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders, *Making Thatcher’s Britain*, 25-42, at 40. On the central place of religion and morality in Thatcher’s worldview, see Matthew Grimley, “Thatcherism, Morality and Religion,” *idem.*, 78-94.

<sup>14</sup> For a succinct formulation of this consumerist critique, see Ian Robinson, “Subsidising Stigma: Social Consequences of Council Housing Policies,” in Digby Anderson and David Marsland, eds., *Home Truths*, (London: Social Affairs Unit, 1983), 77-91.

<sup>15</sup> The phrase “demolition fiestas” comes from Ruth Glass, *Clichés of Urban Doom and Other Essays* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989). For a detailed history of the turn against council housing in the 1980s, see John Boughton, *Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing* (London: Verso, 2018), 169-195.

while residents encountered frustrations and design flaws in their new homes, most of them were happy with the physical fabric of their new surroundings, including the modernist aspects denounced by critics. Unlike the residents cleared from city-center slum housing in the early postwar decades, who were usually critical of their housing despite attachment to the local community and the neighborhood, residents of Southgate and the Towers were generally very positive about their homes—even with the larger estate facing demolition, many tenants wished they could have taken their flats with them when they were forced off the estate.<sup>16</sup> The eventual decline of Southgate and the Towers stemmed from external factors—shifts in local government organization, rising unemployment in local industries, inefficient and unresponsive housing management, and, in Southgate’s case, the spiraling cost of oil after 1973. The political and ideological turn against council housing in the 1980s slashed local housing budgets while providing the language with which local administrators condemned estates like Southgate and Killingworth Towers as irredeemable “sink estates” worthy only of demolition. The final part of the chapter examines the way in which former residents continue to challenge the public image of these estates as anti-social places that were devoid of community. In the last decade, former residents have created online community pages that provide a medium through which they can connect with their old friends and neighbors. These pages, to which members can contribute photos, videos, and memories, form an informal archive that compels us to rethink the interpretation of social life on Britain’s modern estates that has dominated public discourse from Thatcher’s housing revolution to the present.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> D.G. comment on “Killingworth Photos and Videos,” *Facebook* community page, 16 Nov. 2011; and B.B. comment on “Killingworth Photos and Videos,” *Facebook* community page, 10 Sept. 2014.

<sup>17</sup> For a good summary of this discourse, see Michael Romyn, “The Heygate”; and Ben Campkin, *Remaking London*, especially chapter four; and John Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*.

The image of the “problem estate” as shorthand for crime, vandalism, and social breakdown spans the political spectrum; propelling Thatcher’s drive to privatize housing, it became a readily available cliché for both of Britain’s major parties in the following decades. When Tony Blair made his first speech as Prime Minister from London’s Aylesbury estate in 1997, he reached for these stereotyped images. Invoking “the desperate need for urban regeneration,” he lamented the fact that “there are estates where the biggest employer is the drugs industry [he was not referring to pharmaceuticals], where all that is left of the high hopes of the post-war planners is derelict concrete.”<sup>18</sup> Nearly two decades later, David Cameron reached for the same stock imagery when he vowed in January 2016 to “blitz” poverty by knocking down Britain’s most deprived council estates: stepping onto these estates, he said, “you’re confronted by concrete slabs dropped from on high, brutal high-rise towers and dark alleyways that are a gift to criminals and drug dealers.”<sup>19</sup> As Ben Campkin observes, this loaded political discourse takes social breakdown as a given and a starting point, and a later study showing that crime on the Aylesbury estate was actually lower than the borough average failed to save it from being condemned to be demolished in favor of creating an economically “mixed” community through private redevelopment.<sup>20</sup> The effect of the political discourse around brutal, crime-infested “sink estates” is that the complex social policies and economic factors that shaped the estate are ignored in favor of architectural determinism. At the same time, the distinct social contours of each estate are flattened into a dank cliché of anomie and fragmentation.

In attempting to reevaluate two apparently spectacular failures of Britain’s postwar investment in mass public housing, this chapter adds to two discrete but overlapping bodies of scholarship. The first, which takes architecture and planning as its main focus, challenges the

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Ben Campkin, *Remaking London*, 97.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in John Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, 271.

<sup>20</sup> Ben Campkin, *Remaking London*, 95.

reaction against modernist—and particularly Brutalist—architecture. Galvanized by heated campaigns to stop the demolition of postwar buildings like the Heygate and Robin Hood Gardens—both Brutalist council estates in London—historians, architects, and preservationists have sought to recapture the ideals and energy that inspired postwar architecture in its modernist heyday.<sup>21</sup> As titles like *Militant Modernism* and *Raw Concrete: The Beauty of Brutalism* show, this is a provocative (and often macho) movement, which tends to ignore the everyday, experiential dimensions of modernist architecture, as well as its failures.

Parallel with this celebratory architectural literature is a renewed attention to the complicated—but largely positive—impact that public housing had on the lives of millions of British people. This is a far from unified literature: it encompasses first-hand accounts,<sup>22</sup> architectural histories;<sup>23</sup> social histories of life on housing estates;<sup>24</sup> and histories of working-class life in postwar Britain.<sup>25</sup> What has emerged from this scholarship is a renewed emphasis on the successes of Britain’s massive postwar investment in public housing. Council housing provided greatly improved material conditions for millions of Britons and also gave people a less tangible (but no less important) sense that they were “worth something,” as Carolyn Steedman wrote of her childhood experience of receiving free milk and orange juice in school from Britain’s postwar welfare state.<sup>26</sup> Steedman’s comment suggests a strong connection between the

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<sup>21</sup> See Owen Hatherley, *Militant Modernism* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2008); Hatherley, *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain*; Elain Harwood, *Space, Hope, and Brutalism* (New Haven, CT: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2015); Barnabas Calder, *Raw Concrete: The Beauty of Brutalism* (Portsmouth, NH: William Heinemann, 2016); and Stefi Orazi, *Modernist Estates: The Buildings and the People Who Live in Them* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: An Intimate History*.

<sup>23</sup> John Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*; and John Grindrod, *Concretopia*.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Romy, “The Heygate”; Lynn Abrams, et. al., “Aspiration, Agency, and the Production of New Selves in a Scottish New Town, c.1947–c.2016,” *Twentieth Century British History* (May 2018): 1-29; and Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture: The History of a Social Experiment* (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> Selina Todd, *The People*; Todd, “Phoenix Rising: Working-Class Life and Urban Reconstruction, c. 1945–1967,” *Journal of British Studies* 54 (July 2015): 679-702; and Ben Jones, *The Working Class in Mid Twentieth-Century England*.

<sup>26</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago, 1986), 122.

state's provision of mundane material goods and a deeper emotional transformation as people developed new senses of self-regard and individuality.

This need not be seen as some complex alchemical transformation; instead, it was often expressed as a feeling that one had moved up in the world, and that living standards that had been the birthright of the wealthy were suddenly within reach. One Southgate resident said his new flat made him feel like “a bit of a jet-setter.”<sup>27</sup> Residents of the Killingworth Towers described the sensation of moving into their new homes in similar terms: “we thought we had won the pools when we moved into the Towers,” recalled one woman in 2010.<sup>28</sup> Another former tenant contrasted the conveniences of his council house with his former home with its “tin bath and an outside netty [toilet] which backed onto a back alley... and then there was the fishmongers on the other side of the alley, say no more eh! Wonder what it was like for people who were born into money, They'd never understand, would they?!”<sup>29</sup> Much like the Byker residents who compared their new surroundings to Costa Brava (see chapter 3), these comments suggest the sense of a temporal break through which accumulated decades of material grime and social inequity were wiped out in a single quantum leap.

The ungainly vehicles for this leap were council estates like Southgate and Killingworth Towers. The hothouse environment of these brand new estates set in fully planned new towns formed the stage on which residents negotiated their identities and forged new bonds with their material surroundings and neighbors. Chapter 2 explored the planning and early history of Killingworth Township, so the following section will focus solely on the history of Runcorn New Town and the Southgate Estate.

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<sup>27</sup> D. C., comment on “The Development of Runcorn to a New Town,” *Facebook* community page, 15 April 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in John Topping, *The New Technopolis*, 77.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

### **A Modernist Bath: Planning Southgate**

“Runcorn is miserable to look at; so the best of luck to the New Town at the time of writing just beginning to emerge.”<sup>30</sup> Such was Nikolas Pevsner’s judgment of Runcorn when he visited in the early 1970s while researching his guide to Cheshire for the Buildings of England book series. The existing settlement of 26,000 people lay just up the river Mersey from Liverpool, fifteen miles south east of the city. Dominated by the hilltop ruins of an 11<sup>th</sup> century castle, the town had grown up on the river’s south bank during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a railway crossing linked Runcorn to Widnes on the Mersey’s north bank. When a new bridge spanning the river opened to car traffic in 1961, the town was connected to Britain’s expanding motorway network. Now, “Runcorn was ideal for development, to relieve the overcrowded area, including Liverpool, north of the river.”<sup>31</sup>

Development was not long in coming—in April 1964, the area just east of the established town, which mainly comprised open rolling fields, was designated as the site for a New Town to be grafted onto the 19<sup>th</sup>-century settlement. The primary intention was to house the dispersed population of inner Liverpool in modern and attractive planned housing, to be arranged in neighborhoods of 6,000-8,000 people. At the same time, the New Town was also a development project in the industrial and economic sense, with two large industrial estates built to attract new industries and jobs to the area. The ICI chemical works were the largest employer in the area, but a range of light industries that included the Bass and Guinness breweries also opened plants in

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<sup>30</sup> Nikolas Pevsner and Edward Hubbard, *The Buildings of England: Cheshire* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1971), 324-325.

<sup>31</sup> Clinton Bird, “British New Towns: Architecture and Development: Runcorn and Warrington, an Illustrated Guide,” 1980, p. 2. Pamphlet held in Halton Lea Library, Runcorn.



An exhibition for Runcorn New Town. The exhibition was housed in a shop in the old town of Runcorn's High Street. It is unclear whether the old town residents looking through the window are excited by their town's imminent expansion, or are deciding that it is time to move away. Cheshire Archives, NTW 156/7.

Runcorn.<sup>32</sup> The administrators directing the New Town Development Corporation hoped that these expanded opportunities in both blue and white collar jobs would cauterize the steady hemorrhage of people to England's Southeast, and they advertised heavily in national newspapers to attract new residents and industries. The advertisements worked—together with personal contacts with people who knew about the town, they were the main factor that nudged people to apply to move to the town.<sup>33</sup> Runcorn's residents were overwhelmingly white working-

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<sup>32</sup> Frederic Osborn and Arnold Whittick, *New Towns: Their Origins, Achievements and Progress* (London: Leonard Hill, [1963] 1977), 305-313.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Berthoud and Roger Jowell, *Creating a Community: A Study of Runcorn New Town* (London: Social and Community Planning Research, 1972), 22. NTW 191/2.

**why choose Runcorn?..**

**..because**

quite apart from the best communications in the North-West and the financial advantages of Development Area status, this New Town is being built to satisfy man's desire for a better way of life.

Some of the features incorporated in the Master Plan are illustrated here by a model of the new town centre which is being built to provide over 500,000 square feet of covered shopping space.

We could go on about the number of awards made for our industrial and housing design but why not send for a copy of our brochure and then come to see for yourself what it is that will persuade you to choose . . . .

**RUNCORN  
NEW TOWN**

Please write for Industrial Brochure to:  
J. Gee FAI, Chief Estates Officer  
Runcorn Development Corporation  
Chapel Street - Runcorn - Cheshire

An advertisement for Runcorn New Town from the *Times*, Feb 1970. While most of its advertisements targeted employers, this one also appeals to potential residents, with its model of the planned shopping mall and its claim to “satisfy man’s desire for a better way of life.”

class people from Liverpool and its adjacent communities, drawn by the promise of new housing and a new beginning.<sup>34</sup>

Just as Runcorn’s birth as a new town was tied into the penetration of the national motorway network into the area, it was also planned as an experimental solution to the challenge that the car posed to Britain’s towns and cities. Arthur Ling, the chief planner, was chosen because he specialized in transport planning. He had spent his early career working in London, where he worked on both the unrealized wartime MARS Plan for London (an avant-garde modernist plan that advocated remaking the city along functionalist principles, with buildings

<sup>34</sup> I was unable to find information about Runcorn’s ethnic composition before 2011, when the census listed the town’s population as 97.8% white, .7% Asian, .2% Black, and 1.2% Mixed/Multiple. <https://www.citypopulation.de/php/uk-england-northwestengland.php?cityid=E35001305>. Earlier studies held in the archives categorized the population according to age, gender, and class.

laid out along the rail network), and then on Patrick Abercrombie's Greater London Plan of 1943.<sup>35</sup> After London, he worked as Coventry's chief planner in the 1950s before being selected to plan Runcorn in 1964.

At Runcorn, Ling attempted to meet the challenge of the private car with a cheap and efficient public transportation system. Runcorn was designated as a New Town in 1964, less than a year after the Buchanan Commission published *Traffic in Towns*. Like urban planners in Britain's large historic cities, Arthur Ling's urban planning team shared Buchanan's view of the private car as one of the main problems confronting a well-planned society. But unlike Shankland and Bor in Liverpool or Wilfred Burns in Newcastle, whose efforts focused on reshaping an "outworn" cityscape inherited from the Victorian period, Ling's team had an opportunity to build a space age transportation system from scratch on a greenfield site, and bend the shape of the town to fit that system. A publicity brochure published by the Development Corporation, described the "Runcorn concept" as "an attempt to provide an answer to the urban traffic problem by imposing some control on the use of the car for the journey to work and at the same time encouraging the use of an efficient public transport system."<sup>36</sup> In Runcorn's published master plan, Ling affirmed the centrality of transportation in his design. Public transportation, he wrote, was of such importance to the life of the new town, "that it is essential to plan for it as an integral part of the town structure and not to provide it as an afterthought."<sup>37</sup> Rather than design the city for the car and then route buses along the appropriate roads, public transport lines would form the spine of the city.

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<sup>35</sup> On the MARS Plan, see John R. Gold, "Towards the Functional City? MARS, CIAM, and the London Plans, 1933-42," in Thomas Dekker, ed., *The Modern City Revisited* (London: E. & F. N. Spon, 2000), 80-99; on Abercrombie's plan, see Frank Mort, "Fantasies of Metropolitan Life."

<sup>36</sup> *The Busway*, NTW 65/17.

<sup>37</sup> Arthur G. Ling, *Runcorn New Town: Master Plan*, 66.

While Runcorn's Busway was its most famous aspect from the town's inception, the planners' unpublished preliminary reports show that the Busway was just one of several options under consideration in the months after the town's 1964 designation as a New Town. These reports reveal that the circulation of people was the principle preoccupation for Ling's team from the very beginning, even as they debated the exact form the city's transportation network should take. These early reports make clear that Runcorn's planners conceived of their brief as encompassing more than just a provincial town of 100,000—they were designing a model settlement that could break the car's hold on the twentieth-century city. As the master plan's introduction phrased it, "The design and construction of the New Town provides an opportunity to advance the art and science of town planning" through its unique balance between public and private transportation.<sup>38</sup>

Of immediate concern to Ling was striking a balance between the model of a completely walkable city (a garden city ideal, but impractical given Runcorn's site and projected population) and a city dominated by the private car (congested, noisy, and inconvenient). Given these restrictions, "the aim has therefore been to evolve a plan which will provide a public transport system under such advantageous conditions that the public find it attractive and the operators find it economic."<sup>39</sup> More was at stake than the technical calculus of regulating traffic—Ling's team also saw their remit as a social one: what design would forge the most equitable city for Runcorn's future residents? Throughout the planning documents, the car takes an ambivalent place. In his first confidential report to the Development Corporation in December 1964, Ling described his position: while the car represented the promise of individual freedom and flexibility, to design the new city around the car would threaten to isolate those who did not

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, "Introduction."

<sup>39</sup> Ling, "Runcorn New Town: Interim Report Number Two," March 1965, NTW 63/1.



An aerial perspective drawing of Runcorn New Town, from Arthur Ling's 1967 master plan. The perspective is facing west, with the old town and motorway bridge at the top right, and the figure eight busway

Arthur Ling's diagrammatic plan of Runcorn's housing and transportation structure, from his 1967 master plan. girdling the old and new town. In the center are the hilltop castle ruins, with the shopping city along its western slopes. An industrial estate is in the right foreground.

drive—particularly children and the elderly—and also dissolve bonds of sociability established through the communal spaces of public transportation and public walkways.<sup>40</sup> The goal was that “a genuine feeling would develop of belonging to a town with a close-knit community feeling, apart from the obvious desirability of providing quick travel about the town.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ling “Runcorn New Town: Interim Report Number One,” December 1964, NTW 181/1, 10.

<sup>41</sup> Ling, *Runcorn New Town*, “Introduction.”

Ling's proposed solution drew on the linear city concept he had formulated for the abortive MARS Plan for London twenty years earlier: to make the public transportation system form a spine along which to string the town's residential communities, "so that the walking distance is limited to a quarter of a mile to either a monorail or express bus service, which is linked with the town centre, the existing town and the industrial areas."<sup>42</sup> Seen from above, the town would resemble a giant figure eight spread across the Cheshire landscape, centered on a new "shopping city" set beneath the hilltop ruins of Halton Castle. By making public transportation efficient and easily accessible from all residences (a planned maximum of a quarter mile's walk, which Ling estimated would take five minutes), Ling estimated that at least half of the new town's residents would choose to leave their cars at home. Limited parking spaces at factories and in the town center, coupled with a meandering intra-city road system would provide further disincentives for would-be drivers.

One of the most pressing questions facing Runcorn's planning team was what type of public transit would best suit the new town. In one of his earliest proposals, Ling analyzed the relative merits of designing the town around an express bus system or a monorail. In contemplating these alternatives to the private car, Ling was joining a wider conversation centered on experimental transport planning for Britain's new towns.<sup>43</sup> Ling raised the possibility of a traditional bus system sharing routes with private cars, only to dismiss it as slow and incapable of providing an attractive alternative to driving. The decision between the monorail or the bus ultimately came down to financial viability; while Ling maintained that the monorail was ultimately a more attractive option because of its quietness and unobtrusive footprint, it would

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<sup>42</sup> Ling, "Runcorn New Town: Interim Report Number Two," March 1965, NTW 63/1.

<sup>43</sup> Contemporary designs included a monorail for North Bucks New City (later known as Milton Keynes) and the initial model of Killingworth, and a hovercraft for Washington New Town. See Guy Ortolano, "Planning the Urban Future in 1960s Britain."



Arthur Ling's diagrammatic plan for Runcorn's housing, industry, and transportation, from his 1967 master plan.

need a much larger pool of potential passengers than Runcorn could offer in order to be financially viable. His solution, then, was to design a bus system that would run on a roadway completely separate from car and foot traffic; at junctions with conventional roads, the traffic signals would assure that the buses had preferential treatment. Like a monorail track, the route would stand on thirty-foot stilts to deposit its passengers on the second level platform of the town's Shopping City megastructure.

Runcorn's unique transportation system became a magnet by the early 1970s, drawing in experts from around the world. A local newspaper announced that 150 Swedish planners had descended on the town in hopes of replicating the system. Even more exciting, the article noted, was the visit of a delegation of Tanzanian planners, who explained to authorities from the Runcorn Development Corporation that they planned to apply Runcorn's transportation model to their new capital of Dodoma. "All the details were supplied and leader Julius Nyerere was given details when he visited London several years ago. The system has now been completed... but as yet the Development Corporation or Crosville haven't heard how successful it has been."<sup>44</sup> Nationwide newspapers echoed the enthusiasm over Runcorn's transport system, noting that the scheme was "eagerly watched by urban planners from around the world,"<sup>45</sup> and that the success or failure of the experiment "may well determine the future environment of towns and cities yet to be built."<sup>46</sup>

While Runcorn's busway attracted the most interest from urban planners, future residents were most attracted by the prospect of a new home.<sup>47</sup> The town was divided into discrete housing areas of 6,000 - 8,000 people, each with its unique character and building style. Like the freedom of choice the busway would offer between efficient public transport and the privacy of the car, Runcorn offered an array of housing choices to fit individual needs and desires. The options ranged from stand-alone houses with private gardens to large modernist estates linked by

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<sup>44</sup> "From Far Away Places with Strange Sounding Names," *Runcorn Weekly News*, May 11, 1972, clipping held in the records of the Warrington and Runcorn Development Corporation (NTW) at the Cheshire Archives and Local Studies office, NTW 65/32. Runcorn's influence on Dodoma is confirmed in Harry T Dimitriou, ed., *Transport Planning for Third World Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 104.

