

COVENTRY PLANNED
THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE PLAN FOR
COVENTRY 1940 – 1978

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Front cover: *Suggested Plan for Redevelopment of Central Area from The Future Coventry* (undated 1945)

Frontispiece: Coventry Centre c. 1930. Showing Broadgate at middle left, the Cathedral at top right.

This page: The Levelling Stone (1946) in the Upper Precinct with the incised phoenix (Trevor Tennant sculpt.) laid to commemorate the inauguration of Coventry's reconstruction

COVENTRY PLANNED – THE POST-WAR REBUILDING OF COVENTRY

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INTRODUCTION

This Report was commissioned by English Heritage as part of an historic overview and assessment of the post-war reconstruction of Coventry city centre. Much of Coventry, and in particular the 1950s and 1960s shopping precinct, is due to change and this change will demolish many of the original buildings and alter existing street patterns. The time is right for a final assessment of their form, quality and meaning.

The authors' studies of Exeter (1999) Plymouth (2000) revealed a dearth of contemporary or current academic study of the planning and architecture of the post-war period. The bibliographies of those reports were notably short and the reports were mostly based on contemporary information extracted from the Councils' files. With Coventry, as with Broadmead, Bristol (2004) the opposite is the case. Like Bristol, Coventry must be one of the most recorded and studied of modern British cities. These studies range from the academic (Richardson, 1972 and Campbell, 1996) to specific studies of Coventry (Mason and Tiratsoo, 1990 and Hasegawa, 1992). Coventry, like Bristol, was reported in the national architectural and planning journals, whereas Plymouth and Exeter were not. The studies of Mason and Tiratsoo and of Hasegawa, in particular, look at post-war Coventry politics and planning legislation and how they affected the city and Nicholas Bullock's recent study (2002), based on them, attempts to relate Coventry to national trends. However, none of these writers has looked at the *architecture* of Coventry in any detail or tried to explain why it came about. That is what this Report attempts.

The architecture of the 1950s has never been popular and, until recently, has not been the subject of any serious academic study. But attitudes to it are changing. With the work of The Twentieth Century Society, English Heritage and Elaine Harwood and Bridget Cherry in particular, many 1950s buildings are now Listed and Harwood's *A Guide to Post-War Listed Buildings* (2003) shows what an extraordinary and diverse architecture it was. The questions posed by this Report, then, are – are the buildings of Coventry worth preserving separately or as groups? How does the architecture of Coventry compare to its contemporary architecture in Exeter, Plymouth and Bristol? What influence did the architecture of Coventry have on developments elsewhere?

More than in any other post-war city rebuilding, with the exception of Plymouth, the history of Coventry is about the opportunity offered by wartime destruction for rethinking the city centre and how this opportunity was realised.

Caroline Gould

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1. PRE-WAR PLANNING

The German raid on Coventry on 14th November 1940 that destroyed much of the City Centre created the opportunity for its major re-planning. But the City Council's desire to re-configure the original mediaeval plan, which, through the industrialisation of the city, had become severely congested, long pre-dated the destruction. Indeed, as at Bristol, works to clear what was perceived to be un-repairable slum property and to open up new routes within the centre had already begun. Instigated by the City Engineer's Department which also had a Town Planning remit, Corporation Street (1931) and Trinity Street (1937), described as 'road-widening' schemes, were in fact new thoroughfares carved through the existing industrial and medieval city core, allowing for the construction of new department stores, such as the Cooperative Retail Society in West Orchard (1931) and for Owen Owen (1939) on the west side of Trinity Street.¹ These remained isolated and unconnected pieces however, as the difficulties of persuading existing landowners and the cost of compensation made further comprehensive re-planning unachievable. A 1938 plan by the City Engineer appears to show areas that might be redeveloped as opportunities arose but there was no comprehensive proposal for the city centre.

The appointment in 1938 of Donald Gibson² to the new post of City Architect and Town Planner could be seen as an indication of the new (Labour) City Council's desire for change. The new City Architect's Department took over from the City Engineer's Department the provision of schools, hospitals and other municipal buildings together with housing from the Housing Department.

Gibson appointed to his new department a team of young like-minded planner/architects³ with whom he set about re-thinking the City centre. Gibson and his team had been much impressed by the writing of Lewis Mumford⁴, so much so that they distributed his *The Culture of Cities* to City Councillors in an effort to enthuse the Council with new planning ideas. In *The Culture of Cities* Mumford outlines four stages of planning from the survey, evaluation and the plan proper through to what he calls *intelligent absorption* of the plan by the community such that it may be translated into action and re-adapt itself to changing circumstances. Mumford rejects what he describes as monumental, backward-looking, grandiose planning in favour of *poly-centric* city planning that recognises the social function of the city and how it changes. Gibson, together with his team and supported by like-minded Labour Councillors pursued these ideas in formulating proposals for the re-planning of Coventry.

¹ As far back as 1919, when Barclays Bank proposed new bank premises in High Street (1919, Peacock, Bewlay and Cooke, now Yorkshire Bank) the City Engineer tried to enforce a new building line 7'-0" behind the existing, for road widening, but the bank objected unless it could be compensated and the City's General Works Committee allowed construction on the existing line.

² Donald Evelyn Edward Gibson (1908-1991). Before his appointment at Coventry, Gibson had taught at Liverpool University, worked at the Building Research Establishment and held the post of Deputy County Architect for the Isle of Ely.

³ Including Percy Johnson Marshall (1915-1993), graduate of Liverpool University,

⁴ Lewis Mumford (1895-1990) American writer on cities.

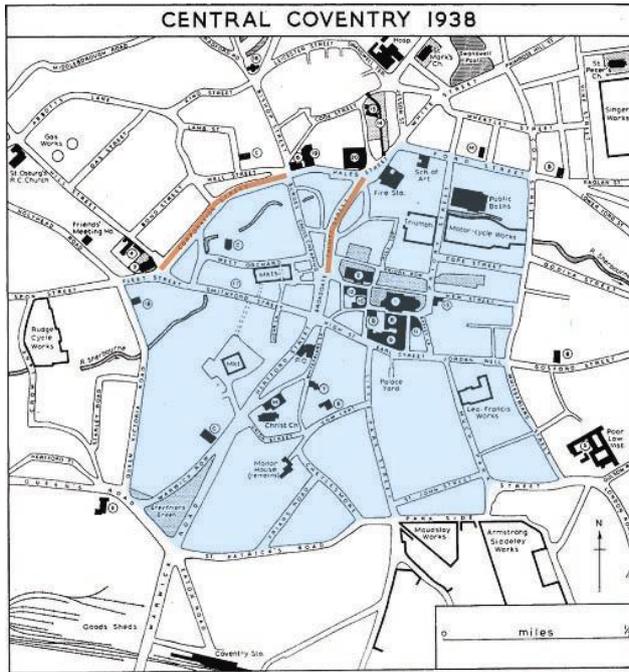


Figure 1: 1938 Central Coventry. Corporation Street and Trinity Street in red



Figure 1: 1939 Model of new Civic Centre displayed in the *Coventry of Tomorrow* exhibition

As well as Mumford, Gibson and his team were influenced by the writing of Le Corbusier and, in particular, his *Urbanisme*, translated as *The City of Tomorrow*, with its four principles for planning cities:

1. *We must de-congest the centres of our cities*
2. *We must augment their density*
3. *We must increase the means for getting about*
4. *We must increase parks and open spaces*⁵

Le Corbusier went on to propose that increased density and open space should be procured by building tall buildings. While embracing these principles, Gibson rejected the idea of tall buildings for Coventry, as being inappropriate for a small city and in competition with the three church spires.

A further influence in planning ideas for Coventry may be found in the Liverpool School of Architecture where Donald Gibson had taught in 1934 and where some of his team had studied. Charles Reilly, Roscoe Professor of Architecture at Liverpool 1904 -1933, had instituted in 1909 the country's first town planning department, the Department of Civic Design, with Stanley Adshead as its first professor and Patrick Abercrombie as studio tutor and lecturer. When in 1915 Adshead left Liverpool to set up the new Department of Town Planning at University College in London, Abercrombie was appointed to replace him and remained there until 1935. Abercrombie was, perhaps, the best known planner for war damaged cities, most notably Plymouth, Hull and London and it is probable that, as well as absorbing the formal Beaux-Arts approach to planning of the Liverpool Architecture School, Gibson also absorbed Abercrombie's ideas about zoning, open space and formal gridded plans.

The 1939 Plan and the 'Coventry of Tomorrow' Exhibition

Beginning with an area east and north of the cathedral and prompted by the offer by Sir Alfred Herbert⁶ to build a new museum and art gallery and by suggestions from the local civic society, the City Guild, Gibson's team had already begun to consider proposals for the new Coventry in 1939. Their plan, of necessity, encompassed only those less commercially developed areas where re-development might reasonably be proposed and was for a specific purpose (a civic centre) designed to enhance the city's standing, that could be expected to receive general support. Their proposals included a *new Library, Museum, Civil Hall, Police and Law Courts and Municipal Offices, around a dignified and spacious close....All the buildings were kept comparatively low in order to emphasise the verticality of the Cathedral...and were to be faced with brick and stone to harmonise with the local*

⁵ Le Corbusier, tr. Etchells, F. (1929) *The City of Tomorrow & Its Planning*

⁶ Sir Alfred Edward Herbert (1866 – 1957) Coventry industrialist who founded in 1887 the Alfred Herbert Machine Tool Company (closed in 1973).

*red sandstone...*⁷ At the same time Gibson sought to raise understanding of planning and design issues through slide lectures to schools and other bodies such as the Rotarians and the mounting of an exhibition, *Coventry of Tomorrow*⁸, for a week in May 1940. This last had over 5000 visitors including Thomas Sharp⁹, William Holford¹⁰ and nearly all the senior school children in the city.

The 1939 Plan envisaged clearing away most of the medieval and eighteenth century buildings adjacent to the cathedral and Holy Trinity Church, the siting of the museum on Earl Street adjacent to the Council House across St Mary Street and the enclosing of a formal open space with civic buildings in long, sinuous four-storey blocks. To the north a more informal park separated the new civic centre from the bus station. The Plan is interesting inasmuch as it presages the scales and formality of later plans. It also foreshadows the idea of the enclosed inward-looking precinct laid out around formal axes and, inadvertently perhaps, indicates the problems that arise with the outward faces of such precincts.

⁷ Johnson Marshall *Rebuilding Cities* p. 293

⁸ The title may have been borrowed from Le Corbusier's *City of Tomorrow*

⁹ Dr Thomas Wilfred Sharp (1901-1978), town planner and author.

¹⁰ William Holford (1907-1975) Architect and town planner, trained at Liverpool University where he succeeded Patrick Abercrombie as Professor of Civic Design in 1937. Succeeded Abercrombie as Professor of Town Planning at University College London in 1948



Figure 3: 1941 Coventry bomb damage model. Broadgate is in the centre with the Cathedral shell centre right.

2. WAR AND AFTERMATH

The Coventry Blitz – 14th November 1940

Coventry was a strategic target for enemy attack¹. Retaining its mediaeval structure, it had developed from the latter half of the nineteenth century into an industrial city with car, bicycle, aircraft engine and munitions factories interlacing its ancient city plots. Smaller raids in June 1940, August 1940 and October 1940 had given a foretaste of what was to come, leaving several casualties and damaging buildings². Follow up raids in 1941 caused further damage but not on a similar scale.

The raid on November 14th 1940 was altogether of a different order. The story has been told several times elsewhere³ but the raid, by more than five hundred aircraft dropping a mixture of high explosive and incendiary bombs, devastated the city centre. Most notable of course was the Cathedral where incendiary bombs set fire to the roof and the nineteenth century iron reinforcing beams twisted, tearing down the arcading and leaving only the external walls and the spire standing. Cope Street and New Street to the east of the Cathedral were also badly damaged⁴.

Worst affected was the area west of the cathedral, the commercial heart of the city, centred on the east-west Smithford Street, bounded on the east by Trinity Street, Broadgate and Hertford Street and on the west by Corporation Street and Queen Victoria Street. Barely any structure in this lozenge-shaped area remained.

But the devastation of 14th November 1940 opened up opportunities for Donald Gibson's team so when, barely three weeks after the raid, he addressed the Royal Society of Arts in London with a paper entitled 'Problems of Building Reconstruction'⁵, Gibson was able not only to lay out how post-war re-construction generally could be managed (by for example using redundant aircraft factories to pre-fabricate housing components) but also to bring his ideas for the comprehensive redevelopment of Coventry City Centre to a wider audience.

*I would like to add a few words on the significance of the recent bombing of Coventry. Many citizens had despaired of the possibility of having a dignified and fitting city centre. High land values, the delays involved by town planning legislation, together with a lack of plan for the central area made it seem impossible. Now, in a night, all this is changed. Over a year and a half ago I prepared a civic centre scheme which, grouped round the two noble medieval churches, embodied all the public buildings in one ordered conception, at the same time suggesting a central park space which is so badly needed. In one night the site is largely cleared ready for this regeneration. It rests but with the fortunes of war and the desires of a great people, to see it accomplished.*⁶

¹ German bomb maps highlight the industrial targets throughout the city. The Germans coined the term *coventriert* to describe towns on which they had inflicted similar damage to Coventry.

² Notably the newly completed Rex Cinema on Corporation Street

³ For a factual account of the bombing including statistics on casualties and buildings destroyed, visit www.historiccoventry.co.uk

⁴ Both these streets would have been destroyed by the 1939 Plan

⁵ R. S. A. 4th December 1940, W. H. Ansell, M.C., P.R.I.B.A. presiding.

⁶ Extracts from Paper read before R.S.A. *Architect and Building News* 1940 Dec. 6

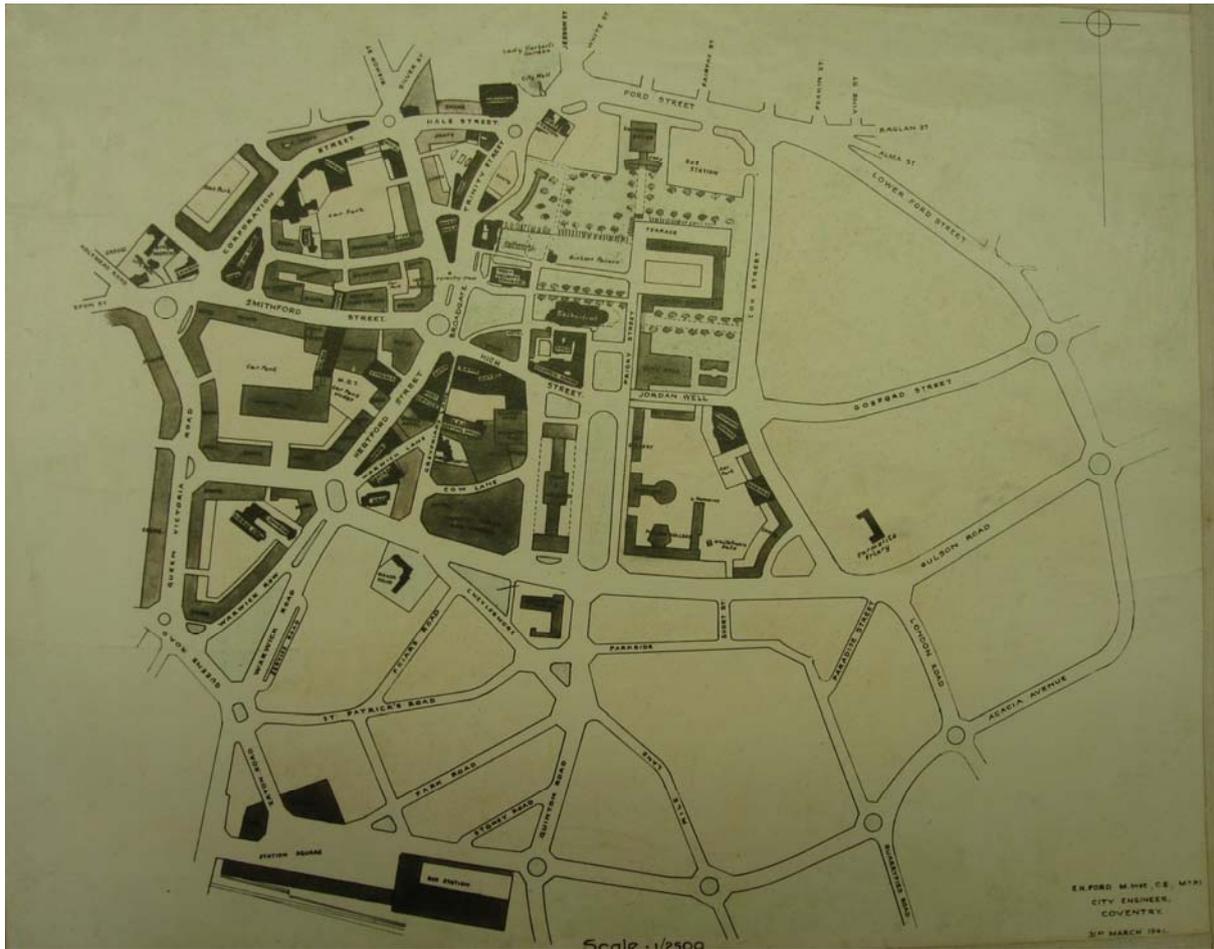


Figure 4: 1941 City Engineer's, (E. H Ford) Plan

The City Council too had been quick to act and, within a month of the raid had set up the City Redevelopment Committee⁷ to direct how the re-planning of the city should proceed. The Committee instructed the city engineer, Ernest Ford, and the city architect, Donald Gibson, to collaborate in preparing a plan while the Town Clerk, Frederick Smith, was to approach central government for enabling legislation and assistance to implement it. This last resulted in a Deputation⁸ being invited to London in January 1941 to meet Lord Reith⁹, the recently appointed Minister of Works and Buildings and First Commissioner of Works. Coventry was the first provincial city to have been badly bombed and Reith was charged with facilitating reconstruction plans. He recalled that,

It was on this occasion that I first gave that advice- repeated later elsewhere- which was often to be quoted in years to come with a good deal of justifiable recrimination attached...I told them that if I were in their position I would plan boldly and comprehensively and that I would not at this stage worry about finance or local boundaries.¹⁰

Emboldened by Reith's encouragement, his indication that central government would finance blitz repair and his intention to regard Coventry (together with Plymouth and Portsmouth) as a test case, the City Council were convinced to proceed quickly with reconstruction plans and pressed Gibson and Ford to complete their plan.

As it turned out, Ford and Gibson held such divergent views that each produced his own plan. Without enabling legislation to overcome the difficulties of coercing or compensating existing landowners, Ford's plan was pragmatic. While accepting Gibson's idea of an inner circulatory road to the south and east and remaining vague as to the land-use in these areas, Ford's plan retained the existing street pattern and land-use of the central area and what remained of the existing buildings. Gibson rejected this approach as retrograde and proposed his own plan responding to *the opportunity, which may never recur, to build a city designed for the future health, amenity and convenience of its citizens.*¹¹ Both plans were presented to the City Council who, on 25th February 1941 by a large majority, agreed with the Redevelopment Committee recommendation that the City Architect's plan be endorsed.

*The 1941 Plan*¹²

Gibson's plan was presented as a two-stage plan, the first stage being *a redevelopment scheme which could start directly war ends*. This retained existing buildings and street patterns around the

⁷ The City Redevelopment Committee was set up under the Chairmanship of Councillor A. Robert Grindlay and Alderman George E. Hodgkinson. There were, in addition four councillor and four alderman members together with the Town Clerk, Frederick Smith, the City Engineer, Ernest H. Ford and the City Architect, Donald E. E. Gibson

⁸ The Deputation consisted of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, the Chairmen of the Redevelopment Committee, the Town Clerk, the City Treasurer, City Architect and City Engineer.

⁹ John Charles Walsham Reith, 1st Baron Reith (1889-1971) Director General of the BBC, MP for Southampton, Minister of Information 1940, Minister of Transport 1940, Minister of Works and Buildings and First Commissioner of Works 1940-1942, Minister of Works and Planning 11.02.42 – 22.02.42.

¹⁰ Lord Reith (1949) *Into the Wind* London: Hodder & Stoughton

¹¹ Report in the *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 1941 Mar. 17, p. 76-77

¹² Published in the *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 1941 Mar. 17, p. 76-77; *The Architect & Building News*, 1941 Mar. 21, p. 188-195; *Architects' Journal*, 1941 Apr. 24, p. 278-281

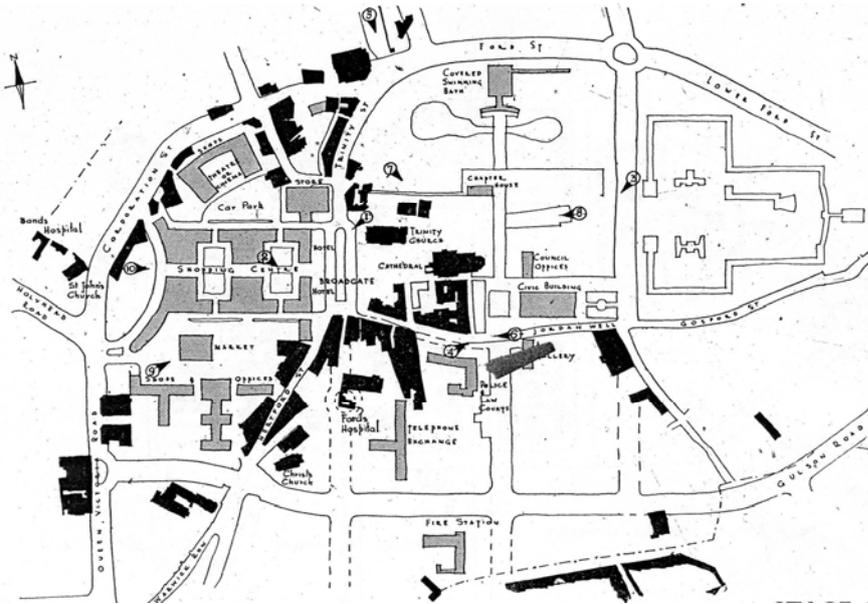


Figure 5: 1941 'Immediate Plan'. Buildings retained shown black. New buildings shown grey

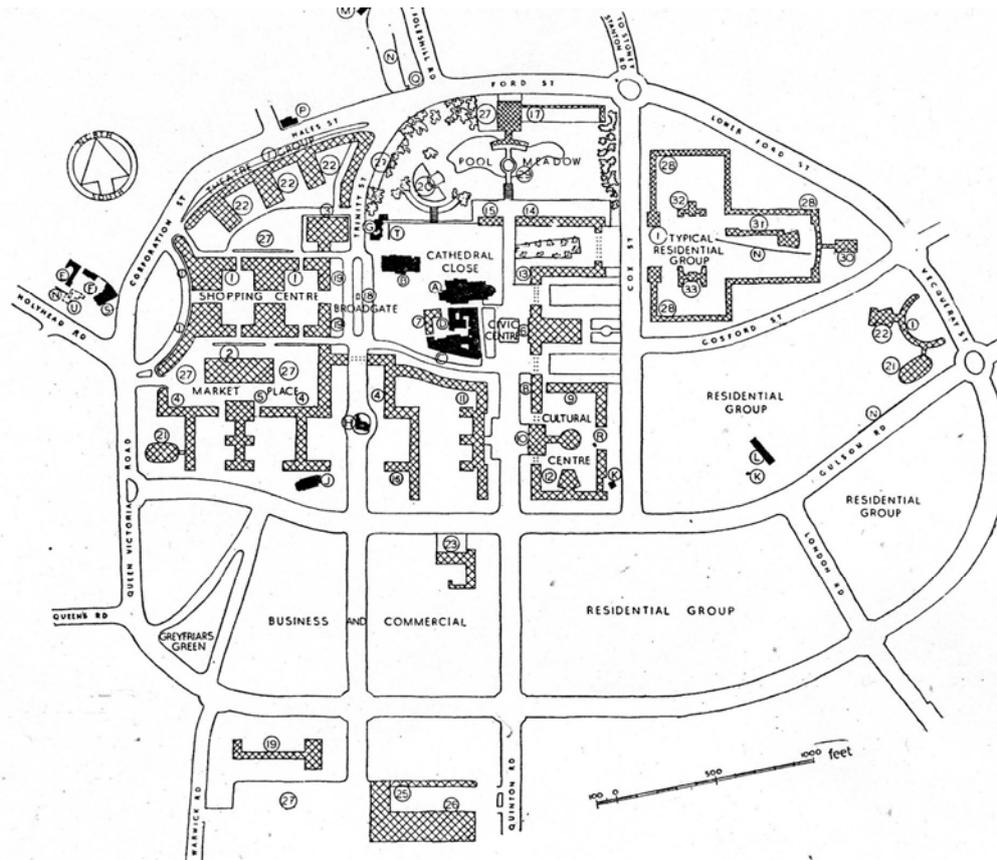


Figure 6: 1941 'Ultimate Plan'. Buildings retained shown black. New buildings shown cross-hatched

central area. The three principal aims of this first stage were *to improve traffic circulation and capacity; to “open up” individual building units; to group together buildings which cater for the same form of activity – shopping, administration, recreation, business.*¹³ The second stage plan, which, Gibson was careful to say, showed only *the general disposition of main routes, grouping of activities and proportion of open space to buildings towards which Coventry should be steered*¹⁴ was much more radical. Gibson proposed an inner circulatory road that followed the line of the existing Queen Victoria Road, Corporation Street, Ford and Lower Ford Streets and Vecqueray Street, looped south to Acacia Avenue and ran west, close to the railway station rejoining Queen Victoria Road at Greyfriars Green.

Within the new inner circulatory road virtually all the existing buildings were to be removed¹⁵ and the entire road system re-configured into a formal grid pattern. It was this plan (together with Sir Patrick Abercrombie’s 1943 Plan for Plymouth) that was one of those studied by Lord Reith’s committee set up to *investigate the obstacles to proper redevelopment in badly damaged areas*¹⁶ and that contributed to the formulation of the 1944 Town and Country Planning Act which set out the legislation for compulsory purchase and compensation for blitzed land for local authorities, enabling them to override land ownerships and regulation that might inhibit comprehensive redevelopment.

It was Gibson’s Plan of 1941 that set out the principles and the basic form of the city centre redevelopment that was carried through a whole series of iterations to its present form. In his plan Gibson describes its conception as being *based around the fine Cathedral tower and spire, the Holy Trinity Church, St Mary’s Hall and the hill they crown, which is Coventry.*¹⁷ Round the cathedral at the centre Gibson proposed a *system of radial and ring roads...using existing roads wherever possible...with a view to accommodating the increased road traffic of the future...* noting that *It would be fitting for the centre of the motor car industry to give a lead.*¹⁸ Within the ring there were to be no through roads or industrial areas.

But it is in the plan for the shopping centre that Gibson is at his most innovative. Laid out in a series of squares on a formal east-west axis centred on the Cathedral spire across the new Broadgate square edged with hotels and a department store at the east end and descending the hill to a crescent-shaped open space on Corporation Street at the west end, its design is based *on the comfort and safety of the shoppers. All shopping will be done in arcades. There will be no crossing from one side of a traffic street to the other...*¹⁹

¹³ Post-War Coventry – A Scheme for Redevelopment of the Centre. *Architects’ Journal* 1941 Apr. 24. These echo the four basic principles for the plan of the city set out by Le Corbusier in *The City of Tomorrow*.

¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁵ Even those that were retained might be moved. Ford’s Hospital could be moved to the Bond’s Hospital site; a foretaste of the Spon Street scheme.

¹⁶ Post-War Coventry – A Scheme for Redevelopment of the Centre. *Architects’ Journal* 1941 Apr. 24.

¹⁷ Re-planning of Coventry. *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* 1941 Mar. 17 p. 76-7

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

Central Coventry's planned pedestrian shopping *Precinct*²⁰ with rear servicing and car-parking and strict segregation of people from vehicles is, possibly, the earliest designed example²¹ at least within the United Kingdom. Added to this, the design for two levels of shopping (borrowed from the 13th and 14th century Chester Rows) allowed, at least in theory, for a denser shopping provision with higher rateable values. Perspective sketches, showing key vistas, illustrated possible treatment with taller six-storey buildings enclosing Broadgate reducing to four and three-storey buildings within the precinct. While emphasising that at this stage, it was the plan that was of primary importance, Gibson was also concerned that the elevational treatment of the precinct should be carefully considered and not return to the varying building heights and 'hideous lettering' of the old city. In plan, elevation and section, the 1941 Plan was to be ordered with clearly defined building hierarchies and rhythms.

The area to the north of the Precinct and with frontages on Corporation Street was zoned for theatres or cinemas. To the south of the Precinct a new market building was to be constructed in the Barracks Square and surrounded by shops and offices. The area to the south of the Cathedral, across High Street, was reserved for business and commercial use while the area to the east of the Cathedral was to be the new Civic Centre with a Cultural Centre to its south. The Pool Meadow Park, first proposed in the 1939 Plan, was retained to provide open space and would contain the new swimming bath.

²⁰ The term *Precinct* appears to be used following the publication, in 1942, of H. Alker Tripp's *Road Traffic and Town Planning*. The 1941 Plan refers to Shopping and Cultural *Centres*.

²¹ The earliest constructed example is Princesshay, Exeter 1951 (demolished 2005).