<sup>45</sup> Jeremy Bugler, "Town Where Cars Take a Back Seat," *Guardian*, Nov. 7, 1971.

<sup>46</sup> Anthony Jones, "Figure-Of-Eight Traffic System Born on the Back of an Envelope," *Times*, May 4, 1972.

<sup>47</sup> In a survey of Runcorn's first five hundred families, well over half of the respondents attributed their decision to move to the prospect of a new house. A fifth moved because of a new job, while family in the area and the idea of "a new start" were the main attractions for roughly ten percent of respondents. Runcorn Development Corporation, *1969 Social Survey: The First 500 Families*. Internal survey undertaken by Runcorn's Social Development Department. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies office, NTW 66/3.

overhead walkways. Among these various housing options, the most prominent—in terms of its six-story bulk, its central location, and the prestige lent it by the reputation of its designer—was the Southgate estate.

Just as Gazzard blended modernist architecture with medieval precedents at Killingworth, James Stirling's design for Southgate claimed to draw inspiration from London's, Bath's, and Edinburgh's eighteenth-century Georgian terraces while relying on the latest techniques in building quickly and cheaply with precast concrete. The layout would take the form of large squares of medium-rise deck-access dwellings, with high-level walkways linking each building and another walkway leading north from the estate to the new Shopping City. It was a very repetitive design. Each terrace comprised five stories. The bottom two floors comprised two-story houses with rear gardens giving out on the square. On the third and fourth floors were two-story maisonettes designed for smaller families, and crowning each terrace was a row of flats at the top story for couples and single residents. Along the third floor facing the square ran each block's access deck, which served as a "street in the sky" for the upper maisonettes and high flats. In order to break up the repetitiveness of the drab monochrome concrete facades and the estate's rigid angles, Stirling integrated brightly colored bands of GRP (glass-reinforced plastic) paneling along the access decks. In a nod to Merseyside's nautical culture—and perhaps in the hope of resonating with the seafaring genes of new residents relocating from Liverpool—most of Southgate's windows were circular, evoking ships' porthole windows.

Even if the estate's connections to its Georgian precedents are somewhat dubious, the comparisons with London, Bath, and Edinburgh show Southgate's urban pretensions. Stirling (responding to the Development Corporation's design brief) intended the estate to break sharply with the soft suburban feel that characterized most British new towns and neighboring



A Cross-Section plan of Southgate's terraces. Halton Lea Library, Runcorn.

developments within Runcorn.<sup>48</sup> As one visitor commented as late as 1989, when the estate was facing demolition, “there is a scale and a dignity to the garden squares that makes Southgate look like an oasis of urbanity in the rest of Runcorn.”<sup>49</sup> Just a five-minute walk from Runcorn’s new shopping center, Southgate would have an urban, city-center atmosphere, housing 6,000 residents at 120 people per acre. Stirling commented that a motivation for giving Southgate an

<sup>48</sup> Most of Runcorn’s housing estates featured conventional semi-detached houses with gardens. Castlefields estate, just to the north of the shopping center, was also a medium-rise deck access design, modeled on the Park Hill estate in Sheffield. Several of Castlefield’s blocks were pulled down in the 2000s.

<sup>49</sup> Deyan Sudjic, “Does This Estate Have to Die?” *Times*, 6 March 1989, 15.



One of Southgate's squares in the mind 1970s. The plastic cladding can be seen at the middle section of the block on the right.

urban feeling was to provide “variety” within the New Town, but there were also commercial reasons outside of Stirling’s control that dictated the decision.<sup>50</sup>

Southgate was not simply a housing community for 6,000 uprooted Liverpoolians. It also was feeder for Runcorn’s “Shopping City,” an American-style indoor shopping mall being constructed at the same time. The mall, financed by Grosvenor Estates Commercial Developments and designed by the new town’s architects, was the largest of its kind in Europe at the time, and it’s dazzling white façade clad in “self-cleaning tiles” resembled, in the words of a *Times* reporter, “a supersonic mosque, with gleaming white bricks on even the dullest day.”<sup>51</sup> By providing a densely populated reservoir of potential consumers within easy walking distance,

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<sup>50</sup> James Stirling, “The Work of Stirling Featuring: Housing, Runcorn New Town and Stirling in Germany,” *Architectural Review* 160, (August 1976): 287-88.

<sup>51</sup> Ian Skidmore, “Runcorn New Town,” *Times* (London), 4 May 1972, 1. It is an intriguing but puzzling analogy, since Runcorn’s population contained few Muslims. While contemporary surveys provide no insight into the town’s religious composition, the 2011 census logged only 119 Muslims (.2% of the population) in Halton, the borough that contains Runcorn. <https://www.citypopulation.de/php/uk-england-northwestengland.php?cityid=E35001305>.

Southgate was to ensure that the mall was never short on shoppers. Grosvenor's decision to finance the building was based on an agreement with the Runcorn Development Corporation that Southgate would be built rapidly so that the mall would not languish without customers while the housing was under construction. The upshot of this compact was a sense of urgency on the part of the new town authorities. As one Corporation memo explained, negotiations with Grosvenor were premised on the idea of a large population bordering the development,

and all the calculations in relation to turnover and of rental values were based on this assumption. In addition, the Corporation's programme for building Southgate had a definite effect upon the speed at which Grosvenor were to build the shops. The Development Corporation therefore has an obligation to see that this housing development is carried out in the manner envisaged.<sup>52</sup>

These commercial considerations ensured that the Corporation officials and the architect were united in their commitment to giving Southgate a dense and urban character. As chapter 2 described, this preoccupation with urbanity was in step with the planning ideals of many of the "Mark II" new towns that began with Cumbernauld in Scotland, and emerged in response to criticisms of the dispersed, "prairie" environment of the first generation of new towns. With the design brief demanding 700 dwellings to be built in three years, recalled Stirling's partner Michael Wilford, "it was obvious that in order to meet those requirements one would have to resort to some sort of prefabricated constructional system."<sup>53</sup>

Yoked to the insistence on high population density and industrialized building methods was the Development Corporation's fateful choice (prodded by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, which was interested in exploring the benefits of such schemes) to connect

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<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Jane Morton, *From Southgate to Hallwood Park* (Liverpool: Merseyside Improved Houses, 1994), 14.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Wilford, interview with Niamh Dillon, 25 June 2009. British Library, Architects' Lives project. <https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Architects-Lives/021M-C0467X0088XX-0002V0#>.

all of the homes in Southgate to a district heating system fueled by natural gas.<sup>54</sup> In a similar manner to their agreement with Grosvenor for the building of the town center, the Runcorn authorities contracted with Shell Gas to build and supply a central heating plant that would serve both Southgate and the shopping center. Oil was then the cheapest fuel, and offered a clean alternative to the coal that had fueled many of the incoming residents' former homes. According to the agreement between the Development Corporation and Shell, residents would be billed not according to their usage, but at fixed rates based on the size of their home. The heating fees would be paid to the Corporation along with the rent. Securing a tenancy at Southgate was conditional upon agreeing to this scheme.<sup>55</sup> While Michael Wilford, later portrayed the whole scheme as a ludicrous demand foisted upon the architects against their wishes, there is no record of Stirling raising an objection, and it fits well with the experimental nature of the whole estate.<sup>56</sup> The seemingly efficient and egalitarian ethos of the heating scheme likely appealed to Stirling, who, while not a socialist, sympathized with the idea that architecture should advance social equality.<sup>57</sup>

Stirling's designs for Southgate were approved in December 1968, and work began the next year. To give the project a degree of flexibility the estate was to be built in two phases, with the large concrete squares making up the first phase, followed by a second phase that would break ground when the initial residents had started to occupy the estate. Although using prefabricated materials was supposed to streamline the building process, labor disputes derailed Southgate's construction schedule. This was a feature of many building projects in the 1970s, as inflation, coupled with a series of disputes between Whitehall and organized labor sparked

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<sup>54</sup> Mark Girouard, *Big Jim: The Life and Work of James Stirling* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1998), 161.

<sup>55</sup> Jane Morton, *From Southgate to Hallwood Park*, 16-18.

<sup>56</sup> Michael Wilford, interview with Niamh Dillon.

<sup>57</sup> See Anthony Vidler, *James Frazier Stirling: Notes from the Archive* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 54.

strikes and sympathy strikes across the country. The frustration these strikes is evident in the following minutes of a 1972 meeting between the Corporation and the construction company contracted to build the estate, Unit Construction Ltd.:

Mr. Morely opened the meeting by stating that his Company had suffered a considerable loss on the job and this was attributable in part to delays suffered as a result of the “3 day week” and also by his Company’s under-assessment of the rate of inflation during the last 2.5 years. He asked if the Corporation were able to help financially.<sup>58</sup>

While the Corporation refused to grant the request for a renegotiated building fee, they were unable to do anything to speed up the sclerotic building process. The situation was exacerbated by strikes in the remote factories where Southgate’s massive concrete walls and floors, as well as the plastic cladding, were assembled.<sup>59</sup> Intended as a timesaving device, prefabrication acted as a drag on the estate’s construction. When the first residents finally began arriving in 1973, they moved in just in time for the “oil shocks” that rocked the world that October, as OPEC nations responded to US support of Israel in the Yom Kippur War by declaring an oil embargo. The giant Shell heating plant set on the edge of the estate—caustically dubbed the “Great White Hope” by residents—symbolized not equality and efficiency but a financial burden and a physical reminder of the instability and uncertainty of global politics. A second oil shock in 1975 more than doubled the cost of heating, ratcheting it from 8p to 18p per therm.<sup>60</sup> With the second phase of building still under construction, Southgate was off to a very rough start.

Development of Southgate’s second phase commenced in 1974, as families were moving into the large terraces. For this area, Stirling eschewed the grand terraces and heavy concrete of the first phase, opting instead for low-rise terraced single-family houses with timber frames and small gardens. But these houses were far from conventional suburban homes; rather, Stirling

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<sup>58</sup> “Supplemental agreement for Southgate phase 1,” New Town Warrington-Runcorn Archive (NTW), Cheshire Archives and Local Studies office, NTW 231/ 6, Box 279.

<sup>59</sup> Giroud, *Big Jim*, 161.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

doubled down on the estate's eccentricity, cladding these houses entirely in brightly hued GRP cladding. The rectilinear orange, gray, and green homes, with their straight lines and porthole windows, earned it the local nicknames the "washing machines" and "Legoland"—a soubriquet that was alternatively affectionate and derisory, depending on the speaker. The entire estate was completed in 1977, and the result was visually striking. It was low-cost housing with an elite design pedigree, much like the Byker Estate in Newcastle. Unlike Erskine's work at Byler, though, Stirling's modernism was not tempered by consultation with its intended users. Would Southgate appeal to its residents, and not just to the rarified tastes of architects?

Even the latter question was far from a foregone conclusion. Southgate got a warm reception among architects outside Britain, but the domestic response was tepid. In a 1975 article for the U.S. journal *Progressive Architecture*, Southgate garnered praise as "a refreshing bit of urbanity in a type of situation the solution to which so typically has tended toward a dispersed suburban plan, both here and in Europe. And despite the seeming monolithic character of the scheme on paper, the quality of the built place is much softer and gentler than might be expected."<sup>61</sup> In the British journal *Building Design*, Stewart Lyall offered a measured assessment, remarking on phase II's "nice, colourful, cheap and cheerful air.... In the squares the brightly coloured GRP more or less comes off. Deliberate or not it is two fingers to the bureaucrats who insist that architecture should be dignified and banal and colourless to match, perhaps, the water." Lyman criticized some points of shoddy workmanship, and his characterization of the back alleys as "straight Butlins" (referring to British holiday camps designed for the working class) has a slightly paternalistic tone, but he conceded that Southgate's completed phase I was starting well: "meantime back at the megastructure everybody is settling

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<sup>61</sup> Sharon Lee Ryder, "Greener Pastures," *Progressive Architecture* (March 1976): 42-47, at 46.

into their great squares with a remarkable degree of satisfaction.”<sup>62</sup> The *Architectural Review* deemed Southgate to be sub-par work from Stirling, though the architectural critic acknowledged that he was working on a shoestring. The review included the perspective of the estate’s social development officer, who concluded with wary optimism: “When Southgate has been completed and the architects, planners and builders have finished their work and left, it will be up to the people themselves to make a home and a community. The people of Southgate, on present form, seem determined to do just that.”<sup>63</sup>

On the other side of Britain at Killingworth, Roy Gazzard thought of his own completed planning work in similar terms, though in his unique idiom. New towns, he wrote in a 1973 discussion of Killingworth, “have to be planted in the right way and in the right relationship with each other but perhaps the most significant aspect of place is the extent to which it is endowed spiritually for good or evil by those who add their own contribution to its sum total of creativity.”<sup>64</sup> As the first pioneers began moving into their homes in Runcorn and Killingworth, it remained to be seen whether the architects’ designs would resonate with their inhabitants. It is to the experiences of the residents of Southgate and Killingworth Towers that we now turn.

### **Moving In, Moving Up**

For one indignant Killingworth resident, Gazzard’s philosophy that residents ultimately determined a design’s success or failure (or its good or evil nature) amounted to an abdication of responsibility. In a letter to *Platform*, the community newspaper, the correspondent accused Gazzard of building his ideal town and then trying to “withdraw from the consequences of it,”

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<sup>62</sup> Sutherland Lyall, *Building Design* (12 August 1977).

<sup>63</sup> “The Work of Stirling,” *Architectural Review* 160, (August 1976): 283-84.

<sup>64</sup> Gazzard, “Six New Towns of Northumbria,” Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/E15, unpaginated book manuscript, written in 1972 for Charles Knight, but never published.

something not easily done “in the face of such an enormous weight of concrete.” The letter maintained that the Towers, with their monumental design and “esoteric plan,” did not provide the type of housing people really wanted. Despite his or her criticism of Gazzard, the writer thought *CommuniCare* and its warden were “doing a wonderful job and I believe that this aspect of community life holds the key to the future success of Killingworth as a social enterprise.”<sup>65</sup> Was this critic speaking for the entire community in his critique of Gazzard’s “esoteric” castle town? How did the new arrivals feel about their new homes?

What Alice Leighton loved about her new maisonette in Glanton Tower were the two indoor toilets and the gas heating. She moved to Killingworth from the nearby town of Heaton in the early 1970s, and her apartment in the brand new estate was a paradise compared to the place she had left. Like all the homes in the Towers, it was wallpapered throughout (the pattern was identical in each home, but residents could choose to replace it with a new pattern or paint over it), and it had gas-fired central heating and a new stove. In her old house in Heaton, the toilet was in the backyard, and she relied on a coal fire, “which although it looked cosy on a cold winter’s day, was much more inconvenient and less efficient.” Mrs. Leighton praised her “light and airy” new home, with its spacious rooms and modern conveniences, such as two toilets, hot running water, and the “very handy” rubbish chute located just outside her front door. Equally fulsome in their praise of their new homes were her friend Mrs. Miller, who lived in Kleider Tower, and Mrs. Margaret Bell, a resident of Dunstan Tower. Like Leighton, their attention focused on the spaciousness and cleanliness of their new homes—generous cupboard space was one of Bell’s favorite features, as well as how easy it was to keep her windows clean. All the women appreciated that their houses had an emergency escape in case of a fire, but feared that it had the potential for some embarrassment: “in the bathroom a thin plywood sheet covers part of the wall

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<sup>65</sup> J. Conway, Letter to the Editor, *Platform*, January 1973, n.p. Held in Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ D17.

enabling the tenant to burst through into the adjoining flat's bathroom to escape." This quirk aside, the women concluded that although observers from outside the estate were quick to judge the Towers' stark exterior, it was, "after all, the inside that counts."<sup>66</sup>

Leighton and her friends' views of their new homes appeared in the first issue of Killingworth's community newspaper, *Platform*, in February 1972. There is a defensive note in the comment about the building's interior being more important than its outside appearance. The Towers were newly built, and, as the article conceded, had already been labeled "barracks" by some of the region's newspapers. Bus drivers in the area dubbed the Towers "Alcatraz."<sup>67</sup> The critics had a point. Roy Gazzard, the buildings' architect, envisioned them as modern analogues to Northumbria's castles. This demanded a degree of barracks-like starkness: housing at Killingworth would be in a "masculine north-country stone tradition with sheer detailing. Tone values will be black, white and grey with colour limited to small areas at the human level." The planting of trees and creepers would eventually soften the Towers gray appearance, Gazzard hoped, but ultimately the success of the development would "depend on the architecture."<sup>68</sup>

For the people moving into Killingworth, their town's imposing "masculine" architecture was not a draw (indeed, many likely would have preferred a bit more color). Instead, many new residents were attracted by the promise of modern comforts like reliable heating, an indoor toilet, and a well-equipped kitchen. These features were widely diffused in Britain's more affluent areas, like London and the Home Counties, but for many Tynesiders moving out of slum housing in the 1960s and 1970s, they were welcome novelties. As Mark Clapson has shown, it was common for people arriving in new towns from slum housing to perceive their new homes as a "castle" or "palace," emphasizing the dramatically improved standard of living that a modern

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<sup>66</sup> Gillian Bell and Gillian Gowrie, "Opinion Column," *Platform*, February 1970, n.p.

<sup>67</sup> Bel Mooney, "Going up in the World," 7.

<sup>68</sup> Roy Gazzard, "Killingworth Township," *Northern Architect* (July./Aug. 1963): 260.



**An open courtyard enclosed by the Killingworth Towers. Roy Gazzard intended the buildings to resemble Northumbria's "masculine" castle heritage.**

home offered.<sup>69</sup> This was particularly the case for women, who, they and the planners expected, would be spending the most time inside the new homes. On one visit to the Towers soon after their construction, Gazzard was surprised to see a woman who had lived in the old miners' housing that had been cleared to make way for the new town. When he had met her during the clearance process, she had vehemently stated that she would never live in one of Gazzard's "monstrosities." Questioned her about her change of heart, she replied, "yes Mr. Gazzard, but you didn't tell me about the two inside toilets, stainless steel sink and Formica tops!"<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Mark Clapson, *Invincible Green Suburbs, Brave New Towns*, 99.

<sup>70</sup> John R. Topping, *The New Technopolis*, 12.

In his unpublished memoir about growing up in the Towers, John Topping writes of his mother having a similar reaction on her first visit to her prospective home in Callaly Tower in December 1971. The family came from Walker, one of Newcastle's suburban communities, where they lived in a home with an outdoor privy. His mother "was a little shocked and overwhelmed by the height and scale of the Towers," writes Topping:

However on stepping inside and closing the door the south facing open plan layout of the fitted kitchen/dayroom (with the glass partition leading to a private balcony with a view across the Tyne valley), pre-wallpapered walls, a free cooker, stainless steel sink and drainer, Formica work tops, an electronic waste bag sealer, two inside toilets, a bathroom with automatic extractor, a Rediffusion television connection, telephone socket, walk-in store room, three bedrooms, a living room, and central heating with a timer and thermostat just proved too tempting...!<sup>71</sup>

Topping's list of his home's conveniences—many of them now taken for granted or, in the case of the electronic waste bag sealer, obsolete—may seem odd, but it likely reflects the calculus that most families made, as they contemplated leaving their homes and settling in the unfamiliar surroundings of a new town.<sup>72</sup> For many people moving into Killingworth from surrounding Tyneside communities, their former housing situations set a very low bar. Mrs. Bennison, a recent transplant from Benwell in western Newcastle came to Killingworth for a range of reasons: "because her husband wanted to, because she liked the idea of a house no one had lived in before, because it seemed a step up from that slum."<sup>73</sup> Even though in the "slum" she had been a short walk from her mother, sisters, and aunts, she was drawn to Killingworth by the promise of rupture, of total personal renewal.

Despite its stark exterior, the housing at Killingworth, like postwar council-owned housing across the country, sought to provide the latest in domestic conveniences to match the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>72</sup> For Topping's parents, family pressure had kept them in Walker until his mother put her foot into a bucket of live bait that his father, a fisherman, had left sitting on the privy floor. Ibid., 9.

<sup>73</sup> Bel Mooney, "Going Up in the World."



**Killingworth Towers residents did what they could to exert their personalities on the external spaces of their homes, as can be seen in the various shades and patterns of these curtains and doors. Amber Collective, Creative Commons.**

rising expectations fostered by Britain's affluence.<sup>74</sup> As Bennison's comment about wanting to live in a home that had never been lived in before indicates, the physical space of Killingworth's homes offered a sort of concrete chrysalis in which tenants could fashion a new version of themselves. Historians have linked this idea of self-fashioning to home ownership and the suburban lifestyle that new towns offered, but even modernist council housing could serve as such a material springboard.<sup>75</sup> Given the rigid structure and blank exterior of the buildings, chances for self-expression were limited, but people availed themselves of what chances were available. Brightly colored doors and curtains were one option for shaping one's surroundings,

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<sup>74</sup> Matthew Hollow, "The Age of Affluence Revisited," 285-86.

<sup>75</sup> For a discussion of the suburban home and new ideas of selfhood, see Lynn Abrams et. al., "Aspiration, Agency, and the Production of New Selves in a Scottish New Town," 16.



**Killingworth Towers standing half-demolished in 1989, with the various apartment decorations and color schemes exposed to the world. Photo by Karen Lewis.**

and following the estate’s demolition they became a way for people to identify their own apartment in photographs, like a birthmark on the body of a loved one killed in a disaster (they also functioned as a temporal marker—of one set of photos posted on the Killingworth Facebook group, one member observed that they were “more than likely taken in the seventies judging by the garish curtains”).<sup>76</sup> Many residents also personalized their home by putting in their own wallpaper, which was poignantly illustrated in photos of the estate as it was being demolished, which exposed the interiors of dozens of homes each distinguished by sedimented layers of wallpaper that had accrued over the years, changing with passing fashions and new owners.

New arrivals in Southgate also encountered a boldly, self-consciously modern domestic environment that provided residents with opportunities to explore and express their identities,

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<sup>76</sup> R. L., comment on “Killingworth Photos and Videos,” *Facebook* community page, 1 Dec. 2016.

and to a greater extent than did the Towers. While the Southgate's public spaces were designed to give residents neoclassical grandeur and grace within the constraints of low-cost public housing, the estate also had a space age bohemian aesthetic that fit with the ethos of Britain's youth culture. An architect visiting Southgate in 1976 described a stroll along the walkways:

The girl at the first intersection, chewing gum, listening to Barry White on her wrist radio, puts a hand on her hip. "You're not from around here, are you?" .... We continue on the wide walkway, past lace curtains and driftwood plaques, past orange and yellow dish towels, mementoes of Covent Garden, soccer trophies and nodding dachshunds each pressed furtively against the sliding glass windows.<sup>77</sup>

Stepping inside one of Southgate's apartments, the visitor was greeted with

a bright green room right out of Pinter.... There are two stereo speakers; one sits atop a pile of pillows, the other shares the cushion of a Danish modern chair with a pictorial arrangement of brass wire, beads and velvet. "I made that," says the lady of the house. "D'you like it?" We allow that we do, and ask if she painted the place herself. "Naw, that was the corpi [Development Corporation] did that. They was all painted different when we came. D'you want some tea?"<sup>78</sup>

In another apartment, this one painted a dazzling shade of lavender, the visitors admired the "windows with their aluminum frames and neoprene gaskets and curved, efficient corners," as the home's proud owner informed them with misplaced brio, "the man who designed it used to design boats."<sup>79</sup> When it opened in 1973, the estate had a reputation for being edgy and urban, drawing young professionals attracted to the idea of renting a brand new flat near the town center. "One of our junior school teachers... loved to crow about her shiny, modernist cubezone," recalled one person who grew up on a neighboring estate.<sup>80</sup> Another Runcorn resident recalled Southgate and the Shopping City as popular destinations for youths from

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<sup>77</sup> Craig Hodgetts, "Inside James Stirling," *Design Quarterly* 100 (1976): 6-19, at 15.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Post by "Residue" on *Magnetic North* blog, 31 January 2011.  
<https://magneticnortherners.wordpress.com/2011/01/31/legoland/>



Southgate's "streets in the sky," summer 1976. Richard Einzig, *Domus* magazine.

around the new town. His cousin loved her top-floor “porthole flat,” and the whole estate was “quite bohemian to live there when it was first constructed.”<sup>81</sup>

Terms like “urban” and “bohemian” sound like the vague aspirational fluff that a real estate agent might have used to sell a Southgate flat, but what did they mean for the residents? The bizarre “street life” that the visitor encountered on Southgate’s elevated walkways suggests that it provided a place to see and be seen—a venue for the kind of unexpected encounters one might expect in a large city, but certainly not on the streets of a buttoned-down suburban housing estate. It was far from the “twee and picturesque” stereotype that clung to Britain’s new towns.<sup>82</sup>

Southgate stood out starkly from its surroundings. It was as though a slice had been carved from inner London and dropped in the countryside. Recalling visits to his sister’s Southgate flat in the 1980s, one man described the atmosphere as a thrilling break from the ordinary: “Being a boring country bumpkin myself, I loved the more exciting urban way of life when staying here, and played long games of “go-carting” with shopping trollies on the landings.”<sup>83</sup> A 1977 survey of Southgate residents nonetheless supports these anecdotal accounts, noting that tenants “enjoy [Southgate’s] modernistic outlook, the spacious well-designed flats and the community life and involvement.”<sup>84</sup> For new arrivals, and especially young people, Southgate promised the density, scale, and excitement of cities like Liverpool and Manchester, but without those cities’ legacy of Victorian slums and smoke-blackened facades.

Stirling had conceived of Southgate as an estate where public housing would meet Georgian elegance. Margaret Davies, who settled in Southgate soon after it opened, felt that life

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<sup>81</sup> Post by Manmade on “Runcorn Southgate” thread, *SkyscraperCity* website, 3 March 2010, <http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=928626>.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Nonie Niesewand, “Ideal Homes,” *The Independent*, 23 August 1997. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/cover-story-ideal-homes-1246812.html>

<sup>83</sup> P. E., comment on “The Development of Runcorn to a New Town,” *Facebook* community page, 18 August 2015. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/288012877904790/>

<sup>84</sup> Runcorn Development Corporation, “Southgate Estate Review: Summary of Meeting 20<sup>th</sup> December 1977,” 1. Typescript held in CRO, NTW 188/5.



"The Chelsea set," summer 1976. Richard Einzig, *Domus* magazine.

on the estate in the 1970s really equaled the fantasy world of architectural drawings. Other Runcornians “called us ‘the Chelsea set.’ We even behaved like the stick figures [from perspective drawings], sitting out on the balconies on good evenings.” Having lived abroad for several years, the estate’s architecture did not feel odd to her.<sup>85</sup> When the architectural photographer Richard Einzig visited the estate in the summer of 1976, he recorded a halcyon scene of young couples and children basking in the sun on Southgate’s “streets in the sky.” 1976 was the hottest summer the UK had experienced in more than three centuries, and was voted the

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<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Jane Morton, *From Southgate to Hallwood Park*, 31.



Southgate's promotional material targeted younger residents by depicting single people or couples and downplaying the conventional new town image of nuclear families. Cheshire Archives.

best year ever in a 2013 survey.<sup>86</sup> In Einzig's sun-drenched photographs, Southgate looks like a pleasant place, with its residents using its access decks and public squares as Stirling had intended. Children frolic apparently unaccompanied on the car-free streets in the sky. In one photo, a young woman leans over the walkway's parapet, either to engage in a bit of people-watching or simply to chat with a neighbor below. In another, a casually stylish young couple lounges on the walkway. They are looking past each other, with slightly world-weary expressions that might be best characterized as blasé—they appear confident, relaxed, and cool (though the man's flared trousers and lace-up hippie shirt had a short lifespan that belied his

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<sup>86</sup> Keir Mudie, "1976 Was Britain's Best Ever Year According to New Study," *Daily Mirror*, 21 July 2013. <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/1976-britians-best-ever-year-2070469>

confidence).<sup>87</sup> But for the dazzling green and yellow GRP siding behind them, the couple could easily be posing on any urban street.

In the advertising material that it distributed to interested tenants, the Development Corporation cultivated Southgate's image as a youthful, chic, estate. Publicity photos of the estate's domestic interiors depict spare, unadorned rooms in a minimalist style. The furnishings look simple and modern, but above all cheap—their modernism more Ikea than Eames. One of the images used most often featured a lone young woman reading a magazine in a Southgate bedroom, probably in one of the top-floor flats.<sup>88</sup> The photo is composed of a series of geometrical shapes, like a Klee painting drained of color. Complementing the circular porthole window are a spherical white pendant lamp and a small circular mirror on the dresser. The blue sky through the porthole and the woman's matching blouse provide the only color, drawing the viewer's eye away from the room itself, and towards the prospect of the shopping center to the north. Part of the reason for the room's sparse decorating was that the Corporation wanted people looking at the room to imagine how they themselves would decorate it, projecting their own domestic ideals onto the apartment's blank canvas.

But even with this caveat, advertisements for Southgate project a domestic vision at odds with images for other homes in the new town. In its promotional materials—both for conventional suburban neighborhoods like The Brow and Halton Brook, as well as for high-density developments like the Castlefields deck-access dwellings—Runcorn authorities peddled a domestic family idyll that could have been set in any typical postwar suburban home. In a pamphlet titled “Look into a Runcorn Home,” readers were assured that Runcorn had over one hundred home types to fit any lifestyle: “look into a Runcorn home and look into a bright

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<sup>87</sup> The German sociologist Georg Simmel characterized a blasé attitude as the defining marker of the modern urban citizen in his 1903 essay “The Metropolis and Mental Life.”

<sup>88</sup> Runcorn Development Corporation, “Southgate.” Pamphlet held at Halton Lea Library, Runcorn.



Runcorn's promotional material usually advertised its homes as safe, clean places to start a new family life. Clockwise from top left, these photos depict kitchens in the Brow and Windmill Hill estates, a back garden in Halton Brook, and the living room of a bungalow on Castlefields estate. Cheshire Archives.

future!”<sup>89</sup> The accompanying images featured happy family scenes, and attracted people like Dave Cargill, who emigrated from Liverpool to Runcorn in 1974 with his wife and four children. For Cargill, Runcorn “was an opportunity to have a fresh look on life.... There were open areas and people had gardens and they wanted to improve their lifestyle, fulfil [*sic*] their dreams.”<sup>90</sup> For another woman, the Runcorn’s main attraction was the new life it would offer her children: “We paid two visits to Runcorn: each time the boys came back with big red cheeks and the second time all the local children knew their names. That’s what decided us.”<sup>91</sup> “I’m a respectable working man,” another new arrival told researchers in 1972, “and it’s difficult to stay a respectable working man in slums, but you *can* be a respectable working man among

<sup>89</sup> Runcorn Development Corporation, “Look into a Runcorn Home.” Pamphlet held at Halton Lea Library, Runcorn.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Emma Hallett, “‘New Town’ Runcorn Celebrates 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday,” *BBC News*, 11 April 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-26969285>.

<sup>91</sup> Quoted in Richard Berthoud and Roger Jowell, *Creating a Community*, 20.

respectable people.”<sup>92</sup> Lynn Abrams argues that moving to a new town allowed people to cultivate a “home-based family lifestyle” that many Britons desired in the postwar years.<sup>93</sup> Southgate slotted into this promise of a new life, but with a focus on youth and individual self-fashioning rather than the nuclear family. As one former resident recalled, the apartment’s generous provision of light and space made him “feel like a bit of a jet-setter!”<sup>94</sup>

When it began admitting residents in 1973, Southgate’s admittance process reflected this jet-setting reputation. Following a standard practice for new town housing, before they were allocated a flat prospective residents were vetted to ensure their financial and social suitability, having to produce evidence they could meet the costs of rent and heating, as well as two reference letters attesting to their character.<sup>95</sup> Employees of the Corporation and people who were moving from Liverpool and Manchester having secured employment one of Runcorn’s industries, like the established ICI chemical works or the new YKK zipper factory, were given highest priority for housing, and the estate filled up rapidly.<sup>96</sup> Those hoping to enter the Killingworth Towers underwent an equally stiff vetting process. Prospective residents from around Newcastle could not simply apply to the Killingworth’s housing council. Instead, they had to be referred by their own local authority to ensure that they fit Killingworth’s financial requirements. They then would attend a meeting for new tenants where they would mix with other future residents, thereby forming social bonds before moving in.<sup>97</sup> A woman who applied in 1969 was rejected because her husband was working in an apprenticeship, the income from which did not meet the minimum qualification. When he got a full-time job the next year, the

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Lynn Abrams, et. al., “Aspiration, Agency, and the Production of New Selves in a Scottish New Town,” 27.

<sup>94</sup> D. C., comment on “The Development of Runcorn to a New Town,” *Facebook* community page, 15 April 2016.

<sup>95</sup> Jane Morton, *From Southgate to Hallwood Park*, 31.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>97</sup> John Topping, “The New Technopolis,” 9.

couple was able to move into one of the Towers' maisonettes.<sup>98</sup> Another man who was among the first to move into Kielder Tower recalls the "lovely big rooms and good neighbours," and that before being allowed to move in an inspector visited his old home to examine the condition of the family's house and furniture.<sup>99</sup> While they never became desired housing for yuppies as Southgate did, Killingworth Towers were also initially very popular, with many residents having come from slum housing in Newcastle.<sup>100</sup> They were willing to run the gamut of local bureaucracy to secure a clean, solid home with modern amenities, and the shared vetting process likely established a degree of trust among residents.

By the mid 1970s, Southgate was 95% occupied and the Killingworth Towers had been completed and were fully occupied.<sup>101</sup> With Southgate's completion coinciding with the opening of a new Department of Environment (DOE) computer center in central Runcorn, the estate was a desirable place to live, and was even home to an MP.<sup>102</sup> The imposing scale of Stirling's squares did not prevent a tight-knit community from forming; former residents recall knowing most of the people in their squares, as children played in the play parks at the center of each block, within view of their parents' apartment balconies.<sup>103</sup> New residents were forging friendships at Killingworth as well. In his memoir of life in the Towers, John Topping writes that his mother initially felt isolated in their new home, and would look longingly out the window

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<sup>98</sup> P.S. comment on "Killingworth Photos and Videos," *Facebook* community page, 23 June 2013.

<sup>99</sup> K.Y., comment on "The Development of Runcorn to a New Town," *Facebook* community page, 22 Jan. 2016.

<sup>100</sup> Stuart Cameron, "Recent Approaches to Problem Council Housing in Tyneside" (Newcastle upon Tyne: Department of Town and Country Planning Working Paper Series, 1987), 26. The yuppie reference comes from Morton, *From Southgate to Hallwood Park*, 31.

<sup>101</sup> Jane Morton, *From Southgate to Hallwood Park*, 31; Peter Kellett, "Killingworth Towers: What Went Wrong? A Case Study of Multi-Storey Housing Failure," *Open House International* 12, 4 (1987): 4-11, at 5.

<sup>102</sup> Tim Mars, "Southgate Saga," *Roof* (Jul.-Aug. 1989): 14-15, at 15.

<sup>103</sup> L.G. and N.J., comments on "The Development of Runcorn to a New Town," *Facebook* community page, 14 Apr. 2016

toward their former home in Walker.<sup>104</sup> But she soon befriended a neighbor who invited her to join her on her regular nine o'clock stroll along the raised walkways into the Citadel; "so my mother would bung me in the pushchair and then we'd weave our way through the Towers to the shops."<sup>105</sup> Such experiences were not rare. One young woman who moved into a flat in the Towers in 1977 recalled her first night:

It was dark, it was raining, no electric and the previous tenants had ripped out everything they could, even the tiles of the walls. The delivery men dumped everything downstairs and left. I was about to break down in tears when there was a knock at the door and the neighbor came in with a tray of sandwiches and hot tea and hot chocolate for the boys.<sup>106</sup>

Through encounters like this, and the routine activities of shopping trips to the town center, supervising children playing in the communal play areas located in each courtyard, and sharing group celebrations like birthday parties or the 1977 Silver Jubilee marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of Elizabeth II's reign, residents formed new friendships and solidarities to replace the relationships left behind in their old neighborhoods.

In addition to these informal networks, Killingworth's leadership hoped the new town could serve as a hothouse environment in which a vibrant cultural life could incubate. Visiting the town in the late 1970s, the journalist John Ardagh wrote that it was "humming with Mothers' Union meetings, beetle and whist drives, mums' morning coffee-parties and amateur drama."<sup>107</sup> The Killingworth Adult Association (KAA) offered evening activities at the local high school, aiming to foster "a community of interests." A brochure from 1970-71 shows the range of choices on offer on a typical Wednesday night: Dressmaking; Beauty on a Budget ("a model-girl appearance need not be expensive. Come and find out how to look your best at all times");

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<sup>104</sup> Women were disproportionately affected by the sense of loneliness and disconnection that commentators dubbed "new town blues." See Judy Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home: Writings on Popular Design and Material Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 148.

<sup>105</sup> John Topping, "The New Technopolis," 12.

<sup>106</sup> L. S., comment on "Killingworth Photos and Videos," *Facebook* community page, 13 August 2015.

<sup>107</sup> John Ardagh, *A Tale of Five Cities*, 225.



Residents celebrating the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977. Long tables were arranged in the courtyards outside the towers, and flags and banners added color to the estate's drab surroundings. Photo by Gail Walker.

Conversational German; Drama; Ladies' Keep Fit; Camera Club; Car Club; Pottery; and Collecting for Pleasure.<sup>108</sup> Roy Gazzard's academic circle had more far-reaching ambitions for Killingworth's cultural life. Gazzard corresponded with an engineering professor and folk culture enthusiast at University of Newcastle, who sent Gazzard a paper arguing that Killingworth, with its totally planned environment and its castle-like Citadel, offered a chance to reverse the decline of Northumbrian folk culture:

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<sup>108</sup> Northumberland County Education Committee, "Interests and Activities in and Around Killingworth, 1970-71" Pamphlet held in Newcastle Central Library Local Studies Room.

The picture one has is of a social and working building in which many activities would go on—Northumbrian dancing, fiddling, piping, stick dressing, photography (for recording vanishing items), architectural studies, historical projects, writing, choirs and even journalism—all directed to maintaining an “image” of Northumberland based on the centuries-old life of the people.<sup>109</sup>

It is unlikely that many of these activities ever sparked enough interest to be offered by the KAA, but its 1970-71 brochure included a reference to the Killingworth Rapper Sword Dance Club.