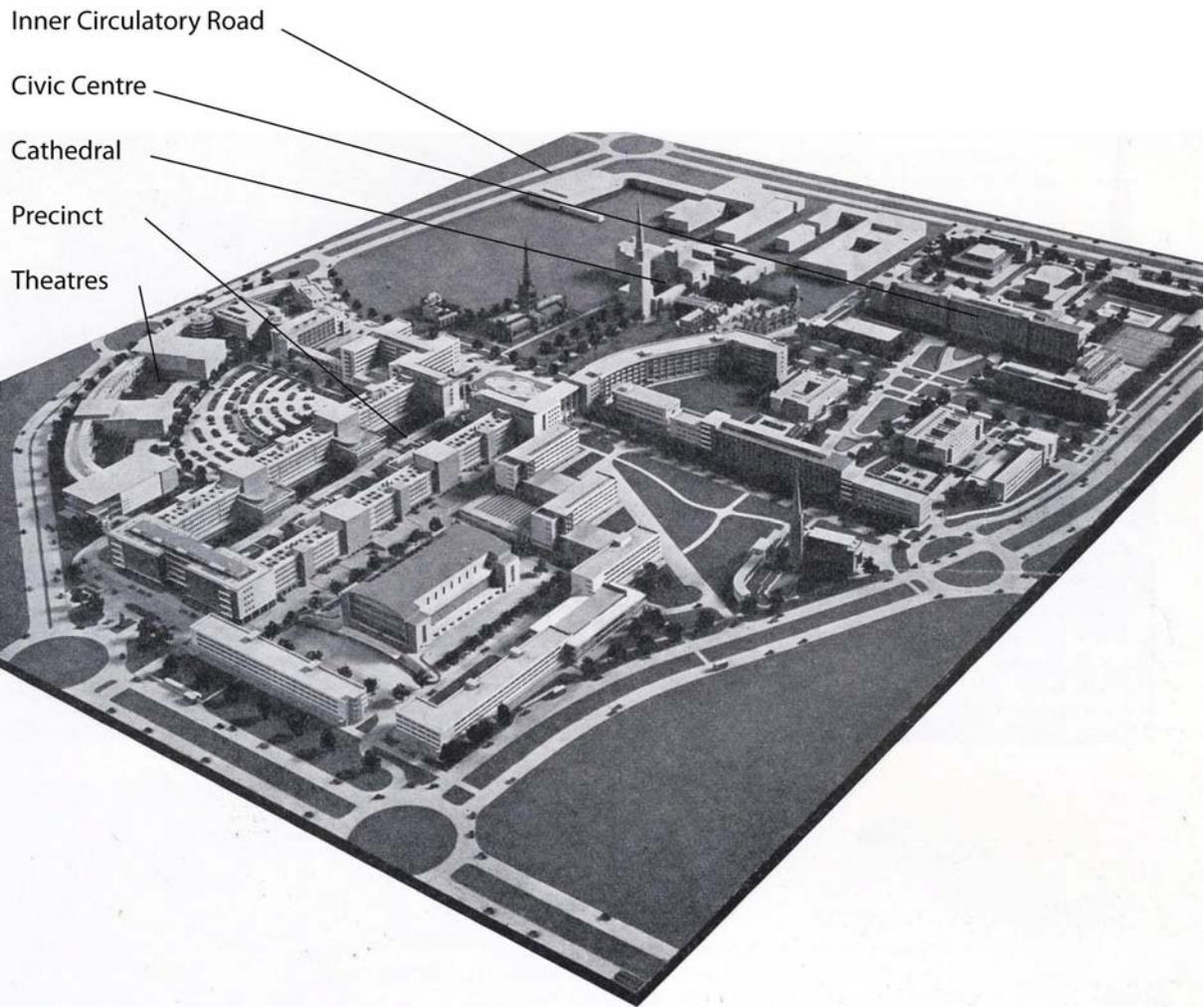


Figure 7: 1942 Third Model

3. PLAN DEVELOPMENT 1941 – 1950

Coventry's 1941 Plan, while apparently being accepted by both its citizens and by central Government, did not develop very rapidly. The City Council was understandably reluctant to commit to working up proposals under existing legislation that had proved cumbersome and inflexible, while the Government was slow to enact legislation that would facilitate the process. In the three years between Coventry's 1941 Plan the establishment of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning in 1943 and the 1944 Town and Country Planning Act that set out how and to what extent war damage reconstruction would be supported by Government, many other cities had been bombed. Coventry, as one of the first blitzed cities, had been encouraged to consider itself a special case but subsequent events had modified the Government's view. There was a resulting 'stand-off' between the parties with the Government urging Coventry to develop and submit its plans for approval and the City, especially the very cautious Town Clerk and Treasurer, seeking assurances as to how it was to be financed and enabled.¹

The Third Model 1942

Delays notwithstanding, work to develop the plan was prompted by the gift in 1942 by Lord Kenilworth² of £1000 towards the cost of a model. This further developed the idea of the shopping precinct focussed on the Cathedral spire but terminating at the west end with the Co-operative Society's store in place of the open crescent shown in the first plan. The two squares of the precinct had become a progression of three, separated from one another by department stores projecting forward from the main building lines. The market remained as a rectangular block standing within a square to the south of the main precinct. The east side of this square was designed as a series of staggered blocks following the line of Hertford Street. Theatres and cinemas fronted onto Corporation Street to the north as before.

The design for the area to the south and east of the Cathedral, designated as the civic centre, was much more comprehensively developed. A monumental bridge canopy separating Broadgate from Hertford Street joined the Broadgate buildings to a curving five-storey block running east along High Street and enclosing to the south a formal space. This was crossed by a grand boulevard running from north to south on the line of Little Park Street with a cross-grid of processional ways leading to the various civic buildings. The development of the plan caused further difficulties for the City in highlighting to Government both the untried precinct form of the shopping centre and the apparently over-scaled provision for civic building. The Coventry Redevelopment Committee was challenged by Government to prove that the Plan had general support and had not been imposed.

¹ For a detailed account of the intricate manoeuvring that took place see Hasegawa (1992) *Replanning the Blitzed City Centre*.

² John Siddley 1st Baron Kenilworth (1866-1956) Founder of Siddley Autocar Company, eventually to become, through mergers, Armstrong Siddley



Figure 8: 1945 Plan

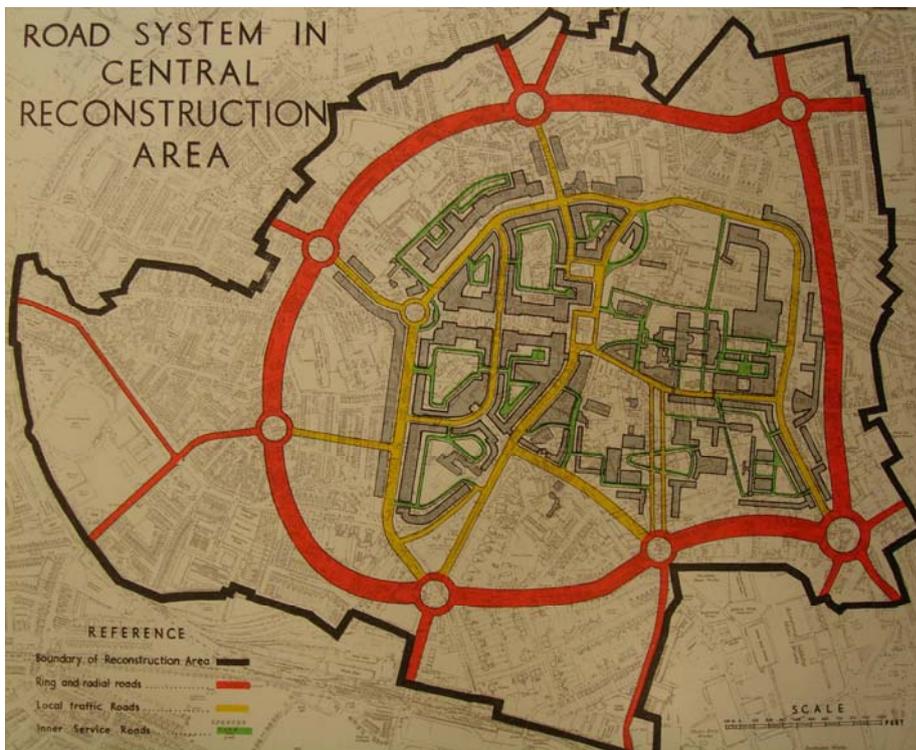


Figure 9: 1945 Plan Road System

Following the passing into law of the 1944 Town and Country Planning Act, Coventry Corporation was finally given the confidence to progress the plan and resolved to consult with the trading and other interest groups affected by the scheme as to modifications they might require. The chamber of commerce, representing the traders, focussed their opposition to the plan on the proposed pedestrian shopping precinct, fearing that it would be unworkable given the perceived preference of customers to be able to arrive, by car, at the front entrance of shops. Support for the chamber's position within the Corporation together with Government advice to the corporation officers to make some kind of compromise without abandoning altogether the principle of a pedestrian precinct prompted Gibson's team to re-think their proposals.

The Fourth Plan 1945 – Coventry of the Future

This plan retained the principle of the east-west shopping precinct focussed on the Cathedral³ spire across Broadgate at the east end. At the west end, the Co-operative 'anchor' store moved north, leaving the axis open to a truncated crescent and roundabout. The principal change to the precinct was its division into two parts by the introduction of a north-south trafficked cross street, Market Street⁴, that cranked west at its north end to join Corporation Street at right angles and, at its south end, curved through 90° to meet Queen Victoria Street at right angles.

Broadgate, at the east end of the precinct remained much as in the earlier plans with the two large buildings marking the entrance to the precinct, the bridge building over Hertford Street making the south side and the large department store (Owen Owen) making the north side. At the west end of the precinct and at its crossing point with Market Street, were located the larger stores which broke forward to mark the different areas. Blocks of smaller shops, on two levels and with offices above, formed links between the large stores. The theatre/ cinema zone moved to the other side of Corporation Street. The market hall was no longer a separate building within its own square but became part of the range of shops on the new cross street (Market Street). The civic area remained as in the 1942 model with buildings disposed formally around the north-south boulevard.

The other principal development from the earlier plans was the realignment of the line of the inner ring road. In parallel with their negotiations with the Ministry of Works, Coventry Corporation was also in discussion with the Ministry of Transport. The 1941 and 1942 plans showed the new road to be centred approximately on the proposed new cultural centre on the re-aligned Much Park Street to the south-east of the Cathedral. It is apparent that the Redevelopment Committee took the decision to centre the ring on Broadgate, shifting it north and west and creating thereby a zone within the ring but

³ The Cathedral is shown as reconstructed on the lines proposed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott (1880 – 1960) in 1944 with a new nave running north south across the old Cathedral's east end.

⁴ In later development of the plan, Market Street was split into the northern Smithford Way and the southern Market Way.



Figure 10: 1947 Declaratory Order Area

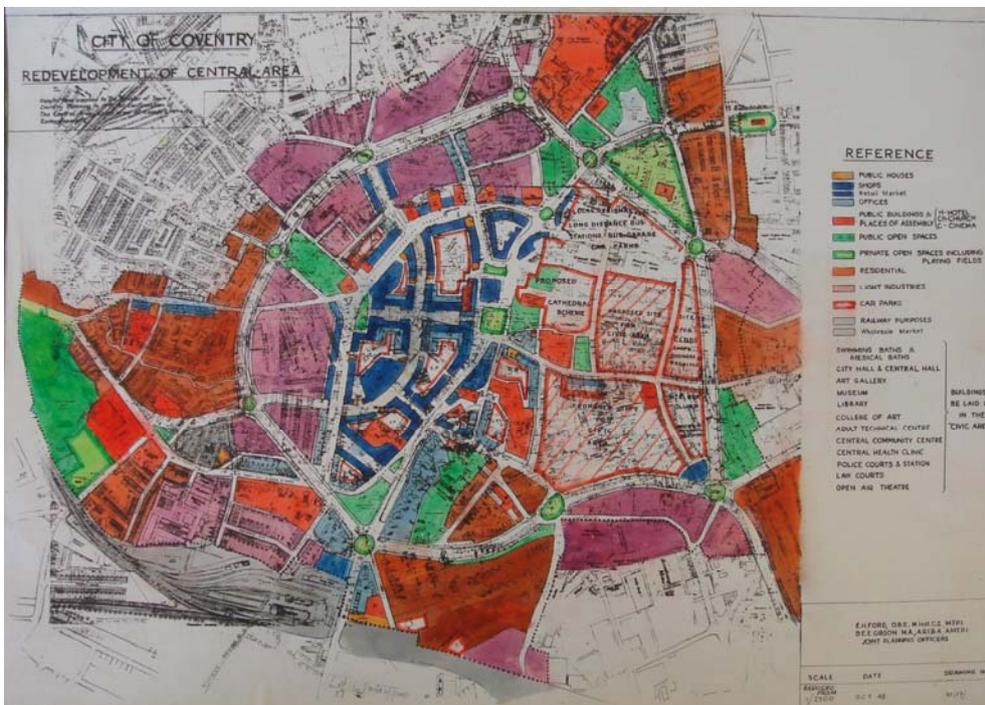


Figure 11: 1949 Ministry of Town & Country Planning approved plan

outside the main shopping area. This, together with the still over-scaled (in the Ministry of Works view) provision for civic buildings caused the Ministry to express reservations about the scheme even at the time that it was made public at the *Coventry of the Future* exhibition⁵ in October 1945, which commemorated the 600th anniversary of Coventry's Charter of Incorporation.

Encouraged by public support however, the Redevelopment Committee decided to proceed to inaugurate the re-development scheme by placing, in June 1946, a commemorative 'Levelling Stone' within the area of the proposed precinct. Later that year, following the successful public inquiry which approved the plan, the decision was taken to begin the redevelopment by laying out the Broadgate garden as a green space with the statue of Lady Godiva in the centre.

In 1947 the Redevelopment Committee also resolved to apply for the Declaratory Order required under the 1944 Town and Country Planning Act to enable compulsory purchase orders to be confirmed to acquire the land needed to realise the plan. Initially for 452 acres, this was reduced by the Ministry of Town and Country Planning to 274 acres covering the central area within the line of the proposed ring road and confirmed in June 1947. In May 1948 the Broadgate garden was completed and planted with bulbs donated by the Dutch National Committee in gratitude for the Netherlands' liberation. On 22nd May 1948 Princess Elizabeth visited Coventry and laid the foundation stone for the new shopping precinct.⁶

The final plan approved by the Ministry of Town and Country Planning on 16th July 1949 shows only the layout of the shopping precinct, as laid out in the 1945 Plan, and the line of the ring road in detail. This last has been brought in towards the centre on its northeast segment with an additional two roundabouts. The large area reserved for civic buildings is simply hatched and labelled *proposed site for civic area* without showing any detail while the zone left between the ring road and Corporation Street and Queen Victoria Road is mostly designated for light industry⁷. The bus station has been moved from its proposed site in the south, adjacent to the railway station, to a site on Pool Meadow north of the civic area.

⁵ The Council published an accompanying illustrated brochure, showing the plans, perspective views of the shopping centre and, by Cyril Farey, a view of Broadgate.

⁶ The stone is part of one of the arcade columns to Broadgate House.

⁷ Reflecting the existing land use.

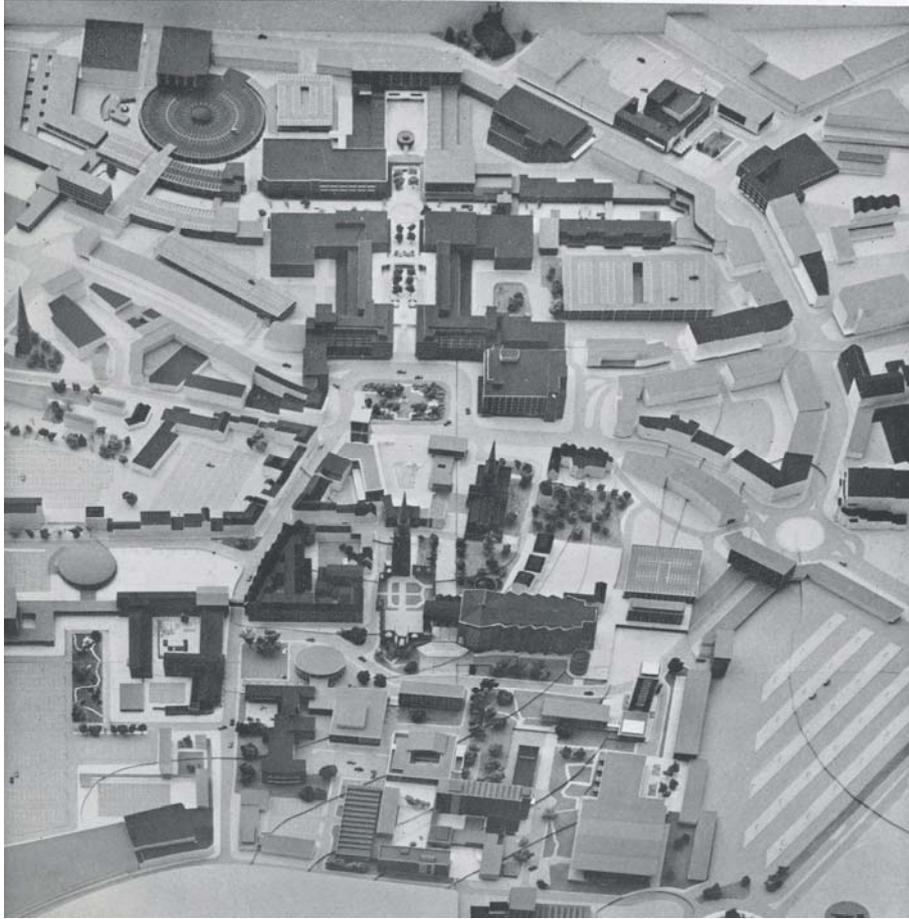


Figure 12: 1958 Model. Completed buildings shown black. Circular Market at top left

4. PLAN DEVELOPMENT 1950 – 1962

Building the new centre proceeded very slowly. Following the completion in 1948 of the Broadgate garden, byelaw and planning applications for the first building, Broadgate House, were lodged in 1949, with applications for the other buildings on Broadgate following in 1952 (Owen Owen) and 1953 (Hotel Leofric). Simultaneously applications were submitted by the multiple stores taking anchor stores in the Upper Precinct (Marks and Spencer and British Home Stores in 1953). Applications for the link blocks of the Upper Precinct were made in 1954 and 1955. So when, in 1953, D. Rigby Childs and D. A. C. A. Boyne completed their 18-month 'Comparison of Progress in Rebuilding Bombed Cities' with a survey of Coventry for the *Architects' Journal*, they were particularly struck by *the blunt fact that thirteen years after the first bombing attack not a single building has been completed in the Central Area*¹.

By 1955, when Donald Gibson was succeeded by Arthur G. Ling as City Architect and Planning Officer, most of Broadgate and the Upper Precinct were complete and a start made, with Woolworths (designed 1952), on Market Street, the trafficked cross street inserted at the insistence of the traders. Ling was determined that this street should not be open to cars and although it is not clear exactly when or how he was able to persuade the Corporation of his view, he prevailed in a relatively short time. Indeed it appears that, while the southern part, now Market Way, was initially accessible to cars, the northern part, now Smithford Way, was not. Ling was also clear that, as redevelopment proceeded the Plan should also develop from being the dictatorial 'Master Plan' needed to define the layout to becoming a 'Servant Plan' able to adapt to changing times and requirements.²

The 1958 Model

At some point too, between 1949 and 1955, the scheme for the covered market reverted from being an attached part of the Market Street frontage to being a separate, albeit an attached (now circular rather than rectangular) building between Market Street and the Lower Precinct. In the model, the new market's entrance onto Market Way is marked by a square (now Shelton Square), which also marks the Market Way connection, via another square (now Bull Yard) to the Hertford Street, Warwick Road and New Union Street junction. There is some indication of an attempt to mark the junctions of the various precinct entrances with Corporation Street and Queen Victoria Road but these are very much reduced from Gibson's first idea of a grand crescent at the west end of the precinct. Instead this is shown as a squat closure block while, at the north end, on Smithford Way there is an angular 'crescent'. Market Way still turns west to join Queen Victoria Road but the curve is made straight.

¹ *Architects' Journal* 1953 Oct. 8

² Special issue: On the rebuilding of Coventry: Historical Background. *Architectural Design* 1958 Dec. p. 473-503

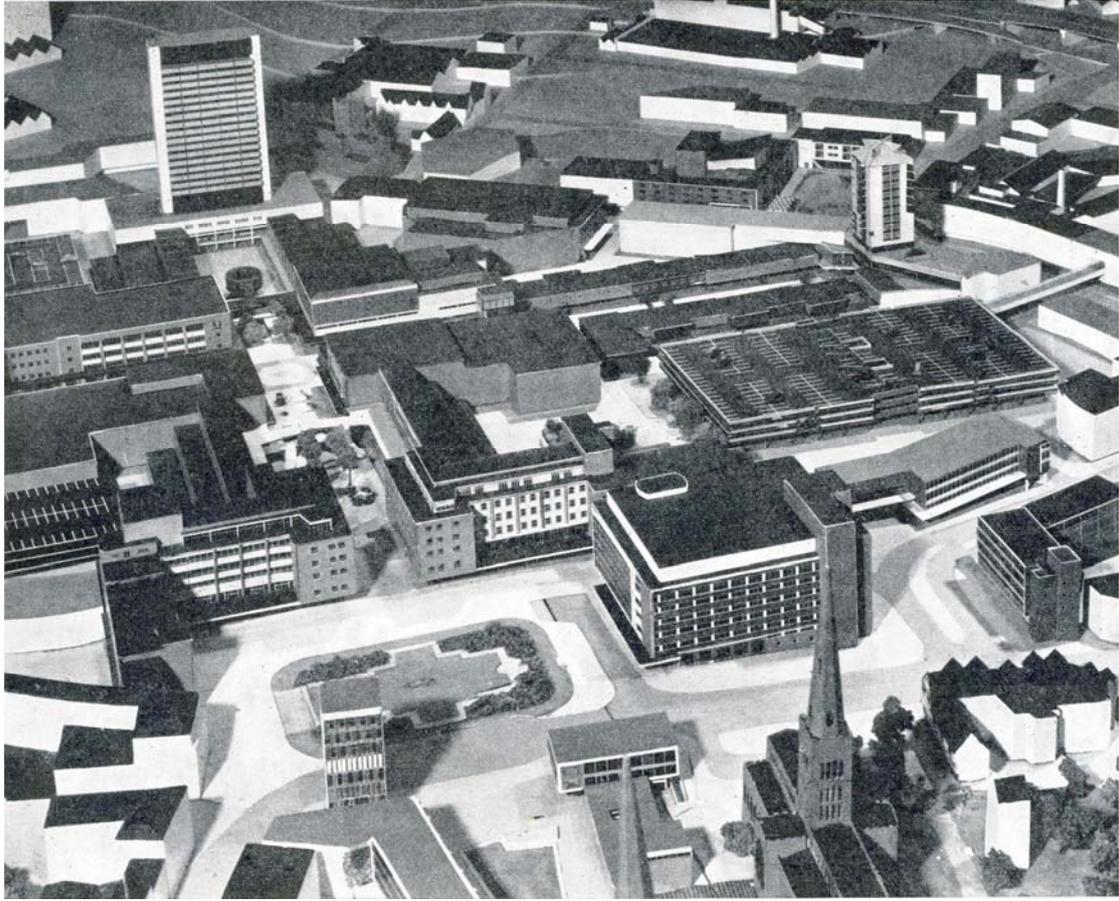


Figure 13. 1962 Model. Precinct terminal towers

A marked change from previous plans is the provision for car parking. Earlier plans appear to show this as filling up the rear spaces and service yards between buildings. In addition to separate multi storey car parks in Barracks Square and West Orchards, the 1958 Model shows car parking on the roof of the circular market hall connected via bridges to roof-top parking on adjacent buildings.

The 1958 Plan also reveals progress in other areas of the city. The only surviving element of the designated 'entertainment zone' on Corporation Street, the Belgrade Theatre, is complete. But it is in the areas reserved for civic buildings that the greatest change occurs. The new Cathedral is shown and the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum completed with the new city library planned, while the remaining area to the east of the Cathedral has been made available for the new College of Art and Technology and the swimming pool. The bus station is located on the Pool Meadow site, thereby losing the proposed central park. All the remaining civic buildings, including council offices, police station and law courts are located on the site to the south of Earl Street, between Little and Much Park Streets.

*The 1962 Plan*³

The last major iteration of the plan for the area within the ring road in 1962 is again concentrated on the shopping centre. Just as the east end of the Upper Precinct focussed on the old Cathedral spire, so it was decided that there should be focal points at the west end of the Lower Precinct, the north end of Smithford Way and on Market Way at the point where it began to curve. Thus three towers are proposed at these three points, two residential and one for office use. This represents a radical departure from Gibson's idea for a city with a uniform roofline that should not compete with the three spires, with consequent congestion and visual confusion. Market Way bends west behind its focal tower to terminate on Shelton Square with the connection through to Queen Victoria Road made via a new enclosed City Arcade.

The Plan also proposes the closure of Hertford Street to traffic and its redevelopment with a *precinctual treatment* with new shops and offices. The Plan aims to provide for *an extended traffic-free area (and) a system of linked car parks*. The other major change is to the layout of the ring road. In its original conception it was to have nine at-grade roundabouts. These are changed to *free-flow junctions with the radial roads*, which variously pass above or below the ring road, as it is in cut or raised.

By 1962, therefore, the framework of the redevelopment plan was set and the locations of the various elements decided. Subsequent iterations have not deviated significantly from this final structure.

³ Published in the *Architects Journal* 1962 July 11 in a special issue to coincide with the RIBA Annual Conference in Coventry. It was at this conference that Colin Buchanan first presented his work on traffic in towns.



Figure 14: 1941 Broadgate sketch,



Figure 15: 1941 Broadgate perspective (Cyril Farey)

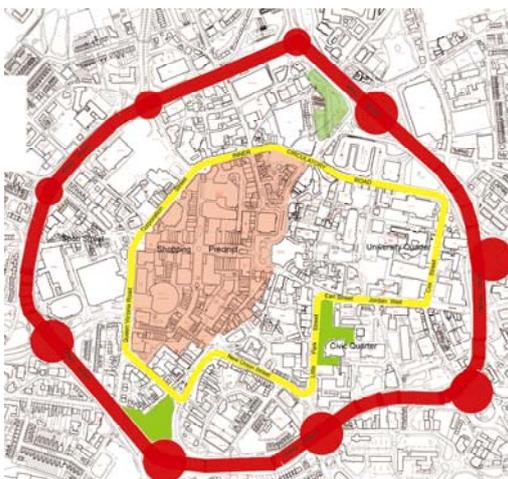


Figure 16: Shopping Precinct and Ring Roads



Figure 17: Shopping Precinct

5. BUILDINGS AND ARCHITECTURE 1950 - 1978 THE SHOPPING PRECINCT¹

It is significant that, perhaps because the City Architect was also the City Planning Officer, the City Architect's Department not only created the master plans but also designed a large percentage of the new buildings and that this continued at least until 1970. At the same time, where private developers or multiple stores were building, using their own architects, these were required in their designs, at least in the earlier stages of realisation of the plans, to conform in scale, height, elevational treatment and materials with their neighbours. The imposition of arcades or canopies and the 20'-0" module framed and gave a unified structure to the ranges of shops. This gave a particular common language to the whole.

The shopping zone or precinct is the area designated as the Reconstruction Area under the 1945 Plan. It is an irregular lozenge shape, bounded on the west/ northwest by Queen Victoria Road and Corporation Street and on the east/ southeast by Trinity Street, Broadgate, Hertford Street and Warwick Row. Its realisation reflects the compromises made as the clarity and, perhaps, over simplicity of the original ideas became obscured by subsequent modifications.

Broadgate

The layout and designs for Broadgate were the first to be realised and set the style for ongoing development. It was early established as the centre of the city and was to be a green open space surrounded by the tallest buildings in the plan, not more than five or six storeys, so as not to compete with the Cathedral spire. To the east, on a site on which temporary shops had been erected, was to be another open space, providing a *dignified*² approach and setting to the Cathedral and making, with Broadgate, a green wedge in the heart of the city.

Sketches published with the 1941 Plan show flat-roofed six-storey blocks with the first two floors given over to shops and restaurants and the upper floors to offices. The ends of the blocks are solid while the upper floors at the centre are recessed. The ground floor is recessed behind arcades. While the 1941 Plan concentrated on the planning intending only to indicate what the eventual buildings might look like, there are strong similarities with what was actually built.

¹ In Coventry, the use of the term 'Precinct' to describe the shopping centre seems to have been introduced later. The earliest 1941 plans refer to the 'Shopping Centre'. It is probable that the word 'Precinct' in this context came to be used only after the publication in 1942 of Alker Tripp's *Town Planning and Road Traffic*. Tripp identifies as 'precincts' the areas defined by a local system of minor roads devoted to different functions.

² The idea of a 'dignified' setting was current in planning thought. In *Living in Cities* (1942) Ralph Tubbs' endpaper sketches show *Yesterday* with the *Cathedral hidden* amongst buildings contrasted with *Tomorrow* with *Dignified surroundings to Cathedral* in a town layout reminiscent of Coventry.

BROADGATE



Figure 18: Broadgate House



Figure 19: Hotel Leofric



Figure 20: Entrance to Upper Precinct *Coventry Standard*



Figure 21: Owen Owen (Primark) – Broadgate



Figure 22: Broadgate South side: Broadgate House - Hertford Street Bridge with clock tower and National Provincial Bank



Figure 23: *The People of Coventry*

The two buildings on the west side facing east across Broadgate and on either side of the entrance to the Upper Precinct, Broadgate House (1953) and the Hotel Leofric (1954) are almost symmetrical, notwithstanding that, while Broadgate House is designed by the City Architect's Department, the Leofric is designed by a private architect (W. S. Hattrell and Partners) for a developer (Ravenseft Properties). Each is of five principal storeys with a sixth storey set back from the building face. The ground floor in each case has shops set out on a 20'-0" module behind an arcade (whose roof forms the terrace for the first floor restaurants) of Hornton stone-clad columns. Each building has a solid (four storey high above the arcaded ground floor) end block of Blockley City Blend 2½" brickwork with symmetrically set square 'hole-in-wall' windows edged in white stone. The structural frames at ground and upper floors are clad in Westmorland slate. The infill cladding to the second, third and fourth floors, with strip windows on Broadgate House and 'hole-in-wall' windows for the Leofric bedrooms, is of Travertine. The flexibility in façade treatment allowed to accommodate offices or bedrooms did not extend to the buildings' section. Strictly enforced storey heights prevented the insertion, in the Leofric, of any double height spaces³.

Broadgate House is, in fact, 'L' shaped also presenting a north-facing elevation on to Broadgate. When built, this formed a bridge block over Hertford Street, then used by cars, with, at second floor a restaurant, suspended from the third and fourth floors. These are faced in Travertine with rows of square hole-in-wall windows framed in black slate. The restaurant has a glazed façade to the north while on the south side, facing Hertford Street the glazing is interspersed with Doultling Stone reliefs depicting 'The People of Coventry' by Trevor Tennant. The bridge terminates to the east against a brick clock tower⁴ to the east side of which is the brick infill block that closes the original line of Hertford Street and cranks to connect uncomfortably with F. C. R. Palmer's red brick and Portland stone neo-classical National Provincial Bank (1930)⁵. With the closure to traffic and the pedestrianisation of Hertford Street in the 1960's the bridge arch has been filled in with a 2-storey curtain walled block with curved corners that projects beyond the building line on both sides, making it difficult to view the sculpture and blocking the physical and visual connection between Broadgate and Hertford Street.

Completing the north side of Broadgate is Hellberg and Harris's Owen Owen department store (1954) (now Primark). This is a six-storey square block with, on Broadgate, a curtain wall elevation with *rather restless glazing*⁶, framed in yellow limestone set in a Portland stone clad façade, with a brick corner and east elevation with strip windows on to Trinity Street. It sits over part of the basement of the original Owen Owen⁷ store that formed the apex of Trinity Street and The Burges.

³ A point of criticism in the contemporary reports on the building, see *Architect & Building News*, 1955 July 7.

⁴ With moving sculptures of Lady Godiva and Peeping Tom (by Trevor Tennant 1953) that emerge on the hour

⁵ The bank faced north on the original Broadgate and formed the corner of High Street with Hertford Street. It replaced a collection of eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings including the Coventry Arms public house.

⁶ Pevsner (1966) p.271

⁷ Completed 1939 and destroyed in the Blitz

UPPER PRECINCT

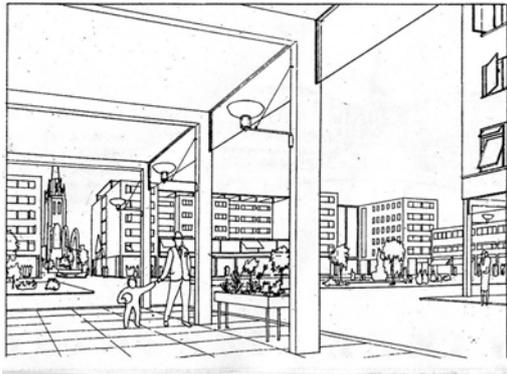


Figure 24: 1941 Sketch



Figure 25: 1945 Model



Figure 26: Precinct Axis c. 1956



Figure 27: Precinct Axis 2008



Figure 28: Deck and Stairs c. 1956



Figure 29: Deck and Stairs 2008



Figure 30: Link Blocks c. 1956



Figure 31. Link Blocks 2008

The Precinct

As originally conceived, the Precinct was based on two ideas. The first was to provide a safe, comfortable place for people to shop and the second, following the example of the Chester Rows, was to exploit the site's topography to provide two-level shopping. These ideas underpinned the design of the precinct as a series of pedestrian squares to be entered at top or bottom at ground level, the upper level becoming a grand gallery as the site sloped away.⁸ It was recognised that the upper level shops would be less attractive but this would allow for secondary retail outlets to be centrally located. All the ground floor shops would have arcades, allowing shoppers to window-shop under cover, the roofs forming the gallery access to the upper-level shops. All servicing and car parking was to be from the rear with the consequent problems of dealing with the interface between the pedestrian and vehicle areas.

The insertion of Market Street (now Smithford Way and Market Way), its subsequent pedestrianisation notwithstanding, had the effect of breaking the planned series of spaces and splitting the Precinct into two distinct areas (the Upper and Lower Precincts) while the slope on the site, especially in the Upper Precinct, was not sufficient to allow entry to the upper level at ground level. From the outset, the original ideas were compromised in their realisation. The upper level shopping has also proved unsuccessful in the Upper Precinct. The stair access was awkward and some ground floor shops took two storeys but without making an entrance at first floor so that the first floor galleries were under-used.

The Upper Precinct

The Upper Precinct is entered from Broadgate at the east between the blocks of Broadgate House and the Hotel Leofric. The space opens out into a square with, to south and north, arcaded blocks that link Broadgate House to British Home Stores (1955, George Coles and Company) and the Leofric to Marks and Spencer (1955, Norman Jones Sons & Rigby). The two link blocks (1956, W. S. Hattrell & Partners for Ravenseft Properties Ltd.) are of four-storeys, with shops at ground and first floors served by galleries, and offices above. The gallery/ arcade roof was reached at either end by symmetrical stairs⁹ with contemporary balustrading. As with Broadgate the exposed concrete frame was clad in Westmorland slate and the spandrel panels below the upper floor windows were Travertine.

It is the galleries and the access to them that have changed the most. At the east end, the stairs that descended elegantly from the gallery on to a lower bridge and thence into the square have been replaced with a clumsy ramp rising from Broadgate to a new bridge at the same level as the gallery. At the west end, stairs have been removed and the bridge replaced. All the handrails, which at the upper floors had integral flower vases, have been

⁸ Johnson-Marshall (1966) p. 295

⁹ The stairs and bridge at the west end housed the sculpture panels, 'Man's Struggle' by Walter Ritchie (1957) now on the Herbert Art Gallery

THE PRECINCT



Figure 32: Marks & Spencer



Figure 33: British Home Stores



Figure 34: Glass lens lights to canopy



Figure 35: Materials: Granite, Horton stone & stainless steel



Figure 36: Dolcis Shoes (Car Phone Warehouse)



Figure 37: Woolworths



Figure 38: Locarno Ballroom (Public Library)

replaced, as have the lighting standards. The new gallery structure has lumpish round columns. A glazed escalator, now the only staircase access to the gallery, bisects the square.

British Home Stores (BHS) and Marks & Spencer (M&S) form the Upper Precinct 'anchor' blocks and break forward to make the west entrance to the upper precinct. The space between them is wider than that between Broadgate House and the Leofric and they are three storeys high, so drop below the link blocks. Both have symmetrical facades on to the Precinct built in the Blockley City Mixture brick specified by Gibson. BHS has two pairs of square windows at either end of its main façade together with five two storey high windows in the centre, all edged in Clipsham stone dressings. M&S has two single square windows at either end with, in the centre, a nine-bay, two-storey Clipsham stone framed window panel with Westmorland slate mullions and Travertine infill panels. Both have concrete canopies with Westmorland slate fascias and round glass pavement lights.¹⁰ At ground floor both have granite and Hornton stone details. BHS has polished stainless steel window frames while M&S had bronze. Turning the corner on to Smithford Way (M&S) and Market Way (BHS) presents something of a contrast. M&S repeats the single window pattern at either end with six pairs of square windows in the centre, the two outer pairs at first floor being set in a projecting frame. Whereas M&S occupies the whole of the front of its block, BHS released the corner of their block through three floors to Dolcis Shoes (1955, Ellis Somake).¹¹ Hence, although the Corporation dictated both the canopy and the Upper Precinct elevation as part of the symmetrical BHS façade, the elevation on to Market Way could vary. Somake designed a refined curtain wall within a re-constructed stone projecting frame, more delicate than that of M&S and pierced the canopy to allow the glass shop front to carry through.¹²

The Lower Precinct

The Lower Precinct's east entrance lies between the anchor blocks of Woolworths (now mixed tenants including Boots the Chemist) and the Locarno Ballroom (now Coventry Central Library). The Woolworth anchor block (1954, F. W. Woolworth Properties) was the earliest part of the Lower Precinct to be completed¹³. Contemporary with the Upper Precinct and using the same palette of materials, brick, Westmorland slate and Travertine, it presents a symmetrical façade to the Precinct. The drop in level allows for an additional storey while maintaining height with BHS. It is a rectangular block with brick corners, pierced with hole-in-wall windows and framing window panels of three bays on the precinct and six on Market Way. The Locarno Ballroom block (1961, Arthur Ling, City Architect), while conforming in

¹⁰ These were required by the Corporation. BHS's glass lights are now covered up

¹¹ Ellis Somake (Dolcis company architect) and Rolf Hellberg, architect of the Owen Owen store, co-authored *Shops and Stores Today* (Batsford: 1956)

¹² Now Car Phone Warehouse, the glass shop front has been interrupted and the refinements obscured.

¹³ Woolworth were active in pushing development and even prepared their own scheme for the shopping centre with below ground servicing.

LOWER PRECINCT



Figure 39: Lower Precinct c. 1960



Figure 40: Lower Precinct 2008



Figure 41: Shop façades 2008



Figure 42: Cast aluminium balustrade



Figure 43: Godiva Café c. 1960



Figure 44: Godiva Café (O'Briens) 2008

scale and massing to the other three anchors at the centre of the Precinct, is treated somewhat differently. The ground and first floor levels are two-storey shops while the dance hall occupied a double height space at second floor. Access to the dance hall was by a glass staircase tower and bridge¹⁴ in the middle of Smithford Way. This accentuated the ballroom entrance, allowed for continuity in the shopping frontage and prevented any attempt to re-introduce traffic into Smithford Way. While the shop plans were based on the regular 20'-0" bay, resulting in regular shop fronts, the treatment of the elevations at the upper floor levels was distinctly different, reflecting both the 'mixed use' nature of the building and its being designed later than Woolworth, BHS or M&S. Unlike these which present their principal façades on to the Precinct and secondary façades on to Market Street, the Locarno presents similar façades on to both. Above the prescribed slate faced canopy at ground floor is a strip of glazing on a Portland stone clad base. The dance hall projects out above this with white Sicilian marble fascias at top and bottom and, in between, rectangular panels of Bedford Grey brickwork set against brightly coloured mosaic¹⁵, thereby breaking the continuity of materials seen in Broadgate and the Upper Precinct.

The Lower Precinct (1959, Arthur Ling, City Architect) was not completed until after Donald Gibson's replacement by Arthur Ling. Private developers seemed unwilling to invest in the project, obliging the Corporation to undertake the development itself. Ling recognised that the two-level shopping in the Upper Precinct had not been completely successful both because access to the upper level was awkward and because some shops occupied both levels with consequent loss of foot traffic. The fall in the site allowed for a better arrangement in the Lower Precinct, with a central ramp¹⁶ down to the lower level and two ramps at either side rising to the upper level. As with the Upper Precinct, the link blocks are set back to create the square. The blocks are three storeys with shops at ground and first floor and storage above. Each 20'-0" wide bay was framed in elevation in Westmorland slate with a shallow projecting pitched roof gable. The ground and first floor shop fronts were set back behind the structural frame. The second floor projected over the first and, on elevation, had alternating panels of glazing and neon displays representing Coventry industries. The first floor gallery came forward of the structural frame, being in part in the open and part under cover. The gallery balustrade was of patterned cast aluminium panels.

At the same time as the development of the link blocks, and before the northern link block was built, the Corporation completed the Lady Godiva café (1958, Arthur Ling, City Architect) in the centre of the Lower Precinct. This is cylindrical, cantilevering out from a central structural foot and accessed from the galleries via a bridge. As built, it had externally shaded flat glass windows separated by black mullions that projected up and down.

¹⁴ Now demolished and replaced with a glazed stair within the west range of shops.

¹⁵ By Fred Millett (1920-1980), mural artist and teacher.

¹⁶ This was decorated with fine tiled murals by Gordon Cullen (1914-1994) depicting images of early Coventry from Pre-historic times to Late-Mediaeval and Georgian to Modern with references to Coventry's past industries. Some of the mural was destroyed in the 1970s and the remainder was re-positioned at the west entrance of the Precinct on to Corporation Street when the Lower Precinct was altered.



Figure 45: Lower Precinct entrance and Mercia House 2008



Figure 46: Lower Precinct: marble replacing Westmorland slate 2008

SMITHFORD WAY



Figure 47: Hillman House & Locarno entrance tower c. 1960



Figure 48. Hillman House & Library entrance 2008

The Lower Precinct terminal block¹⁷, Mercia House (1968 Arthur Ling; Terence Gregory, City Architect with North & Partners of Maidenhead), was the only one to be designed and developed by the Corporation and coincides with Ling's replacement by Terence Gregory¹⁸ in 1964. The scheme comprised two department stores and shops on three floors, a restaurant on the third floor with a seventeen-storey apartment block above. The flats were for 'families without children' and, though council owned, 75% were let at market rents. Separated from its podium by the glazed restaurant, the 60'-0" square tower was designed to 'float' above the precinct. White glazed tile cladding emphasised the horizontal balcony lines contrasting with the dark voids of the recessed windows. A passage below the podium leads through to Corporation Street and a rather apologetic open space.

The Lower Precinct is perhaps the most altered area of all the shopping centre. In 2000 it underwent major works (Michael Aukett Architects for Arrowcroft) including the installation of a glazed roof, the bringing forward of the recessed shop fronts at first floor and the recladding of the façades including substituting green marble for the original Westmorland slate and Travertine cladding. The circular café, re-named O'Briens, has been re-glazed in a very 'cool' style, using curved glass and omitting the mullions and external roller blinds. The paving patterns, now in polished stone, resemble the original but with light and dark colours reversed. The refurbishment ignores the tower, which is in need of repair, with missing tiles. The new glazed roof structure ignores the existing structural module, makes the lines of shallow pitched roofs over the shops less apparent and obscures the view east up the precinct to the Cathedral spire. An additional, completely internal arcade of shops has replaced the car park between the Lower Precinct and the circular market building to the south.

Smithford Way

Smithford Way is the north end of the original Market Street, renamed, together with its southern counterpart, Market Way, when it was pedestrianised in 1958. Its south entrance, on to the Precinct, lies between Marks & Spencer and the Locarno. Both these run north as rectangular sites with a short range of shops facing on to Smithford Way. M&S developed front serviced lock-up shops with, at first floor, strip windows in Portland stone cladding. The Locarno's glazed stair tower has been removed from the centre of the street and replaced with a clumsy glazed attached stair and lift tower, replacing some of the shops on this site and interrupting the shopping frontage. The site between the Locarno and the west range of shops was originally the City Tavern (1960, H. Whiteman and Son). This, together with the

¹⁷ Designs for the termination of the Lower Precinct had not, under Gibson been satisfactorily resolved. First shown in the 1941 Plan as a crescent opening on to Corporation Street, it had, through a series of iterations, become a 22-storey slab block, thought to be too overbearing. Eventually it was decided that, just as the east end of the precinct was focussed on the Cathedral spire, so the three other 'arms' to the shopping centre should each terminate in a tower.

¹⁸ Terence Gregory (1919-2000) City Architect 1964-1973; Chief Executive, Coventry City Council 1973-1983.



Figure 49: Hillman House

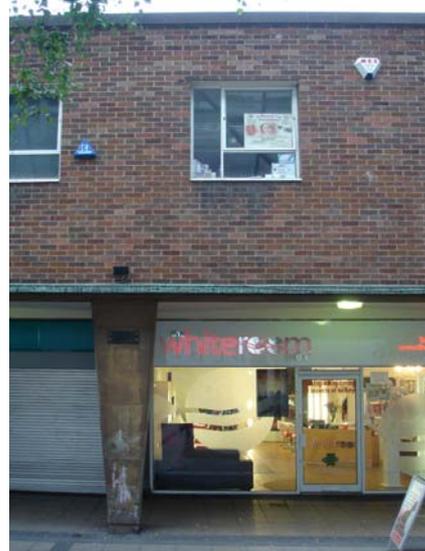


Figure 50: Smithford Way shop façade 2008

MARKET WAY & CITY MARKET

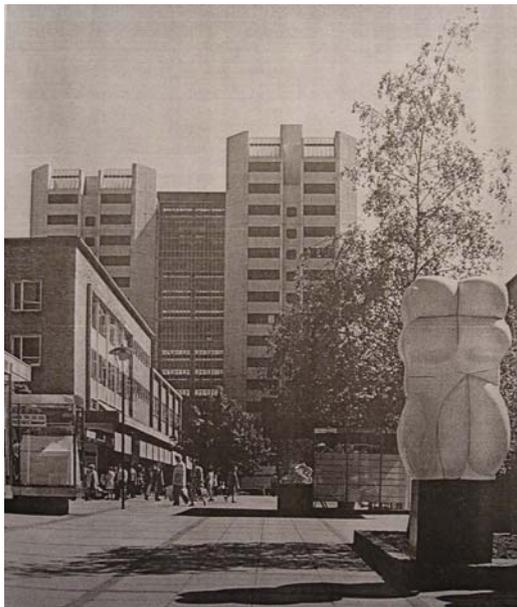


Figure 51: Market Way; Coventry Point c. 1978



Figure 52: Market Way; Coventry Point 2008

Locarno and the Market Tavern in Market Way, was intended to extend the 'life' of the precinct beyond shop hours. It has been refaced and replaced with shops with a glazed canopy.

Of a width to take two-way traffic, the remainder of Smithford Way was developed as two opposing, two-storey ranges of shops of which now only the west range survives. The upper floors are of Blockley brick with square hole-in-wall metal windows. The ground floor shop fronts sit behind a canopy, with a green copper fascia, supported on Hornton stone-clad tapering columns. The east range together with the multi-storey car park at the rear, has been replaced with the West Orchards Shopping Centre (1991, John Clark Associates), an enclosed mall with car parking on six floors, connecting to the Upper Precinct at first floor over its rear service yard. In height and footprint, it marks a significant change in scale, overtopping the surrounding buildings and encroaching on the roadway, reducing the width by one third. The 'Y' shaped glazed overhanging roof, further shades the street.

The termination of Smithford Way was more considered than the Lower Precinct, if not more successful. The street ends in a three-storey 'z' shaped block of shops and offices that forms an angular crescent space on Corporation Street. This is surmounted by a thirteen-storey apartment block, Hillman House (1965, Arthur Swift & Partners), loosely based on Frank Lloyd Wright's Price Tower in Bartlesville, Oklahoma (1952-56) which is a square plan, twisted to make glazed triangular spaces. Square in plan with triangular glazed projections and a pyramidal roof extension, Hillman House was the first of the three terminal tower blocks to the Precinct. The offices are clad in an aluminium framed curtain wall with dark green mosaic spandrel panels and, on Corporation Street, project out over the shops to form a canopy with a hardwood strip soffit.

Market Way & City Market

Market Way divides into two distinct sections. The first, straight section lies between the British Home Stores and Woolworth blocks and is terminated by the third tower block, Coventry Point (1978 John Madin Design Group). The Corporation's specification for the tower included a height requirement and a white external finish to give *an area of brightness*¹⁹ to the precinct beneath it. Market Way could not be interrupted and the site area was very restricted. The design is of twin towers, one placed in the centre of Market Way and the other to one side, joined together with a glazed link block. The centrally placed tower is a square balanced on a mushroom shaped cantilevered slab that over-sails the precinct with only the central lift core reaching the ground. The second tower, a rectangle, sits above three floors of shops and offices. The towers have chamfered corners and are clad in white aggregate pre-cast structural panels with expressed stair towers and metal strip windows. At third floor

¹⁹ Arup Journal 1978 Dec.



Figure 53: Market Way c. 1960



Figure 54: Market Way 2008



Figure 55: Market Way site of Coventry Point c. 1960



Figure 56: Market Way 2008



Figure 57: City Market



Figure 58: City Market interior 2008

level is an incongruous steel space frame cantilevered canopy, designed to eliminate down draughts at the ground but overshadowing the access, blotting out the *area of brightness* and making it difficult to appreciate the unusual structure. The concrete panels have discoloured over time to a dull grey.

On either side of Market Way, to the south of Coventry Point, on the east side is the former Gas Showroom, a cubist essay in white tiles with a large corner window that now abuts the tower. On the west side was the free-standing Market Tavern, now replaced by a bank, a clumsily executed extension to the curved range of shops. Beyond, Market Way curves away to the southwest with opposing ranges of two storey shops (1955, City Architect), again on the 20'-0" module, but this time with deep reconstructed stone frames and dark timber mullioned window panels at first floor. The canopies cantilever from the frontage again with a hardwood boarded soffit. These, together with the circular retail market that lies behind the west side shops, were the first city centre buildings in the country to have roof top car parking²⁰. The main entrance to the market is from Market Way, with a solid white boarded façade over the entranceway. The market (1959, Arthur Ling, City Architect), described as *novel and enterprising*, incorporated one of a pair of existing factory buildings on Queen Victoria Road²¹ (now demolished) that interrupted the circular plan. The hall itself is of reinforced concrete construction with radial frames and concentric ring beams. At the centre is a circular clerestory roof light over a circular space with seating and the market roundabout. Round the perimeter walls are external stalls with awnings and above, clerestory windows lighting the market hall. Within the market hall are murals painted by students from Dresden, participants in a reciprocal programme of works uniting the two blitzed cities.

Shelton Square & City Arcade

Market Way terminates in Shelton Square (formerly Market Square). The west side of the square is three-storeys with, on the ground floor, shops, with storage above and car parking on the roof. The brick first floor façade is separated from the decorative brickwork parapet wall to the car park by strip windows. The first floor projects over the ground floor shop frontages to form a canopy and is supported on concrete columns. The north side of the square is similarly treated but here the roof car park with its decorative brick parapet projects over a first floor gallery, which forms the canopy to the ground floor shops below. Marred by clumsy over-cladding by Tesco on the west façade on Market Way, this side together with the adjoining east side was designed as two-level shopping. The east side of the square has a markedly different treatment. Here a Portland stone with square aluminium windows, four-storey office block (1960, Ardin & Brooks) is supported on six slender double height mosaic clad columns behind which are recessed the two levels of shops. The upper level was reached by a grand stair descending into the square but this was removed in 1966 when the use of the upper level as separate shops was abandoned. The block marks the double height entrance to the shopping centre from the south west through Bull Yard. The south side completes the square

²⁰ Possibly in response to Coventry's designation as 'Car City'. The ramps to the car park were heated to prevent freezing.

²¹ This housed the fishmongers' stalls decorated with small ships figurehead-like sculptures of mermaids, sailors and Neptune by James C. Brown. These have been moved to the re-located fishmongers' stalls in the main market hall.

SHELTON SQUARE & CITY ARCADE



Figure 59: Shelton Square c. 1965



Figure 60: Shelton Square 2008. Stair removed



Figure 61: City Arcade 1964. Ordered signage

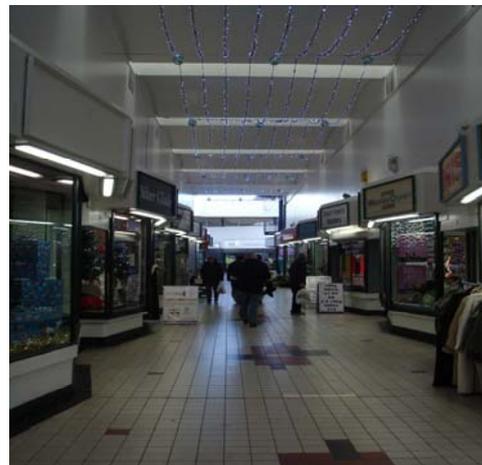


Figure 62: City Arcade 2008. Signage and paving alterations

BULL YARD



Figure 63: Bull Yard c. 1970



Figure 64: Bull Yard 2008

with a two-storey block (again shops at ground floor with storage above) that drops at the east end to pass below the office block to Bull Yard and returns south to lead into the City Arcade (1964, Terence Gregory, City Architect) was designed to provide small shop units and form another entrance, from Queen Victoria Road, into the shopping precinct. The arcade is double height with a roof car park. Rectangular tube roof lights illuminate the arcade and form divisions in the car park. Here, unlike elsewhere, the angled glass shop fronts and signage were designed together and not left to the individual tenants to provide.

Bull Yard

Shelton Square leads out from its southwest corner into Bull Yard (1965, Terence Gregory, City Architect). Bull Yard is a square marking the entrance into the shopping precinct and is perhaps the most successful of all the secondary entrances. The east side is open to the junction of Hertford and New Union Streets. Its design is a significant change in style from the earlier shopping precinct and perhaps marks the change of City Architect from Arthur Ling to Terence Gregory. The common theme of brickwork and window panels is abandoned in favour of something more contemporary though again the 20'-0" module is maintained. The ground floors of the north and south sides are shops while, on the west side, is the Three Tuns public house, the only pub to survive in the shopping centre. Its elevation to Bull Yard is a heavily moulded cast concrete abstract mural by William Mitchell.²² The first floor on all three sides of the square overhangs the ground floor to form a canopy, thus continuing the canopy/ arcade requirement set by Gibson. The first floor walls are closely centred bronze clad projecting mullions with glazed and black enamelled steel panels between.²³ This originally contrasted very sharply with the white stone of the Shelton Square block and with the white concrete of the car park parapet wall on the north side, but these have now discoloured. The square was originally the access to the Barracks multi-storey car park to the north, but was pedestrianised in a subsequent phase following the formation of a tunnel access under Hertford Street. The access remains however, adjacent to the Three Tuns, compromising the square's enclosure.

Hertford Street

Hertford Street is not, strictly, part of the shopping precinct. The intention, under the 1941 Plan, had been to clear and realign it from its northeast/ southwest orientation but this proved to be impossible. The first new building on Hertford Street was the wing of Broadgate House (1953) that bridged the street, allowing its continued use by traffic. This was the only building on the street to be designed and built by the City. A consortium of owners then developed a

²² William George Mitchell (b 1925) Sculptor

²³ The black stove-enamelled panels have rusted badly at their base.

HERTFORD STREET

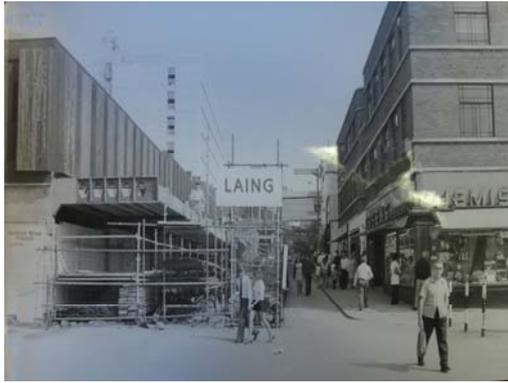


Figure 65: Hertford Street c.1973



Figure 66: Hertford Street 2008



Figure 67: Hertford Street 1974



Figure 68: Hertford Street 2008



Figure 69: Hertford Street north end with ABC cinema (JJB Sports), Hertford Street Bridge, National Provincial Bank (NatWest)

range of shops on the east side, squeezed in between the surviving pre-War Post Office and the southern end of the street. Following the decision to close the street to traffic and to create the 'Hertford Street Precinct', the west side of the street from Bull Yard to the Empire Theatre (demolished 1968) was redeveloped with a two-storey range of shops ²⁴stepping upwards to the north. The roadway was divided into a ramp serving the west side shops and a level access with stairs to accommodate the existing east side thresholds. This west side range of shops (1972, W. S. Hattrell and Partners) follows the usual pattern of the two-storey 20'-0" module shops with canopy. The first floor is clad in sculpted bronze fibreglass panels (William Mitchell) that complement the bronze fin mullions of the adjacent Bull Yard. The original solid canopy has been replaced with lightweight glazing. The office tower above the shops is clad in sculpted pre-cast concrete panels (William Mitchell). At the same time, the middle section of the street was enclosed with a translucent roof and the Empire Theatre, the cinema facing on to the small open space at the head of the street, was replaced (1972) with a dark brick and in-situ concrete 'Brutalist' block. ²⁵

²⁴ These were intended to be 'high quality shops'. *Coventry Evening Telegraph* 1966 Dec. 24

²⁵ Formerly Coventry Corn Exchange (1858), the original building was converted to a cinema in 1906, burnt down and rebuilt in 1931. Rebuilt in 1972 as the ABC cinema, the present building has been converted into shops at ground and upper levels.

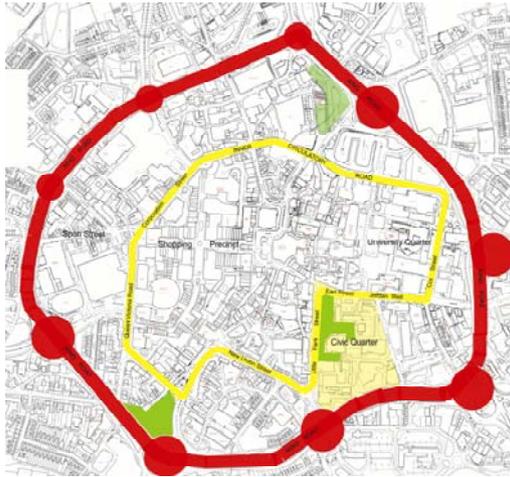


Figure 69: Civic Quarter & ring roads

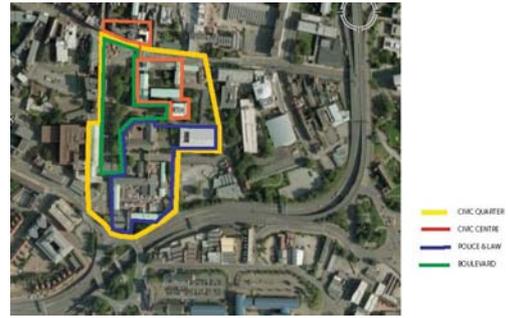


Figure 71: Civic Quarter



Figure 72: Civic Buildings and Boulevard



Figure 73: Civic Buildings: Architecture & Planning



Figure 75: Tower & Magistrates Court



Figure 74: Town Hall Extension and bridge



Figure 76: Police Headquarters

6. BUILDINGS AND ARCHITECTURE 1950 – 1978 CIVIC AND UNIVERSITY QUARTER

In the face of government disapproval, Coventry Corporation maintained the zone reserved in the 1945 Plan for civic buildings. This is a rectangle lying between Fairfax Street to the north, the ring road to east and south, Little Park Street to the west and bisected by Earl Street and Jordan Well. In the event, the area did prove too large for solely civic and associated functions but, fortuitously, its reservation meant that with the post-War rise in education provision there was a suitable central site on which to provide a new campus for the Colleges of Art and Technology. The civic buildings were therefore confined to the southern half of the site along Little Park Street, south of Earl Street/ Jordan Well with the education buildings being sited to the north.