But that such organized options existed does not mean that the new town was a community of amateur craftspeople, folk dancers, and budding thespians—according to an independent survey of 109 residents taken around 1970, 40 respondents were uninterested in community activities in Killingworth. Many of the apparently apathetic respondents did, however, indicate that if the town had a sports center, swimming baths, a bingo hall, and better pubs, they would be more inclined toward social activities. The existing pubs were a particular sore spot, as “out of 61 men interviewed 48 complained, on the whole strongly, about the pub, decrying the beer and sometimes the price of drinks.”<sup>110</sup> Unsurprisingly, residents in the new town desired the services and facilities available to a mature and fully formed town; they also, for the most part, were more interested in modern leisure activities like sports and bingo than in the social uplift envisaged by the town’s leaders. Many of these desires would soon be fulfilled with the completion of the town center in 1974.

When a BBC commentator visited Killingworth Towers in 1971, with the estate still unfinished and dominated by cranes and construction equipment, he remarked, “the thing that impresses me is the lived-in feeling – it really is a neighbourhood even after just only a year. It really is a very unusual sort of environment, yet women and children here seem so much at home

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<sup>109</sup> W. Fisher Cassie, “Traditional Culture,” 1966. Held in Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/D2.

<sup>110</sup> Juliet Taylor, “Report of a Survey on Community Attitudes in Killingworth Township,” 7. Unpublished student thesis, Hull University. Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/D7.

in it.”<sup>111</sup> In this observer’s eyes, at least, the Towers had become the “vertical village” that Gazzard had envisioned, with new friendship networks replicating the slum communities that they replaced.

Within a decade, though, the Towers were to be termed “difficult to let,” with almost 20% of the apartments unoccupied, and another 50% of residents desiring to leave.<sup>112</sup> In Runcorn, a similarly dramatic crisis gripped Southgate, with an entire block lying abandoned by 1981 because it lacked adequate heating. “The spiral of decline at Southgate has been so rapid that it is hard to believe that it was initially popular and easy to let,” wrote one commentator in 1989.<sup>113</sup> Where did it all go wrong?

### **Cracks in the Façade**

Where indeed? A number of observers posed the question in newspaper articles and architecture journals during the two estates’ terminal years. These assessments blamed a range of factors—utopian architecture, mismanagement, inadequate funding, the tenants themselves, or, usually, a combination of all of these factors. In their short life spans, Southgate and the Towers had become a poster child for what was amiss with modern architecture. Among the residents, suspects accumulated as well. For Southgate’s ills, some blamed the “friggin’ bastard dogs” that barked at all hours, their droppings forming a sludge on the concrete “streets in the sky” when it rained. Some blamed the Vietnamese “boat people” (refugees who fled Vietnam in the aftermath of the Vietnam War and were resettled across Britain, with seven families being ending up in Runcorn) for starting trouble and “running around late at night.” Some blamed the estate’s

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<sup>111</sup> Vernon Sproxton, “The Eighties: Neighbourhood Planning,” BBC typescript, 1971. Quoted in John Topping, “The New Technopolis,” 13.

<sup>112</sup> Peter Kellett, “Killingworth Towers: What Went Wrong?” 6.

<sup>113</sup> Tim Mars, “Southgate Saga,” 15.

design, which “looked like a guinea pig experiment” and trapped residents in a “concrete jungle.”<sup>114</sup> What people could agree on, though, was that by the mid-1980s, Southgate was in trouble. It was plagued by vandalism, drug use, and unemployment.

For both Southgate and the Towers, the slide from a healthy new community to a notorious “sink estate” was dramatic. As with most new homes, both had their share of “teething” problems linked to the design and construction. John Topping’s father liked the sound construction of his new home in the Towers, but immediately after moving in he noticed a problem with the wiring—whenever anyone stepped on one area of the upstairs landing, the apartment’s electricity would short. He discovered that a nail from the floorboard was pushing into the wiring below, which tripped the electricity.<sup>115</sup> Another design oversight had a wider impact on residents in the new estate. After discovering that many apartments in the Towers lacked an emergency exit, the Council hired one local handyman to carve an escape route through the wall of each bathroom into the bathroom of the adjoining apartment. He recalled that he “had to drill through about 9” of concrete then knock it through. Spent most of the winter doing this!”<sup>116</sup> This system could lead to awkward incidents. One resident, on investigating noises in her bathroom, found two neighbor girls who had been frightened by a knock at their door while their parents were away.<sup>117</sup> Such flaws, the result of building hundreds of homes quickly, were relatively easy to fix. Others stemmed from more serious problems related to misconceived designs or attempts to cut costs during construction.

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<sup>114</sup> Comments on “The Development of Runcorn to a New Town,” *Facebook* community page, April 13, 2016, [https://www.facebook.com/groups/288012877904790/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/groups/288012877904790/?ref=br_rs). The information on the Vietnamese families housed in Runcorn comes from Roger Harrison, “Modern and Medieval New Towns: A Comparative Study,” (University of Wales: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1985), 195.

<sup>115</sup> John Topping, *The New Technopolis*, 11.

<sup>116</sup> C. W., comment on “Killingworth Photos and Videos,” *Facebook* community page, 7 Sept 2017.

<sup>117</sup> V. B., comment on “Killingworth Photos and Videos,” *Facebook* community page, 26 Feb 2018.

Some of the most serious difficulties came from Gazzard's deck-access designs. One of the core pieces of Gazzard's plan for the Towers was the idea that they would be connected by upper-level access decks that would keep residents on the upper levels from feeling isolated from their neighbors. His original plan for noise-damping rubber flooring had been scrapped for financial reasons, and by the time the town center opened in 1974, residents living along the walkways were complaining to the Council about the incessant pounding of feet along the concrete decks as people made their way along the raised routes to the center for shopping, recreation, or church.<sup>118</sup> The noise was particularly distressing for people trying to get young children to nap or for adults who worked the night shift. When a rubber coating was eventually applied to the decks, the noise changed from a patter of feet to "a low booming noise which is quieter for people walking along but even noisier for the residents." Faced with continued complaints, the Council chose to block off some of the access routes, forcing residents to follow ground-level routes around the estate.<sup>119</sup>

But even navigating the town on the ground could be difficult for new residents or visitors. Gazzard's design for the Towers had emphasized, as he related, "creating a secure place to which [residents] belonged and which belonged to the place in which it was set. The concept was of a secure area."<sup>120</sup> He imagined the Towers as a place for "gossiping and strolling," asserting that "there is nothing claustrophobic about these courts, they give shelter and enclosure, but the sense of a visual and physical connection with adjacent courts is always there."<sup>121</sup> There is no evidence for whether or not residents in the Towers felt this sense of security when walking

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<sup>118</sup> Stuart Cameron, "Recent Approaches to Problem Council Housing in Tyneside," 25.

<sup>119</sup> "Bid to Muffle Flat Noise," *Platform* (October 1974), 3. GAZ/D17.

<sup>120</sup> Quoted in Paul Barnard, "The Demolition of Killingworth Towers: An Analysis of Perspectives and an Investigation into Their Influences upon the Decision-Making Process," 29. Unpublished student thesis, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1988. GAZ/D19.

<sup>121</sup> Roy Gazzard, "Killingworth Township Interim Housing Report," 7 December 1965, n.p. Roy Gazzard Papers, GAZ/D12.



**The Killingworth Towers from above. The community newspaper noted that many people found the estate disorienting because of its layouts and the similar appearance of the buildings.**

through the estate's enclosed courtyards, framed by imposing, largely identical concrete facades. What was common in the early years was a sense of disorientation. "Is anyone lost?" a 1972 *Platform* article asked its readers. "When you leave the Town Centre can you find your way around?... Do you know which is Ford Tower and which is Dunstan?" The issue featured a pull-out map of the new town so that "you need never be lost in Killingworth again."<sup>122</sup> For those who were reluctant to carry a map everywhere with them, the Council installed metal plates at the entrances to each Tower on which were etched the layout of the estate. Still, navigating the estate was not easy, particularly for outsiders. In another *Platform* article, a student visiting from

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<sup>122</sup> "Is Anyone Lost?" *Platform* (November 1972), 1. GAZ/D17.



The Northumberland County Council installed metal plates with maps of the Killingworth Towers to help residents find their way around the estate.

Nottingham described his first encounter with the town, in which he wandered around the Towers for over almost an hour before finding the building he was looking for: “I suppose any strange place is confusing at first, but everywhere seemed so alike, that for a while I was so lost that I doubt whether I could even have given up my quest and found the bus back to Newcastle.”<sup>123</sup> Navigating the Towers likely became second nature to residents after they had lived there for several months, but when added to the stresses of relocating to a new environment and trying to make new social connections, the disorientation caused by maneuvering around the twenty-seven nearly identical blocks likely added to people’s sense of being uprooted and alone.

New arrivals at Southgate faced similar challenges in adapting to life on a wholly new housing estate. As at Killingworth, the deck-access design was a chief culprit. In early 1975, the

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<sup>123</sup> Tony Colwell, “A Visitor’s Eye-View of Tyneside: First Visit,” *Platform* (March 1973).

Southgate Community Association (SCA), the mouthpiece for Southgate residents, approached the Development Corporation to complain about “intruders making a pest of themselves on the decks.”<sup>124</sup> Some of the culprits were likely young people attracted by the estate’s exciting design (like the above-mentioned visitor who relished racing shopping carts along the decks), but the petition also singled out people from other estates using Southgate’s walkways as a thoroughfare to get to the city center. As at Killingworth, the Development Corporation erected barriers, closed off decks, and laid down rubber to dampen the noise. Faced with unanticipated costs of altering Stirling’s designs, the Corporation began cutting back on the estate’s landscaping budget—tree planting was curtailed, and the budget for groundskeeping reduced.<sup>125</sup> In these early interactions between the Southgate community and the Corporation, the authorities proved responsive to tenant demands, but at the price of cutting services, which would cause new problems for residents.

Another design-related difficulty that arose early on stemmed from the porthole windows that Stirling thought would resonate with Merseysiders’ nautical heritage. While many residents loved the windows and thought they gave the estate a unique look they could take pride in, others found them unwieldy to operate. As Tom Webb, the secretary of the SCA, pointed out to a reporter in 1990, the windows were incredibly difficult for people with mobility problems to operate. “The catches are too high. My missus has to climb on to the kitchen sink to get to them—she’s only small. You get an eight-and-a-half-month pregnant woman and it’s just not on. It’s not a major problem, but these things add up.”<sup>126</sup> For one particular resident, Southgate’s portholes posed a challenge of an altogether different nature. The man, a 36-year-old father of four identified in local papers as Mr. Dutch, routinely availed himself of his large porthole

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<sup>124</sup> Jane Morton, *From Southgate to Hallwood Park*, 33.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>126</sup> Quoted in Brian Hatton, “The Future in Ruins,” *Blueprint* (Sept 1990): 46-50, at 49.

window to disport naked at the exact time each morning that a busload of nurses went by outside his window. Standing at the window with his arms and legs outstretched, “he just looked like God,” a bemused nurse told the court during Dutch’s 1981 trial for lewd conduct. Dutch’s attorney blamed the architect, arguing that the porthole windows “seem to have been designed specifically to bring such cases as this to court.”<sup>127</sup> In language that would have impressed Roy Gazzard but failed to move the judge, Dutch claimed that Southgate’s windows “stirred the latent demons in his soul.”<sup>128</sup> Dutch’s case likely would have been simply dismissed as a bizarre and humorous punch line in the early 1970s (according to Michael Wilford, Stirling’s partner, when he learned of the case the architect “hooted with laughter and made some unprintable remark about unauthorized extensions”), but in Britain’s changed political climate of the early 1980s, it was one more example of the failure of utopian designs as they confronted messy realities.<sup>129</sup> As we will see, Dutch’s reaction to blame Southgate’s architect was part of a broader cultural turn against the design of large-scale housing estates.

### **Managed Decline**

Besides these immediate concerns with flaws in the estates’ design or construction, more intractable problems arose for both estates in the late 1970s. These challenges were rooted not in the estates’ physical structure, but rather in large-scale political and economic shifts, and in the way the local housing authorities managed the estates. In Killingworth, the nub of the change in the Towers’ fortunes was the nationwide reorganization of local government that resulted from the 1972 Local Government Act. Because Killingworth was a locally financed new town lacking

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<sup>127</sup> Quoted in Hugh Pearman, “What Went Wrong at Runcorn?” *Architect* (December 2010).  
[http://www.architectmagazine.com/design/urbanism-planning/what-went-wrong-at-runcorn\\_o](http://www.architectmagazine.com/design/urbanism-planning/what-went-wrong-at-runcorn_o).

<sup>128</sup> Quoted in Richard Meier et. al., “An American Tribute to James Stirling,” *ANY: Architecture New York* No. 2, (Sept/Oct 1993): 48-55, at 53.

<sup>129</sup> Michael Wilford, quoted in *Ibid*.

the buffer of a Whitehall-funded development corporation, the reorganization had a direct impact on the town's management. When the act went into effect in 1974, Killingworth was no longer governed by Northumberland County Council (NCC), which had provided the majority of the funding to build the new town. Now, it fell under the jurisdiction of the North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough in the expanded county of Tyne and Wear. Roy Gazzard contended that the prospect of losing Killingworth prompted NCC to abandon their careful planning program in favor of working with speculative builders who offered a quicker return on their investments.<sup>130</sup> He also speculated that North Tyneside was less committed to Killingworth than Northumbria had been because it had "less of a castle heritage."<sup>131</sup> Writing in 1985, he described the changeover as disastrous for the new town—the Development Group was disbanded and "what had been a stable well-rooted community thereafter began to lose its identity. The early idealism faded as the original tenants graduated as owner occupiers, leaving their places to be taken by footloose or problem families for which Killingworth's high density accommodation was quite unsuited."<sup>132</sup> At first glance, Gazzard's apparent non sequitur—linking government reorganization to social breakdown and ominous "problem families"—sounds like the cranky reaction of an architect whose high-flown plans have collided with reality. Was there any basis for his splenetic response?

The political shake-up of 1974 did, in fact, have a decisive impact on Killingworth's fortunes, and the Towers were particularly affected. It was not primarily the abandonment of Gazzard's original plans for the town that sparked the change, but specific management decisions regarding the Towers. A key turning point came with the handover in 1974, when the

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<sup>130</sup> Roy Gazzard, "Killingworth and the New Towns: Triumph or Disaster?" *Platform* (March 1973).

<sup>131</sup> Quoted in John Topping, *The New Technopolis*, 224.

<sup>132</sup> Roy Gazzard, "New-Town Initiatives in the North East of England," in Richard Chapman, *Public Policy Studies*, 90.

Towers went from being the special development project of a rural authority (NCC) to yet another urban housing estate under the care of an overburdened Tyneside council. North Tyneside Council immediately centralized the estate's management in Wallsend, a Newcastle suburb six miles away, and transferred the Towers' resident housing manager elsewhere.<sup>133</sup> At the same time, the new authority introduced a policy banning families with young children from housing more than three stories high. The Towers' housing was composed entirely of maisonettes that were intended for families, and at the time of the policy change this demographic almost exclusively populated the estate. Suddenly, all families housed above the third floor in these blocks (which ranged from six to ten stories), were compelled to move to low-rise housing.<sup>134</sup> This dispersal of many of the Towers' original residents severed many of the delicate social threads that had formed in the estate's first half-decade. Over the following years, childless couples and single adults trickled into the over-sized homes to replace them, but never in enough numbers to keep the estate full.

To compensate for the flagging demand for homes in the Towers, the Council began offering them as the sole option for Tynesiders most desperately in need of housing, like those on housing waiting lists and homeless people. Following the Labour government's Housing (Homeless Persons) Act of 1977, North Tyneside, in common with local authorities across the country, found itself having to provide housing for its most vulnerable members, such as pregnant women and people with health issues. As John Boughton observes, this well-meaning and in many ways commendable legislation had unintended consequences for public housing; since the Act failed to provide any additional funding for local authorities, overburdened councils often concentrated their most needy citizens in council housing, which signaled that

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<sup>133</sup> Peter Kellett, "Killingworth Towers: What Went Wrong?" 8.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

public housing was only a place of last resort.<sup>135</sup> It was the beginning of the trend of “residualisation,” which would spike dramatically over the following decade in council estates across the country, particularly “problem estates” like the Towers and Southgate.

According to the 1981 census, in comparison with the rest of Killingworth the Towers had an exceptionally high proportion of young adults, single parent families (allocated to the estate in spite of the policy of not housing children in upper-story homes), and unemployed people.<sup>136</sup> “Under-occupation” became common, as in the case of one young woman who, on applying to the Council for housing in 1982, was offered a home in Dunstan Tower. “I was a single person,” she recalled thirty years later, “but was offered a three bedroomed maisonette. At that time there did not appear to be a lot of children living nearby and most of the properties were vacant.... I lived on the ground level and my experience was of single men not much older than teenagers living above. One tenant played the same record over and over for days at a time.”<sup>137</sup> Trying perhaps to make a virtue of necessity, the Council reached out to Newcastle University and Newcastle Polytechnic to see if they were interested in using the Towers for student housing, but both universities declined the proposal.<sup>138</sup>

Seeking ever more widely to fill the estate’s empty homes, the Council began advertising the housing in local newspapers.<sup>139</sup> When that failed, they resorted to advertising in Durham Prison, and soon after that, as a 1988 sociological study contended, tenants began to experience “specific problems relating to crime, personal assault, household disturbances and drugs; all of these became an expected and common aspect of the life on the estate for the tenants.”<sup>140</sup> It is

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<sup>135</sup> John Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, 143-44.

<sup>136</sup> Stuart Cameron, “Recent Approaches to Problem Council Housing in Tyneside,” 26.

<sup>137</sup> K.B., comment on “Killingworth Photos and Videos,” *Facebook* community page, 1 July 2013.

<sup>138</sup> Peter Kellett, “Killingworth Towers: What Went Wrong?” 9.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>140</sup> Marjorie Bulos and Stephen Walker, “Britain’s Tower Blocks: The Demolition

unlikely that there was (as the article seems to suggest) a direct connection between housing former prison inmates in the Towers and the estate's crime level. What is clear is that by creating a situation where only the most desperate groups were being housed in the Towers, the Council was contributing to the stigmatization of the estate as an "anti-social" and crime-ridden place. A resident of a neighboring estate during the 1970s recalled hearing rumors about ex-prisoners filling the Towers; such news further denigrated the estate's reputation, which already had nicknames like "the barracks" and "Alcatraz."<sup>141</sup> The Council's management of the estate compounded the Towers' image—rooted in Gazzard's design—as a bleak and unfriendly place, effacing the Towers' early years from popular memory. Moreover, by relaxing the vetting rules for the estate, the Council alienated the remaining original tenants, who felt that the Towers were becoming a "dumping ground" for "problem families."<sup>142</sup> Part of the original sense of community was rooted in the feeling of trust that the vetting policy inspired, but by the end of the 1970s, this trust had evaporated.

By 1981, the Towers were classed as "difficult-to-let," with 20% of its homes lay empty and 61% categorized as under-occupied.<sup>143</sup> While the buildings had no structural problems, and were unaffected by the dampness or poor heating that afflicted many system-built blocks built at the same time, they failed to attract new residents. Combined with the loss of income from this empty housing, there was a simultaneous spike in the estate's costs. The many empty properties beckoned to would-be vandals, who damaged and absconded with pipework in unoccupied homes, which resulted in flooding in the surrounding properties. Those quirky escape hatches

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Controversy," *The Netherlands Journal of Housing and Environmental Research* 3, 1 (1988): 39-59, at 49.

<sup>141</sup> V.B., comment on "Killingworth Photos and Videos," *Facebook* community page, 1 July 2013.

<sup>142</sup> Peter Kellett, "Killingworth Towers: What Went Wrong?" 6. John Topping also recalls rumors spreading among Towers tenants that their estate was becoming a "dumping ground" for the Council's problem tenants. John Topping, *The New Technopolis*, 189.