Civic Buildings

The civic buildings are all set back from Little Park Street leaving a green open space, the vestige of the design for the grand boulevard, first planned in 1942, leading south from the Council House (1912-20, Garrett and Simister). The first buildings to be completed, on the corner of Little Park and Earl Streets (1956, Arthur Ling, City Architect) and including the City Architects' department, form a courtyard, three sides of which are three and four-storey blocks of Blockley brick with shallow pitched copper roofs. The fourth, north, side on Earl Street, is a curtain wall glazed block on two floors, raised on diamond set white mosaic-clad columns over an open undercroft with a glazed entrance/ exhibition hall. The northwest corner of the courtyard is a later three-storey block (1974, Terence Gregory, City Architect) with a copper clad bridge link across Earl Street to the Council House. This building is square on plan with chamfered corners. On elevation the windows are deeply recessed behind a framework of Accrington Smooth Red facing brick under a steep copper roof. The final City Council building is the sixteen-storey office block (1972, Terence Gregory, City Architect), a tidy square block with a central core and perimeter glazing behind pre-cast concrete mullions. It sits at the southeast corner of the courtyard and is approached from Little Park Street over Meschede Way, a landscaped pedestrian route, signifying the processional route across the site first suggested in the 1941 Plan. To the south of Meschede Way are the Crown and County Court (1986, John Madin Design Group) and the Magistrates Court building (1987, City Engineer), completing the civic buildings enclave. Linked to the magistrates Court by a bridge over St John Street, the Police Headquarters (1958, Arthur Ling, City Architect) lies to the south and marks the entrance to Little Park Street. Based round a square for parades, the headquarters is made up of separate, differently scaled linked blocks serving different functions. Hence the formal plan is not particularly legible in elevation. The west side of the square, facing Little Park Street has, from north to south, the gable of the Administration block that steps forward to the street line and stepping back, the long elevation of the entrance

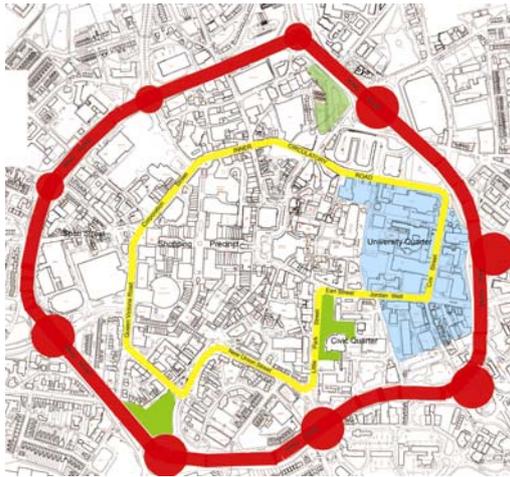


Figure 77: University Quarter



— UNIVERSITY QUARTER
 — UNIVERSITY BUILDINGS
 — OTHER BUILDINGS
 — GREEN SPACE

Figure 78: University Quarter



Figure 79: Herbert Art Gallery & Museum: West Wing



Figure 80: Herbert Art Gallery: East End



Figure 81: University entrance & halls of residence



Figure 82: University: James Starley Building & laboratories

block and the gable of the assembly hall finished in diaper patterned brickwork. The south elevation of the Assembly Hall is an undulating wall of concrete panels with tall narrow windows. The headquarters, with the former telephone exchange opposite together mark the southern entrance to the Little Park Street 'boulevard'.

Cathedral and University Quarter

The area east of the Cathedral and north of Earl Street and Jordan Well, designated in the 1939 Plan for civic buildings, had, by 1958, been reassigned for educational use. Exceptions to this use are the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum (1960, Herbert Son and Sawday) on the southern edge of the site and the swimming pool on the north. The original pre-War site for the Herbert, next to the Council House to the west, on which building had started, had been abandoned as too small¹. The building is a long three-storey block, facing south on Earl Street and stopped at either end by transverse wings. Of Blockley brick, plain and patterned, with stone detailing, large window panels and hole in wall windows, the building is plain and somewhat under scaled for its site. The original west wing is raised on brick piers while the east wing has a lightly bowed east elevation with a full height panel of contrasting patterned brickwork and windows sandwiched between brick 'bookends'. The south facing bookend has a diaper brickwork pattern now partly concealed by the Walter Ritchie sculptures moved from the Upper Precinct. The west wing under-croft has been filled in to make a café and it has been extended with a new pavilion on the roof with zinc-clad angled roof lights (2005, Haworth Tompkins). The north end of the west wing was first extended by the first phase of the proposed new central library (1965-7, City Architect) and, with the relocation of the library into the Locarno Ballroom in the Precinct, this site has been incorporated into the Herbert, with a new, glass and laminated timber grid-shell roofed extension (2008, Pringle Richards Sharratt) to the west, housing the City Archive.

Coventry University Buildings

Initially the institutions occupying the site were Lanchester College of Technology and Coventry College of Art. In 1970 the two institutions combined to become Lanchester Polytechnic, changing its name to Coventry Polytechnic in 1987 and becoming Coventry University in 1992.

The site for the university lies between Fairfax Street to the north, Priory Street to the west, Cox Street to the east and Jordan Well to the south. The university buildings, originally for Lanchester College of Technology and Coventry College of Art (1957–1964, Arthur Ling, City Architect) are a series of interlocking buildings designed together. The buildings are laid out so as to provide a series of open spaces, seen to be especially important because of the adjacent old and new Cathedrals. Hence the administrative block and main entrance to the

¹ The building was converted into a public lavatory, since completely rebuilt as Brown's Café Bar.



Figure 83: University: James Starley Building



Figure 84: James Starley Building entrance to university



Figure 85: Halls of Residence



Figure 86: Halls of Residence



Figure 87: Swimming Pool



Figure 88: Graham Sutherland Building (College of Art)

university directly addresses the new Cathedral's grand entrance across a broad open space. The students' union building makes the north side of this space, while the Herbert, and particularly now its new extension, mark the southern side. To the north and east, the towers of the student residences (1963 and 1969, Arthur Ling & Terence Gregory, City Architect) enclose a further space bounded on the west by the Britannia Hotel (1970, G. R. Stone and Partners), a well-scaled but rather lumpish concrete building. The buildings also define the site externally. Particularly striking is the long block that forms a boundary wall against Cox Street. Three floors of patent-glazed laboratories sit above a brick ground floor. The other buildings, while not especially distinguished individually, are appropriate in scale and siting. These include the Administration block, the Students' Union and the main teaching blocks. These vary in height but have a common handwriting, like the Cox Street block, of glazing with coloured spandrel panels between mullions. The single-storey workshop block has an unusual external structure that allows for the clear spans that were required internally.

The student residences on the north end of the site, were built in two phases, the first a twenty-storey tower block (1963, City Architect), square on plan with a central core and four corner towers. On the east and west elevations the corner towers enclose a three-bay window panel divided with concrete fin mullions that rise full height, expressing the internal room divisions. The second phase (1969, City Architect) is a thirteen-storey tower with a six-storey linear block of five cluster units with expressed pyramid roofs making the boundary of the site with Fairfax Street.

The swimming pool, Central Baths (1962-6, Arthur Ling, City Architect, Listed Grade II) makes the northeast corner of the site. Brick clad on the north and fully glazed on the south, it engages visually with the campus spaces to the south. Its 'W'-shaped roof over-sails the three pools including a 50-metre main pool. Together with the halls of residence to the west, it makes the south side of Fairfax Street and encloses the university precinct. It was extended with a rather clumsy, angular, zinc clad sports centre (1974, City Architect) that bridges over Cox Street.

The university site has extended east across Cox Street to the ring road in the area zoned 'for clubs' on the 1945 Plan. The Art College (1967, City Architect) occupies the southernmost part of this site with a seven-storey main block and the irregular southeast corner filled in with single-storey workshops. The main block is set at right angles to Cox Street. Slender concrete columns with dark framed glazed panels between, rise through four floors to a beam from which rise concrete mullions through a further two floors. The top floor, concrete clad, sits above this and houses north lit studios. Other, tidy but less distinguished university buildings occupy the remainder of the site.

LANDSCAPE



Figure 89: Little Park Street Processional Way



Figure 90: Little Park Street



Figure 91: Civic Centre courtyard



Figure 92: University Square

Landscape

The landscaping over the whole of the Civic and University Quarters, though much reduced from the original layout of the 1945 Plan, does provide a framework within which buildings that are diverse in scale and materials and built over a considerable time period sit comfortably juxtaposed. The vestige of the processional way south from the Council House down Little Park Street and crossed by Meschede Way, is addressed across a tree lined lawn by civic buildings to the east and by a mixed range of eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century buildings on the west. North of Earl Street a sequence of formal and less formal areas hold the Cathedral and the university buildings in a matrix of paved, tree planted space. The most recent to be completed is the grand place between the Cathedral and the entrance to the University with flagpoles and stone balls defining it. The recent addition to the Herbert Gallery resolves its northern façade against this space by way of a stepped arena. But, with the exception of the Cathedral, the buildings surrounding this space are rather small in scale for its area. That this is part of Priory Street only becomes apparent as it ramps downwards north from the hilltop with the square enclosed by the Cathedral, Britannia Hotel and the student residences to the west.

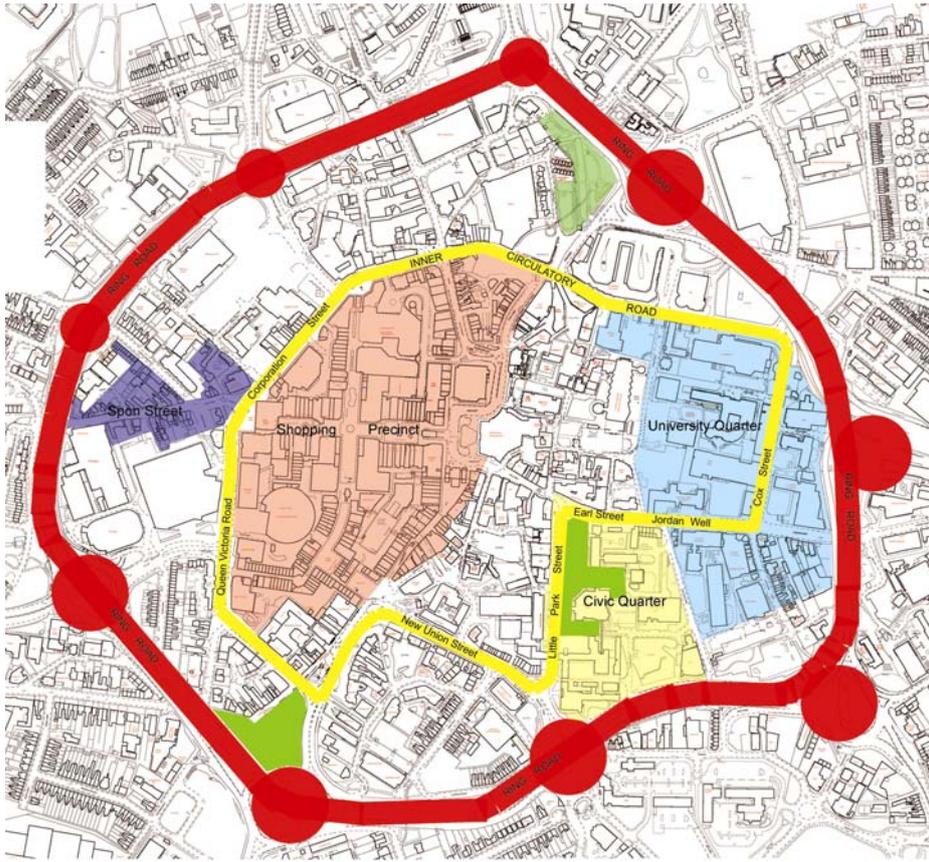


Figure 92. The Ring Road and Inner Circulatory Road

7. BUILDINGS AND ARCHITECTURE 1950 – 1978 THE RING ROADS

Gibson's 1941 Plan envisaged an inner ring road centred approximately on the proposed civic centre to the east of the existing Council House and following existing streets. To the west, the line followed was along Queen Victoria Road, which was to be straightened out at its north to connect to Corporation Street. This joined Hales Street and Ford Street to the north and cast a wide eastward loop along Lower Ford and Vecqueray Streets, returning westwards along Gulson Road and St Patrick Road to connect with the south end of Queen Victoria Road. Radial roads joined the ring road on a series of roundabouts and the road itself was drawn as a broad dual carriageway. Only in the shopping and civic centre areas was the plan drawn in any detail. The remaining areas were variously labelled *residential group* or *business and commercial*. This line persisted in subsequent plans including in the 1942 Model but, by the 1945 Plan, the circle of the ring road had shifted northwest so as to be clearly centred on Broadgate and with a radius of 0.5 miles.¹ Initially the new line was resisted by the Government on the grounds that it encompassed too large a part of the city centre but, following representations that the existing roads were needed for commercial uses with direct riparian access, it was eventually accepted. It was agreed that the existing roads should form an inner circulatory road both as, a local distributor road round the new shopping and civic centres and, in sections, a shopping street.

The Ring Road

*The ring road, and the radial arms that have been made linking traffic to it, have swathed through property, stopped up roads, brought us subways and overbridges. We have built another defensive wall like the old city wall, this time to keep the through traffic out!*²

The ring road, as originally conceived in the 1945 Plan, was to be an encircling boulevard, at grade, with seven roundabouts at the junctions with radial roads into the city, including connections through to the inner circulatory road and the main precinct axis, and with broad green reservations with cycle and footways on both sides. The line drawn to an extent followed existing roads at least to the south and west but, inevitably, because of its breadth, overrode any surviving finer grain of the areas through which it passed. The 1948 Plan, agreed by the Ministry of Town and Country Planning shows modifications to the line of the road and the addition of two roundabouts at the northeast section. Although the road line and cross-section with its major interchanges were agreed by 1948, construction of the road was delayed because other works of reconstruction were seen to be more pressing. By 1956,

¹ This new line and its delineation as a broad dual carriageway main arterial road with access for sub-arterial roads only at roundabouts and with large green reservations on both sides may have been prompted by the publication, in 1942, of H. Alker Tripp's influential *Town Planning and Road Traffic* in which road types and their particular features are strictly categorised.

² Newbold, E. B. (1982) *Portrait of Coventry* p. 52

however, with substantial progress on the city centre reconstruction including the closure of some existing roads to traffic with consequent increasing congestion, the need for the ring road had become urgent. Applications for funding were made to the Ministry of Transport who, in early 1958, approved a grant to cover the first section of the road, together with assurances that further grants would be forthcoming for subsequent stages³. The first two sections⁴ to be completed followed the original design of a dual carriageway with wide reservations with cycle tracks and single level interchanges at the junctions with radial roads but, by Stage 3 (1962-64), there was a shift to providing grade separated interchanges because the closeness of the road junctions interrupted the free flow of traffic on the ring road. The change to an uninterrupted roadway has resulted in profound design changes. The wide verges and cycle tracks have disappeared and the carriageway with its associated slip roads and interchanges dives down into cutting or rises on an elevated structure.⁵ Whether the resultant urban highway is more of an actual barrier between the centre and the outer city than the boulevard parkway would have been, visually and in experience it certainly is. The road, with its associated slip roads, flyovers and underpasses fills the area allocated, leaving only inaccessible, useless spaces between. New development adjacent to the road is built tight against it and turns its back⁶ on it. Despite the landscape treatment of underpasses and footbridges,⁷ the pedestrian's experience is of wasted, uncomfortable space.

Inner Circulatory Road

As first proposed, the inner circulatory road followed the line, clockwise, of the original ring road proposal on Queen Victoria Road, Corporation Street and Hales Street. It then followed a new road, Fairfax Street, to join Cox Street which was to feed, via Whitefriars Street, directly on to the new ring road. This was to connect back from a roundabout to another new road, New Union Street, which was to join Warwick Road and complete the circuit. In the development of the Plan, the inner circulatory road was separated from the ring road and was itself adjusted from Cox Street to follow Jordan Well, Earl Street and Little Park Street where it joined New Union Street. That part of the road that embraced the commercial centre, namely New Union Street, Warwick Road, Queen Victoria Road, Corporation Street and Hales Street, was to be developed on much the same guidelines that governed the shopping precinct with three and four-storey blocks with arcaded shops at ground floor and offices above.

³ The city authorities envisaged a build time in six stages over six to seven years. The road was begun in 1959 and finally finished with the rebuilding of the first section in 1974.

⁴ Section 1 (1959) runs west between London Road and Mile Lane. Section 2 (1961) runs west between Foleshill Road and Radford Road.

⁵ Criticism of the ring road by Colin Buchanan in *Traffic in Towns* (1963) focussed on its tight constraint on the city centre with consequent limitations on parking and free traffic flow within the centre.

⁶ This accords with Alker Tripp's demand for *backages* (as opposed to frontages) against main traffic arteries.

⁷ Some attempts have been made to enliven the underpasses by tiles and roof lights. The most notable is the now derelict series of fountains in cobble paving designed by Douglas Smith of Leicester, under the north east section of the ring road

CORPORATION STREET



Figure 94: Cooperative Store



Figure 95: Shops and offices.



Figure 96: Belgrade Theatre flats



Figure 97: West Orchard House & entrance to Smithford Way



Figure 98: Coventry Evening Telegraph



Figure 99: Mercia House & Lower Precinct entrance

Corporation Street

The earliest and most complete section of the inner circulatory road to be so developed is Corporation Street⁸. Here, the buildings on both sides of the street follow this pattern for the most part. The earliest post-War building on the street is the Coventry and District Cooperative Society store⁹ (1956, Cooperative Wholesale Society Architects' Department). This faces northwest across Corporation Street with a Blockley brick façade on two storeys above a ground floor shop front behind an arcade of square columns. A fourth storey is set back behind the façade line. The façade has a double height window panel in a projecting stone frame. The arcade columns are carved with symbols of the building's reconstruction and Cooperative Society activity. The next building on Corporation Street to be completed, the Belgrade Theatre (1958, City Architect, Grade II), occupies a corner site on the northwest side of the street, in the area zoned in the 1945 Plan for entertainment. The theatre's main façade faces northeast across an open square and Upper Well Street. Its Corporation Street elevation is again of Blockley brick with hole-in-wall windows on three storeys above ground floor shops behind a mosaic clad, round columned arcade. At first floor, over the theatre entrance, a projecting box window lights the first floor lounge and theatre offices, separated by a cast relief sculpture of the city of Belgrade¹⁰. The upper floors of the Corporation Street block housed flats for actors¹¹. The Coventry Evening Telegraph (CET) building (1960, L. A. Culliford and Partners) has a canopied, re-entrant corner entrance on the corner of Corporation Street and Upper Well Street. The three-storey Corporation Street elevation combines Westmorland slate details with Travertine stone panels as in the Precinct. Its arcade columns, square and clad in Travertine and slate, carry through under the adjacent brick 'New Oxford House'. Next to this the scale of the street jumps with an eight-storey office building (1971, Fitzroy Robinson) with precast concrete panel upper floors over a 1½ storey-height arcade. Opposite, on the southwest side of Corporation Street, is a three and four-storey range of shops with offices (1968, City Architect) with a tidy curtain wall façade. Next to this and opposite the CET, the angular crescent of shops and offices that marks the entrance to Smithford Way¹² completes this part of the street. The southern end of Corporation Street going in to Queen Victoria Road has first, the three-storey block marking the west entrance to the Lower Precinct under the Mercia House tower. This tries to make a 'place' with the medieval church (St John Baptist) and Spon Street opposite. Corporation Street is, perhaps, the most complete section of the inner circulatory road, with both sides developed with arcaded shops.

⁸ Corporation Street (1931) was an earlier piece of pre-War road improvement cut through an industrial area to connect Queen Victoria Road and Hales Street. Some understanding of the appearance of pre-War Corporation Street may be gained from the surviving building adjacent to the new Cooperative Society store, red brick and Portland stone neo-Georgian 3-storey with mansard roof, shops on ground floor and offices above.

⁹ Replacing the Cooperative store (1937) in West Orchard destroyed by bombing.

¹⁰ In 'ciment fondu' by James C. Brown, 1958 based on an engraving by Giacomo de Rossi, 1684

¹¹ With the exception of the two tower blocks (Hillman House and Mercia House) on the precinct, the only new residential use within the city centre.

¹² Described in Section 5.

QUEEN VICTORIA ROAD



Figure 100: City Arcade entrance

NEW UNION STREET



Figure 101: Christchurch South *professional precinct*



Figure 102: Christchurch House & Spire House.

*Queen Victoria Road*¹³

Much of Queen Victoria Road survived the blitz, including a pair of early twentieth century three-storey factory buildings, one of which, the Cornercroft Building (now demolished) was incorporated into the new circular covered market (1959, City Architect). Both were refaced (1959, City Architect) with curtain wall glazing between original brick piers and, as a pair marked the vehicular entrance over Rover Road to the market service yard. The original line of the street has been altered (c.1970) at both ends, the north being straightened out to connect directly with Corporation Street and, at the south, a new road, Greyfriars Road, connecting it to Warwick Road. In the process, almost all the surviving pre-War buildings have been replaced. The first to go were those on the site of the west entrance to the City Arcade, replaced with a three-storey concrete portal frame canopy with two-storey flanking blocks of shops and offices.

New Union Street

The other section of the inner circulatory road that adheres to the arcaded shops with offices above formula first set out in the Precinct, is New Union Street. The street was cut through from the south end of Little Park Street to connect to the junction of Warwick Road with Hertford Street. Here, on the south side is the Christchurch South 'professional'¹⁴ precinct (1969, Hellberg and Harris) with, again shops at ground floor under two storeys of offices carried on an arcade of tile-clad columns. The range on the street screens a courtyard behind formed round a surviving Tudor manor house¹⁵. The main material used is brick, but a dark purple/brown in place of the Blockley City Mixture used elsewhere. Opposite, the four to seven-storey blocks, Spire House and Christchurch House, use a similar purple brick in horizontal bands alternating with bands of glazing. Here the arcaded pavement is set above the road level. On the same side, a three-storey range of 12 arcaded shops and offices completes the street. These have glazing panels with white panels at the floor levels and dark panels below the windows, separated by black mullions.

Little Park Street

The civic buildings on the east side of Little Park Street have been described. On the west side, some existing buildings survived the blitz and new ones, most notably the Telephone Exchange (1955 and 1980s, Ministry of Works, PSA) and Coventry Economic Building Society (1962, Redgrave and Clarke) with frontages on both Little Park and High Streets, have been inserted. The street backs on to a 'pocket' of land wedged between it, High Street, Hertford Street and New Union Street that appears to have been only cursorily considered in planning. Originally scheduled for re-development, it was designated in the 1945 Plan as *to be rebuilt as a whole for business* it has been rebuilt in part but with no overall plan. Ford's Hospital, in the centre of the site and scheduled in the 1941 plan

¹³ Presumably an earlier road improvement or extension to the city, connecting two of the original radial roads leading into Broadgate. The road appears to have been mixed use terrace housing and industrial.

¹⁴ So described in *Coventry New Architecture*.

¹⁵ Cheylesmore Manor House repaired and extended as the Registry Office.

LITTLE PARK STREET



Figure 103: Little Park Street



Figure 104: Coventry Economic Building Society



Figure 105: Fords Hospital and Extension

BETWEEN THE ROADS



Figure 106: Residual light industry



Figure 107: Residual housing

SPON STREET



Figure 108: Spon Street; East end



Figure 109: Spon Street; West end & underpass

to be removed, has been repaired and a well scaled brick extension built (1968, Redgrave & Clarke).

Between the Roads

The 1945 Plan was specific about uses for the areas between the inner circulatory road and the ring road. The narrow band between Cox Street and the eastern part of the ring road, now occupied by Coventry University, was designated 'for clubs'. The area to the south, between New Union Street and the ring road, was shown as 'residential', largely continuing its existing use. In the largest areas to the west and north, except for the area reserved for entertainment on Corporation Street and Hales Street¹⁶, the designation was for light or 'service industries', again reflecting existing uses, though, as elsewhere some residual housing and other uses had survived. Recognising the lack of green space in the centre, the Plan proposed green areas, in the south, behind the villas on Warwick Road and, in the west, behind St John Baptist church. In the event only the existing areas of Lady Herbert's Garden to the north and Grey Friars Green to the southwest were retained and there were no additions.

Most light industrial uses have now been discontinued and have been replaced, in the northern and northwest sections, with commercial and office uses and, in the western section, with retail and entertainment. While the original industrial uses were housed for the most part in coarse grained, single-use and inaccessible buildings, the opportunity to replace them with multiple use buildings and to improve the permeability and legibility of these sites has been missed.

Spon Street

Spon Street, between Corporation Street and the western ring road, is a surviving fragment of the medieval city and is where, in the 1960s it was proposed, not only to preserve the surviving buildings but also to move threatened buildings from elsewhere¹⁷. The straightening of the north end of Queen Victoria Road released a triangle of land at the eastern end of Spon Street, providing an additional site for some of these. The triangular site between Spon Street, Hill Street and the ring road is one of the few remaining 'pockets' of original city plan. The survival and extension of Spon Street is a curious anomaly in the re-building of Coventry. Though charming, it is at a completely different scale to its surroundings, and presents as a 'model' of a street, belonging in a museum rather than part of the new Coventry.

¹⁶ This shows the retention of the then existing Opera House and Coventry Theatre on Hales Street.

¹⁷ This was not a new idea. Gibson's 1941 Plan had proposed moving Ford's Hospital, badly damaged in the Blitz, from Greyfriars Lane in the centre to the nearby Bond's Hospital site on Hill Street. The Spon Street scheme was carried out by F. W. B. Charles from 1964.

PUBLIC ART



Figure 110: Upper Precinct Levelling Stone



Figure 111: Broadgate 1953: Lady Godiva statue & clock tower: Coventry Standard



Figure 113: Broadgate Lady Godiva statue 2008



Figure 115: Lower Precinct Gordon Cullen tile mural



Figure 112: Broadgate Clock tower 2008



Figure 114: Hertford Street The People of Coventry



Figure 116: City Market painted mural

8. PUBLIC ART¹

From the beginning, public art has been an important element within the new Coventry and this has continued to the present day, both as integral with the buildings and as free-standing sculpture or landscape objects. Notable for its consistent employment of outstanding artists and its use of applied art is the Cathedral (1962, Sir Basil Spence). As an extraordinary *Gesamtkunstwerk* (a complete work of art) it must have encouraged the City to pursue a vigorous public art policy.

First to be installed in 1946, at the head of the Upper Precinct, was the *Levelling Stone*, a shield-shaped paving slab of Westmorland slate carved with the phoenix emblem (Trevor Tennant sculpt.) and framed in a band of Hopton Wood stone inscribed with the names of the Redevelopment Committee and the City's Chief Officers. The *Broadgate Standard*, a tall slender column with the Elephant-and-Castle city emblem (1948, by British Pressed Panels Ltd) stands at the Broadgate entrance to the Upper Precinct and, in the centre of Broadgate is the equestrian statue of *Lady Godiva* (1944, William Reid Dick sculpt.; plinth by Sir Edwin Lutyens; Listed Grade 2*). When first installed in 1949, the statue stood in the centre of green space, facing south towards Hertford Street and the clock tower with the comic *Lady Godiva and Peeping Tom clock* (1953, Trevor Tennant sculpt.), but, with the construction of the Cathedral Lanes Shopping Centre, the statue now stands on a paved area and has been turned to face west down the Precinct. The clock tower forms the western abutment to the Hertford Street bridge block of Broadgate House on the south face of which are Douling stone relief panels representing *The People of Coventry* (1953, Trevor Tennant sculpt.). The *Princess Elizabeth Pillar*, (1950-1, John Skelton and James C. Brown sculpt.) one of the Broadgate House arcade pillars, of Blue Hornton stone, commemorates the royal visit in 1948. Within the east entrance hall to Broadgate House is a mosaic wall panel (1953, Hugh R. Hosking and Rene Antonietti) depicting the Coventry Martyrs 1511–1555.

The two stone relief panels depicting *Man's Struggle* (1959, Walter Ritchie sculpt.) that decorated the lower pair of staircases in the Upper Precinct were removed when the stairs and gallery were re-configured and were re-erected on the south elevation of the Herbert Art Gallery, obscuring the patterned brickwork. In the Lower Precinct, the east access ramp has been altered and the tile panel murals (1961, Gordon Cullen) depicting Coventry industries removed to the west access passage. The Lower Precinct link block gables have neon panels also depicting Coventry industries in a more light hearted way. The Locarno Ballroom is decorated with mosaic wall panels (1959, Fred Millett). Within the circular covered market are miniature ships' figurehead sculptures (1958, James C. Brown sculpt.) representing mermaids, sailors and Neptune. Wall paintings by visiting students from Dresden also decorate the walls. All the free-standing sculptures that formerly decorated Market

¹ For a full description of the public sculpture within the city centre see Nozlopy, George T. (2003) *Public Sculpture of Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.



Figure 117: Bull Yard; Three Tuns facade



Figure 11*: Hertford Street sculpted panels



Figure 119: Belgrade Theatre mural panel



Figure 120: Underpass decorative tiles



Figure 121: Cooperative Store incised column



Figure 122: Underpass fountains

Way including *Phoenix*² (1962, George Wagstaffe sculpt.) have been removed together with the original glazed shop show-cases. The result is that the scale of the street is made uncomfortable, not helped by the fast-food kiosks and the now oversized trees. Over the passage between Shelton Square and Bull Yard is a relief mural of *Sir Guy and the Dun Cow* (1962, Alma Ramsay sculpt.)

Bull Yard and Hertford Street have a different approach. Here the art is very strongly integrated and, in Hertford Street especially, is very much part of the architecture. Remarkable is the elevation in Bull Yard of the Three Tuns Public House. The whole wall is an abstract composition of worked 'Faircrete' concrete (1965, William George Mitchell sculpt.) with very heavy moulding on the exterior and a smoother more restrained interior surface. William Mitchell was also the sculptor, in 1969, of the resin bronze and the precast concrete panels of the Hertford Street shops and offices.

On Corporation Street, the Belgrade Theatre has the 'ciment fondu' model of Belgrade (1958, James C. Brown sculpt.) based on a 17th century engraving by Giacomo de Rossi, while the Coop's Hornton stone arcade pillars are carved with motifs depicting the rebuilding of Coventry and the Coop's activities (1956, John Skelton sculpt.). These have been painted over, losing the quality of the stone surface and the crispness of the incised carving.

Together with the Walter Ritchie panels from the Upper Precinct, the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum has, on its east wall, Portland stone panels depicting aspects of the Herbert's collection including *Painting, Archaeology, Sculpture and Natural History*.

Attempts to beautify the Ring Road underpasses include coloured tile work to the walls and, at *Volgograd Place*, an elaborate but now abandoned series of overlapping concrete disc fountains by Douglas Smith of Leicester.³

More recent examples of public art have tended to be more landscape and less building focussed and to try to make places including the series of spaces leading from the Cathedral to Millennium Place, the grand University Square, the yet-to-be-revealed new square outside the Belgrade Theatre or the rather less successful insertion of a water feature in the ill-defined pedestrian area between Bull Yard and Hertford Street. Most lamentable is the *Coventry Cross* (1976, George Wagstaffe sculpt.) in Cuckoo Lane, a ferro-concrete lump in an uncomfortable space behind the Cathedral Lanes Shopping Centre.

² Originally of bronze resin, it was re-cast in bronze in 1983 and set up at the entrance to Hertford Street.

³ Douglas Smith architect and landscape architect, founded Douglas Smith Stimson Partnership (DSSP)

POST 1978



Figure 123: Upper Precinct new bridge and escalator



Figure 124: Upper Precinct new bridge



Figure 125: Upper Precinct ramp and Cathedral Lanes shopping centre



Figure 126: Lower Precinct new glazed roof



Figure 127: Lower Precinct paving and roof

9. BUILDINGS AND ARCHITECTURE POST 1978

With the completion of the ring road in 1974 and of Coventry Point in 1978, most of the Plan, through its various iterations and alterations, was virtually complete. It had taken thirty years and already significant alterations had taken place within the Precinct. In Shelton Square the grand stair to the upper level had been removed in 1965, only five years after its completion, and a fountain, later also removed, placed in the centre of the square.¹ The bridge across Market Way connecting the roof-top car parks was also taken away.

The Precinct

The biggest change to the Upper Precinct happened in 1978. The access to the upper level walkways reached by symmetrical pairs of curving stairs from the lower level had always been seen as unsatisfactory and the shops at this level did not thrive. The access stairs were removed completely from the west end and the bridge replaced. At the same time the water feature and brick planting boxes under the west bridge were removed together with the Walter Ritchie sculptures². At the east end the stairs were replaced with a ramp rising from Broadgate to a new bridge across the Precinct, the space under the ramp, a cramped kiosk, being let to a jeweller. The spaces left between the central ramp and the buildings on either side, Broadgate House and the Hotel Leofric, are narrow, constraining the entrance from Broadgate into the lower level of the Upper Precinct and further restricting the view east from the Precinct. In conjunction with the development of the West Orchards Shopping Centre, a glass enclosure housing escalator access to the upper level was inserted in the middle of the open space of the Upper Precinct in 1991.

Roofing the Precinct

The access at the east end of the Lower Precinct was altered as part of the reconstruction carried out in 2002 when the narrow entrance ramp down to the lower level was widened³ and the access to the circular café altered. The most significant aspect of this reconstruction is the glazed roof over the whole of the Lower Precinct. This encloses the entire open area with a pitched roof on a structure that is unrelated to the original buildings. The effect of the enclosure is to convert the Lower Precinct to interior space as a separate shopping centre, like West Orchards, divided from the remainder of the shopping precinct. The new polished stone paving and marble shop front surrounds further emphasise this separation.

¹ Shelton Square has undergone several changes. At some point the fountain was replaced with a curved shelter and stepped paving unrelated to the surrounding buildings.

² Later remounted on the Herbert Art Gallery. See Section 6.

³ The Gordon Cullen tile mural depicting aspects of Coventry's industrial past that decorated the side of the ramp was relocated to the west end access passage to the Lower Precinct.

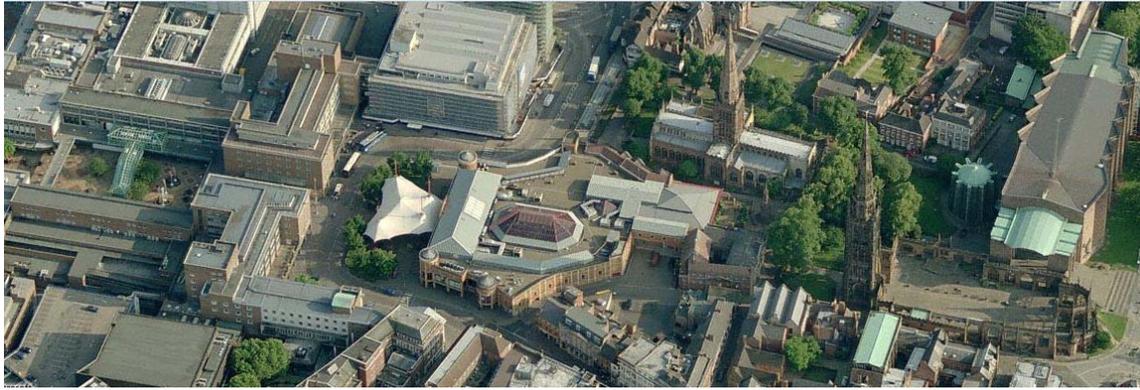


Figure 128: Broadgate; Cathedral Lanes Shopping Centre and Cathedral



Figure 129: Broadgate - Cathedral Lanes Shopping Centre



Figure 130: Smithford Way; West Orchards Shopping Centre

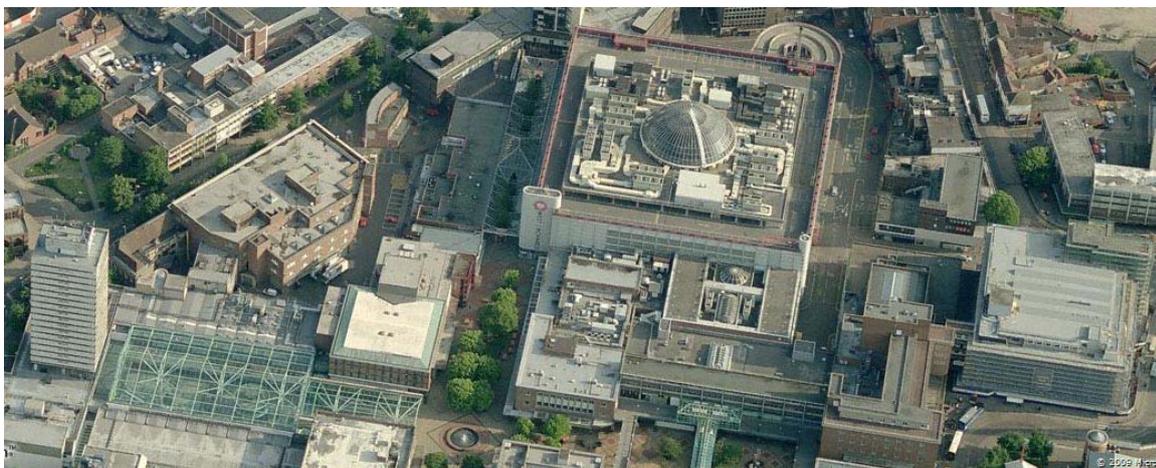


Figure 131: West Orchards Shopping Centre and Precinct

Cathedral Lanes Shopping Centre

The only prominent city centre site that had remained undeveloped was that between Broadgate and the Cathedral. From Gibson's 1941 Plan and in all the subsequent Plans, this area was designated as open space and part of the axis from the Cathedral spire through the Precinct. That to achieve this would require the demolition of the old County Hall building (1783-4, Samuel Eglinton) does not seem to have been a concern. In the meantime the site was used for temporary shops, forming the fourth side of the new square of Broadgate. It is not clear when the decision was taken to give up the idea of an open space and release the site for commercial development but the timing of the competition, in 1985, for the design of a new shopping centre, coincides with the period under Mrs Thatcher's first government, of industrial re-structuring and high unemployment that hit Coventry particularly hard. It seems that the City was unable to resist the commercial imperative. The Cathedral Lanes Shopping Centre (1989, Chapman Taylor and Partners) is the first enclosed shopping centre in Coventry and is essentially inward looking. The arcade on the outside, a nod to the Precinct, does not shelter shop entrances. But it is in its planning that it is especially obtrusive. Not only does it occupy a site that had been designated as open space but it also breaks forward to encroach on the existing open space in Broadgate. Furthermore it interrupts the view of the Cathedral spire from the Precinct, a critical feature of the post-War Plans for the city. The Lady Godiva statue that had been centred in the middle of Broadgate and facing south was re-positioned, centred on the shopping centre entrance and facing west, down the Precinct. It was covered by a tented canopy, since removed, that emphasised the meanness of the installation. The north side of the shopping centre has a wall of flats facing All Saints church while the east side faces the Cathedral spire and a lamentable concrete representation of the Coventry Cross. To construct the shopping centre, Martins Bank (1937, Bromley Cartwright & Waumsley of Nottingham) on High Street, a tidy neo-Georgian essay in brick with a stone ground floor and Roman tiled roof that had survived the Blitz, was demolished.

West Orchards Shopping Centre

The second enclosed shopping centre in Coventry, West Orchards (1991, John Clark Associates) is also a problematic addition to the Plan. It has taken the site north of the Upper Precinct previously occupied by the eastern range of shops on Smithford Way and the multi-storey car park behind them. Three storeys of shopping with three storeys of car parking above, around a six-storey atrium, it turns its back on the adjacent Precinct. As with Cathedral Lanes and Broadgate, the building's footprint encroaches on Smithford Way, which it overshadows, reducing its width by one third. With only one entrance from Smithford Way and few outward looking shops, the building makes the street less lively and the glazed canopy makes the original shops opposite seem darker under their own arcade. The main material used, silver metal panels, is also out of keeping with the Precinct.



Figure 132: Odeon, Arena & Skydome



Figure 133: IKEA



Figure 134: Millennium Place and route to Cathedral

Odeon, Skydome & Arena and Ikea

The demolition in 1961 of the Opera House (1889, C. J. Phipps), used as a cinema since the War, and of the Hippodrome (1937, W. S. Hattrell and Partners) in 2002 left the Belgrade as the only theatre in the city centre. The large site area west of Queen Victoria Road was zoned in the 1945 Plan for light industrial use. With the removal of light industry from the city centre the site was re-zoned and half has been developed with a new leisure and entertainment complex, the SkyDome Arena (2000, Rank Leisure) including a 4,200 seat multi-purpose hall, a 9-screen cinema, an ice rink and multi-storey car park against the ring road and presenting a pastiche copy of an early 20th century factory building as the façade at the north edge of the site against Spon Street. The buildings are standard, late 20th century commercial sheds clad in silver metal panels, and while not increasing the impermeability of the site, do nothing in their appearance or use to enhance the complexity and grain of this part of the centre. This is compounded by the addition of the seven-storey Ikea store (2007, Capita Ruddle Wilkinson) on the remaining half of the site adjacent to Queen Victoria Road. Clad in blue and yellow panels, it overtops the modest timber frame buildings on Spon Street as well as overshadowing the buildings on the east side of Queen Victoria Road. Essentially inward facing and of a new and gross scale, neither of these buildings contributes anything to the enlivening of the streets on which they are sited.

'Belgrade Plaza'

The site behind the Belgrade Theatre, also zoned in the 1945 Plan for light industry, is being developed with offices, a casino and hotel and a multi-storey car park accessed from the ring road.

Phoenix Initiative and Millennium Place

In 2000 as Coventry's Millennium scheme, the City proposed the Phoenix Initiative, so-called from the idea that Coventry would, like the phoenix, be reborn from the ashes of its destruction⁴. The brief for the project was to create a new route between the (ancient) Cathedral and the (modern) Museum of British Road Transport through a series of squares, revealing Coventry's ancient historic fabric and terminating in a contemporary place, celebrating Coventry's technological achievements. The plan (2000, MacCormac Jamieson Pritchard) included for the first time in the centre of the city, a mixed-use of shops, offices and residential buildings. It has been only partially successful, with much of the commercial space unoccupied and the route apparently little used. While the route through the ruins and the Visitor Centre make attractive small spaces, the grand square, Millennium Place, is lacking in scale and is dominated by the rather incomprehensible *Whittle Arch*.

⁴ The phoenix image was invoked by the city in the levelling stone, laid in the Upper Precinct in 1946 and by Sir Basil Spence in his book, *Phoenix at Coventry*, describing the rebuilding of the Cathedral.

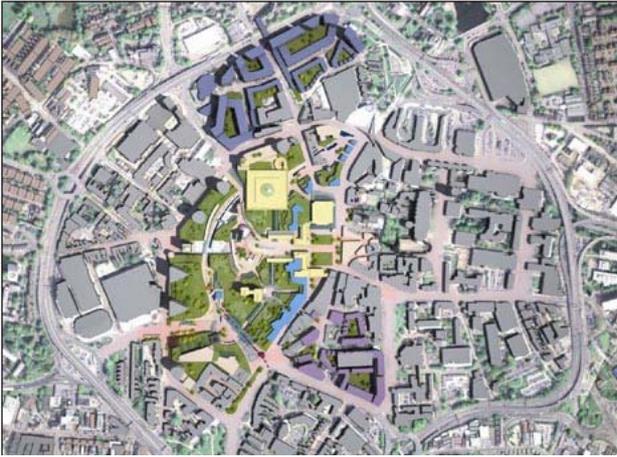


Figure 135: 2008 Jerde Scheme; Plan



Figure 136: Jerde Scheme 2008; central Arena with library

Jerde Scheme 2008

Most recently Coventry has commissioned a new scheme⁵ for the comprehensive redevelopment of the whole shopping centre, the area bounded by Corporation Street, The Burges, Cross Cheaping, Broadgate, Hertford Street, Warwick Row, Greyfriars Road and Queen Victoria Road. While retaining elements of the original, most notably the buildings of Broadgate and the Upper Precinct, together with the three terminal towers and the West Orchard shopping centre, most of the shopping precinct is to be replaced. Although as densely developed as before, the scheme is made to appear more open by replacing rooftop car parking with a green surface. The two levels of shopping are retained. Two triangular residential and four square office towers are added. A large space, the 'Coventry Arena' is opened up in the centre of the scheme, with an 'iconic' library of dubious geometric form replacing the Locarno. The published drawings are difficult to read and the scale is unclear as are the routes for pedestrians and traffic.

Although it is difficult to interpret the scheme from the information published, it is hard to understand what the project's intentions are, except for the production of vast new areas of commercial space.

⁵ By the Jerde Partnership from Venice, California. According to its website the firm specialises in 'place making'

10. COVENTRY COMPARED - TO PLYMOUTH, EXETER AND BRISTOL
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COVENTRY

The War and Instigation of the Plans

The extent of the damage caused by the Blitz in Plymouth, Exeter, Bristol and Coventry varied. In Plymouth, the whole of the city centre was destroyed leaving the Guildhall and St. Andrew's Church as roofless shells and those buildings which were not totally demolished by bombing were 'made safe' and removed by the Royal Engineers in 1942. In Exeter, the bombs missed the Cathedral, the Cathedral Close and the Guildhall but destroyed parts of Fore Street to the west and most of High Street and the Georgian terraces of Bedford Circus to the east. In Bristol, the bombs destroyed the shopping centre and the industrial buildings to the south towards Temple Meads but Broadmead remained virtually untouched. In Coventry, while the targets were ostensibly the factories that interlaced the city centre, the congested site meant that damage was extensive and indiscriminate. As at Plymouth, virtually the whole of the city centre was destroyed including, most notably, the Cathedral and the commercial area around Smithford Street to the west. In Exeter and Plymouth it was obvious which areas needed rebuilding and for what purposes they might be used and the principle of this was hardly debated. In Bristol it was not obvious where rebuilding should start and, in a city which never had a single 'centre' and where the zones – civic centre, university, commercial docks, railway station, residential inner suburbs, industrial suburbs - were already established over a wide area, and had also survived intact, the debates concentrated mainly on the location of the new shopping centre. In Coventry, the task that the City Architects' Department had set itself before the War, to construct a new city centre was rendered immeasurably easier by the bomb damage. The effect of the destruction on the finances of the cities varied too. Bristol thrived during and after the War with its rate income virtually unaltered. Exeter suffered immediately because the damage to shops affected its position as the regional shopping centre and Plymouth had literally had its heart removed – the Blitz had destroyed shops, businesses, the financial institutions, the civic centre and the Church. Coventry, similarly, had lost its centre – the old Broadgate and Smithford Street, the heart of the city's commercial enclave, together with the Cathedral had been swept away.

The psychological effects of the War were different in each city. As it had done before the War, Exeter saw itself as a regional centre and, with the Cathedral, the Close and other mediaeval buildings intact, as a centre for tourism and the gateway to the Devon countryside. Rebuilding was necessary to re-establish the shops but there was no need to expand greatly the population of the city, there was no housing crisis and new housing could be accommodated easily in the suburbs where it had started in the 1930s. Plymouth was the opposite. The crises of poor housing and an inability to develop the city centre had been identified in the 1930s and the War gave the city a golden opportunity to change for the better. It would remain an important naval base, a garrison town and a fishing port but it

could become the regional centre to outdo any town in Cornwall and to rival the pre-War eminence of Exeter. The position of Bristol was assured. It had no rivals, its industries were modern, its population steadily increasing and the assumption of the Merchant Adventurers' control over city business and governance remained unchallenged. Bristol already was a great city and there was no need for change; matters of civic design or architecture were secondary to business and commerce. Like Plymouth, Coventry had already identified the problems of poor housing and a congested city centre before the War. It therefore seized the opportunity to plan wholesale redevelopment including a significant increase in shopping provision that had previously been constrained and to set itself up in competition with its neighbours, notably Birmingham.¹

There is much in common in the officers of each city council. In Plymouth, Bristol and Coventry they were appointed in the 1930s and therefore knew the cities before the destruction of the Blitz. The most ambitious was probably James Paton Watson, the Plymouth city engineer, who, having been frustrated in his attempts to change the city in the 1930s, saw his great opportunity in 1943 and devoted the rest of his career, until he retired in 1958, to the realisation of *A Plan for Plymouth*. In Exeter, Harold Gayton, the city planning officer, John Brierley, the city engineer and surveyor, and Harold Rowe, the city architect, were all appointed just after the War. In Bristol, both H. Marston Webb, the city engineer, and Nelson Meredith, the city architect, were responsible for the pre-War planning of the city and thus had a vested interest in continuing these policies. In Coventry, Donald Gibson both created and saw through the early realisation of the plan. Gibson left Coventry in 1955 and the subsequent City Architects, Arthur Ling and Terence Gregory, imposed their own significant variations on the original Plan. In the other cities, the planning process remained consistent at least until the mid-1960s. In Coventry, Exeter and Plymouth the architects had equal status with the other chief officers and their voices could be heard whereas in Bristol, the post of city architect was subservient to that of other chief officers and thus there was no architectural representation at the higher committees. Meredith, in Bristol, was the only one who demonstrated any great sensitivity towards historic buildings. Indeed, the preservation of historic buildings was only an issue in Bristol where it had some significant effect on the form of Broadmead. In Exeter, only St. Stephen's Church and the city walls constrained the development of Princesshay and in Plymouth, once St. Andrew's had been repaired, the few retained buildings were ingeniously woven into the new fabric of the city without changing the predetermined form. In Coventry, surviving buildings that impeded the development of the shopping centre plan were not retained. Only those bombed buildings such as the Cathedral itself, like Plymouth's Charles Church or Bristol's St. Peter's church, in part because they lay outside the main plan area, were retained as enduring evidence of the war damage suffered by the city.

¹ Unlike Bristol, Plymouth or even Exeter, which are the dominant cities in their regions, there are seven cities within 50 miles of Coventry, with the largest, Birmingham, only 20 miles away.

The political leadership of the cities both during and immediately after the War was very important. The strongest and by far the most important leaders were Lord Astor, the wartime mayor of Plymouth, and his wife, Nancy, who was MP for Plymouth Sutton from 1919-1945. Through their political connections with Lord Reith, the Minister of Works, they succeeded in appointing Patrick Abercrombie as planner for Plymouth in 1942. The appointment was an extraordinary *coup* – Abercrombie, professor of Town & Country Planning at University College, was the greatest town planner in England, he was at the height of his powers and had just completed the first plan for London. As a member of the Barlow Commission he had direct connections to the wartime government and was influential in both setting up the Ministry of Town & Country Planning in 1943 and the draughting of the 1944 Town & Country Planning Act, which set out the principles of the compulsory purchase of city centre land after the War. In Abercrombie, Plymouth had secured not only the best practical planner available but also someone who understood the labyrinthine legislation of post-war government.

It is tempting to say that, in appointing Thomas Sharp as planner to the city, Exeter had managed second best. This is far from the case. Whilst Abercrombie was pre-eminent in regional planning, he had never designed a city and had little experience of dealing with historic cities. Whereas Abercrombie was known for his predilection for formal plans, Sharp had made his reputation through his sensitive writing about historic cities, particularly about Cathedral cities like Durham and Canterbury, in his *English Panorama* of 1936 and elsewhere. In fact, one could argue that the Plan for Exeter which was presented in 1945 and published in book form as *Exeter Phoenix* in 1946 was too sensitive to its historic setting in that Sharp tried to reveal the whole of the mediaeval city and erase from the city centre the layers of history that had followed. However, the appointment of Sharp was politically and practically astute, especially as the city engineer was due for retirement and it was possible for the new blood, like Harold Gayton, to be involved in the preparation of the plan.

Bristol failed to appoint an external planning consultant. There is no doubt that this was due to political complacency and naivety in general and to the arguments of Marston Webb, who saw such an appointment as a threat, in particular. Meredith's views were never published but one suspects that he would have welcomed a more sensitive architectural eye. Perhaps it was thought that Abercrombie's 1930 Regional Plan was sufficient and, of course, it was true that some of his proposals for zoning and traffic planning were already in place before the War. But as the post-War plans were published, Exeter and Plymouth as well as Oxford, Bath, Coventry, Kingston upon Hull and the rest, it must have become obvious to everybody in Bristol that the city had missed the wider view and that all of the proposals for the city centre were unhappy compromises. It is possible that some comfort was taken from the knowledge that Coventry's plan, universally acknowledged in the professional press as the best post-War plan, was produced by a city architect, Donald Gibson, without external assistance.

Although, like Bristol, Coventry did not appoint an external planning consultant, Donald Gibson both had support from his (newly elected Labour) city council and fellow officers and had the status of architect *and* city planning officer,² a status that was never offered to Meredith. Furthermore, from his appointment in 1938, Gibson had begun to consider how Coventry might be re-planned and, to this end, had assembled a team of like-minded architect-planners, many of them Liverpool³ trained, so that the external influence on the plan for Coventry was manifest. Coventry, too, was quick to exploit the attention it received as the first provincial city to be bombed and, while there were considerable delays by government in the provision of means, there was a great reluctance, ultimately, to frustrate the implementation of the plan.

The Plans Compared – Ring Roads

It is easier to explain what the plans for Coventry, Bristol, Plymouth and Exeter had in common. The first and most influential factor was planning for traffic and roads. The increase in motor traffic in the 1930s in all cities had caused chaos and the resolution of suitable spaces for traffic, pedestrians and civic squares and parks formed the basis for all the new plans. This had started before the War, of course, but now armed with the (inadequate) statistical analysis of traffic censuses, examples from America and Nazi Germany (which were thought equally good), Alker Tripp's theories and Abercrombie's method of analytical planning, the traffic engineer could plan the roads of the future with unchallengeable certainty. It was discovered that traffic was of two types – through traffic and local traffic – and that, once through traffic was eliminated by providing ring roads, local traffic could be given distributor roads which would separate vehicles from pedestrians to the comfort and safety of both. If example were needed, then the Slussen interchange just south of the old city of Stockholm⁴ was available to show how a sensitive, caring society should solve such problems. Add this to Alker Tripp's American-inspired ideas of the precinct which avoided local through traffic and the formula was in place to provide ideal solutions.

As has been noted, Coventry's first ring road proposal as an inner circulatory route pre-dated the publication of Alker Tripp's influential *Road Traffic and Town Planning* and, although not designed in any detail, made pragmatic use of existing roads, which were to be widened into dual carriageways. It provided access to the new shopping and civic centres and to new residential and commercial zones to the east and south. The eventual separation of the inner ring road from this inner circulatory road and its realignment as an encircling parkway ring largely ignored the surviving fabric. The shopping and civic zones within the ring were well defined, but the other areas, zoned for 'light industry' or 'clubs' were largely leftover space.

² This is a generalisation. The full story is explained in Hasegawa (1992).

³ Abercrombie had been Professor of Town Planning at Liverpool 1915-1935. Gibson had briefly taught at Liverpool.

⁴ The Slussen interchange by Tage William-Olsson and Gösta Lundborg (1931-35) is the meeting point for all land traffic between Södermanland and Uppland and water traffic between the open sea and Lake Mälaren and ties together six lanes of traffic in a clover-leaf form borrowed from contemporary motorway design. Slussen is illustrated in Bertil Hultén (1951) *Building Modern Sweden*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books p.43. There have been many recent schemes to redesign it.

Although, as first conceived, the ring road was seen as a green line around the city, the engagement of the city with the road was not explored. Bristol's outer ring roads were not completed but the inner circuit road, started before the War, formed the basis for all of the precincts in the centre of the city and the physical shape of Broadmead. Exeter too was surrounded by a ring road. Here a dual carriageway followed the perimeter of the mediaeval wall and thus it did not much affect the geometry of land within it. Its route avoided Southernhay and the surviving Georgian terraces (the gaps at the eastern end were not restored) by swinging south-east along Paris Street and back to Magdalen Street with a new road through the suburbs. Otherwise the graphics of the Plan indicate that all buildings outside the wall were to be cleared and the new road run through open parkland ending up at a vast clover-leaf interchange (Slussen again) at Exe Bridge. The old city was divided into four sectors with a major place in the middle at the junction of South Street, North Street, Fore Street and High Street and another, this time a landscaped square, at the east end of the new High Street. The ring road at Plymouth followed an entirely new route unaffected by any existing feature except the railway line to Millbay on the west side (the future Western Approach). Abercrombie's version was the grandest of them all, more geometrically resolved than at Bristol or Coventry and far less inhibited by topology or history than Exeter. The whole plan was conceived on a massive scale with vast traffic roundabouts – circles, ellipses and octagons - at the radial junctions to the suburbs. The dual carriageway of the main route, the A38 via Union Street to the Torpoint Ferry, was made to slice through the city centre, dividing the shopping precinct from the civic precinct and yet another ring road was driven up to the Hoe, through West Hoe and back to Western Approach. One admires the scale and audacity of the proposal. Abercrombie was not tinkering with the old city like Webb in Bristol and, to a lesser extent, Gibson and Ling in Coventry, nor trying to react to history as Sharp in Exeter but creating something completely new, dragging Plymouth from provincial backwater into a new era. Abercrombie saw his ring road as a Parisian *boulevard*, lined with trees, whereas the later designs of Coventry's inner ring road, the Bristol inner circuit road and the Exeter ring road where it cut through the suburbs had no aspirations above the merely functional.

The Plans Compared – Precincts and Zones

The other fundamental factor that the four plans have in common is the division of the city into use zones or precincts. It must be remembered that the first half of the twentieth century was unkind to the British city. The great phase of civic development and prosperity of the nineteenth century had been brought to a swift close by the First World War and the political and economic uncertainties of the next two decades had left cities poorly maintained, with little new building and overwhelming problems of overcrowding and under-investment. So it was in Exeter, Plymouth and Bristol and Coventry. The purpose of the Barlow Commission

was to report on the state of the urban poor⁵ and, under Abercrombie's guidance, it saw the physical solution in terms of separating the mixed uses of the city into carefully divided zones or precincts so that the problems of each could be analysed and solved separately. This is what Abercrombie had preached through the 1930s, it had formed part of his regional plan for Bristol and Bath and, to give the idea further credence, was the basis of the Garden Cities of Letchworth and Welwyn. The idea fitted very neatly with the principles of traffic planning, was already in place in Bristol and was embraced by Gibson and his team at Coventry.

In Coventry the shopping and civic precincts were clearly defined sectors within the inner circulatory road leaving few pockets of undefined usage. The area between the ring and inner circulatory roads was less clearly defined and the zones outside the ring road barely at all so that connections across the road were not explored.

In Exeter, the division of the city centre naturally formed four precincts. The north-east sector, grouped around the Castle, made a civic centre with the law courts, County Council Offices, art school, museum and art gallery; the south-east sector contained the Cathedral with new shopping along High Street and offices and parkland alongside the city wall. The two western sectors composed offices and shopping along Fore Street and housing against the ring road on the south (where the ring road came within the city wall) and on the north facing out across St. Bartholomew's cemetery. Sharp's was the only plan that included housing in the central area. Gibson's continued existing housing uses in small areas on the perimeter. Abercrombie's had none and Meredith's, somewhat apologetically, inserted some key-worker housing behind St. Mary Redcliffe. Those civic functions that could not fit within the city wall - the theatre, police station, fire station and post office - Sharp pushed eastwards along Sidwell Street and Paris Street.

The greatest diagram was Abercrombie's *Plan for Plymouth*. Here the functions of the new city were neatly spread out from the railway station in the north to the Hoe in the south starting with a cultural centre on the site of the existing Technical College and then with government offices, shopping, civic centre and hotel and residential contained within the ring road before the open space of the Hoe. Industry was zoned between Millbay and Union Street (where there had previously been shopping) and out beyond Sutton Harbour, which was relabelled 'historic Plymouth'.