<sup>143</sup> Bulos and Walker, "Britain's Tower Blocks: The Demolition Controversy," 49.

connecting neighboring bathrooms became a source of worry for residents, as through them intruders who broke into one empty property could work their way along a whole row of homes.<sup>144</sup> Clogged rubbish chutes, boarded-up windows, stray dogs, and graffiti greeted investigators by the middle of the decade.<sup>145</sup> Although the Council set up a special task force in 1984 to “turn the estate around” through close management and consultation with the residents, it proceeded with a policy of deliberately running the estate into the ground by shutting down all empty properties, cutting off their electricity, boarding their windows, and placing sheet metal over the doors.<sup>146</sup> These stopgap measures may have deterred vandals in the short-run, but they effectively signaled to the Towers’ remaining residents that the Council had no serious plans to rehabilitate the estate. This impression was confirmed in February 1986, when without consulting the residents, the Council decided to contract a private company to demolish the estate and replace it with tracts of typical low-rise housing.

As the demolition crews prepared to descend on the Killingworth Towers, Southgate was nearing the end of its short life. Here, a transfer of housing management also played a large role in the estate’s demise, but the source of Southgate’s problems was the district-heating scheme. By the end of the 1970s, the heating system had gone from a visionary dream of cheap high tech collectivized energy to a prohibitively expensive albatross. It was meant to be an extremely cheap source of fuel, burning the final “tar” of the oil refining process—so cheap that Corporation official saw no point in installing individual meters. Tenants would simply be billed yearly at a flat rate calculated based on the previous year’s consumption. At first, all went according to plan. For one working-class respondent to a 1975 survey, expenses at Southgate compared favorably to his Liverpool home: “I find the rents reasonable. I was paying £7 a week

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<sup>144</sup> L.C., comment on “Killingworth Photos and Videos,” *Facebook* community page, 16 Sept. 2013.

<sup>145</sup> Peter Kellett, “Killingworth Towers: What Went Wrong?” 6.

<sup>146</sup> Bulos and Walker, “Britain’s Tower Blocks: The Demolition Controversy,” 49.



Original model of the northeast portion of Southgate, with the district heating plant, ironically nicknamed the "Great White Hope," visible at the estate's top left corner. The bridge leading north towards the shopping center is at the bottom left.

for, 2 rooms in Liverpool in which you couldn't swing a cat. I'm paying £2 more now for full central heating and a nice house."<sup>147</sup> As oil prices soared during the 1970s, though, residents continued to consume the same amount of "free" heat, having no incentive to cut back on their consumption of a communal resource.<sup>148</sup> The climbing cost of energy was reflected in the rent. A family who moved into one of the estate's deck-level four-person maisonettes in 1974 owed a weekly rent of £8.55, including the cost of heat. That number had leaped to £10.85 by mid-1976, climbed to £13.67 the following year, and reached 14.53 in mid 1978, four years after the family arrived.<sup>149</sup> As the Corporation added the spiraling cost of heating Southgate to the residents' rent, an exodus to neighboring developments began. Southgate residents' heating costs in 1978 were triply expensive than residents in neighboring estates whose homes that were heated through

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<sup>147</sup> Patricia Prescott-Clarke and Richard Stowell, *Runcorn: A Second Look* (London: Social and Community Planning Research, 1975), 23.

<sup>148</sup> Tim Mars, "Southgate Saga," 15.

<sup>149</sup> Jane Morton, *From Southgate to Hallwood Park*, 35.

individual gas-fired boilers.<sup>150</sup> In effect, living on Southgate became ruinously expensive for any working families, who had to shell out more and more of their weekly incomes on housing. A 1977 housing report noted an alarming level “moonlight flits” on the part of households who had fallen behind in their rent due to the heating.<sup>151</sup> It was less of a burden for families on housing benefit, since heating was covered by their state housing benefit.<sup>152</sup>

The result was a shocking turnaround in Southgate’s fortunes, as the estate went from a chic and prestigious place to live to an estate increasingly populated by families with little recourse for other housing options. Like at Killingworth, the Corporation quickly dropped its initial vetting requirements, which had required residents to be employed and able to afford the housing costs; now applicants were admitted “with the sole eligibility factor that they must be able to show a clean rent book.”<sup>153</sup> Also as at Killingworth, this management policy compounded a design-based difficulty with an image crisis, as Southgate gained a reputation as a place for “problem families” on the periphery of respectable society.

For longtime residents who had stuck with Southgate despite the rising rents the housing policies were a palpable source of resentment. According to a 1983 survey, residents generally liked their homes, appreciating the warmth and hot water supplied by the district heating (but disliking the associated cost). People mainly complained about litter, poor cleaning of public spaces, dog noise and excrement, vandalism, and hooliganism—all complaints leveled at the way the authorities failed to enforce tenancy requirements and invest in the estates’ maintenance.<sup>154</sup> For one former resident, the problem with Southgate was that “the Housing Corporation decided

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Runcorn Development Corporation, “Southgate Estate Review: Summary of Meeting 20<sup>th</sup> December 1977,” 1.

<sup>152</sup> Tim Mars, “Southgate Saga,” 15.

<sup>153</sup> Jane Morton, *From Southgate to Hallwood Park*, 35.

<sup>154</sup> Warrington and Runcorn Development Corporation, “Southgate Residents’ Survey,” August 1983. CRO, NTW 21c. 13.

to put all their ‘rotten eggs’ in one basket,” which drove out the ordinary working-class residents.<sup>155</sup> Another felt that Southgate’s decline was “what happens when you put ‘society’s undesirables’ all in one place.”<sup>156</sup> What these complaints reveal is the erosion of trust, both laterally among residents, who divided between the “respectable” original residents and the new “problem families,” and between the residents and the Corporation.

These local problems played out against a series of changes at the regional and national levels that decisively influenced Southgate’s and Runcorn’s fortunes. One economic factor in the estate’s decline was the lack of sufficient employment in the area, reflecting a general economic downturn and loss of jobs across Merseyside in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>157</sup> Part of the rationale for building the new town (besides moving people from overcrowded neighborhoods in inner Liverpool) was to attract new industries to the area, which would receive a government grant for moving to the new town.<sup>158</sup> It was the prospect of a new home and a new job in one of these industries that had drawn many people to leave Liverpool and settle in the new town, but by the mid-1970s many residents still had to commute into the city. A 1977 Corporation investigation found that 26% of workers on the estate traveled to Liverpool for work, a substantially higher number than Runcorn’s other estates.<sup>159</sup> I get woken up every morning on my estate at 5.30 a.m.,” complained one woman responding to a 1975 survey. “It’s the men off to work in Liverpool.”<sup>160</sup> Several respondents to the same survey complained that Runcorn was failing to attract industry permanently, and many linked it to the terms of the government’s industrial

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<sup>155</sup> M.R., comment on “The Development of Runcorn to a New Town,” *Facebook* community page, 9 December 2011.

<sup>156</sup> D.C., comment on “The Development of Runcorn to a New Town,” *Facebook* community page, 15 April 2015.

<sup>157</sup> See Richard Meegan, “Paradise Postponed: The Growth and Decline of Merseyside’s Outer Estates,” in Philip Cooke, ed., *Localities: The Changing Face of Urban Britain* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 198-234.

<sup>158</sup> Anthony Alexander, *Britain’s New Towns*, 98-99.

<sup>159</sup> Runcorn Development Corporation, “Southgate Estate Review: Summary of Meeting 20<sup>th</sup> December 1977,” 1.

<sup>160</sup> Patricia Prescott-Clarke and Richard Stowell, *Runcorn: A Second Look*, 17.

subsidies. As one worker living in Southgate told investigators, “You don't know in Runcorn how long your job is going to last. Firms close down and move away with their government grant machinery and you are on the dole.” Other respondents confirmed the man’s sour view. “The smaller firms on the Astmoor (trading estate) come for the government grant, stop a couple of years, and move out again,” complained a pensioner. “They get the money and machinery, then move the machinery elsewhere.” Not only were the jobs missing, but the ones that there were often paid too little. A Southgate worker said, “You can work 4 nights a week here, 15 hours a night, for £24 a week. How can a man manage on that?”<sup>161</sup> While larger employers like the YKK zip factory stayed in the town, the lack of stable and remunerative employment from smaller light industries compounded Southgate’s existing difficulties.<sup>162</sup> As the estate’s rents skyrocketed in tandem with the heating costs, by 1978 well over half of the Southgate man’s paycheck would go towards rent.

Coupled with these economic woes were other policy changes at the national level that affected the entire New Town program. Following a series of studies into unemployment, poverty, and vandalism in Britain’s inner cities, Peter Shore, the head of the Department of Environment, announced that the government would begin winding down the New Town Development Corporations to divert resources towards the nation’s beleaguered cities.<sup>163</sup> In the same week that he announced a heightened investment in inner cities, Shore announced a curtailment of resources for new towns. As Shore described it the policy was a zero-sum game: “Increased expenditure on programmes for inner areas can, in present circumstances, come only

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 17-18.

<sup>162</sup> The brewing conglomerate Bass Charrington, on the other hand, built the largest brewery in Europe only to shut it down within two decades, writing off a huge investment. See David W. Gutzke, “Runcorn Brewery: The Unofficial History of a Corporate Disaster,” *Social History* 41, 81 (May 2008):215-251.

<sup>163</sup> One key study, under the auspices of the national charity Shelter, took place in Liverpool’s Granby area in the late 1960s and early 1970s. See Des McConaghy, *Another Chance for Cities: SNAP 69/72* (Liverpool, 1972). For an excellent study of the planning aspects of Britain’s inner-city crisis, see Otto Saumarez Smith, “The Inner City Crisis.”

from a marginal redistribution of current resources, and this with difficulty. We shall need to see whether the new towns can help with this process.”<sup>164</sup> What this meant for Southgate is that it became something of a political football in the late 1970s, as the Halton Borough Council, which was expected to assume control over the new town’s estates, protested that maintaining the Southgate would be too much of a burden on its slim resources. The Council estimated that taking on Runcorn’s housing estates would mean raising its own rents by £2 or raising local rates by 6%.<sup>165</sup> Michael Heseltine, the Conservative Environmental Secretary, gave Halton a brief reprieve in 1981 by transferring all of Runcorn’s housing management to the Warrington New Town Development Corporation (Warrington was a rival new town across the Mersey) until 1989, but the move was understood to be a stopgap measure.

Handed this short reprieve, the Corporation (now locally known as “Devco”) cast about for a permanent solution for their Southgate headache. As the 1983 residents’ survey had made clear, most Southgate tenants still liked their homes but resented the estate’s management and heating expenses. If the Corporation could improve Southgate’s security, fill its empty homes, and fix the district heating, the estate could be salvaged. The issue of heating was particularly challenging, since Devco found the prospect of refitting the estate with new metered gas furnaces for each home to be prohibitively expensive. They experimented with keeping the district heating in place but adding individual meters rather than charging a flat rate, but that led people to cut back drastically on their use, making the system less efficient and more expensive to run. Without a steady flow of heat in the winter months, condensation along the oversized windows also emerged as a new scourge for the tenants; what had been warm and dry homes became

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<sup>164</sup> Quoted in Saumarez-Smith, “The Inner City Crisis,” 12.

<sup>165</sup> Jane Morton, *From Southgate to Hallwood Park*, 37.

vulnerable to chill, damp, and mold.<sup>166</sup> A community worker explained the impact of the new metering system on tenants:

Now the tickets cost £4.25 for 200 watts, they last between thirty-six and forty-eight hours. Before the heating used to cost £7.50 for a whole week of twenty-four-hour heating. That was if you were on the dole. Otherwise it was about £9, and of course people started moaning is they were going out to work all day and had to pay for heating they weren't using.<sup>167</sup>

When Jackie Owen complained to Devco that her walls were accumulating a layer of black mold, which had even gotten into her baby's clothes, "they told me just to rub the walls down with raw bleach. Great!"<sup>168</sup>

Owen's complaint points to the rifts that had opened between Southgate residents and the estate's management by the mid-1980s, with tenants growing increasingly frustrated at Devco's apparent apathy. "It is not unusual to wait five years for one repair to be done here," resident Tom Webb told a journalist in the late 1980s. "It took them four-and-a-half years to come and fix my window catch, and when they eventually came, they said that my type of screws were no longer made."<sup>169</sup> There was a brief thaw in 1984 when Devco, following the example set by a government-funded Priority Estates Project (PEP) at Bolton, attempted to revive Southgate's fortunes through more intensive management. PEP was an initiative launched in the late 1970s to restore Britain's most stigmatized estates through four interventions: intensive local management offices on each estate; tenant consultation; central government commitment to experimentation in housing; neutral outside parties working closely with authorities and residents to address grievances and improve management.<sup>170</sup> Such experiments had been markedly successful at even

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<sup>166</sup> Tim Mars, "Southgate Saga," 15.

<sup>167</sup> Quoted in Brian Hatton, "The Future in Ruins," 49.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Anne Power, "Area-Based Poverty and Resident Empowerment," *Urban Studies* 33, 9 (1996): 1535-1564, at 1546.

the most deprived estates, such as at Broadwater Farm in North London.<sup>171</sup> Devco established a management office in King James Square, at the center of Southgate, which was able to respond quickly to residents' concerns and requests for repairs. Immediately, vacancies were drastically reduced and by 1986, there were waiting lists for some property types. When Devco reinstated their vetting policy, they found that people became interested in staying long-term. When this three-year experiment at "stabilizing" Southgate wrapped up in 1986, vandalism and petty crime had dropped dramatically and the relationship between the residents and the Corporation had improved.<sup>172</sup>

The reprieve did not last, though. As Devco wound down its experiment with responsive management, it was searching for a way to unload Southgate with a minimum of public funds. In a 1985 letter to tenants, the Corporation announced its intention to bring Southgate into step with the Conservative government's priorities: "As you know, the Government is trying to reduce public expenditure." The letter explained that the Corporation was talking with private developers and housing associations to find ways of "broadening the social mix" on the estate (i.e. bringing in wealthier residents) and improve parts of the estate to allow for their sale.<sup>173</sup> Freezing any new expenditure on Southgate's built fabric, Devco sought bids from housing associations in the area to take over the estate at minimal burden on the public purse. Finally, in 1989 they made an abrupt announcement to Southgate's residents that the estate would be demolished and the land sold off to private developers. Like the Killingworth Towers, Southgate faced demolition barely more than a decade after its completion, at an enormous cost in public funds as well as a huge social and—as one medical study of Runcorn residents concluded—

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<sup>171</sup> See Anne Power, *Estates on the Edge: The Social Consequences of Mass Housing in Northern Europe* (Houndmills, UK: MacMillan, 1997), 195-215. For a brief and engaging account, see Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: An Intimate History*, 125-29.

<sup>172</sup> Jane Morton, *From Southgate to Hallwood Park*, 43-44.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

psychological cost for its residents.<sup>174</sup> After years of searching for low-cost fixes and short-term stabilizing measures rather than long-term solutions, both estates were written off as irredeemable “problem estates” fit only for clearance. The reason destruction was presented as the only alternative rests as much in national politics as in local choices.

### Utopias on Trial

The issues that plagued Southgate and Killingworth Towers were imbricated in a nationwide eclipse of both modernist architecture and council housing more broadly. When Margaret Thatcher took office in 1979, nearly half of British people lived in council housing. Thirty years later that number had dropped to 12 percent.<sup>175</sup> There were a range of factors that contributed this steep decline in council housing, some stretching back well before Thatcher took office intending to “roll back the frontiers of the state.”<sup>176</sup> For instance, promoting property ownership through the sale of council houses to their occupants, one of the central planks of Thatcher’s platform, was a practice that went back to Harold Macmillan’s tenure as Secretary of Housing during the mid-1950s.<sup>177</sup> The practice had continued fitfully throughout the 1960s and 1970s, especially under Conservative authorities.<sup>178</sup> But these earlier programs had not been widely popular, and had allowed local councils to reinvest the profits from sales in building more

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<sup>174</sup> D.S. Halpern and J. Reid, “Effect of Unexpected Demolition Announcement on Health of Residents,” *British Medical Journal* 304 (9 May 1992): 1229-30. There is a growing body of research on the impact of displacing low-income public housing tenants in the name of “regeneration” and “mixed communities.” See Richard Thomas, et. al., “Housing Improvement and Self-Reported Mental Distress among Council Estate Residents,” *Social Science and Medicine* 60 (2005): 2773-83. A US study raising similar questions is Lynne C. Manzo, Rachel G. Kleit and Dawn Couch, “Moving Three Times Is Like Having Your House on Fire Once”: The Experience of Place and Impending Displacement among Public Housing Residents,” *Urban Studies* 45, 9 (August 2008): 1855-78.

<sup>175</sup> Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: An Intimate History*, 98.

<sup>176</sup> Margaret Thatcher, “Speech to the College of Europe,” 20 Sept 1988. Margaret Thatcher Foundation website, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107332>.

<sup>177</sup> Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: An Intimate History*, 92.

<sup>178</sup> Ben Jones, “Slum Clearance, Privatization and Residualization: The Practices and Politics of Council Housing in Mid-Twentieth-Century England,” *Twentieth Century British History* 21, 4 (1 December 2010): 510-539.

public housing. Thatcher's 1980 Right to Buy legislation was calculated to eviscerate the foundations of public housing in Britain. It gave council tenants the opportunity to buy their homes at steep discounts (as much as 50% in 1980, raised to 60% in 1984), and empowered the DOE to compel recalcitrant local authorities to comply with the sales.<sup>179</sup> Crucially, local councils were barred from using the profits to expand or improve their housing stock.

The end results of Right to Buy benefitted relatively affluent renters who could afford to buy a council-owned home, but were disastrous for the majority of tenants, for multi-story housing blocks (the apartments of which were less desirable for would-be buyers than stand-alone houses), and public housing in general. The "residualisation" process, already underway in some estates following the 1977 Housing Act, now turned all of Britain's public housing into "a residual or poor law service which offers undesirable second best properties to the poor."<sup>180</sup> Over the course of Thatcher's tenure, the ranks of Britain's most desperate rose dramatically, with the homeless population climbing from 76,342 to 178,867 between 1980 and 1991. At the same time, the government slashed local housing subsidies by almost half—from £2.13 billion in 1980 to £1.21 billion a decade later. In this restricted climate, local authorities were more likely to look for cheap, easy fixes to the nagging issues that afflict estates like Southgate and Killingworth Towers.

At a party rally in 1986, Margaret Thatcher celebrated the sale of the millionth council house as a victory for democracy. "The great political reform of the last century was to enable more and more people to have a vote," she told the assembled Conservative delegates. "Now the great Tory reform of this century is to enable more and more people to own property. Popular capitalism is nothing less than a crusade to enfranchise the many in the economic life of the

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<sup>179</sup> John Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, 170-71.

<sup>180</sup> Ray Forrest and Alan Murie, *Selling the Welfare State: The Privatisation of Public Housing* (London: Routledge, 1991), 11. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 175.

nation.”<sup>181</sup> In Thatcher’s equation, home ownership was equivalent to a vote in the creation of a just and democratic society. For those lacking the money to be a part of this property owning democracy, Thatcher was working to devise a consolation prize—the “regeneration” of large estates by de-modernizing them through surgical techniques like removing the elevated walkways and dividing up communal spaces. Her architectural guru who inspired this decision was Alice Coleman, a professor of Geography at King’s College, London.

Thatcher arranged a meeting with Coleman in 1986 and gave her funding to undertake a £50 million project to redesign a number of “problem estates” by altering blocks that, as Coleman put it, “breed anti-social people.”<sup>182</sup> Coleman was riding a wave of popularity (coupled with an equal measure of notoriety) at the time, following the 1985 publication of her book *Utopia on Trial*, which identified an array of “design disadvantages” afflicting modernist housing blocks. Drawing on the American writers Jane Jacobs and Oscar Newman, Coleman contended that the built forms of modernist housing blocks fostered crime.<sup>183</sup> The “streets in the sky” favored by 1960s architects were perfect for criminals since they offered little opportunity for public surveillance and had many exits by which to escape police. Coleman criticized stairwells, lifts, and lawns open to the public as failing to provide “defensible space”—neither public nor private, they made it impossible to identify who belonged and who was an unwelcome intruder.

In language that resonated with Thatcher’s own rhetoric of personal responsibility, Coleman argued that moral breakdown could be tied to the physical design of estates. Careful to

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<sup>181</sup> Margaret Thatcher, “Speech to Conservative Party Conference,” 10 Oct. 1986. Margaret Thatcher Foundation website, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106498>.

<sup>182</sup> Quoted in Ludovic Hunter-Tilney, “Architecture: Paradise Lost,” *New Statesman*, 12 March 2012. <https://www.newstatesman.com/art/2012/03/coleman-thatcher-interview>

<sup>183</sup> For an analysis of how Coleman transferred Newman’s North American concept of “defensible space” to British policy, see Jane M. Jacobs and Loretta Lees, “Defensible Space on the Move: Revisiting the Urban Geography of Alice Coleman,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37 5 (Sept 2013): 1559-83.

avoid the accusation of architectural determinism, she argued, “Human beings are all individuals, and react in different ways. At one end of the spectrum there are a few who will always rise above adversity, no matter how appalling their environment, while at the other end there are a few who will always be sluts or criminals, even in ideal conditions.”<sup>184</sup> Bad designs did not force people into crime, she claimed, but it made them extremely likely to fall into it given the right circumstances. Coupled with this moralizing language, Coleman examined public housing in pathological terms: problem estates “breed their own anti-social elements,” and Utopian design even caused “psychiatric illness.”<sup>185</sup>

Coleman buttressed this language of moral crisis with a pretention to scientific precision. Together with her Design Disadvantage Team, she sleuthed around a number of London estates, noting the presence of “variables,” including the size of blocks, the number of dwellings per entrance, the number of stories, overhead walkways, and the layouts of corridors. Her team counted up indicators of faulty design like graffiti, litter, damage, urine, and feces, from which she compiled a rigorous Design Disadvantage Score. Not surprisingly, large council estates scored exceptionally poorly—modernist blocks, contended Coleman, were “not only financial disasters; they are also human disasters that sear many lives with traumatic experiences.”<sup>186</sup> Not poverty or unemployment, but rather design coupled with the weak character of the estates’ residents was the chief culprit in producing urban crime and social breakdown. “Flats create anonymity, not community.... Only criminals profit from anonymity,” she later wrote.<sup>187</sup> Her proposed remedy was to halt construction on large estates and to reshape existing blocks in a way that would encourage territoriality and a sense of individualism and ownership among

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<sup>184</sup> Alice Coleman, *Utopia on Trial*, 20.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-71.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>187</sup> Alice Coleman, “The Psychology of Housing,” 10.

residents—sensibilities that clashed with the ideals embedded in public housing, but gelled perfectly with the Thatcherite view of housing.

Among academics, Coleman’s work was poorly received both for its politics and its science. Critics labeled her argument “simplistic” and charged *Utopia on Trial* with drawing on and amplifying New Right ideas in Britain.<sup>188</sup> As one critique summarized Coleman’s philosophy of housing: “Utopia: Modern Movement: public housing . . . Bad; Welfare State: planning: public housing . . . Bad; Natural Selection: Free market: house-and-garden . . . Good.”<sup>189</sup> The architectural theorist Bill Hillier observed that Coleman made no allowance for the fact that larger buildings housed a larger population. He pointed out that when judged according to the number of “disadvantage indicators” per head, large estates actually fared better than smaller ones.<sup>190</sup>

But academic rigor and public appeal are seldom directly related, and Coleman’s views fit snugly into the emerging common sense of 1980s Britain. Armed with Coleman’s scientific proof of modern design’s anti-social influence, investigators across the country combed over council estates in search of disadvantage indicators.<sup>191</sup> As Ben Campkin argues in his history of urban regeneration in south London, Coleman’s research “provided a convenient ‘independent’ scientific justification for the government’s drastic scaling back of public housing provision.”<sup>192</sup> At both Killingworth and Runcorn, Coleman’s arguments—and the turn against modernist design of which they were a part—played a key role in the decision to demolish the Towers and Southgate.

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<sup>188</sup> Stella Lowry, “Families and Flats,” *British Medical Journal* 300 (January 1990): 245-47.

<sup>189</sup> Alan Lipman and Howard Harris, “Dystopian Aesthetics—A Refusal from “Nowhere,” *Design Studies* 8 1 (January, 1987): 33-40, at 35.

<sup>190</sup> Bill Hillier, “City of Alice’s Dreams,” *Architects’ Journal* 184, 28 (1986): 39-41.

<sup>191</sup> Like Coleman, few of these investigators paid attention to issues of estate management or social factors like unemployment and the effects of racial segregation in their studies. An example of this trend treated in Chapter 4 is Robin Abrams, “Byker Revisited.”

<sup>192</sup> Ben Campkin, *Remaking London*, 93.

As it weighed the options available for dealing with the Towers in 1985 and 1986, the North Tyneside Council continued to board up unused units while shutting down communication channels with the estates' residents.<sup>193</sup> Tenants had petitioned the council to install steel plate security doors at the top of the Towers' nine elevator shafts to deter vandals from breaking in and controlling the lifts, to install security doors with intercoms at the main entrances, and to remove barriers on the estates walkways.<sup>194</sup> While these were relatively cheap alterations, the Council was looking for a more permanent solution. Three options emerged for dealing with the estate. The first proposed turning the Towers over to a private developer who would demolish parts of the estate, improve others, and build conventional terraced homes for sale on the cleared ground. One design recommendation included lopping off the structures' top floors to make them conform to Alice Coleman's preferred building scale. This option was appealing since it limited the Council's financial burden—most of the funds would come through a government Urban Development Grant (UDG) paid directly to the private developer.<sup>195</sup> The second option, and the most expensive one for the Council, was for the Council to completely demolish and redevelop the estate with two-story houses. The third and least expensive option (though since UDGs were not available to local authorities, it would involve more expense for the Council than the first option) was to improve the Towers through targeted repairs and design modifications.<sup>196</sup> For this option, the North Tyneside Architects' Department conducted an evaluation of the estate based on Coleman's ideas, and recommended alterations that would enhance surveillance of the

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<sup>193</sup> Bulos and Walker, "Britain's Tower Blocks: The Demolition Controversy," 49.

<sup>194</sup> John Topping, *The New Technopolis*, 215. The Council had erected the barriers in 1980 to reduce foot traffic between blocks, but in response many people tried to climb around them, leading to one death and several injuries.

<sup>195</sup> Urban Development Grants were introduced in 1982 to encourage private investment in urban redevelopment, and simultaneously to cut back on municipal spending. Carol-Ann Beswick and Sasha Tsenkova, "Overview of Urban Regeneration Policies," in Sasha Tenkova, ed., *Urban Regeneration: Learning from the British Experience* (Calgary: University of Calgary, 2002), 13.

<sup>196</sup> Bulos and Walker, "Britain's Tower Blocks: The Demolition Controversy," 49.

Towers' public spaces.<sup>197</sup> In effect, however, the third option had already been closed off. One councilor referred to the Towers in 1985 as a "headache" for which the Council had no plans. Even as the housing department toyed with the idea of setting up a tenants' co-operative to involve residents in direct management, they met resistance. As one housing official said, "the councilors just weren't interested. The commitment to save the towers was never there politically."<sup>198</sup> Indeed, the opposite was the case, as demolition appeared to be a potential political victory among residents in Killingworth's low-rise estates, who complained about the Towers' "image problem."<sup>199</sup> Homeowners and property developers especially favored demolishing the estate because of the buoyant effect they expected it to have on property values—an identical motivation that some residents suggest lay behind Kensington's decision to re-clad Grenfell Tower in 2016.<sup>200</sup> Throughout the Council's decisions regarding the Towers' fate, a range of ideological, political, and economic influences came into play that sidelined meaningful engagement with the estate's residents.

The final decision, which came in February 1986, was to contract a private, UDG-funded developer to completely demolish the Towers and redevelop them as a conventional low-rise housing estate—a mishmash of the first two options. The design brief for the redevelopment specified 240 detached houses, with the emphasis on "the creation of defensible space."<sup>201</sup> The solution was only possible through the government's £5 million UDG, which allowed the developer to build new housing at a very low cost. As a contemporary study remarked, the Council's decision passed on the cost of redevelopment to the residents, who would pay in terms

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<sup>197</sup> Paul Barnard, "The Demolition of Killingworth Towers," 63.

<sup>198</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 64. Underlining in original.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 70. For the reasons behind the Grenfell Tower renovation, see Andrew Griffin, "Grenfell Tower Cladding that May Have Led to Fire Was Chosen to Improve Appearance of Kensington Block of Flats," *The Independent*, 14 June 2017. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/grenfell-tower-cladding-fire-cause-improve-kensington-block-flats-appearance-blaze-24-storey-west-a7789951.html>

<sup>201</sup> Paul Barnard, "The Demolition of Killingworth Towers," 78.

of lost housing and broken social relationships with their friends and neighbors. “The estate was neither unsound nor structurally faulty.... Demolition clearly registers the failure of management.”<sup>202</sup> But embarking on the innovative management approaches that sociologists had shown could be effective in making council estates sustainable and popular places to live was a time-consuming option with no immediate political payoff.<sup>203</sup> The decision fit nicely with Coleman’s approach to problem estates: “Do we really want to spend all this money on housing in order to keep at bay some of the problems caused by the way it was designed in the first place?”<sup>204</sup> For Coleman and for North Tyneside, ending was better than mending. Demolition commenced on the afternoon of 7 August 1987. A red crane arrived on the back of a flatbed truck in the morning, and was wheeled to the front of Glanton Tower. To the end, the Towers continued to divide local opinion. One woman threw a party to celebrate the demolition.<sup>205</sup> For others, it was a painful moment. John Topping had just graduated from high school in 1987, and the Towers were interwoven with his entire life. That afternoon he rode his bike towards the sound of the demolition machinery.

As I started to pedal I heard a large, deep knock. My heart started pounding and I had butterflies in my stomach. I peddled faster and faster then I heard another thud. As I got round the corner at the top of Garth Four I saw the wrecking ball drop and smash through the roof of a flat in Glanton Tower. My heart sank and I instantly had a lump in my throat as *this was it*—they’d actually begun the demolition for real.... The feeling was pretty intense and I could feel myself welling up, so I cycled down to the lake. That was the first day of what turned out to be a very long and painful process to witness.<sup>206</sup>

The demolition of Topping’s childhood home left him with a feeling of emptiness, and it seemed as though his childhood experiences were about to dissolve with the buildings. “There were so

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<sup>202</sup> Bulos and Walker, “Britain’s Tower Blocks: The Demolition Controversy,” 49.

<sup>203</sup> See Anne Power, “Area-Based Poverty and Resident Empowerment”; and Bulos et. al., “Successful Initiatives in the Management of Tower Blocks,” paper presented at Housing Centre Trust Seminar, South Bank Polytechnic, London, 18 Sept 1985.

<sup>204</sup> Alice Coleman, interview with N. Fielding, “Utopia is Semi-Detached,” *Roof* (July 1985): 22-24.

<sup>205</sup> M.S. comment on “Killingworth Photos and Videos,” *Facebook* community page, 4 July 2017.

<sup>206</sup> John Topping, *The New Technopolis*, 263-64. Italics in original text.



**Beginning of the demolition of the Killingworth Towers, 6 August 1987, 3:30 pm. Photo by Dave Gilmore.**

many things running through my mind at once,” he later recalled, “the main being I would never be able to show people where I grew up. I was proud of where I was from and this huge part of my childhood was simply going to be wiped off the face of the earth.”<sup>207</sup> Another former resident put the effects of the demolition in similar terms: “It feels so strange,” she wrote in 2013, “when you grow up somewhere and it disappears off the face of the earth.”<sup>208</sup> With former residents dispersed to new homes across the region, would memories of the friendships and community

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>208</sup> K.R., comment on “Killingworth Photos and Videos,” *Facebook* community page, 2 June 2013.

solidarity forged in the Towers vanish with the concrete buildings? Would the negative images that dominated local press coverage of the estate be the Towers' only lasting legacy?<sup>209</sup>

### **Love in the Ruins**

Just before her death in 1990, the urban sociologist Ruth Glass reflected on the history of Britain's experiments in public housing in language that Topping's feelings at seeing the Towers destroyed:

Not many months pass in the current era without seeing yet another public-sector tower block being blown up and reduced to rubble in a few minutes. Nowadays such spectacles seem to be viewed as festive occasions.... The dramatic assaults on the tower blocks are part of a general scheme to turn social objectives upside down in all fields of social policy, not least in the field of housing. We are being brainwashed. A society that had been justifiably proud of the quantity and quality of its public housing sector was ordered to embrace the official Thatcherite view that public housing was sickly, slummy, sinister; the work of the devil; peopled by the zombies of the welfare state.<sup>210</sup>

Glass was not a neutral observer—her career had spanned Britain's history of planning and implementing the urban fabric of the welfare state, and she had played a leading role as both a scholar and practitioner of those changes.<sup>211</sup> What she described for an academic audience—the Thatcherite vilification of public housing as a misguided, utopian experiment that had destroyed individuals and communities across Britain—was a sentiment that many of the former council tenants experienced on a more visceral and personal level. For the large number of displaced residents of Killingworth and Southgate for whom the good memories of their former homes outnumbered the bad ones, the turn against council houses was a form of gaslighting. With their

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<sup>209</sup> Paul Barnard studied local newspaper articles about the Towers in the 1980s, and found that out of 37 total articles in the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* and *Newcastle Journal*, 3 were positive, 4 were neutral, and the remaining 30 were negative. Barnard, "The Demolition of Killingworth Towers," 73.

<sup>210</sup> Ruth Glass, *Clichés of Urban Doom*, x.

<sup>211</sup> Glass worked with the planner Max Lock on planning the northern industrial city of Middlesbrough in 1945-46, and later produced influential studies on gentrification (a term she coined) and black immigration to Britain. See Helen Meller, "Gender, Citizenship and the Making of the Modern Environment," in Elizabeth Darling and Lesley Whitworth, eds., *Women and the making of Built Space in England, 1870-1950* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 13-32.

homes destroyed and their friends scattered, how could they counter the powerful political and media discourse that painted council estate life as something out of *A Clockwork Orange* or *1984*, or worse, as fodder for jokes?<sup>212</sup> Were their positive memories a weird anomaly, or perhaps a form of false consciousness?

These questions must have weighed particularly heavily during the first decade following the estates' demolition, as months, then years, went by and the media attention died out. As we have seen, both the Towers and Southgate had gained a certain degree of notoriety as “sink estates” during the mid-1980s. Yet unlike more famous council housing projects like Broadwater Farm and Ronan Point in London, there were no riots or explosions here to make them a household name, nor did they have the cultural cachet of modernist icons like Sheffield's Park Hill, London's Robin Hood Gardens and Trellick Tower, or Newcastle's Byker estate. Before the wide diffusion of private Internet access at the turn of the millennium, former Southgate and Killingworth Tower tenants would have had trouble finding any documentation of their former estates, which, like many similar projects across the country, appeared to have slipped through the cracks of public memory.

On the rare occasions when they were mentioned, it was invariably from the perspective of an outsider, and in a negative light. Erstwhile modernist architects could be especially damning, as with Rod Hackney's 1990 (by which point he was the leading light of the community architecture movement) book *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly*, which placed Southgate squarely in the latter two categories and featured several unflattering photographs of the estate during its terminal year.<sup>213</sup> Leon Krier, who had worked with on Southgate briefly

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<sup>212</sup> See John Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, 194; Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: An Intimate History*; and Owen Jones, *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class* (London: Verso, 2011).

<sup>213</sup> Rod Hackney, *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly: Cities in Crisis* (London: Frederick Muller, 1990), 96-97.



**The end of history: Hallwood Park, successor to Southgate, with its conventional architecture and rigid separation of public and private space, is the spatial antithesis of its predecessor. Joe Blundell, Creative Commons.**

while employed by Stirling and had since become one of Britain’s foremost anti-modernist architects, lambasted the project in an interview as “dreadful, completely negative.... [it] was a nightmare.” His interviewer concurred, dismissing Southgate as “unable to properly communicate on a human level with all the concrete and plastic.”<sup>214</sup> Set on the very periphery of England and built by a less well-known architect, Killingworth Towers was even more obscure. The leading history of British council housing devoted half of a paragraph to it, but to learn more, people would be forced to look for traces among the newspaper microfilms of local universities and libraries.<sup>215</sup>

Standing in a cul-de-sac amidst small pitched-roof brick homes in Runcorn’s Hallwood Park, it is hard for a visitor to imagine that it was not always thus—that this place was once

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<sup>214</sup> Geoffrey H. Baker interview with Leon Krier, 6 Jan. 2005, in *The Architecture of James Stirling and His Partners James Gowan and Michael Wilford: A Study of Architectural Creativity in the Twentieth Century* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 185.

<sup>215</sup> Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 260.

composed of towering concrete terraces and soaring walkways. Or that these silent and empty streets were once (as late as 1989, with the demolition sentence hanging over the estate) spacious public squares where “children play in well-landscaped gardens” and “mothers wheel their prams home from the nearby shopping centre.”<sup>216</sup> Alice Coleman had claimed the detached two story house as an evolutionary endpoint, “a natural culmination of humanity’s quest for shelter and territory,” as John Boughton puts it.<sup>217</sup> The architectural sins of the 1960s and 1970s have been so thoroughly erased that only the stray salvaged iron map in a private Killingworth garden offers archaeological evidence of an alternative way of distributing human communities in space.<sup>218</sup>

But private memories rasp against history’s verdicts like an oblong bone in a ball-and-socket joint. When the local public library staged an exhibition in 2014 to mark the fifty-year anniversary of Runcorn’s the designation as a New Town, the event drew hundreds of residents and former residents from across the region. The overwhelming majority of housing-related entries in the exhibition’s comment book focused on Southgate. Some were simple statements like “I loved my flat on Southgate. Fond memories,” and “Liked Southgate, felt like I was coming to a better place (came from Yorkshire).”<sup>219</sup> Others were indictments of the estate’s demolition: “Came to Southgate when it was first built—best community ever, should never have pulled it down. Destroyed a lovely place,” and “I have lived in Runcorn all my life and it has changed over the years. Even Hallwood Park has changed. They should have left it the way it

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<sup>216</sup> Deyan Sudjic, “Does This Estate Have to Die?”

<sup>217</sup> John Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, 184.

<sup>218</sup> When someone posted a photo of an iron plate Killingworth Towers map, another member remarked that her neighbor had one in her back garden. A third member offered to buy one of the mementos if any were for sale. Comments on “Killingworth Photos and Videos,” *Facebook* community page, 21 Sept 2014.

<sup>219</sup> K. H., aged 60, and M. S., aged 45. Comment book for Runcorn New Town Exhibition, Halton Lea Library, Runcorn. The ages are from 2014, but they help to gauge whether the respondent was a child or an adult in the 1970s and 1980s.

was as it was better that way.”<sup>220</sup> Some visitors referred explicitly to Southgate’s physical fabric, both to celebrate it—“we used to play music so loud in our Southgate flat but the neighbours still couldn’t hear it because the walls were so thick,” and “I lived on level 3 of the blue Legoland flats. I loved it. You couldn’t hear noise. The rooms were massive”—or to point out its flaws in its final years—“It was quite a dirty place to live but the neighbours were friendly. I remember the cockroaches which the cat used to eat.”<sup>221</sup>

In most of the comments, though, Southgate simply forms a concrete stage for human relationships. “I loved Southgate,” wrote one former resident. “Children were happier. You popped into each other’s houses for a chat and a cuppa.”<sup>222</sup> “We would make wine and bring and share food,” recalled another woman. “Everyone helped each other. We used to put fairy lights up outside.”<sup>223</sup> Another opined, “the community spirit on Southgate has never been replicated on any other estate,” while a third provided a detailed recollection of that spirit:

My most outstanding memory of Southgate is the fantastic community spirit, everyone knew each other and helped each other out, like the time when my son fell from the derelict block of flats by the Merry Monk pub, people on the estate were the first to help my son, then they organized a raffle to help us with the travel costs to Alder Hey [a children’s hospital].<sup>224</sup>

“I remember when the Vietnamese boat people came to live on Southgate,” wrote a woman who had spent her childhood on the estate. “My nan got great pleasure in trying to teach them to speak English.”<sup>225</sup> A recurring theme among the comments is the way in which the estate facilitated feelings of happiness and pleasure, of mutual aid, sharing, and that vague concept of “community.”