It is interesting to note how each city dealt with public transport. In Coventry Gibson placed the bus station next to the railway station on the south outside the ring road. Sharp developed the existing Central Station on Queen Street and placed a huge bus station opposite it, between the tracks and the ring road. Similarly, Abercrombie retained the position of the North Station, placed the bus station next to it with a new hotel and railway offices and linked the access roads into a vast octagonal roundabout on the ring road and a dual carriageway

⁵ The full title is the *Report of the Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population*. Cmd 6153 London: HMSO 1941.

road leading north to Tavistock. In Bristol, however, Webb placed the new bus station north of Broadmead on the north side of the ring road as far from Temple Meads railway station as it was possible to be. In Coventry, Bristol and Plymouth the reinstatement of the pre-War tram systems was hardly discussed and it was assumed that buses, sharing the same roads as other vehicles, would provide all inner-city transport.

The Plans Compared – Architecture and Planning

The layout of Coventry can be compared to Sharp's plan for Princesshay and High Street. Gibson, in the new pedestrian precinct retained the position of Broadgate and, approximately, the line of Smithford Street, realigning it on the Cathedral spire, both widening the street to make arcaded spaces and narrowing it to contain them and terminating in a crescent that made the connection with the inner circulatory road. In Exeter, Sharp retained High Street as a trafficked street but widened it to make a very long, thin place with continuous arcades. This started at the surviving narrow, mediaeval end of the street and terminated in the landscaped square, which resolved the interchange of the new ring road. Thus Sharp was attempting to solve the practical problems of providing space for cars and shoppers but also forming recognisable spaces between the buildings and in this the Plan for Exeter resembles the first plans for Broadmead. However, Sharp went further by providing a distinct new urban form. Most successful was the creation of Princesshay – the first built pedestrian shopping street in England - which eliminated all cars and service vehicles, leaving the shoppers in their own space with picturesque views of the Cathedral just like the views of Canterbury published in *English Panorama* and following the example of Coventry. It was a masterstroke – a strong idea and a practical solution while, unlike at Coventry, avoiding the obvious controversy of turning the whole new shopping centre in to a pedestrian area. Although at Broadmead, Meredith proposed a pedestrianised space around Quakers Friars, he never resolved the conflict between access and servicing.

The plan form of the new city of Plymouth was a meticulously ordered grid with its main north-south axis aligned to the war memorial on the Hoe and its cross streets terminating in great semi-circular circuses which surely must rival any in Bath or Nash's London. The greatest feature of all was the main north-south axis. This was not composed of buildings but rather a broad public space which united the central precincts – a linear park for the enjoyment of all the citizens with lawns and flowerbeds and ornamental gardens and fountains at the road intersections. More than in any other city plan of the 1940s, Abercrombie had captured the spirit of the moment; the new city was to be democratic, egalitarian, open and to be enjoyed by all. It was the true architecture of the Welfare State and everybody recognised it at once.

The presentation of the plans to the public varied enormously. Coventry had led the way in 1940 with its pre-Blitz exhibition, *Coventry of Tomorrow*, of plans and a model for the new civic centre. Following the destruction, it was first to present new *intermediate* and *ultimate*

plans. These were widely published in March 1941⁶ and included perspective drawings showing the intended vistas and the scale of the development⁷. These were followed, in 1942, by a model showing the whole of the civic and shopping centres as then conceived. Finally in 1945, the *Coventry of the Future* exhibition was accompanied by a brochure showing both plans and perspective views⁸ indicating the architectural treatment and including a full-colour perspective of the new Broadgate by Cyril Farey⁹. Later iterations of the plan were exhibited, in model form, first in showcases in the Precinct and, subsequently in the exhibition space under the Department of Architecture and Planning¹⁰. The plans for Exeter and Plymouth were beautifully published in book form for public discussion – Abercrombie's in quarto and designed to match his volumes for other cities and regions,¹¹ Sharp's published by The Architectural Press with rather more progressive graphics and dense black-and-white photographs bled off the pages. Both books were a visual feast of maps, diagrams, photographs and perspectives held together with serious academic text. In both volumes the perspective drawings of the new cities were the most accessible and seductive images. Those in *Exeter Phoenix* were by A.C. Webb and, like those produced for Broadmead, rather underplayed the architecture of the new buildings. The drawings in *A Plan for Plymouth* by J.D.M. Harvey were the very best of their kind – committing themselves to definite images of real buildings, far more than described in the text and instantly recognisable as a progressive new architecture (in the shopping centre) or as acceptable old forms (in the civic and theatre precincts).¹² In all the cities, the presentation of the new plans to the citizens was seen as important and that meant the usual round of talks to Rotary Clubs, Chambers of Commerce and the like which fell to Donald Gibson, Paton Watson, Harold Rowe and Nelson Meredith. Plymouth went much further through exhibitions in the City Museum & Art Gallery, talks to schools often organised by the City Librarian, William Best Harris, an exhibition in London used to lobby Members of Parliament and an extraordinary film, *The Way We Live*, produced by the film maker Jill Cragie in 1946.¹³ In Plymouth, the plan was welcomed by nearly everybody. Bristol did the least; the rather amateur model for Broadmead was built by the architects' department, the plan was never presented in a single coherent form, the perspective drawings were few and rather feeble and the plan was put on public display for the shortest possible time. As unchanging 'revised' plans were presented,

⁶ Published in the *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 1941 Mar. 17, p. 76-77; *The Architect & Building News*, 1941 Mar. 21, p. 188-195; *Architects' Journal*, 1941 Apr. 24, p. 278-281.

⁷ The published drawings, including some rough sketches by Percy Johnson Marshall intended only for internal use, were prepared by members of Gibson's team.

⁸ The drawings are signed AW.

⁹ Cyril Farey (1888-1954) was an architect and leading perspectivist of the 1930s.

¹⁰ Photographs of the models were also published in Trevor Dannat's *Modern Architecture in Britain* (1959) and Percy Johnson Marshall's *Rebuilding Cities* (1966).

¹¹ There was even a version for school children, edited by the Director of Education, Andrew Scotland, in 1946.

¹² J.D.M Harvey (1895-1978) was an architect and one of the leading perspectivists of the 1930s and had worked for Lutyens, Tait and many of the larger London offices. His perspectives in *A Plan for Plymouth* are 'modern' for the shopping centre and North Cross, classical for the new civic centre and 'art deco' for the new theatre. Mostly his 'modern' was based on Tait's Glasgow Exhibition of 1938 for which he had produced drawings.

¹³ Jill Cragie met her future husband, Michael Foot, in the making of the film. Foot was elected Labour MP for Plymouth Devonport in 1945 and the film ends with scenes of Plymouth citizens casting votes for Labour and their bright futures.

the process seemed to be greeted with increasing scepticism and mistrust of officials and politicians alike.

Revisions to the Plans and Post-War Politics

Following the edicts of Lord Reith and the Ministry of Works and with the example of Coventry's Redevelopment Committee as a 'test case', Plymouth, Bristol and Exeter each set up a Reconstruction Committee composed of city councillors and advised by its planning and architectural officers. Initially these Committees were seen by central government as instruments of propaganda but this attitude changed after the 1945 General Election when they became the instrument through which all local plans gained Government approval and finance. They were crucial to the new Labour government which had been elected by a huge majority on the promise of delivering a 'new Jerusalem'. Their relationship to Government was critical to the process of making of Declaratory Orders under the 1944 Town & Country Planning Act, the resolution of the public inquiries which would follow, the approval of plans by the Ministry of Town & Country Planning and, eventually, the granting of building licences. Plymouth was quickest off the mark, making its Declaratory Order in 1945 and disposing of its public inquiry in October 1946 which, although there were appeals to the High Court, enabled the first 30 acres of land to be compulsorily purchased. Works started on the sewer system in Raleigh Street in March 1947 and the first part of Royal Parade, the main cross street, was opened by the King in October. Bristol failed to complete the legal process for Broadmead until 1948 (and that was a hopeless compromise) and did not start building (on an existing street) until 1950. Like Bristol, Coventry was very slow to complete the legal process, its plan only finally being signed off in 1949 and the first buildings only completed in 1953. How did Plymouth achieve this programme? Firstly, in Lord Astor it had a totally dedicated chairman of its Reconstruction Committee who had the political sense to remove party politics from the business of reconstruction. In this he had support from the political right, from Sir Clifford Tozer who became chairman in 1945, and from the political left, from Alderman Mason, the deputy chairman, and from Hubert Medland, the MP for Plymouth Drake, who struck up an extraordinary personal relationship with Dame Evelyn Sharp, Deputy Secretary at the Ministry of Town & Country Planning. Secondly, and uniquely in any British city, the Reconstruction Committee appointed Abercrombie to be their consultant, a rôle which he fulfilled until his retirement in 1947. This gave the City a detailed insight of the workings of the Ministry, access to the Minister and an understanding of the legislation of the 1944 and 1947 Planning Acts¹⁴ which the other cities, including Coventry, lacked.

In Exeter, Sharp was not retained after the public inquiry in 1946 and the plan was taken forward by the chief officers with Rowe responsible for the architecture. The main controversies were caused by the route of the ring road and disagreements with the Ministry of Transport over costs, not by Sharp's proposals for Princesshay. His ideas of planning a

¹⁴ The planning advisor to the Ministry was, of course, William Holford, another of Abercrombie's Liverpool students.

great space along the High Street and for the pedestrian street survived more-or-less intact, although the proposed arcades disappeared after opposition from traders. It is not known if Exeter had any special connection with Government but the process of turning *Exeter Phoenix* into practical reality seems to have been both quick and efficient. The layout seems to have been fixed by 1948 and the first designs for buildings date from 1949 with the foundation stone for Princesshay laid by Princess Elizabeth in October 1949.

Although first to publish its plans, Coventry was slow to implement them. That they survived to be realised intact must be due in part to the tenacity of Gibson's team who, despite the caution of the Town Clerk and Treasurer and Government reluctance to underwrite the proposals, persisted in pushing them through. Coventry had powerful chief officers, backed by councillors, who were able to engage and enthuse the public in favour of their proposals. Plymouth had councillors who were dedicated and knowledgeable and were able to accept that they needed professional and political help in their mammoth task. In Exeter, the problem was considerably simpler and smaller and it seems to have been fortunate in its choice of new, young chief officers. Bristol, by contrast, suffered from officers whose ideas were either entrenched or suppressed, from a Committee who had no understanding of the problem it was trying to solve, who were unable to seek external advice and who were mis-led by conflicting advice from the Ministry, and from Members of Parliament who were either uninterested in or ignorant of the problems.

The plans for Coventry, Plymouth and Exeter survived translation into reality. Although the layout at Coventry was, apparently, compromised by the insertion of the trafficked cross-street, it had the effect of making the plan more permeable and accessible. The layout at Plymouth was much simplified from the Abercrombie diagram, mainly to accommodate larger shops units and simplified access. At Exeter, Rowe and Brierley added a small square half way along Princesshay to carry the route from Castle Street through to the city walls and Southernhay, thereby making the plan more permeable, much in spirit of Sharp's pre-War theories. One of the disappointments at Plymouth was the sacrifice of the 'Bath-like' cross arcades proposed by Abercrombie which meant that the city blocks became rather too large and inflexible. The ideas which drove Meredith's first plans for Broadmead were quickly discarded and the final plans were driven only by commercial necessity. It was quite impossible to introduce architectural or planning ideas after the agreement of the functional layout.

Post-War Architecture in Plymouth, Exeter, Broadmead and Coventry

While Gibson was careful to state that the plan was of prime importance and the appearance of the buildings, as depicted in perspective views, was only suggested, there was clearly, in the minds of his team, an idea of how the city should look. Certainly there was a view that although Le Corbusier's four principles should underpin the plan, his solution of high rise building was not appropriate for Coventry. Instead the buildings were to be *kept low in order*

*to emphasise the verticality of the Cathedral... and were to be faced in brick and stone to harmonise with the local red sandstone...*¹⁵

Gibson, Abercrombie and Sharp were uncertain about the appearance of the buildings for their new city centres. They were agreed that the new buildings should not copy the styles of the past (and in this they reflected the position held by most younger contemporary architects) but were reticent in defining exactly what the new, contemporary style should be. Of course, the definition of 'style' was exactly what the Modern Movement was against – the appearance of new architecture should emerge from a logical analysis of function and technology – but such ideas were fine in theory but very difficult to put into practice. Abercrombie suggested that the new architecture should be made from pre-cast concrete, following undefined American examples, and called for a consistency of materials for new buildings to give them the architectural impact of Georgian London or Bath and Nash's Regent Street. Sharp too wanted consistency but left the choice open. Gibson quickly achieved consistency by laying down the scale, storey-heights and construction materials required and by imposing the arcade form. More than anywhere else, furthermore, Coventry's City Architect's Department designed and carried out development itself.

*One of the things Lord Reith had asked was – how do you get people to put up the buildings you want in the way you want. The answer...was compulsory acquisition of land...with a subsequent leasing of sites to developers...Leasehold control gave powers to require the developer to do...whatever you wanted him to do...we were very anxious to put up the first buildings ourselves...The people who followed were thus able to see the sort of thing we had in mind.*¹⁶

Criticised as *undistinguished*¹⁷ the use of Blockley brick with different stone detailing gives the both the shopping precinct and the civic quarter a common language. The first new building of post-War Plymouth was built of pre-cast concrete panels but presumably it was not much liked for the first buildings in the city centre were clad in brick and then, very quickly afterwards, in Portland stone.¹⁸ Although there was some pre-War precedent for the use of Portland stone in the city, its choice was more probably due to a need for grandeur and thus a deliberate reference to the formal buildings of pre-War London (like Reith's Broadcasting House) or to Liverpool (like the port buildings which Abercrombie would have known well). The choice of material in Exeter was more straightforward. There were local building stones but none was suitable for the cladding of framed buildings and it was obvious to choose the local brick that supported local industry, reduced costs and gave architectural links to the past, particularly to the remaining Georgian terraces of Southernhay. Meredith also required

¹⁵ Johnson Marshall, *Rebuilding Cities*, p. 293

¹⁶ Donald Gibson in *Architectural Design*, 1958 Dec.

¹⁷ Pevsner, *Warwickshire*, p. 271

¹⁸ The first building in Plymouth was Dingles Bakery & Store in Ebrington Street, out of the city centre, by Sir John Burnet Tait & Lorne (1946-1950) in precast concrete panels with a 2" brick stair tower at the east end. The first in the city centre was the NAAFI by Messrs. Joseph (1949-51) much influenced by the brick buildings of Sir John Burnet Tait & Lorne of the 1930s.

architectural consistency for Broadmead. By 1949 he had chosen Bath stone (immediately compromised by allowing the use of cheaper, reconstituted stone) for all the fronts onto Broadmead, whether these were small buildings like his own 93-95 Broadmead or grander like Marks & Spencer. Red brick in its cheapest variety was reserved for the backs.

Plymouth and Exeter were fortunate in that the rebuilding involved many building types other than shops and in many cases functions could be mixed to produce larger buildings than the three storey shops of Coventry or Broadmead. This gave the High Street in Exeter and Royal Parade and parts of Armada Way in Plymouth a greater city scale and presence and the variety of uses and users gave them vitality. Plymouth started its rebuilding with institutions and department stores along Royal Parade of at least four storeys, the roof terraces and twin towers of Dingles and Pearl Assurance establishing a scale which was intended to emulate Princes Street in Edinburgh (which also faced south with gardens on one side). The architecture was a variation of T.S. Tait's architecture of mass where solid dominated void and the forms appeared to have been carved from dense material.¹⁹ This is not to say that it lacked elegance – the terrace edges were as thin as possible, the metal windows surprisingly filigree and vigorous carved decoration was integrated into the architecture. The architecture of the new Exeter was, perhaps, more conservative – the first buildings were neo-Georgian (or neo-Roman for the banks) - but this was quickly adapted by a variety of architects into a stripped classical modernism which suited shops of one or two storeys, grand (but rather squeezed) entrances to offices and repeated bays of office windows. Again, the buildings of Exeter are beautifully detailed; the brickwork used different bonding patterns, the window and door openings were edged in decorated stonework, balconies accentuated with fancy ironwork and the heights of the buildings exaggerated with steep clay-tiled roofs. Exeter and, especially, Plymouth attracted work by the very best architects of that generation – William Curtis Green (who won the Royal Gold Medal in 1942) built Barclays Banks in both cities, Easton & Robertson (Gold Medals in 1955 and 1949 respectively) built Lloyds Bank on Royal Parade, Frederick Etchells repaired St. Andrew's Church and Geoffrey Jellicoe designed Plymouth Civic Centre (with Hector Stirling, the city architect) and the landscape of the Great Square. There were significant contributions from local architects to Exeter and Plymouth. Best of these, Walls & Pearn (also Liverpool graduates) with their Pannier Market (1956-59) and Athenaeum (1958-61) produced considered, original and well-designed buildings which integrated (almost) seamlessly into the fabric of their new cities. Broadmead failed to attract the best architects and therefore lacked significant buildings, which would have set standards for others to follow. Coventry does not appear to have courted well-known architects from outside the city. Uniquely all the 'public' buildings and much of the shopping was designed by the City Architects' department. The larger stores either had their own unnamed architects or

¹⁹ This style started with Adelaide House on London Bridge in 1920-25 and continued with St. Andrew's House, Edinburgh (1936-39) and 44 Main Street, Johannesburg (1938-45). Tait's work of this period is discussed in its Scottish context in 'The Architecture of 'Mass': Burnet Tait and the Beaux-Arts Legacy' in Miles Glendinning, Randal MacInnes, Aonghus MacKechnie (1996) *A History of Scottish Architecture*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press pp.394-400.

used outside commercial firms. Developers tended to use local architects, notably W. S. Hattrell & Partners and Redgrave & Clarke. An exception was Ellis Somake for Dolcis who produced outstanding buildings in Broadmead, Plymouth and Coventry. It is clear that the control systems put in place in Coventry by Gibson, in Exeter by Brierley and Rowe and in Plymouth by Paton Watson, Catchpole and their advisors worked better than Meredith's in Broadmead.

Key to these systems was the concept of an overall composition of the mass of buildings facing the streets. This predetermined the height, width and fascia, cornice and string course levels and the basic composition and materials of the façades but, more important, composed these forms across the streets to make the proportions of the public spaces between. It is not entirely clear where these ideas came from or how they were ingrained into the minds of those who ordained the planning systems. They were part of a Beaux-Arts training in architecture at most schools of architecture before the War and some of these courses, as at Liverpool University, included town planning but there was no text book, no guidance from the Ministry of Town & Country Planning and no other single body which could have made the principles clear to local authorities. There were conferences, for example of the Town Planning Institute and of the Association of Municipal Corporations, held annually and where such matters were discussed informally but no definitive guidelines seem to have arisen from these bodies and none was published, yet similar planning systems were in place in all four cities.

The clearest example of the system in operation was the composition of High Street in Exeter. The buildings which enclosed the long narrow space were composed in a series of major and minor rhythms, the major rhythm on the north side given by Currys/Lloyds/Commercial Union/Marks & Spencer window/Mark Rowe window and on the south side by the gable of Eastgate House/corner of 1-7 High Street/the first 'wing' of 8-15 High Street/the second 'wing' of 8-15 High Street/the corner of Barclays and, last, Colsons. Between these are lower buildings each with a horizontal emphasis. Both types relate across the street, for example the horizontal of Pearl cleverly places its asymmetrical window on the axis of Bedford Street; the grand window of Mark Rowe is axial to Southernhay West; the centre (alleyway) of 8-15 High Street almost aligns to Castle Street; the angled corners of Westminster Bank and Marks & Spencer balance across Castle Street as do the corners of St. Stephen's House and Barclays across Bedford Street.

By contrast, the composition of Coventry's Upper and Lower Precincts was a simpler and less subtle rhythm of large anchor blocks breaking forward with lower link blocks set back between. The link blocks elevations are divided on the 20'-0" module allowing for different shop front treatments without breaking the overall symmetry. The large blocks at the east end and at the junction with Market Street (now Smithford/Market Way) are similar in massing, height and materials allowing for some variation in façade treatment while maintaining consistency across the precinct. But the composition is less clear at the junction with Market

Street. Here the anchor blocks, with the exception of British Home Stores/ Dolcis, rather than marking the junction with significant corner treatments, present secondary, side elevations on the cross street. Furthermore, the continuations north and south of Market Street, while consistent in terms of materials and continuous arcading are at a smaller scale than that of the main Precinct and do not connect particularly convincingly to it. The insertions of the Coventry Point tower at the south and the glazed stair tower (now demolished) to the Locarno Ball Room to the north have served to mask the change in scale. Coventry was also something of a hybrid. Although the shopping precinct plan, like Plymouth, was entirely new within itself, like Exeter, it was bounded by existing roads with which it had to make connections and, while earlier versions of the plan attempted this, the final plan has not achieved this particularly well with Shelton Square/ Bull Yard being perhaps the best.

The composition of Plymouth was larger and more complicated. The main axis of Armada Way aligned to the War Memorial on the Hoe and the railway station and was set at 200 feet wide at the Great Square and above Mayflower Street and at 150 feet elsewhere.²⁰ The cross streets within the shopping precinct were set initially at 75 feet wide. Each cross street related to some significant terminating feature – thus Eastlake Street aligned on the centre of Marks & Spencer, New George Street to the centre of Westminster Bank, Raleigh Street to the Athenaeum, Frankfort Gate to the Pannier Market and, most dramatic of all, Royal Parade to the stair tower of the Gas Board on Derry's Cross and to the wonderful portico of the National Provincial Bank on St. Andrew's Cross. Armada Way was marked by the twin towers of Dingles and Pearl Assurance and stone pylons both at North Cross and at the entrance to the Great Square. Only on the western side of New George Street was an attempt made to compose the street in rhythms like Exeter High Street. Here, 50 New George Street/Woolworths/the existing Odeon Cinema/Tozers Department Store/the Pannier Market formed the major rhythms between otherwise horizontal, lower buildings. Elsewhere, the three storey shops were mostly symmetrically composed separately or in blocks with two types of elevational treatment - the earliest with a large, horizontal window at the first floor and smaller, 'hole-in-wall' windows above and the later with a double height 'grand' window with spandrel panels running through the first and second floors similar to many at Coventry.

As at Exeter, the corner buildings were important to the composition but their geometry was far more inventive and resolved in many different ways: Norwich Union and Gas Board have chamfered corners, Boots a concave curve, the Plymouth & South Devon Savings Bank a convex curve, Dingles and Pearl indented right angles, Martins Bank interlocking blocks, the Co-op a continuous curve from Royal Parade into Raleigh Street and New George Street and just a few make plain right angled corners. In only some isolated instances did Coventry attempt inventive geometries. The Coventry Evening Telegraph (1958) on Corporation Street

²⁰ The width of Parkway at Welwyn Garden City and the width of the great axis in *A Plan for Plymouth* were also 200 feet.

has an indented corner entrance but more as a means of rather clumsily resolving the junction of two blocks.

The design rules gave Coventry, Plymouth and Exeter both an order and a controlled variation. They did not inhibit the better architects and probably guided the poorer architects to produce better buildings. Even those buildings that could hardly be labelled as good architecture fitted quite comfortably within the overall *ensembles*. It was the lack of an overall driving idea that was the undoing of Broadmead. With the exception of The Hub, there was no obvious composition, there were no axes and there were no elevational rhythms and thus the resulting architecture, although not very different in detail from Plymouth or parts of Exeter and Coventry, reads as either a collection of rather feeble, separate façades or as single strips of the most ordinary kind. At Broadmead there were no grand public spaces similar to Coventry Precinct, Exeter High Street or to Armada Way, no proper connections through to the existing, old city as at Exeter and no sense of being part of a grand plan as at Plymouth.

Spaces that the plans had in common were the service courts behind the shops. This form of back servicing had been used at a smaller scale at Welwyn Garden City. Except in Coventry where they were always shown as dual-purpose spaces, they were originally for servicing only, but very quickly they were adapted for private cars so that the public's introduction to the shopping centres was via an architecture of plumbing pipes, rubbish bins and unrelieved concrete paving. The service courts at Plymouth had only one entrance each and thus, at least, they were hidden from the main streets. In Broadmead, Callowhill Court had two entrances and Quakers Friars had four and its parking encircled the mediaeval buildings. Uniquely in Coventry was there parking on the shop rooftops with bridges between connecting to multi storey car parks within the rear service yards.

Attitudes to existing buildings

While the Town and Country Planning Act 1947 first proposed the idea of Listing and preserving historic buildings, attitudes to the repair and retention of historic buildings in the early 1950s were very different from our own. There was, nevertheless, an idea that, after so much destruction, the best of the old should be retained and both *Exeter Phoenix* and *A Plan for Plymouth* discussed the future of surviving historic buildings. It is difficult to explain the gross insensitivity of Quakers Friars in Bristol when Meredith was known for his support for the Listing of historically important buildings. Perhaps old buildings were regarded more for their archaeological interest than for their architectural appearance or context; presumably Meredith thought that it was sufficient to retain the buildings of Quakers Friars and that the changed context did not matter. At Coventry, Gibson was manifestly opposed to the retention of surviving historic buildings where these interfered with the Plan, his first proposals sweeping away all the buildings on High Street including the National and Provincial and Lloyds Banks as well as suggesting the removal to the Bond's Hospital site adjacent to Spon

Street²¹, of the badly damaged Ford's Hospital.²² Only the Cathedral, lying, as it does, outside the main plan areas, was to be retained. The other cities were more sensitive. For example, in Exeter, St. Stephen's Church naturally formed part of the High Street and a small garden courtyard was formed on its south side and, in Plymouth, St. Andrew's was restored and given a fine new setting against the gardens of Royal Parade. But the idea persisted that surviving old buildings were to be seen in isolation. The Victorian Lloyds Bank in Plymouth was retained only *because* it had survived²³. In this context, the retention of Wesley's Chapel and the Merchants Tailors' Almshouse in Broadmead seems less strange – they always had been sandwiched between buildings, the fact that these were now 'modern', of a far greater scale and of different materials was just part of a great tradition of city renewal. Nevertheless there is no doubt now that the buildings are seriously degraded by their settings; the Quakers moved out of Quakers Friars and the Almshouses became a pub-restaurant because of the changed circumstances and neither building has ever found an appropriate new use. Now one may mourn the loss of significant buildings but the times were against their retention; the mood for change, the unstoppable certainty of the political leadership, the system of land ownership and development and the unpreparedness of both the architectural and planning professions to deal intellectually with heritage all contributed to the further destruction. While, in Bristol, Meredith proposed moving buildings to King Street to preserve them, only in Coventry, starting in the late-1960s, were buildings actually moved to Spon Street.

Buildings and materials in the late 1950s and early 1960s

In Coventry, the consistent use of the same Blockley brick with mostly Westmorland slate and Hornton stone details persisted with the completion of the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, until 1960. A more diverse mixture of materials was introduced in, for example, the buildings for the Lanchester College of Technology buildings (1955-1964) with curtain walls of black steel and aluminium framing with glass and coloured infill panels for the teaching blocks and pre-cast concrete aggregate panels for the halls of residence. Elsewhere, as in Hertford Street, bronze coloured glass reinforced plastic (GRP) sculpted panels formed the upper storeys of the shops and, in New Union Street, a dark purple brown brick replaced the Blockley city blend brick. Most striking were the bronze fin mullions with glass and black stove-enamelled steel infill panels of Bull Yard over topped by the smooth white Portland stone Shelton Square tower.

²¹ Clearly, because it had survived the Blitz and did not lie in the area to be redeveloped, the Spon Street area was early seen to be an area that could be conserved and added to with buildings moved from elsewhere in the City, although it was only in 1968 that the plans were implemented.

²² Only the curtailment of the plan and its restriction to the shopping and civic areas saved High Street. Ford's Hospital was repaired and more housing for the elderly added (1968, Redgrave and Clarke)

²³ It was only a fragment of the original building. It remained under-used until it became a public house in the 1980s (one of the first examples of a former bank being so used) and it is now uncomfortably stranded between a multi-storey car park, the Civic Centre car park and the Theatre Royal.

In Plymouth too, as in the later phases of Broadmead, there was a gradual shift away from stone-faced formal façades to the greater use of lightweight curtain walls. The new city architect, Hector Stirling, was less enamoured of Portland stone and preferred grey-green Westmorland slate which was ideally suited to (relatively) lightweight cladding. At first the material occurred only in spandrel panels but his Crown Courts (1960-63, in association with Jellicoe Ballantyne & Coleridge) was completely clad in Westmorland slate. When the true curtain walls arrived, the spandrel panels were in dark green Thermalux, matching the colour of the slate, and similar panels were used in the banks and building societies on the upper part of Armada Way and the later shops in New George Street. However, the cladding panels of the Pannier Market (1956-59 by Walls & Pearn) were turquoise blue and the twin offices on Armada Way where it met Mayflower Street (Armada House (1959-62) by Evans Powell & Powell and Sun Alliance (c.1954) by Edward Narracott & Partner) were in stark black, making a sharp punctuation to the rows of Portland stone clad buildings.²⁴ Stirling's housing around Frankfort Gate (1955-58) had bright red panels and it is clear that the colours were introduced to add variety to brick and Portland stone buildings, which had been publicly criticised for their uniform dullness. Exeter was more resistant to changes in architectural fashion. New building, for example, Boots (1956-57) by C. St. Clair Oakes was in brick to match the architecture of the whole High Street and says much for Oakes' sensitivity for the context of new Exeter. Boots never produced a standard architecture for its many shops. Much more adventurous was the curtain walled façade of Hughes Garage (1955-57 by Redfern & Gilpin) in Princesshay with thin steel frames and bright red infill panels of a vertical proportion which act as the perfect foil to the rather pragmatic brick architecture of the street.²⁵ The long repeat-bay façades were unique to the later phases of Broadmead. This sort of hasty mass-production was not allowed in Exeter or Plymouth (even on the later stages of Cornwall Street) which kept to the smaller plots divisions and the variety of architecture these implied. Bristol was more affected by the economic boom of the early 1960s and was far more impatient to cash in on the potential rateable income.