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<sup>220</sup> M. L., aged 67, and D. L., aged 29. Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Anonymous; Mrs. W, aged 73; S. M., aged 48. Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> I. S., aged 62. Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Mrs. W., aged 73. Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> C. M., aged 58, and A.S., no age provided. Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> S., aged 48. Ibid. Whether her pupils shared the woman’s pleasure is a mystery.

Such sentiments are surprising, and yet also, in a sense, expected. For an outsider visiting the exhibition, whose only knowledge of the estate was gleaned from media reports of anomie, vandalism, and crime, any professions of fondness for Southgate puzzled me; that they dominated the comment book was incomprehensible. At the same time, comments like “children were happier” point to an unsurprising nostalgia, not simply for Southgate, but for an irrecoverable past. These were not simply neutral memories, but rather critiques of the present on the part of exiles temporally and spatially expelled, not from some space age Eden, but from a neighborhood where they had built meaningful connections with the people around them. It was also longing for a historical moment in which governmental policy was explicitly directed towards broadening social equality, however limited and imperfect was that policy’s execution.<sup>226</sup>

As they recorded their memories in the exhibition’s comment book, it is likely that people leafed through the pages to look at earlier responses, and perhaps seeing their former neighbors’ recollections subtly influenced people’s own memories. This social dimension notwithstanding, the notebook’s form as a single physical object bound by the space of the exhibition room limited the extent to which people could share their memories. But by the time of Runcorn’s exhibition in 2014, a forum in which people could reconnect with their former Southgate neighbors had been in place for more than five years. In 2008, a woman who had spent her childhood on the estate formed the Facebook group “Growing up in Southgate/Hallwood Park in the 70’s, 80’s, and 90’s” to celebrate “what a great community Southgate was” and to help people “share their stories on here what an impact [Southgate] had on us growing

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<sup>226</sup> For a discussion of nostalgia’s critical potential, see Peter Fritzsche, “Specters of History: On Nostalgia, Exile, and Modernity,” *The American Historical Review*, 106, no. 5 (Dec. 2001): 1587-1618, at 1617.

up.”<sup>227</sup> Membership in the group has steadily expanded to 369 members after its first decade. A parallel group documenting the history of Runcorn New Town, founded in 2012, has more than 1,400 members, many of whom lived on Southgate. At Killingworth, former residents created a similar Facebook group, “Killingworth Towers,” in February 2010. A month later, the group had expanded to over one thousand members.<sup>228</sup> When the group disbanded soon after, members migrated to yet another group dedicated to sharing photos of past and present Killingworth.<sup>229</sup>

These online platforms offer a chance, as one former Towers resident put it in 2013, to “rekindle that community spirit that has been lost over the years.”<sup>230</sup> It is an idea of community rooted not in the everyday informal networks that the sociologist Ray Pahl terms “community on the ground,” but instead a “community in the mind” structured around shared memories of a vanished place.<sup>231</sup> Many of the members of these groups have long since moved away from Runcorn or Killingworth and have reconnected with old acquaintances that they have not seen for decades. One such woman was shocked to find a photograph of Southgate being demolished. “Oh no has it really been knocked down? I only noticed the group on Thursday and it has been great looking at old photos, but it is very sad now knowing it has all gone & i could never visit again.” Other members commiserated. “I know it had it’s problems but I really miss it :-( am I really the only one who gets the odd pang of longing to be back there?” “Cried when they did that.”<sup>232</sup> A wave of similar comments followed, with one man praising the “brilliant” estate’s

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<sup>227</sup> L. E. comment on “Growing up in Southgate/Hallwood Park in the 70’s, 80’s, and 90’s,” *Facebook* community page, 22 Dec. 2015.

<sup>228</sup> John Topping, *The New Technopolis*, 458.

<sup>229</sup> The “Killingworth Towers” group’s dissolution seems to have resulted from a dispute between the group’s founder and other members, many of whom were shocked to find that all the memories they had shared had suddenly evaporated into the ether.

<sup>230</sup> D. K., comment on “Killingworth Photos and Videos,” *Facebook* community page, 17 Sept 2013.

<sup>231</sup> Ray Pahl, “Are All Communities Communities in the Mind?” *The Sociological Review* 53 (Nov. 2005): 621-640.

<sup>232</sup> L. E., K. J., and V. O., comments on “Growing Up on Southgate/Hallwood,” *Facebook* community page, 22 December 2015.

“community spirit and not like now m8 they ripped a community apart when they knocked it down,” and another woman noting that Southgate “was always slated [criticized], usually by people who didn't live there.”<sup>233</sup> This final point highlights a defensive note that goes back to the early years of both estates, when residents wrote to the local press to dispute labels like “barracks” and “Alcatraz” with which outsiders labeled their homes.

But the distinction between insiders and outsiders is not always clear. Like all communities, these online groups are not stable or united—there are fractures and exclusions, rumors and gossip, as well as fierce debates over the legacy of their former estates. “A lot of rose-tinted glasses here and short memories,” one man interjected into a predominantly warm and positive discussion of the Towers, “it was an ill-conceived shithole that was designed to hide people away on the cheap.”<sup>234</sup> The policing of memory went both ways. When one group member likened the Towers to “something from Soviet Russia,” another contradicted him, writing, “so NOT like russia, and a great place to grow up as a kid, and your kids could go anywhere in killingworth without having to cross a single road.”<sup>235</sup>

Added to these internal fault lines between each estate’s fans and critics, there is a deeper division between those who belong to the estate’s “community in the mind” and those who fall outside its bounds. As an expert who designed the Towers and never had the experience of living there, Roy Gazzard belongs to this category, and discussions about his role easily slide into rumors and cultural clichés regarding corrupt and arrogant architects. “The architect was Poulson I’m sure and he was convicted for fraud,” wrote one member in 2016, confusing Gazzard with an

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<sup>233</sup> S. B. and C. M., comments on “Growing Up on Southgate/Hallwood,” *Facebook* community page, 22 December 2015.

<sup>234</sup> G. S., comment on “Killingworth Photos and Videos,” *Facebook* community page, 22 January 2017. It was a bit of a hobbyhorse for the man, who doused members with a nearly identically written cold bath on several other discussion threads.

<sup>235</sup> H. S. and S. H., comments on “Killingworth Photos and Videos,” *Facebook* community page, 26 March 2015.

infamous Yorkshire architect whose career ended in the same corruption scandal that brought down T. Dan Smith in 1973. Another person speculated that Gazzard designed ugly modern buildings for poor people but himself lived in “a period property in a quaint market town in the Home Counties” (Gazzard lived in a contemporary building in Durham), while a third assured people Gazzard had won awards for the Towers but had then committed suicide shortly after (neither were true).<sup>236</sup>

While these comments suggest a perceived class division between the Towers’ ordinary residents and the estate’s distant, out-of-touch designer, peoples’ memories of Southgate also point to a divide running along national and ethnic lines. The collective memory of the Vietnamese “boat people” is a case in point. Following the 1975 invasion of Saigon by North Vietnamese forces at the end of the Vietnamese War, refugees had begun fleeing the country and British aid organizations worked with the government to resettle refugees in camps, small towns, and cities across the nation.<sup>237</sup> Runcorn became one such receiving area in 1979; with its ample supply of planned public housing run by the Development Corporation (and with Southgate becoming increasingly hard to fill because of heating bills), it served as an efficient catchment for the spatial engineering of the displaced people.<sup>238</sup> Seven Vietnamese families who had been

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<sup>236</sup> C. B., comments on “Killingworth Photos and Videos,” *Facebook* community page, 22 January 2015; and E. W., “Killingworth Photos and Videos,” *Facebook* community page, 26 March 2015. Gazzard did win awards for Killingworth’s low-rise housing, but not the Towers. He died in 2016 of natural causes at the age of 93. The suicide rumor is identical to a myth that when the architect Erno Goldfinger witnessed the social reality of his Trellick Tower, he committed suicide by throwing himself from the roof “in a fit of self-immolating anguish.” See Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: An Intimate History*, 111.

<sup>237</sup> See Jordanna Bailkin, *Unsettled: Refugee Camps and the Making of Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). The organization that orchestrated the refugee resettlement in Runcorn was an NGO called the Ockenden Venture. Together with Save the Children and the British Council for Aid to Refugees, it took responsibility for working with local governments, focusing on the Midlands and North of Britain. Surrey History Service, “Ockenden International, Formerly the Ockenden Venture, Refugee Charity of Woking,” p. 2. Online Archive Catalogue published on Surrey County Council website. <https://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/7155.pdf>

<sup>238</sup> In resettling the Vietnamese refugees, the Home Office sought to disperse them across the country in clusters of 4 to 10 families, which were seen as the ideal size so as not to overburden the local authorities, but big

rescued from boats in the South China Sea were housed in Runcorn and provided with housing furnished by contributions from local churches. This was a miniscule number, and the families did not stay long because of the challenges of finding a job in Merseyside's depressed economy (which only compounded difficulties formed by cultural and linguistic barriers). Another reason for choosing not to settle permanently in Runcorn may have been the widespread feeling among British ethnic minorities that new towns were "for whites," as a 1980 study put it.<sup>239</sup> Despite their short stay, though, Runcorn's Vietnamese settlers left an outsized impact in people's recollections of life in the new town.<sup>240</sup> As the woman's memory of her grandmother's delight in giving the refugees English lessons shows, some of these memories have a warm glow. But in other memories they are a scapegoat for the estate's decline into chaos in the 1980s. "Some of the trouble started when the boat people as they called them came running around late at night," wrote one former resident in 2016.<sup>241</sup> Similar memories posted to the group have congealed into a common trope, with one woman describing "getting chased by Vietnamese boy people 10 of us, like a maze that place, didnt catch us though." On another occasion the same woman recalled running from "some 6 stone chinese fella, (bit wary of them after watching bruce lee films)."<sup>242</sup> In these shared memories, Southgate's refugee population appears as a disruptive presence,

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enough to prevent isolation. Vaughan Robinson, "Up the Creek Without a Paddle? Britain's Boat People Ten Years on," *Geography* 74, no. 4 (October 1989: 332-338, at 332.

<sup>239</sup> Commission For Racial Equality, *Ethnic Minorities and New Or Expanding Towns* (London: Commission for Racial Equality, 1980), 8. For a later study of Harlow New Town that reached similar conclusions, see John Wrench, Harbhajan Brar and Paul Martin, *Invisible Minorities: Racism in New Towns and New Contexts* (Coventry: Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, 1993).

<sup>240</sup> Roger Harrison, "Modern and Medieval New Towns," 195. Runcorn had received refugees earlier in the 1970s as well, when six families of Ugandan Asians fleeing the Idi Amin regime settled there temporarily in 1972.

<sup>241</sup> A. K., comment on "The Development of Runcorn to a New Town," *Facebook* community page, 14 April 2016.

<sup>242</sup> S. G., comments on "The Development of Runcorn to a New Town," *Facebook* community page, 1 February 2014, and 18 May 2014.

partly threatening and partly comical, that haunted the estate's public spaces and abetted the slide from Southgate's halcyon early years to its tumultuous decline.<sup>243</sup>

As with the discussions of Gazzard for Killingworth's online community, Southgate's Vietnamese serve as a remembered other, a counterpoint with which to establish ones' own belonging in the community bound together through the shared experience of life on the estate. Such anecdotes should caution us to avoid an uncritically celebratory view of the online revival of these communities. As with place-based communities, these virtual communities are partly constructed and imagined. They have implicit boundaries separating insiders from outsiders, and are occasionally riven by squabbles and factions.

In a way, the platform that these online groups provide could be seen as a twenty-first-century analog to the efflorescence of workers' autobiographies encouraged by the community publishing movement in Britain in the 1970s, which chronicled people's recollections of growing up in working-class communities. These memoirs were rescue operations that sought to salvage the reputation of neighborhoods that had been condemned as slums and demolished in the preceding decades. They were the product of the type of modernist urban renewal campaigns that propelled people from Britain's inner cities to new estates like the Killingworth Towers or Southgate. Chris Waters observes that by producing "both dislocation and a rupture in historical consciousness," postwar urban renewal also created "nostalgia for older, presumably more settled, ways of life and for the places in which past lives were lived."<sup>244</sup> Organized by left-wing activists hoping to "build working-class consciousness," the community publishing movement

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<sup>243</sup> For a discussion of how urban communities form around memories of "us" and "them," see Talja Blokland, "Memory Magic: How a Working-Class Neighbourhood Became an Imagined Community and Class Started to Matter when It Lost Its Base," in Fiona Devine, et. al., eds., *Rethinking Class: Culture, Identities and Lifestyles* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 123-139.

<sup>244</sup> Chris Waters, "Representations of Everyday Life: L.S. Lowry and the Landscape of Memory in Postwar Britain," *Representations* 65 (Jan, 1999): 121-150, at 138.

rooted the working-class experience in the milieu of the “traditional” urban neighborhood of terraced streets.<sup>245</sup> The community publishers would have agreed with the sociologist Norman Dennis’s 1958 assessment that since “people on the new estates [did] not share a history,” they were incapable of creating any form of community spirit.<sup>246</sup> As Waters observes, the movement was rooted in nostalgia for a specific idea of community, which had been consolidated in the 1950s by writers like Richard Hoggart.<sup>247</sup>

Even had the patrons of working-class memory envisioned modernist estates as legitimate sites of community, the movement’s political momentum had faltered by the time Southgate and Killingworth were demolished. The optimism that animated the movement to fuel workers’ collective consciousness for political ends had dissolved after three consecutive victories for Thatcher’s Conservatives and an intellectual challenge, fueled by post-structuralism and Britain’s growing feminist movement, to any facile connection between experience, consciousness, and class identity.<sup>248</sup> There was no cultural groundswell to document people’s experiences of life on Southgate and the Towers during the 1990s; Britain’s experiment with mass public housing was widely reported in the press as a disastrous misfire.<sup>249</sup>

The widening of the Internet’s scope that happened in the first years of the twenty-first century—the proliferation of platforms to which even technologically challenged users could add their opinions and photographs—has provided former council estate residents with channels to

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<sup>245</sup> Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England*, 57-58.

<sup>246</sup> Quoted in Chris Waters, “Representations of Everyday Life,” 135.

<sup>247</sup> Chris Waters, “Autobiography, Nostalgia, and the Changing Practices of Working-Class Selfhood,” in George Behlmer and Fred Leventhal, eds., *Singular Continuities: Tradition, Nostalgia, and Identity in Modern Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 178-195, at 193.

<sup>248</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm, “The Forward March of Labour Halted?” *Marxism Today* (Sept. 1978): 279-286; Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class*, c. 1848-1914, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); James Vernon, *Politics and the People. A Study in English Political Culture, 1815-1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain*; and Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

<sup>249</sup> John Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, 194.

convey the full complexity of life in Britain's planned modernist spaces. The images and memories are often banal, but it is that very banality, repeated hundreds of times in people's stories—stories of shared tea and shopping trips and blasting music and games of tag on streets in the sky—that gives them their power. Such stories insist on the persistence of community. But this community is not rooted in the sepia image of the “traditional” community of northern Britain's back-to-back terraced housing, but rather in everyday accumulated interactions that remain in memories, private and shared, thirty years after the demolition crews descended on Southgate and Killingworth Towers.

This collective identity of belonging to a community of the mind is intertwined with deeply felt individual connections to these vanished places in the memories of many former residents. This was illustrated when I finally ventured to interject in a discussion on Runcorn's Facebook community. I was curious whether residents had the freedom to personalize their homes with their own choices of wallpaper. They were—but “why would you need to?” asked one woman, “the colours were great!!!”<sup>250</sup> What came through most strongly in the responses was not how people had changed their Southgate homes, but how those homes had changed them. The woman had arrived on Southgate as an eighteen year-old nursing student. It was her first apartment as an adult, and with her odd working hours, she would often wander around the estate late at night when she was unable to sleep. For her, Southgate provided a new freedom, but also a sense of security and well being to explore. “My time on Southgate was life changing and character building,” a man wrote in response to the woman's story. “I was 18 and no idea about anything when I got my flat.... Same as you I was young and to be fair a bit scared to be on my

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<sup>250</sup> B. C., comment on “The Development of Runcorn to a New Town,” *Facebook* community page, 17 July 2018.

own on Southgate with its reputation. Loved that flat. Still think of it fondly.”<sup>251</sup> The idea of a new home building personal character has a distinct Thatcherite ring to it, but these recollections rested not on home ownership but on the freedom and flexibility provided by a cheap council flat. In memories of Southgate and Killingworth Towers, these conceptions of young people’s individuality and self-discovery flow seamlessly into senses of broader community belonging.

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<sup>251</sup> M. M., comment on “The Development of Runcorn to a New Town,” *Facebook* community page, 17 July 2018.

## Conclusion

*I'm gazing at faces staring blankly at me  
Oh, I suppose it's just a sign of the times.  
They tell me that tomorrow will never arrive  
But I've seen it end a million times.*  
—The Chameleons, “Up the Down Staircase,” 1983

*Utopia never comes, because we know we should not like it if it did.*  
—Margaret Thatcher, 1988<sup>1</sup>

*Those who were living now are dead  
Those who were breathing are from the living earth fled.  
If you want to see how the poor die, come see Grenfell Tower.  
See the tower, and let a world-changing dream flower.*  
Ben Okri, 2017<sup>2</sup>

The 1980s were a bleak decade in Britain for urban planning, architectural modernism, public housing, and even the idea that state investments in building cities and homes could change people’s lives for the better. Grouping all of these ideas and institutions under the rubric of “Utopia,” Alice Coleman portrayed them as a wrong turn taken by Britain’s postwar governments, away from a time-honored Darwinian approach to the built environment where people learned to fend for themselves in a struggle to find shelter. For Coleman, Utopia was a paternalistic and authoritarian intrusion that ended up “trapping people in dwellings not of their own choosing.”<sup>3</sup> As the last chapter showed, even while Coleman’s academic peers challenged her conclusions, notions of defensible space and “design disadvantage” became a lingua franca for critics of modernist design in public housing, and, by encouraging “territoriality,” was particularly instrumental in supporting proprietary ideas of space.

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Thatcher, “Speech to the College of Europe,” 20 Sept. 1988.  
<https://www.margarethatcher.org/document/107332>.

<sup>2</sup> Ben Okri, “Grenfell Tower, June 2017,” *Financial Times*, 23 June 2017.  
<https://www.ft.com/content/39022f72-5742-11e7-80b6-9bfa4c1f83d2?mhq5j=e3>.

<sup>3</sup> Alice Coleman, *Utopia on Trial*, 6.