Stirling's first designs (from 1954) for the Civic Centre tower in Plymouth showed a slick curtain wall of glass and panels. Had it been completed, it would have been the first such building in Britain but the design was adapted by Jellicoe Ballantyne & Coleridge (1957-62) to be clad in precast concrete aggregate panels. The idea first proposed by Abercrombie and used at Dingles Bakery had gone full circle. The curtain wall, produced from thick precast concrete transoms and mullions, lacked the finesse of steel or aluminium, but was within the capabilities of the construction industry which was, as yet, unprepared for the large metal assemblies which had become usual only in America. J.E. Dalling used a similar precast concrete assembly for the façade of Eastgate House (1957-60) in Princesshay and a hybrid

²⁴ They may be compared to the curtain wall cladding of 93-97 and 118-126 New Cavendish Street, London (1955-57) by Gollins Melvin & Ward and 45-46 Albemarle Street, London (1957) Ernö Goldfinger. Both are illustrated in Dannatt *op.cit.* pp.59-63.

²⁵ It is opposite J.E. Dalling's 25-31 Princesshay (1953-56) which was clad in reconstructed Portland stone. Clearly there was an idea that this central section of Princesshay should be different.

form, with precast mullions but metal-framed infill panels, used for 34-50 Bedford Street (1956 by L.H. Fewster & Partners) and for the Post Office (1957-59 by C.G. Pinfold of the Ministry of Works) in Exeter. This latter lacked the elegance of the Post Office on St. Andrew's Cross in Plymouth (1954- by Christopher J. Woodbridge of the Ministry of Works) with its skinny concave curtain wall and continuous Westmorland slate spandrels, framed Festival of Britain-style within a Portland stone surround. In Bristol, the concrete panel style was used more for office buildings rather than for the shops in Broadmead, although, of course, much of the western part of The Horsefair and Penn Street used concrete mullions and lightweight infill panels and 111-121 The Horsefair a stylish green curtain wall. When the concrete panels came, they came in the crude form of Castle Mead House (1973-81) and the Holiday Inn Hotel (1972) and, with much more architectural ambition, to Ronald Sims' exceptional Baptist Church (1967-69) on Union Street. In Coventry the change in materials came with Arthur Ling's replacement in 1955 of Donald Gibson as City Architect. The introduction of the terminal towers called for new materials and concrete, tile-clad in the case of Mercia House (1964, Arthur Ling, City Architect) but in exposed aggregate panels on Hillman House (1962, Arthur Swift & Partners) and the much later Coventry Point (1978, John Madin Design Group), was deemed to be appropriate. Brick also ceased to be used for the upper floors of the shops, being replaced with framed glazed panels in Market Way, bronze fins with glazed infill panels in Bull Yard and GRP bronze panels in Hertford Street. The use of Portland stone cladding as on the Shelton Square office block (1960, Ardin & Brooks) gave way to pre-cast concrete panels as on the Hertford Street office block (1972, W. S. Hattrell & Partners).

Continued development from the 1960s

The first phases of the rebuilding of Coventry, Plymouth, Exeter and Broadmead under the direction of the Reconstruction Committees were completed by the early 1960s. The Committees were disbanded and new buildings were erected under the conventional planning systems. The enthusiasm for grand plans waned, the idea that the materials and style of the architecture should be consistent became unfashionable and, most influential of all, the funding of new developments became sporadic as they relied more on private economy and speculation and less on government loans and necessity. The first immediate change was to the shopfronts. With the relative affluence of the 1960s, shopkeepers realised that the balance between rents, rates, investment and profit could be far more carefully calculated. Investment in high-quality shopfitting was unnecessary to produce profits, tenancies to the city landlord were not permanent (as owner-occupation had been before the War) and business could react quickly to consumer demand and fashion by altering the house style of the shopfronts or by relocating to new premises. Tenancies in Exeter were the most stable, but in Plymouth and Broadmead, the 1960s and 1970s are marked by a constant 'musical chairs' of changing shopfronts and fittings, business relocations and new businesses requiring different, generally larger, floor areas as the retail trade reinvented itself for a different world. In Coventry, within the 20'-0" module framework, the design of individual shop fronts had

always been the choice of the original tenant and these were frequently changed with changing tenancies. The first supermarkets arrived in Broadmead in the early 1960s but did not arrive in Plymouth, in the form of Tesco at Drake Circus, until 1971. The Broadmead supermarkets were fitted into standard terraces of shops, but Drake Circus was a new form based on the New Town shopping centres with integrated car parking and shops looking inwards to a pedestrianised mall. It was added to the original grid plan on the end of Old Town Street and edged the north-east sector of the shopping precinct against the ring road, isolating the Charles Church and Exeter Street, and effectively cutting off all routes to the northern suburbs. The form of the plan was very similar to Broadmead and made a similar barrier, except that at Broadmead most shops faced outwards to Bond Street and inwards to The Horsefair and Penn Street. At Broadmead the plan was adapted to include larger shops – Littlewoods and C&A – within the existing layout whereas Drake Circus was a completely new, and alien, urban form. At Exeter the new, larger shops like Bobby's, the department store,²⁶ were pushed out east along Sidwell Street where, as they became more remote from the thriving High Street, they became less commercially successful. In Coventry there were no supermarkets within the main precinct, only the Co-op on Corporation Street which connected into the Lower Precinct. Later, Sainsbury (1963-4, Pick Everard Keay and Gimson) opened in Trinity Street in a block that follows the street line and scale of its surroundings. Plymouth city centre was completed in the 1980s by the Armada Centre (including the Copthorne Hotel and Sainsburys supermarket) that filled the north-west triangle between Armada Way and Western Approach. The shops introduced the first enclosed shopping mall to the city and it repeated the blank façades of Drake Circus onto Armada Way. It was a terrible mistake: the activity of shopping was hidden behind rough concrete cladding, the supermarket was concealed on the roof where it was accessible only by car and the hotel entrance faced one carriageway of Western Approach. Coventry never had significant supermarkets within the shopping centre. Food shopping was concentrated around and within the covered market and the larger stores occupied corner sites with ranges of smaller shop units between. Just as tenancies were not permanent, nor were the buildings. In Coventry both the City Tavern (1958, H. Whiteman & Son), a copper-clad façade between the Locarno Ballroom and the western range of shops, in Smithford Way and the Market Tavern (1956, City Architect), a freestanding two-storey brick box with a mono-pitch roof, in Market Way, designed to continue the life of the Precinct beyond the shopping day, were demolished and replaced with shops that rather feebly copied their neighbours. The Locarno Ballroom itself closed in 1980 to be converted into the Central Library and its landmark glass lift and stair tower in the centre of Smithford Way was demolished. The east side shops on Smithford Way and the multi-storey car park behind them were demolished in 1990 to be replaced with the West Orchards Shopping Centre. Of the theatres and cinemas within the ring road, only the Belgrade survives in use. The Opera House (1889, demolished 1961) and the

²⁶ Bobby's (later Debenhams) designed by George Baines & Syborn of London opened in January 1962. It was voted among the 10 'worst buildings in Britain' by *The Times* in 1987. Shopping centres do not fare well in such polls. Drake Circus was voted fifth in the 'Britain's Worst Streets' campaign by CABE in 2002.

Hippodrome (1937, demolished 2000) on Hales Street both survived the War, continuing in use as a cinema and theatre (later a bingo hall) respectively until demolition. The Hippodrome (also known as the Coventry Theatre) survived until demolition to make Millennium Place. The Gaumont Palace (1931) in Jordan Well is now the University's Ellen Terry Theatre. In Broadmead the first demolition was the seven-year-old Dolphin public house in The Horsefair, Broadmead in 1961 to allow for the extension to Marks & Spencer. Cinemas were especially vulnerable: the Odeon, Plymouth closed in August 1962 to make way for Littlewoods, The Savoy, Exeter in 1987 for a block of shops and offices and The Drake, Plymouth as late as 2002 to make way for a club of rather similar design.²⁷ The News Theatre in Fairfax House, Broadmead proposed in 1955 was never built and the old News Theatre and the Gem were never replaced. Meredith's shops on Lower Castle Street disappeared in 1970 to be replaced by the far more ambitious Holiday Inn Hotel, Castle Mead House, multi-storey car park and the replacement Europa Cinema. Even this did not survive the 1980s. The insertion of The Galleries into Broadmead (1986-91), which required the demolition of almost a complete block, was only possible because the cost of development would be offset by increased rental value within a decade. It is significant that it was only in Broadmead that the commercial possibility existed to replace almost new buildings with larger, denser buildings of different types. In Broadmead the shops were altered, the department stores re-vamped and the street patterns changed more often than in Plymouth or Exeter. In Plymouth, new shopping types were *added* to the plan because there always was a surfeit of undeveloped central land and the older buildings survived because there were no economic reasons to change them. In Exeter the Guildhall Shopping Precinct of the late 1960s²⁸ relieved the pressure for change to the High Street and, although Marks & Spencer relocated, the High Street and Princesshay continued to be sufficiently successful to ensure their unchanged survival. No one thought that the quality of the architecture alone was a reason for preservation.

The pressures that turned Broadmead into a pedestrians only area in the 1970s were felt equally in Plymouth. The reaction was much the same and Vällingby, the satellite new town on the edge of Stockholm, just as influential in the form of the paving. Of course the opportunities in Plymouth were greater than in Bristol. New George Street and Cornwall Street were of similar width to Broadmead, but Armada Way was twice as wide and the City Engineer had set a precedent with the Braille Garden at the north end in 1959. Thus through the 1970s and 1980s the City redesigned the great axis, not with the formal planting that Abercrombie might have envisaged, but with an extraordinary mixture of all the informal shrubs, municipal bedding, rockeries, different species of trees and water features that might

²⁷ The ABC Cinema on Derry's Cross, Plymouth and The Odeon, Broadmead are still cinemas despite their relative inaccessibility and the obvious attractions of the out-of-town multiplexes at Coxside, Plymouth and Cribbs Causeway near Filton. In Exeter, Harry Weedon's 1936 Odeon limps on and a new arts cinema, The Picture House, created from a 1930s warehouse, opened in April 1995 designed by Burrell Foley Fischer of London.

²⁸ The Guildhall Shopping Precinct (1969-76) by Alec F. French & Partners with Lord Holford & Partners as planning consultants extended by Norman Jones & Rigby (1979-82) to include Marks & Spencer. The Harlequin Shopping Centre to its north was added by Bruges Tozer of Bristol (1985-87). It is worth reading Bridget Cherry's commentary in *Buildings of England: Devon* (1989) pp.420-421 for an almost contemporary view. One cannot disagree.

grace a suburban garden. To this was added paving of every (cheap) kind and a veritable museum of contemporary street furniture – bollards, seats, signs, waste bins, lights, kiosks, cycle racks – without any notion of what they looked like either separately or together or in the context of Plymouth. Inevitably a great stainless steel gnomon filled the crossing of Armada Way and New George Street. The features filled every other available space too and no account was taken of the fact that the trees grew and blocked the light from upper windows or, more importantly, the view along the great axis. The police feared that shop windows would be broken by any large gatherings and therefore discouraged them and the City discovered that the paving and features were uncleanable and very expensive to maintain. The stream that ran between the rockeries was mostly turned off and its channel filled with leaves and litter. Exeter was much more fortunate. The Guildhall Centre was pedestrianised anyway and no traffic engineer could work out how to keep buses out of the High Street, so it remained a trafficked street with, eventually, restrictions on access for private cars during the day. The pavements were widened and Bedford Street blocked off but, in contrast to Plymouth or Broadmead, the place still looked busy on a dull winter's day. However, Exeter never took a pride in Princesshay despite its obvious commercial success and its cheap concrete paving slabs were never upgraded or redesigned. A sad municipal tourist plaque quoted Professor W.G. Hoskins that the architecture was commonplace and not distinctive and the tourist guide only mentioned the lost architecture of Bedford Circus. Coventry Precinct, like Exeter, was always a pedestrian-only area. But although it is scaled for pedestrians the space between the shops has been subject to constant revision. The landscape and paving has changed radically, nowhere more so than in the Upper Precinct and in Shelton Square where the access to the upper levels has been altered.

The one thing that did not change in Exeter, Plymouth and Broadmead was the planning authorities' insistence on the defined use classes of shopping and offices. In the 1960s, there were few pressures for housing in city centres and, as has been noted, the only additions were new types of shopping, greater car parking (in the form of multi-storey car parks), hotels and offices. None of these gave a particular vitality to the city centres and the consistent criticism of Broadmead and Plymouth was that they were 'dead' in the evenings.²⁹ The blame for this was placed firmly with the lack of mixed uses – the lack of housing, cafés, restaurants and entertainments but, although this was admitted and recognised as a fault, neither Bristol nor Plymouth was minded to do anything about it. By contrast in Coventry, attempts were made to enliven the centre, particularly in the later stages of the development. Pubs were allowed in Smithford and Market Ways and the City Architect designed a dance hall in the centre of the precinct. At the same time two blocks of flats were built. But the attempt to inject a mix of uses has not survived; the two pubs have been demolished and the dance hall has been converted to the City Library. Somehow, it was acceptable for European

²⁹ The Bristol School of Architecture produced a short film, *Dead Centre* (1961), which extolled the need for mixtures of uses in city centres and was specifically aimed at the Wine Street development then being discussed. Information from 'The 1960s: The Need for Protest' in Gordon Priest and Pamela Cobb (1980) *The Fight for Bristol*. Bristol Civic Society/The Redcliffe Press pp.23-24.

cities to have mixed uses and housing at their centres, and this would be a reason to visit them as a tourist, but post-Abercrombie planners were unable to see why or how such an idea could be achieved at home.

Neither did the developers. In Plymouth, P&O Developments acquired the Drake Circus shopping centre in the late 1980s and proposed a complete redevelopment with a covered mall and a new 'anchor' store³⁰ with Chapman Taylor as architects. In Exeter, Land Securities acquired most of the leases around Princesshay and, faced by the possibility of a rival in Plymouth and the opportunity of outdoing the faltering Guildhall Centre, proposed redeveloping the whole area from the south side of the High Street to the City wall.³¹ Both proposals caused local uproars but the usual planning procedures were upset by the cities being the ground landlords (inherited from the compulsory purchase orders of the 1940s) and therefore joint-developers. There was no effective opposition to Drake Circus. Chapman Taylor's somewhat revised version received planning permission in 2003-04 and the new centre completed in 2007. The scheme turns its back on the city, fails to integrate with Old Town Street and Cornwall Street, fails to connect northwards to the University and fails to add new uses to the original mix. Architecturally it is an eclectic *mélange*, adding a plethora of new, different materials to the Plymouth vocabulary which fail to take any account of the 1950s context. In Exeter, the reaction was somewhat different. There was significant opposition to the proposals from Devon County Council and English Heritage and, to avoid a lengthy and expensive Public Enquiry, the developer chose to negotiate revisions with English Heritage and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment. The architects were replaced by Wilkinson Eyre with Panter Hudspith designing the housing and the whole scheme co-ordinated by Chapman Taylor. But, although some of the original buildings were retained and some more housing added to the mix, the scheme has altered the grand space and rhythms of High Street and swept away all of Princesshay. The replacement is to a significantly greater scale and made of good quality, if somewhat 'glitzy', materials. At least the new plan is based on streets or lanes (rather similar to Princesshay) and makes some very decent new public spaces. In Broadmead, Cabot Circus, again with Chapman Taylor as architects, is like a very big version of Drake Circus. Although there is some small attempt to add other uses (a cinema and some housing), the scheme forms an equally impenetrable barrier to the inner circuit road and the suburbs and has been conceived, it seems, in complete isolation from its context to comply with a convenient standard retail diagram. The difference with Broadmead is its scale. The new Broadmead, its new inner circuit road and its new car park building are very big indeed. Perhaps because this was difficult to imagine, perhaps because all the buildings proposed for demolition were unloved or perhaps because shopping has become the national pastime, there was very little protest either from the Civic

³⁰ The idea was based on the American mall and its many British clones including Cribbs Causeway. The plan form establishes 'anchor' stores at the extremities and lines up as many smaller stores as economically possible in between. The external elevations are blind and the building is surrounded by car parking.

³¹ The architects were McColl with Harrison Sutton of Totnes as architects for a very small amount of housing which was added to the otherwise blank walls for the shopping and car parks.

Society or from the population of the densely packed suburbs to the east. In this local context and in the national context of the urban regeneration of major cities, it seems extraordinary that the proposals for Broadmead were so wrong and so unstoppable. Coventry has not escaped similar changes. Cathedral Lanes shopping centre on Broadgate has both compromised the square and blocked the axis between the Cathedral spire and the Precinct. The West Orchards shopping centre has blighted the north end of Smithford Way. But current proposals (2008, Jerde) will hugely affect the Precinct. While Broadgate and the Upper Precinct are to be retained, most of the remainder of the shopping centre, with the exception of the three terminal tower blocks and the West Orchards shopping centre, is to be replaced. The proposals are hard to read both in terms of their scale and their actual configuration. With the exception of the proposed 'iconic' new library building the architectural intentions are quite unclear. The proposed buildings are amorphous as is the space between and the clarity of the original Precinct plan will be lost forever.

There is some good news. In 2002, Lord Owen, the former MP for Plymouth Devonport, was instrumental in sponsoring David Mackay of MBM Aquitectes of Barcelona, to prepare a planning study for the centre of Plymouth in an attempt to influence the future urban strategies of the City.³² One would have thought that Mackay, an urbane European masterplanner/architect, and Plymouth, xenophobic and insular, would have had little in common. But, fortunately, the opposite proved to be the case; historically Barcelona and Plymouth were surprisingly similar and Mackay's knowledge, gentle authority and genuine enthusiasm for a new city proved infectious and, through numerous local meetings, newspaper articles and formal lectures, he has persuaded the City to look again at its urban form, its connectivity and its exceptional assets. His report, *A Vision for Plymouth*, was presented in October 2003³³ and in 2004 the City appointed him as its planning advisor, Design Champion and chairman of its Design Panel. He was the first external planning advisor to the City since Sir Patrick Abercrombie retired in 1947. In June 2004, the City closed the pedestrian underpass where Armada Way crossed Royal Parade, demolished all the fussy gardens between Dingles and Pearl Assurance created a level crossing to the Great Square, re-discovering a wonderful urban space which has been concealed for over 30 years. This is symbolically significant for it represents a new attitude to the Abercrombie Plan where it could be seen as an important historical asset rather than something to be ashamed of. The City could repave the whole of Armada Way, bring traffic back into parts of the centre and eliminate pedestrian bridges and underpasses. If the Mackay *Vision* and the City's implementation are successful, Plymouth will redefine itself as a regenerated *European* city; one from which Exeter, Broadmead and Coventry could learn many lessons. Mackay's dialectic is based on the re-discovery of the street, the functions of which, he argues, were eroded by the theorists of the Modern Movement:

³² David Mackay spoke at the *Urban Plymouth Conference* organised by the South West Region of the RIBA on 2nd May 2002. He was employed in 2003 by Plymouth 20/20, an amalgam of Lord Owen's Charity, the Regional Development Agency, Plymouth City Council and other local bodies.

³³ The Report was in conjunction with Roger Zogolovitch of AZ Urban Studio of London.

The street is the backbone of our society. For a society is not solely about individual freedom, it is about the freedom to associate with others and to enjoy the unexpected encounter. Such social encounters, planned or unplanned, allow an exchange of information that not only enriches our experience and knowledge, but provides a market place for cultural and commercial transactions. The street gives a recognisable form to public space where people can seek out their markets and, in the course of their search, acquire unexpected information – be it in a new product in a shop window or a chance meeting with a friend. This is obviously true in a small town and should be true in our larger cities.

In recent decades, a key reason for the decay in the quality of the public space and the street is the desire to extinguish conflict. Herein lies one of the great misunderstandings about the configuration of urban settlements. The street of the town or the city is alive if it involves conflict. It provides the moments of opportunity; it is the basis of tolerance, the major instrument of civilization. To remove conflict, and its opportunity for tolerance, is to strike a death blow to the vitality of the street...

People must be given priority in the city and there is a time and a place for the pedestrians to take over, provided that two conditions are observed. The first is that pedestrian only space should not be over-extensive, as in the historical centre of Krakow in Poland. Instead it should act as an urban oasis like the Cathedral Square in Barcelona – thronged with people at the intersection of intensively used buildings and streets. Secondly, a street with traffic should always be in sight, thereby giving comfort and safety.³⁴

The Case for Conservation

Attitudes to the town planning and architecture of the 1950s are slowly changing. The criticism that they were neither 'traditional' nor 'modern' and therefore could be ignored as part of the history of architecture is no longer acceptable. They have to be taken seriously and set in their proper contexts. Victorian architecture, which for the generation working in the 1950s was universally despised, is now much admired. The architecture of the Modern Movement is admired by many but still regarded by some with suspicion and held to be 'dangerous'. Just as this architecture has been re-assessed in the late twentieth century, so we must re-assess the architecture of the 1950s now.

The first problem is the use of the term 'modern'. To the architectural press of the 1950s this meant Scandinavian architecture, the architecture of a select few European architects (including Le Corbusier) and the architecture of the West Coast and corporate America although each was fundamentally different in appearance and derivation. When British

³⁴ David Mackay (2004) 'Recovering a Lost Tradition' in *Footprints in the City*. Catalogue of exhibition at Aedes East, Berlin 7.05.04-27.06.04. Berlin: AedesBerlin.

examples were gathered together under the title 'modern' in the late 1950s, they were characterised by being highly abstract, gridded, composed in rectangles, unornamented and presented as individual buildings out of any context.³⁵ With the exception of Coventry, these were not the buildings of the rebuilt city centres and they were mostly designed after 1955 by a younger generation of architects who had graduated after the War. The architectural historian, still under the spell of J.M. Richards and Sigfried Giedion,³⁶ seeking a connection from the 'modern' architecture of the 1930s to the 'modern' of the late 1950s, could safely ignore the 'aberrations' which arrived in between because the pattern of architectural history had only been partly examined. As the other 'non-modern' architecture of the 1920s and 1930s was analysed, so the convenient, biased history previously presented was questioned and revised.³⁷ The story was far more complicated and interesting than the editors of the *Review* and *Journal* had cared to admit.

The second problem has been the lack of references. The revival of interest in Victorian and Modern Movement architecture was accompanied by learned and popular books, magazine articles and exhibitions. Very quickly they were absorbed into the national psyche to become the background for television drama (*The Forsyte Saga* or *Poirot*), the subject of popular cinema, themes for fashion and graphics and even visited by members of the National Trust (Tyntesfield and The Homewood). There is little excuse for not knowing about the architecture and this knowledge has led, inevitably, to its appreciation, conservation and protection. No such equivalent phenomenon has yet happened for design of the 1940s and 1950s. There has been no 'Fifties Exhibition' although there have been many separate exhibitions of furniture, ceramics, paintings and sculpture and the music and literature of the period are constantly revived.³⁸ The 'learned' analysis of the architecture is being written, notably by Elain Harwood and Nicholas Bullock, and the objects have been expertly recorded by Lesley Jackson, but all this has yet to reach a general, popular audience.³⁹ Until it does, there can be little hope that the minor works of its architecture will be appreciated or that they will be conserved. Although many of the major buildings of the 1950s are now Listed,⁴⁰ the effect has yet to 'trickle down' to the less obvious and more difficult regional examples. This process takes time and experience, as has been seen with the process of Listing buildings of

³⁵ As in the buildings illustrated in Trevor Dannatt *op cit*. This reproduced many buildings that had been published in *The Architectural Review* through the 1950s.

³⁶ The 'conventional' view of the history of the Modern Movement in architecture as set out by J.M. Richards (1940) in *An Introduction to Modern Architecture*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books and by Sigfried Giedion (1941) *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*. Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press. Giedion was secretary to CIAM through the 1930s. Essentially the same view is promoted by William J.R. Curtis (1982) *Modern Architecture since 1900*. London: Phaidon Press.

³⁷ This was encouraged by the major exhibition of the works of Sir Edwin Lutyens at the Hayward Gallery in 1981 and the Thirties Exhibition of 1979. The latter showed much more than the International Style architecture of the period, although it stopped short of neo-Georgian. The magazine *Architectural Design* was a great supporter of minority architectural interests.

³⁸ The 2008 exhibition *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970* at the Victoria & Albert Museum covered an enormous breadth of subjects globally with only a small proportion devoted to consideration of architecture and rebuilding cities.

³⁹ Elain Harwood has been much involved with the Journals of the Twentieth Century Society, two of which have dealt with 1950s subjects. Nicholas Bullock's *Building the Post-War World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* was published in 2002. Lesley Jackson's *'Contemporary': architecture and interiors of the 1950s* (1994), *The Sixties* (1998) and *The New Look: Design in the Fifties* (1991) have done much to celebrate the furniture, ceramics, fabrics and objects of the periods.

⁴⁰ See Elain Harwood (2003) *England: A Guide to Post-War Listed Buildings*. London: Batsford/English Heritage.

the 1930s. In Plymouth, only six city centre buildings are Listed (The Guildhall, The Pannier Market, Barclays Bank, the Civic Centre and the Unitarian and Baptist churches); in Coventry too, only four city centre buildings are listed and none are in the Precinct (Coventry Cathedral, the Swimming Baths, the Belgrade Theatre and, outside the ring road, the Railway Station); in Exeter and Broadmead there are none. The case for making the centre of Plymouth a Conservation Area has been discussed but Plymouth City Council is unenthusiastic and one suspects that the underlying reasons are that the buildings are still not considered worthy and that it is thought that such moves would inhibit new investment in the City centre. It is perhaps even harder to make a case for Coventry, given the alterations to both Upper and Lower Precincts. Exeter High Street and Princesshay were, by accident, within a Conservation Area because they were within the City walls but this did not prevent the Land Securities' scheme from removing them. Again, there was little support for their retention until it was too late.

The third problem is the problem of time. The buildings of the shopping centres of Coventry, Plymouth, Exeter and Broadmead were intended to be changed over time. Just how much they would need to adapt to the constant demands of the retail industry could not have been foreseen by the original developers or architects but, in only a few cases, have the buildings changed beyond recognition and only in Exeter and Broadmead have there been major demolitions. The longer these buildings survive, the more likely they are to be appreciated although the many small, incremental changes degrade them significantly. This is a fragile architecture and changes to the streetscape, shop fronts, fascias and windows make a major difference. Also, after fifty years, the stone cladding and the metal windows are deteriorating but maintenance is generally very poor and rarely carried out with the right skills and materials. If there are not individual buildings of sufficient quality to List, then there are certainly groups of buildings that are worthy of special attention. Exeter High Street and Princesshay would have come into this category, but, sadly, it is now only possible to rescue the north side of High Street and the sense of the great space has been eroded. In Coventry, the plan of the whole shopping centre together with the buildings of Broadgate, the Upper and Lower Precincts, the south end of Smithford Way, some of Market Way including the covered market, Bull Yard and parts of Hertford Street and Corporation Street might be included together with the Civic and University quarters. One might also suggest that Market Street be reinstated as a trafficked street, the ring road be returned to grade and the connections between the centre and the outer areas be mended. In Plymouth, one would include most of Royal Parade, Old Town Street and parts of New George Street and, of course, the space of Armada Way. As it is, only Jellicoe's Great Square is on the Landscape Register and this does not guarantee that it will be properly looked after.⁴¹ In Broadmead, the space and buildings of The Hub and the part of Merchant Street up to Jones' Department Store are

⁴¹ It has not been looked after. The beautiful 'dancing' seats that matched the tapering columns of Jellicoe's Council Chamber were removed in the 1990s and replaced with feeble non-replicas, the swirling paving pattern which matched the profile of the raised flower bed has been removed and replaced with rectilinear cheap concrete, the planting on the raised bed has been 'let go' and now blocks the view along Armada Way. Soon, the old trees will need replacing – one wonders if that will be done properly.

special and would serve as a fitting memorial to the saga from which they were born. But Broadmead never had the originality of Coventry or the strengths of Abercrombie's grid plan at Plymouth or the intimacy and studied subtleties of Sharp's Princesshay. In Plymouth there is still some hope that Abercrombie's Plan will be used to create an exemplary modern city centre that keeps much of the original architecture. In Broadmead one comes to the conclusion that adapting the existing layout can only compound the many errors of the past. In Coventry there remains a structure to be rediscovered and celebrated.

The Significance of Coventry

Plymouth is the realisation of the grand, formal plan. Exeter embraced conservation and sought to weave its grand new spaces into the surviving city fabric. Bristol, Broadmead (arguably the least successful) is the consequence of development driven principally by commercial considerations. Where does Coventry sit both with these, the most comprehensive examples of war-damaged city re-planning in England, and elsewhere?⁴²

Coventry's was the first and the most publicised of the reconstruction plans. As the first provincial city to be comprehensively damaged in 1940, and with a City Architect and his team already in place and considering its reconfiguration, it very quickly set about the re-planning of the centre. It was encouraged by central government to *plan boldly* and was considered, initially at least, as the pioneer test-case reconstruction project. In terms of its scale and its comprehensive nature, it lies somewhere between Plymouth and Exeter though neither Abercrombie nor Sharp acknowledges Coventry as an influence. Equally, Gibson's acknowledged influences were the writings of Lewis Mumford and Le Corbusier, not the pre-War writings of Abercrombie or concrete, built examples from elsewhere. However the symmetrical axial *Beaux-Arts* approach espoused by Abercrombie and the Liverpool School of Architecture is clearly evident both in the layout of the Precinct and in the formal designs for the Civic Quarter and there was certainly an appreciation of projects in other places that informed the development of Coventry's plan. Notable amongst these was the Lijnbaan⁴³ in Rotterdam, like Coventry's Shopping Precinct, a pedestrian shopping street crossed by trafficked streets.⁴⁴ Known to Donald Gibson and his team, the Lijnbaan used similar details to Coventry, notably the pedestrianisation of the main shopping street, the arcading of the shops and elevated walkways.

In Coventry, uniquely among post-War cities reconstruction, not only did the City Architect prepare the plan but also by far the majority of the buildings were designed and carried out by

⁴² Kingston upon Hull was also badly damaged but relatively little of the comprehensive Plan prepared by Sir Edwin Lutyens and Patrick Abercrombie was carried out.