Further, for urban planners the decade brought a bewildering “attitudinal revolution,” in the words of the historian and planner Gordon Cherry, writing in 1988. “Belief had been lost in any positive role in government with regard to either long term, strategic shaping of the urban environment or in shorter term environmental management, while concern about the negative functions of plan making persisted. Planning relapsed into a lip service to policy often without much purpose.”<sup>4</sup> Cities, which modernists imagined in the 1960s as places where careful planning could create “a new vision of what we want to be ourselves,” became sites of experimentation for neoliberal concepts of deregulation and laissez-faire economics, most famously in “enterprise zones” like East London’s Docklands.<sup>5</sup> With the disintegration of the Soviet Union at the decade’s end, planning’s critics seemed vindicated in their insistence on the inefficiency, and even immorality, of utopian attempts to remake the world. As the planning historian Nigel Taylor observes, those who triumphantly championed liberalism and the free market as the “end of history” made few distinctions between Soviet-style socialism and social democratic public sector planning such as Britain’s.<sup>6</sup>

This loss of confidence in the efficacy of planning was in many ways a result of experts’ misjudgments. As this dissertation has argued, the modernist planning projects of the 1960s and 1970s rested on planners’ notions of the needs and desires of the “ordinary” Britons who would marvel at their flyovers and motorways and play, stroll, and gossip in the new housing estates’ communal spaces. Despite attempts to democratize it throughout the 1960s and 1970s, modernist planning was a fundamentally paternalist project based on experts’ ideas of what constituted a well-ordered and humane city. The planners’ visions and those of their clients often failed to

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<sup>4</sup> Gordon Cherry, *Cities and Plans: The Shaping of Urban Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Edward Arnold, 1988), 185.

<sup>5</sup> Sam Wetherell, “Freedom Planned.”

<sup>6</sup> Nigel Taylor, *Urban Planning Theory since 1945*, 133-134.

align. Where experts like Wilfred Burns and Graeme Shankland rhapsodized over the thrilling urban vistas that their viaducts and motorways would open, people whose homes lay in the roads' path felt disruption and dispossession. Roy Gazzard, informed by his experiences as an urban planner in colonial Uganda, envisioned a new community buffered from the tribulations of industrial decline by the comforting embrace of a modernist castle town. But the people who lived in Killingworth often experienced the castle design more as a confusing maze than a comforting embrace. Ralph Erskine attempted to keep Byker's working-class community together during the neighborhood's reconstruction, but the project ended up scattering many of the original residents, who were often lured away by the promise of a better life beyond the bounds of the "traditional community." James Stirling designed the "porthole" windows on the Southgate estate to connect with residents' Liverpoolian nautical heritage. Some residents appreciated the gesture, but most people were more concerned about how easy they were to open and clean, and their most famous use was as an exquisite frame for one man's exhibitionism. Such slippages between the planners' ideals and the much messier reality offered abundant ammunition for the critics of "utopia" who sought to dismantle Britain's postwar planning framework.

At a deeper level than such tragicomic examples, though, modernist urban planning was increasingly out of step with British cultural trends by the middle of the 1970s. Discussing the collapse of Birmingham's motorway plans in the 1970s, Simon Gunn points to a series of "disjointed fatalities"—popular protests, concerns for public health, technical problems, and corruption—that cumulatively derailed the project.<sup>7</sup> To the list of discrete but intertwined catastrophes that undid modernist planning one could add the transatlantic economic shocks of the 1970s and the growing movements for the conservation of the natural and built environment.

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<sup>7</sup> Simon Gunn, "Ring Road," 231.

The skyrocketing cost of oil after 1973, which, as chapter 4 showed, effectively doomed Southgate, also contributed to halting Newcastle's ambitious urban motorway schemes, since Burns's plans assumed a steady rise in automobile usage. With fuel prices climbing and environmental experts like the Club of Rome forecasting the rapid depletion of natural resources, protestors in Newcastle demanded a move away from ambitious growth oriented planning in the name of "a sane future."<sup>8</sup> As Christopher Klemek and Sam Wetherell have shown, these challenges to the postwar planning regime were transnational in scope, with anti-planning ideas and movements migrating across national borders in tandem with disembodied economic forces.<sup>9</sup> In Britain, the reaction against modernism in architecture was far more pronounced than in the U.S. or on the continent. "Master planners" like Wilfred Burns, Graeme Shankland, and Walter Bor had never advocated the pell-mell modernization of Newcastle or Liverpool; one of their main claims to authority as planners was that they would preserve the best of their cities' heritage from unchecked private development. But they nonetheless conceded that some Victorian treasures would have to be sacrificed to ensure the city's continued prosperity in a rapidly changing world, and, as chapter 1 showed, a large number of residents supported them.

The conservationist backlash began in the late 1960s and by the 1980s became a full-fledged culture war. In London, the partial collapse of the new Ronan Point high-rise apartments in 1968 provided a focus for simmering discontents with postwar planning and architecture. Long confined to lone critics like Iain Nairn and John Betjeman and to occasional pieces in professional journals, the assault on postwar planning now became a burning public concern,

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<sup>8</sup> Tyneside Environmental Concern and Friends of the Earth: "Why We Should Stop: Arguments about the Re-development of Urban Centres, With Particular Reference to Newcastle upon Tyne and Its Motoring System Taking Due Consideration of the Problems Caused by Growth, and Its Limitations," n.d. (c. 1973). Newcastle Local Studies Room, L656.1.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal*; and Sam Wetherell, "Freedom Planned."

fueled by sensational reports in the national news media.<sup>10</sup> The highest-profile criticisms of modernist planning in Britain targeted developments in London—the furor surrounding Ronan Point’s collapse, the destruction of the historical Euston Arch, and the plan to clear and redevelop Covent Garden all indicated swelling popular discontent—but the renewed concern for Britain’s Victorian “heritage” was a national movement.

One of the reasons the reaction against urban modernism was so total and vehement in Britain was that the criticisms extended far beyond architecture. The reaction was also bound up with a cultural revolution that challenged the foundational idea of planning: that the planner held expertise that allowed him (and very occasionally her) to make the ultimate decision over how to best shape urban space. One pillar of this planning expertise was the reams of statistical data that indicated urban subjects’ wants and needs. As Simon Gunn observes, such studies operated on the assumption of abstract, universal categories like “workers” and “housewives,” and were ill-suited to adapt to the rapid changes that attended deindustrialization, non-white immigration from Britain’s former colonies, and an increasing number of women in the workforce.<sup>11</sup> Planning, like disciplines such as medicine, psychology, the law, and history, was subject to increasing scrutiny over its pretensions to epistemological truth. The planner’s vision was simply one urban “story” among many, and it was not clearly the primary one.<sup>12</sup> Faced with the competing plans of urban residents and other professionals, many planners began to see their role not as creative urban designers but as advocates and mediators making value judgments between competing interests.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> John R. Gold, *The Practice of Modernism*, 276-80.

<sup>11</sup> Simon Gunn, “The Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism,” 858-60 and 864-66.

<sup>12</sup> See Barbara Eckstein and James A. Throgmorton, eds., *Story and Sustainability*.

<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Taylor, *Urban Planning Theory since 1945*, 161-162.

But as this dissertation has contended, the other pillar of planning authority relied not on statistics but on claims to moral authority rooted in a longer strand of paternalism. In the family romance of the modern British city, the “master planner” was decidedly the father figure. By the 1970s, this pillar was reduced to an increasingly withered stump, under attack from the right and the left. Planners’ critics described them as domineering elites who had robbed urban Britons of the power to choose their own housing and shape their surroundings. It was a potent populist critique that united the anarchist architects Colin Ward and John F. C. Turner with Margaret Thatcher, Alice Coleman, and even Prince Charles.<sup>14</sup> These critiques, which channeled a growing wave of popular individualism, laid modernist planning open to the Thatcherite assault of the 1980s.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, declining deference in terms of class, age, and gender (recall the young “Florries” set to make a more equal Newcastle), together with a growing counterculture leveled a challenge not simply at planners’ intellectual expertise, but also at their moral authority to plan the city. This barrage from the left rocked the certainty of modernist planners, but it provided fertile new openings for small-scale projects supported by local governments as politically diverse as Lewisham (Conservative), Camden (Labour), and Liverpool (first under Liberal and then Trotskyist leadership).

Even as the grand plans of citywide urban renewal faltered, small scale experiments with “community architecture” and democratic planning flourished in the 1970s. Phil Kitchen arrived in Newcastle in 1971, fresh from his training in Glasgow University’s Town and Regional Planning department. He had been inspired to become a planner after watching a television program on T. Dan Smith’s campaign to make Newcastle the “Brasilia of the North,” but by the time he arrived in Newcastle, Smith was facing corruption charges and the original fervor had

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<sup>14</sup> See Colin Ward, *Housing: An Anarchist Approach* (London: Freedom Press, 1976); and John F. C. Turner, *Housing by People: Towards Autonomy in Building Environments* (London: Marion Boyars, 1976).

<sup>15</sup> Emily Robinson, et. al., “Telling Stories about Post-War Britain.”

been sapped from the urban renewal drive. Still, Kitchen was “fired by revolutionary enthusiasm, inspired by movements across the world, and optimistic that we could change things.” He set himself up as a “Planner for the People” in western Newcastle’s Arthur’s Hill neighborhood, and worked closely with community groups and individual residents to renovate their homes, pedestrianize local streets, and build new play areas for children. He and his young architectural colleagues

would go on May Day demonstrations and rub shoulders with lefties in the Days of Hope Book Shop.... We hoped this would be the start of a revolution, in which people from disadvantaged working class communities, trade unionists and sympathetic trained professionals from all over the country would come together in solidarity to form a more just and equal society. It hasn’t happened, has it? ... Yet.<sup>16</sup>

The community architecture movement reinvigorated the original social ideals behind urban renewal, but, as chapter 3 showed in the case of Ralph Erskine’s work at Byker, its interventions came under increasing scrutiny when the architect crossed the line from consultant to planner. In the 1960s, Wilfred Burns could split hairs to distinguish between “planning of community” (bad) and “planning for community” (good), and Roy Gazzard could still glory in his role as Killingworth’s social engineer. But the role of the planner had increasingly authoritarian implications by the 1970s, when leftist critics like Sirkka-Liisa Kontinen outflanked Erskine’s socialism by portraying his project as a form of social cleansing imposed from above.

As Phil Kitchen’s recollections show, planners were not passively divorced from the cultural upheavals of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Rather, many of the leaders of 1960s urban renewal spearheaded small-scale community planning projects during the 1970s.<sup>17</sup> But the emerging generation of architects and planners shared the broader cultural suspicion of their professions’ authoritative claims to truth. One architect who began training at the Architectural

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<sup>16</sup> Phil Kitchen, “Planner for the People,” in Anna Flowers and Vanessa Histon, eds., *All Right Now!* 17-18.

<sup>17</sup> See Otto Saumarez Smith, “The Inner City Crisis.”

Association in 1966 later recalled the school's principal announcing, "'I don't know what architecture is, it's up to you to find out,' and we followed a very loose course" in a learning environment that was "optimistic, utopian, egalitarian, and breathtakingly open."<sup>18</sup> During the late 1960s and 1970s, successive governments adopted Community Development Programmes (pumping funds into western Newcastle, where Kitchen worked) and Inner Area Studies, both of which attempted to formulate holistic approaches to fighting inner-city poverty that went beyond physical redevelopment by trying to combat systemic racial and class-based inequalities.<sup>19</sup> At the local level, projects like Byker and the London Borough of Camden's Alexandra Road and Branch Hill estates provided experimental new designs for high-density, low-rise public housing that was "anti-monumental, anti-stylistic, and fit for ordinary people," as one municipal architect put it.<sup>20</sup> In this context, radical young planners—such as Phil Kitchen or the British and Scandinavian planners working at Byker—thrived, working with historically underserved communities to form, as Kitchen put it, "a more just and equal society." The results of this surge in activity spun in a variety of architectural and political directions—it produced some of the most creative of Britain's modernist council housing, but also often contributed to the disavowal of existing council housing and the promotion of Colman's concepts of territoriality and defensible space.<sup>21</sup>

The irony was that, when Margaret Thatcher justified her government's assault on Britain's planning apparatus by denouncing the stifling effects of planners' "utopia," many of her

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Blundell Jones, "Sixty-Eight and After," in Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu, and Jeremy Till, eds., *Architecture and Participation* (London: Spon Press, 2005), 128.

<sup>19</sup> Sarah Banks and Mick Carpenter, "Researching the Local Politics and Practices of Radical Community Development Projects in 1970s Britain," *Community Development Journal*, 52, no. 1 (April 2017): 226-246.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in John Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, 155.

<sup>21</sup> For example, Liverpool's celebrated housing co-operatives, which gave tenants a free hand in designing their own homes and neighborhoods, but ended up creating closed off and uninviting tracts of houses arranged along cul-de-sacs in the heart of the city. See Nicholas Wates, "The Liverpool Breakthrough, or Public Sector Housing Phase 2," *Architectural Journal* 176, no 36 (September 1982): 51-58.

targets felt the same way. Modernist planning, after all, was responsible for dismembering living communities across the country for the sake of some bureaucrats' ideas of progress. And many planners would have agreed with Prince Charles when he castigated Britain's architects and planners for having "consistently ignored the feelings and wishes of the mass of ordinary people in this country."<sup>22</sup> It was a judgment that directly echoed one architect's 1978 assessment of Stirling's Southgate estate as "a satirical mockery of ordinary people's aspirations."<sup>23</sup> Across the political spectrum by the early 1980s, politicians, journalists, and many architects and planners judged modernist planning a complete disaster at the individual as well the social level. From this foregone conclusion, governments for the last four decades have relentlessly stripped from local councils the funds to creatively plan their cities, or even to manage their dwindling public housing stock. In the name of austerity, efficiency, and market discipline, public housing has been sold off to well-off residents, developers, or private housing associations; management has been outsourced to often-unaccountable non-profit groups known as "arms length management organizations."

The implications of the slashing of public budgets and the disavowal of responsibility for council housing became clear on the morning of 14 June 2017, when Londoners woke up to the smoking ruin of Grenfell Tower. Rather, the implications became clear in conflicting ways that highlighted the divisive legacy of Britain's postwar planning. For Simon Jenkins (whose jaundiced view of planning as a blitz we encountered in the introduction), the fire was yet another example of the failure of modern planning. Grenfell Tower, designed in 1967 and

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<sup>22</sup> Prince Charles, A Speech by HRH The Prince of Wales at the 150th Anniversary of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), Royal Gala Evening at Hampton Court Palace," 30 May 1984. <https://www.princeofwales.gov.uk/speech/speech-hrh-prince-wales-150th-anniversary-royal-institute-british-architects-riba-royal-gala>.

<sup>23</sup> Raymond Andrews, comment at the RIBA Conference "Living in Cities," Liverpool, 14 July 1978. From conference newsletter held in Liverpool Record Room, 711 CIV 8/18.

completed in 1974, provided the “simple lesson” that tower blocks “are antisocial, high-maintenance, disempowering, unnecessary, mostly ugly, and they can never be truly safe.”<sup>24</sup> Jenkins’s flash judgment, delivered the day after the blaze, neatly packaged a decades-old critique of Britain’s council housing that discounted a complicated history of mismanagement, under-funding, and social and economic inequality in favor of the simple lessons of architectural design. But as subsequent investigations revealed, the chief reason for the fire was the Kensington and Chelsea Tenants’ Management Organization’s decision to use a cheap and flammable type of cladding to prettify the building (many of the surrounding area’s wealthy residents agreed with Jenkins that the tower was ugly), over the residents’ safety concerns.<sup>25</sup> Grenfell’s lessons were far from simple, but they come down more to economics than to architecture. As the Nigerian poet and novelist Ben Okri wrote after the fire, “[Grenfell’s victims] did not die when they died; their deaths happened long before. It happened in the minds of people who never saw them. It happened in the profit margins. It happened in the laws. They died because money could be saved and made.”<sup>26</sup> It was not the architectural follies of the 1960s and 1970s that led to the disaster at Grenfell. Rather, it was the product of a more recent history that was checkered by a series of managerial choices coupled with politically motivated deregulation and mandated municipal austerity.

This may seem an odd way to conclude a dissertation that has been much more about individuals and ideas than about economics and impersonal forces. But the congeries of ideas that critics like Simon Jenkins invoked have repeatedly justified choices to demolish housing

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<sup>24</sup> Simon Jenkins, “The Lesson from Grenfell Is Simple: Stop Building Residential Towers,” *The Guardian*, 15 June 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jun/15/lessons-grenfell-tower-safer-cladding-tower-blocks>.

<sup>25</sup> Grenfell Action Group, “KCTMO—Playing with Fire!” Grenfell Action Group blog, 20 November 2016. <https://grenfellactiongroup.wordpress.com/2016/11/20/kctmo-playing-with-fire/>.

<sup>26</sup> Ben Okri, “Grenfell Tower, June 2017,” *Financial Times*, 23 June 2017. <https://www.ft.com/content/39022f72-5742-11e7-80b6-9bfa4c1f83d2?mhq5j=e3>.

estates, deregulate urban space, and slash public spending. Ideas mattered in the shaping of Britain's postwar urban spaces, though not always in the way that the architects and planners of the 1960s and 1970s intended when they set about designing places that would foster neighborliness and new patterns of community. The social life of the courtyards and walkways at Byker, Killingworth, and Southgate bore little resemblance to the "traditional" community that their planners hoped to emulate. But when residents remembered the demolished social world of the Towers and Southgate, they recalled the estates' "community spirit" that had formed along the streets in the sky and the communal play areas.

Likewise, twenty-first-century Byker's polyglot multiethnic population is far from Ralph Erskine's vision for preserving the original white working-class community, but it has become a model for resident-managed public housing in an era when many "iconic" council estates have been either demolished or privatized and gentrified. This outcome would not have been possible without Erskine's original vision of democratic planning and tenant involvement, combined with the residents' vocal insistence (much like their Byker predecessors in the 1960s) that theirs was a uniquely vibrant and thriving "community"—a word equally important in Byker's history for its rhetorical power as for its description of a real phenomenon. Byker residents used the notion of community as a strategic tool in the 1960s to elicit special attention and increased funds for the redevelopment of their homes, and the memory of the old Byker community served as a symbolic weapon for Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen to underline the new Byker's shortcomings. But community also meant something tangible for Byker people. It meant the support networks that sustained people, as in the watchful eyes making sure single pensioners collected their milk during a cold spell, or Gerel and Ariunaa's friends and acquaintances bombarding the Home Office with phone calls demanding the refugees' release. Without these "utopian" ideas, it is

likely that Byker would have been regenerated years ago and its residents removed to make way for a “proper” social mix.

It would be too simplistic to observe that there was a strong community in the old Byker that matched postwar ideas of the “traditional” industrial working class, and that there is now a thriving community in the new Byker that better fits the realities of the new postindustrial and multiethnic Britain, and from this to conclude that everything worked out for the best (or that community is simply an analytically meaningless concept). To do so would be to overlook the shattered friendships, the loneliness, and the disorientation that modernist urban renewal brought with it. As the historian E. P. Thompson observed in his 1963 book, *The Making of the English Working Class*, scholars who judge dramatic historical processes like industrialization (or, in Thompson’s own context, slum clearance) in terms of final outcomes overlook the sensory and psychological trauma that those processes wrought in lives, towns, and cities across Britain.<sup>27</sup> In putting the ideas, ambitions, and experiences of both the planners and the planned for in the same optic, my aim has not been to rescue either of them from, as Thompson famously put it, “the enormous condescension of posterity” (though both have suffered their share of condescension).<sup>28</sup> They do not need rescuing, and (considering how many people actually read dissertations) would not realize a rescue had been attempted.

By foregrounding the motley, sometimes cacophonous visions and plans for the postwar British city, my aim has been to break from a one-way view of planning in which ordinary people appear as passive victims and planners as their arrogant antagonists. This tired but persistent narrative elides the ongoing history of residents’ planning from below, and it has justified the ideologically motivated destruction and privatization of much of Britain’s public

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<sup>27</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

housing. At estates like Killingworth and Southgate, what resulted was a reenactment in the 1980s of the social and psychological trauma of the slum clearance drives of the preceding decades. As the experiences of “ordinary” people like John Topping, Shirely Magnitsky, and Ann Evans show, when Britain’s postwar modernist planning projects were treated as investments rather than burdens and housing of last resort, they worked. They were neither utopia nor dystopia for their tenants—they were home.

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