⁴³ A comparison was made between Coventry and Rotterdam by Robert Gardner-Medwin (1907-1995) in a talk in September 1955 on the BBC Third Programme entitled *Rebuilding Rotterdam and Coventry*. Gardner-Medwin was an architect and town planner, a graduate of Liverpool University and Roscoe Professor of Architecture at Liverpool (1952-1973).

⁴⁴ The mixing of pedestrian and trafficked streets was criticised by purists including Percy Johnson-Marshall who compared Coventry favourably with Rotterdam because, in contrast with the Lijnbaan's trafficked cross-streets, Arthur Ling had re-pedestrianised Market Street.

the City Architect's department.⁴⁵ This has resulted in a clarity and consistency of design and execution not seen elsewhere. From the broad zoning within the ring road of areas for shopping, civic and industrial use to the detailed building of these areas over time, Coventry has managed to retain a clear vision that has survived through changes in emphasis and accretive alterations.

While Coventry's international significance lies partly in its designation as a *city of peace and reconciliation* centred on the Cathedral and the University's Centre for the Study of Forgiveness and Reconciliation, its plans for reconstruction were also widely published and its pedestrianised Shopping Precinct was at least in tune with, if not a prototype for schemes elsewhere, most notably, for example, in Sweden at Vällingby on the outskirts of Stockholm as well as in Rotterdam.

Coventry's wider influence was perhaps most evident nationally in the planning of the post-War new towns⁴⁶, more particularly in the design of their shopping centres, especially at Stevenage but also at Harlow and Crawley.

*A foreign architect has remarked that if you have seen Coventry and Stevenage you have seen the best contribution to urban planning that England has made since the war. The precinctual area at Coventry is probably about the same size as that at Stevenage, but being only part of the centre of a much larger city it is obviously not so complete.*⁴⁷

Of particular note in Stevenage (and to a lesser extent in Harlow and Crawley) is the complete separation of pedestrians and vehicles within the shopping precinct.

The first plan to be prepared, Coventry's was the last to be completed. But throughout the plan's development, over 30 years, the key elements of its structure were retained, namely the ring roads, the zoning of commercial and civic space and, above all, the pedestrian Precinct with its axis focussed on the Cathedral spire. The ideas that underpinned the original plan have come full circle. The vision that created well-proportioned, democratic space with finely detailed buildings has survived, lumpish alterations notwithstanding, and remains to be re-discovered.

⁴⁵ Those buildings not designed by the City Architect's Department were, in the initial implementation stages, required to conform in terms of scale, height, the 20'-0" width module and use of materials.

⁴⁶ The post-War new towns were the product of the New Towns Act 1946 which drew on the experience of the Garden City movement and the proposals of Abercrombie to set out revolutionary systems for land-use control and positive town construction.

⁴⁷ Osborn & Whittick. *The New Towns* p. 161.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COVENTRY

The Plan in general

1. It is obvious that the tight circle drawn by the ring road and its configuration as an urban motorway with grade separated junctions has sharply and arbitrarily divided the centre from the remainder of the city. The separation between the centre and the city outside the ring and the shortage of negotiable connections across it are unacceptable in a modern city. The layout and form of, and the necessity for a ring road should be carefully re-considered. One radical proposal would be to redesign the ring road at grade, together with its junctions. The spaces left over after planning, the *backages* advocated by Alker Tripp, should be re-configured to enclose the road and present, instead, *frontages*.
2. It is recognised that the plan had to adapt to changing demands including, in the Precinct, the insertion of the cross street and its subsequent pedestrianisation. But the decision to terminate the ends of the precinct 'arms' with tower blocks is questionable as they both compete with the three spires, isolate the shopping centre from its surroundings and result in unsatisfactory and mean connections to the outside. It seems to indicate a loss of understanding of the whole nature of the Precinct, further compounded by the later alterations, including the roofing of the Lower Precinct, that have tended to treat each part separately. The precinct needs a unifying strategy both to restore clarity and to knit it convincingly into the city. The clutter that impedes the overriding clear unifying idea of the grand axis aligned with the Cathedral spire needs to be cleared away.
3. The Civic and University quarters, though not as grand as originally conceived, have been developed beyond the purely functional into coherent and striking compositions that both work internally and address the external street pattern. They need to be well understood, repaired and reinforced.

The Plan in particular

4. Recent development on the inner circulatory road, in contrast to older buildings on it, has mostly not addressed the street. There needs to be a clear policy on how streets should be redeveloped and how frontages should be ordered. It should be noted that streets need fronts; fronts overlook the street; fronts contain main entrances; fronts are the *busy* parts of buildings.
5. The plan of the shopping centre, including the service areas, is extraordinarily built up with available space given over to car parking either on the roofs of the buildings or in multi-storey blocks behind, which are interconnected via bridges or tunnels. Rooftop car parking restricts the form of building (e.g. pitched roofs, roof lights and other rooftop uses

such as planting, solar collectors etc. are unachievable). The only open space therefore is within the Precinct. This needs a careful, coherent strategy for landscaping and paving.

6. It is recognised that while the whole surface area is very built up, the outer reaches of the Precinct are not very densely developed, particularly on Market Way where the ranges are two-storey with shops at ground level, offices above and car parking on the roof. These could be redeveloped, abandoning the roof top car parking, with offices or even flats on two or three storeys above the shops without detracting from the street or the fairly successful Shelton Square/ Bull Yard connections. Similarly in Smithford Way the surviving and now very overshadowed range of two-storey shops and offices could be re-thought in conjunction with the junction with Corporation Street.

Use Classes and mixed use

7. The insistence on predominantly single use classes within the Precinct has been one of the principal factors in its loss of liveliness. These attitudes have been changing in Coventry, as elsewhere, but policies should be in place to ensure that new development is genuinely mixed-use not only retail chains¹ and offices with a very little housing of an exclusive nature. This would require a profound change from developers who would have to review the methods of long-term tenure and the longevity of construction. Retail developments, like the West Orchards Shopping Centre and the entertainment complex, Coventry Skydome, have been notoriously short-term and this 'norm' has to change.
8. The instigation for this change must come from the City Council, not from developers' proposals. The City Council and its partners should learn to lead the development process, not merely react to developers' short-term ideas. As ground landlord, the City Council should be in a strong position to direct the process.
9. Another of the problems of Coventry's Precinct is the size and lack of permeability of the blocks that make up the sectors. Despite the entrances into the back service courts and car parks the perception is that the blocks are impermeable. Furthermore the entrances are unattractive and dingy. Any revisions to the Plan should ensure that the actual and perceived permeability is increased and the connections made attractive and lively.
10. The bridge opening from Broadgate to Hertford Street might be reopened, not for traffic but to improve both the open space in Hertford Street and its connection with Broadgate.
11. The removal of the tented canopy over the Lady Godiva statue has greatly improved the aspect of Broadgate but the Cathedral Lanes Shopping Centre should, ideally, be removed and the planned open space to the Cathedral carried out.

¹ When first opened, the Precinct boasted a variety of independent shops including bakers and grocers close to the Market and, in the Lower Precinct, a pet shop whose window housed a fruit bat.

12. Alternatively, it should be replaced with buildings that do not encroach on to Broadgate and that properly address the street.

Traffic planning/Pedestrianisation/Street furniture and advertising

13. The ring road should, at the least, be rethought as an encircling boulevard, not an urban motorway and the connections to it from both the centre and outside made negotiable and attractive.
14. Within the shopping Precinct the idea of complete pedestrianisation should be challenged. Whilst this aids pedestrian access during shopping hours, it restricts access at other times and seriously affects the liveliness of the area.
15. The paving, planting and landscape elements have undergone many revisions over the years and remain disconnected. The materials chosen are of variable quality; there are many types and scales of materials and patterns. The quality of street furniture is variously feeble and some tree planting misplaced and inappropriate. The whole collection of street features is impossible to maintain or keep clean. In particular one should note:
 1. Paving patterns should recognise the rhythm of the adjacent buildings rather than becoming larger, scale-less surfaces. Equally, paving patterns should be consistent and not frantically over-patterned.
 2. Paving materials should be of the highest quality and of 'natural', not artificial, materials wherever possible. As few paving materials as possible should be used.
 3. All paving and external landscape needs constant cleaning and maintenance and thus the design of the landscape will be better if it is simpler and there is less of it.
 4. Street furniture – lighting, signs, advertising, bollards, barriers, cameras, shelters, seating, litter bins and the like – should be of one consistent type of a very good design.
 5. The oversized fountain basin together with the proliferation of mobile kiosks around it in the central crossing of the Precinct should be re-thought.
 6. The landscaping around the civic centre needs to be repaired. The structure has survived but is uncared for.
16. The 20'-0" module for the shops and the arcading have provided a uniform framework within which individual shop owners can order their own shop fronts. However, at the

least there needs to be some regulation to uphold the framework and control encroachment of individual shop fascias without inhibiting individual expression.

Public Art

17. From the outset of the plan, public art, mostly sculpture, has been an important and integral element within the City centre. Much of it is obscured, some has been moved and some has disappeared.
18. New artwork has tended to be sited as isolated objects. Like street furniture, its positioning should be considered so as to enhance the space it occupies.

Protection for Significant Spaces and Buildings

19. Notwithstanding the amount of alteration and erosion of detail, the strength of the plan and the consistency of scale and materials of the buildings firmly underpin the case for Conservation Area status to be granted to cover Broadgate, the Upper and Lower Precincts, and the lines of Smithford and Market Ways with Shelton Square/ Bull Yard, the City Arcade and Market together with Hertford Street. Without inhibiting re-development in the outer reaches of the shopping centre, it could help protect the best of the Precinct by bringing a unified overview to consideration of the whole shopping centre instead of the fragmented treatment that has obtained hitherto. It should encourage the re-thinking of such alterations as the clumsy ramp and glass-enclosed escalator in the Upper Precinct, the separation of the Lower Precinct as almost a separate shopping mall and the piecemeal reconfiguration of Shelton Square. At the same time it would tend to advance improvements to the connections and the surroundings of significant buildings, notably the Market.
22. The existing Conservation Area No. 5 covering the Hill Top and Cathedral area might be extended to give protection to the Herbert Art Gallery, the university buildings and swimming pool surroundings.
21. An additional Conservation Area to cover the civic centre and the processional way on Little Park Street might also be considered.
22. High Street, where the finer bank buildings are sited, together with the area to the south including Ford's Hospital are protected by Conservation Area designation. Martins Bank, however, on the north side, a survivor of the Blitz, was demolished to make way for the Cathedral Lanes Shopping Centre. The other surviving buildings, while not individually especially distinguished, with the possible exception of the Lloyds and the National Westminster Banks, do make the street. Redevelopment in this area should respect the surviving 'urban grain' as well as protecting notable buildings.

12. BUILDING GAZETTEER

The following gazetteer has been assembled from the Planning and Byelaw files of Coventry City Council, held in the Coventry City Archive and the references given at the end of each entry. The reference number is the *Disposal* Reference and therefore does not relate to the sequence of planning application registrations. Dates are given as accurately as possible. The references are not exhaustive but have been assembled from the journal collection at the British Architectural Library and other sources.

Reference abbreviations are:

†	Denotes building substantially altered
‡	Denotes building demolished
<i>A&BN</i>	Architect & Building News
<i>AJ</i>	The Architects' Journal
<i>AR</i>	The Architectural Review
<i>CCC</i>	Files from Coventry City Council
<i>Br</i>	The Builder
<i>RIBAJ</i>	The Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects

BROADGATE

Name: BROADGATE HOUSE
Planning/Byelaw reference: 31285
Architect: City Architects Department
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1949
Completion: 1953
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References

Name: WESTMINSTER BANK
Planning/Byelaw reference: 9684
Architect: Gardner & Baldwin of Coventry
Client/Developer: Westminster Bank
Commencement: 1969
Completion:
Original tenant: Westminster Bank
Current tenant: Nationwide Building Society
Planning history: Infill of Broadgate House/ Hertford Street bridge
References:

Name: HOTEL LEOFRIC
Planning/Byelaw reference: 37021 and 37467
Architect: W. S. Hattrell & Partners of Coventry
Client/Developer: Ravenseft Properties Ltd
Commencement: 1954
Completion: 1955
Original tenant:
Current tenant: Travelodge
Planning history:
References: *AJ* 1955 June 16, *A&BN* 1955 July 7

Name: OWEN OWEN DEPARTMENT STORE
Planning/Byelaw reference: 34996
Architect: R. Hellberg of Coventry
Client/Developer: OwenOwen
Commencement: 1952
Completion: 1954
Original tenant: Owen Owen
Current tenant: Primark
Planning history:
References: A&BN 1951 April 20, A&BN 1954 Oct 21

Name: CATHEDRAL LANES SHOPPING CENTRE
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: Chapman Taylor & Partners of London
Client/Developer: John Laing Developments Ltd
Commencement: 1986
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: AR 1986 Jan.

Name: NATIONAL PROVINCIAL BANK
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: F. C. R. Palmer
Client/Developer: National Provincial Bank
Commencement:
Completion: 1930
Original tenant: National Provincial Bank
Current tenant: NatWest Bank
Planning history:
References:

UPPER PRECINCT

Name: LINK BLOCKS 'D' & 'E' (North & South Blocks)
Planning/Byelaw reference: 37992
Architect: W. S. Hattrell & Partners of Coventry
Client/Developer: Ravenseft Properties Ltd
Commencement: 1954
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: BRITISH HOME STORES
Planning/Byelaw reference: 33426
Architect: George Coles of 40 Craven Street, Strand, London WC2
Client/Developer: British Home Stores
Commencement: 1951
Completion:
Original tenant: British Home Stores
Current tenant: British Home Stores
Planning history:
References:

Name: DOLCIS SHOES
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: Ellis E. Somake FRIBA (Staff Architect, Dolcis Shoe Co.)
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion: 1955
Original tenant: Dolcis Shoes
Current tenant: The Carphone Warehouse
Planning history:
References: *A&BN* 1955 May 5

Name: MARKS & SPENCER
Planning/Byelaw reference: 35927
Architect: Norman Jones Sons & Rigby of Southport
Client/Developer: Marks & Spencer
Commencement:
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

LOWER PRECINCT

Name: F. W. WOOLWORTH
Planning/Byelaw reference: 33476
Architect: F. W. Woolworth Construction Department
Client/Developer: F. W. Woolworth & Co.
Commencement: 1954
Completion:
Original tenant: F. W. Woolworth
Current tenant: F. W. Woolworth; Boots; Argos
Planning history: Divided 1986 into multiple tenancies.
Woolworths closed December 2008
References:

Name: LOCARNO BALLROOM & SHOPS†
Planning/Byelaw reference: 47613
Architect: City Architect with Kett & Neve
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1959
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant: Waterstone's Bookshop; Central Library
Planning history: Ballroom closed in 1980's. Converted to Public Library 1990's.
References: *AR* 1961 June, *A&BN* 1961 July 19

Name: LOWER PRECINCT LINK BLOCKS†
Planning/Byelaw reference: 42376
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1956
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: LADY GODIVA CAFÉ†
Planning/Byelaw reference: 44711
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1957
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant: O' Briens Sandwich Bar
Planning history:
References:

Name: MERCIA HOUSE
(2 Department Stores, 3 shops, 96 flats)
Planning/Byelaw reference: 61672
Architect: City Architect with North & Partners of Maidenhead
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1964
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: A&BN 1968 Oct 23

SMITHFORD WAY

Name: CITY TAVERN‡
Planning/Byelaw reference: 46929
Architect: H. Whiteman & Son of Coventry
Client/Developer: Associated Midland Breweries Ltd
Commencement: 1958
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history: Demolished
References:

Name: SHOPS (West side)
Planning/Byelaw reference: 37742
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1954
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: SHOPS (East side)‡
Planning/Byelaw reference: 39055
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1954
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history: Demolished. Replaced with West Orchards Shopping Centre
References:

Name: LOCK-UP SHOPS (East side)
Planning/Byelaw reference: 49526
Architect: Norman Jones Sons & Rigby of Southport
Client/Developer: Marks & Spencer
Commencement: 1959
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: LOCK-UP SHOPS (East side)
Planning/Byelaw reference: 49829
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1959
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: WEST ORCHARDS SHOPPING CENTRE
Planning/Byelaw reference: BR 69898
Architect: John Clark Associates of London
Client/Developer: Burton Property Trust Ltd
Commencement: 1986
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: HILLMAN HOUSE
Shops & 40 Flats
Planning/Byelaw reference: 57143
Architect: Arthur Swift & Partners
Client/Developer: Calgary & Edmonton Land Company
Commencement: 1962
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

MARKET WAY

Name: COVENTRY POINT
Planning/Byelaw reference: 16593
Architect: John Madin Design Group
Client/Developer: Bryant Samuels Development Ltd
Commencement: 1971
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: *Arup Journal* 1978, Dec.

Name: GAS SHOWROOM†
Planning/Byelaw reference: 62649
Architect:
Client/Developer: West Midlands Gas Board
Commencement: 1964
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: MARKET TAVERN‡
Planning/Byelaw reference: 42184
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1956
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history: Demolished
References:

Name: SHOPS & OFFICES
Planning/Byelaw reference: 47333
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1958
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: BARRACKS CAR PARK
Planning/Byelaw reference: 54441
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1961
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: SHOPS & OFFICES
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect:
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: CITY MARKET & CONVERSION OF CORNERCROFT BUILDING†
Planning/Byelaw reference: 43312
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1956
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history: Cornercroft building demolished
References: A&BN 1959 Apr. 22; Br 1960

SHELTON SQUARE

Name: SHOPS & OFFICE BLOCK†
Planning/Byelaw reference: 47367
Architect: Ardin & Brooks of London
Client/Developer: Parkin & Co.
Commencement: 1958
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history: Staircase to upper level removed c. 1965
References:

Name: SHOPS & OFFICES
Planning/Byelaw reference: 45750
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement:
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: CITY ARCADE
Planning/Byelaw reference: 50413
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1960
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

BULL YARD

Name: SHOPS & OFFICES
Planning/Byelaw reference: 59337
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1963
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

HERTFORD STREET

Name: SHOPS & OFFICE BLOCK
Planning/Byelaw reference: 9365
Architect: W. S. Hattrell & Partners of Coventry
Client/Developer: Ravenseft Properties Ltd
Commencement: 1969
Completion: 1974
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: HERTFORD STREET ARCADE
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect:
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: CINEMA & SHOPS†
Planning/Byelaw reference: 14982
Architect:
Client/Developer: EMI
Commencement: 1971
Completion:
Original tenant: ABC Cinema
Current tenant: JJB Sports
Planning history: Closed c. 1985
References:

CIVIC & UNIVERSITY QUARTERS LITTLE PARK STREET – EAST SIDE

Name: POLICE HEADQUARTERS
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1954
Completion: 1958
Original tenant: Coventry City Police
Current tenant: West Midlands Police
Planning history:
References: *A&BN* 1958, May 7

Name: MAGISTRATES COURT
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: City Engineer
Client/Developer: Coventry City Council
Commencement: 1984
Completion: 1987
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: CIVIC CENTRE
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1956
Completion: 1960
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

EARL STREET

Name: CIVIC CENTRE EXTENSION & BRIDGE
Planning/Byelaw reference: 23088, 24470
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Council
Commencement: 1973
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: CIVIC CENTRE TOWER
Planning/Byelaw reference: 14881
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Council
Commencement: 1971
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: CIVIC CENTRE: ARCHITECTURE & TOWN PLANNING
Planning/Byelaw reference: 43216
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1956
Completion: 1961
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: 6 SHOPS & MAISONNETTES
Planning/Byelaw reference: 36292
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1953
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

JORDAN WELL

Name: HERBERT ART GALLERY & MUSEUM†
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: Herbert, Son & Sawday of Leicester;
extensions by Haworth Tompkins of London & Pringle Richards
Sharratt of London
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1954
Completion: 1960
Extensions 2005 & 2008
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: *RIBA*J 2005 Sept., *Architecture Today* 2007 Nov., *AJ* 2009 Jan 29

Name: UNIVERSITY: RICHARD CROSSMAN BUILDING
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect:
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: GAUMONT CINEMA
Planning/Byelaw reference: 8674
Architect: W. H Watkins of Bristol
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion: 1931
Original tenant: Gaumont Cinema
Current tenant: Coventry University: Ellen Terry Theatre
Planning history: Odeon Cinema 1955. Closed c. 1985
References: *Picture House* 1984, No. 5

COX STREET

Name: UNIVERSITY: GRAHAM SUTHERLAND BUILDING
Planning/Byelaw reference: 66026
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry College of Art
Commencement: 1965
Completion:
Original tenant: Coventry College of Art
Current tenant: Coventry University
Planning history:
References:

Name: UNIVERSITY: JAMES STARLEY BUILDING
Planning/Byelaw reference: 51951, 54359
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Lanchester College of Technology
Commencement: 1961
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: *A&BN* 1957 Jun. 6, *Interbuild* 1962 Jan,

Name: UNIVERSITY: BUGATTI BUILDING
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Lanchester Polytechnic
Commencement:
Completion:
Original tenant: Lanchester Polytechnic
Current tenant: Coventry University
Planning history:
References:

Name: UNIVERSITY: STUDENTS UNION
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect:
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion:
Original tenant: Club
Current tenant: Coventry University
Planning history:
References:

FAIRFAX STREET- SOUTH SIDE

Name: CENTRAL BATHS
Planning/Byelaw reference: 57057
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: City of Coventry Markets and Baths Committee
Commencement: 1962
Completion: 1966
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: *A&BN* 1966 Aug. 17

Name: NEW SPORTS CENTRE
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Council
Commencement:
Completion: 1974
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: *BD* 1974 Oct. 18; *BD* 1977 Oct. 14

Name: UNIVERSITY: HALLS OF RESIDENCE: QUADRANT HALL
Planning/Byelaw reference: 11288
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Lanchester Polytechnic
Commencement: 1969
Completion: 1974
Original tenant: Lanchester Polytechnic
Current tenant: Coventry university
Planning history:
References: *AJ* 1974 Apr. 17

Name: HOTEL
Planning/Byelaw reference: 11866
Architect: G. R. Stone & Associates
Client/Developer: De Vere Hotels
Commencement:
Completion: 1973
Original tenant: De Vere Hotels
Current tenant: Britannia Hotels
Planning history:
References: *Building* 1973 Mar. 30

PRIORY STREET

Name: UNIVERSITY: HALLS OF RESIDENCE: PRIORY HALL
Planning/Byelaw reference: 61403
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Lanchester College of Technology
Commencement: 1963
Completion: 1967
Original tenant: Lanchester College of Technology
Current tenant: Coventry University
Planning history: Bison High Rise Wall Frame System
References: *Building* 1967 Mar. 10

Name: UNIVERSITY: STUDENTS UNION
Planning/Byelaw reference: 56889
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Lanchester College of Technology
Commencement: 1962
Completion:
Original tenant: Lanchester College of Technology
Current tenant: Coventry University
Planning history:
References:

Name: UNIVERSITY; ADMINISTRATIVE BLOCK
Planning/Byelaw reference: 56889
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Lanchester College of Technology
Commencement: 1962
Completion:
Original tenant: Lanchester College of Technology
Current tenant: Coventry University
Planning history:
References:

Name: COVENTRY CATHEDRAL
Planning/Byelaw reference: 38599
Architect: Sir Basil Spence
Client/Developer:
Commencement: 1954
Completion: 1962
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: *Coventry Cathedral: Art & Architecture in Post-War Britain* (see bibliography)

INNER CIRCULATORY ROAD CORPORATION STREET

Name: SHOPS & OFFICES (South side)
Planning/Byelaw reference: 66107
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1965
Completion: 1968
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: *Coventry New Architecture*

Name: OFFICES (North side)
Planning/Byelaw reference: 16989
Architect: Fitzroy Robinson of London
Client/Developer:
Commencement: 1971
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: NEW OXFORD HOUSE (North side)
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect:
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: COVENTRY EVENING TELEGRAPH (North side)
Planning/Byelaw reference: 41513
Architect: L. A. Culliford & Partners
Client/Developer: Coventry Evening Telegraph
Commencement: 1956
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: *Coventry new Architecture*

Name: WEST ORCHARDS HOUSE
(base of Hillman House)
Planning/Byelaw reference: 57143
Architect: Arthur Swift & Partners
Client/Developer: Calgary & Edmonton Land Company
Commencement: 1962
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: BELGRADE THEATRE & FLATS (North side)†
Planning/Byelaw reference: 39363
Architect: City Architect
Extensions by Stanton Williams of London
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1955
Completion: 1958 Extensions 2007
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: *A&BN 1958 Jun. 18, AJ 1958 Aug. 7, AJ 2007 Dec. 13*

Name: A. E. U. HEADQUARTERS (North side)
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: J. Roland Sidwell
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion: 1961
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: *Coventry New Architecture*

Name: COOPERATIVE STORE (South side)
Planning/Byelaw reference: 37577
Architect: C.W.S. Building Department
Client/Developer: Coventry & District Cooperative Stores
Commencement: 1954
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: *Cooperative Architecture*

Name: BASE OF MERCIA HOUSE (South side)
Planning/Byelaw reference: 61672
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Corporation
Commencement: 1964
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

QUEEN VICTORIA ROAD

Name: FLEET HOUSE
(extension to base of Mercia House)
Planning/Byelaw reference: 65259
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Council
Commencement: 1965
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: ICELAND FREEZER STORE
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant: Iceland
Planning history: Re-fronted pair to Cornercroft Building (now demolished)
References:

Name: SHOPS & ENTRANCE TO CITY ARCADE
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect:
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

NEW UNION STREET

Name: CHRISTCHURCH south professional precinct
(shops and offices)

Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: Hellberg, Harris & Partners
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion: 1969
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: *Coventry New Architecture*

Name: REGISTRY OFFICE

Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Council
Commencement: 1968
Completion: 1972
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history: Repair and extension to Cheylesmore Manor (13thc. Half-timbered)
References: *AJ 1972 Aug. 9*

Name: SPIRE HOUSE

Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect:
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: CHRISTCHURCH HOUSE

Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect:
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: 12 SHOPS & OFFICES

Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect:
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: *Coventry New Architecture*

LITTLE PARK STREET – WEST SIDE

Name: TELEPHONE EXCHANGE
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: Ministry of Public Buildings & Works
Client/Developer: General Post Office
Commencement:
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant: British Telecom
Planning history:
References: *Coventry New Architecture*

Name: COVENTRY ECONOMIC BUILDING SOCIETY
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: Redgrave & Clarke of Coventry
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion: 1964
Original tenant: Coventry Economic Building Society
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: *Coventry New Architecture*

Name: LIVERPOOL VICTORIAN FRIENDLY SOCIETY
Planning/Byelaw reference: 21810
Architect: Redgrave & Clarke of Coventry
Client/Developer:
Commencement: 1973
Completion:
Original tenant: Liverpool Victorian Friendly Society
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

HIGH STREET

Name: MARTINS BANK (north side)‡
Planning/Byelaw reference: 20555
Architect: Bromley Cartwright & Waumsley of Nottingham
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: BARCLAYS BANK (north side)
Planning/Byelaw reference: 8842
Architect: Peacock Bewlay & Cooke of Birmingham
Client/Developer: Barclays Bank
Commencement: 1919
Completion:
Original tenant: Barclays Bank
Current tenant: Yorkshire Bank
Planning history:
References:

Name: LLOYDS BANK (south side)
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: Buckland & Haywood of Birmingham
Client/Developer: Lloyds Bank
Commencement:
Completion: 1932
Original tenant: Lloyds Bank
Current tenant: Lloyds Bank
Planning history:
References:

Name: BARCLAYS BANK (south side)
Planning/Byelaw reference: 52391
Architect: Barclays Bank Ltd Property Division
Client/Developer: Barclays Bank
Commencement: 1981
Completion:
Original tenant: Barclays Bank
Current tenant: Barclays Bank
Planning history:
References:

GREYFRIARS LANE

Name: OLD PEOPLE'S HOME
Planning/Byelaw reference: 7624
Architect: Redgrave & Clarke of Coventry
Client/Developer: General Municipal Charities of the City of Coventry
Commencement: 1968
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant: Eventide Homes Ltd.
Planning history: Extension to 16th c. Ford's Hospital almshouses
References:

CROSS CHEAPING

Name: SHOPS & OFFICES
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: W. S. Hattrell & Partners of Coventry
Client/Developer: Ravenseft Properties Ltd
Commencement:
Completion: 1962
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history: On site of bombed 1937 Owen Owen store
References: *Coventry New Architecture*

Name: SHOPS & OFFICES
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: Leonard J. Multon & Partners of Birmingham
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion: 1968
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: *Coventry New Architecture*

TRINITY STREET

Name: SAINSBURYS SUPERMARKET
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: Pick Everard Keay & Gimson of London
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion: 1964
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: *Coventry New Architecture*

FAIRFAX ROAD – NORTH SIDE

Name: POOL MEADOW BUS STATION
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: City Architect
Client/Developer: Coventry City Council
Commencement:
Completion: 1996
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: *Building* 1996 Mar. 29

HALES STREET

Name: COVENTRY TRANSPORT MUSEUM
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: MacCormac Jamieson Prichard of London
Client/Developer: Coventry City Council
Commencement:
Completion: 2004
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: *Museums Journal* 2004 May

BETWEEN THE ROADS TOWER STREET

Name: POSTAL SORTING OFFICE
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: Department of the Environment Property Services Agency
Client/Developer: Directorate of Post Office Services
Commencement:
Completion: 1977
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References: *Construction (London)* 1977 June

HILL STREET

Name: FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
Planning/Byelaw reference: 27832
Architect: A. H. Gardner & Partners of Coventry
Client/Developer: Society of Friends
Commencement: 1951
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: OLD PEOPLE'S HOME
Planning/Byelaw reference: 61432
Architect:
Client/Developer: Coventry Churches Charity
Commencement: 1984
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history: Extension to Bond's Hospital
References:

SPON STREET

Name: SPON STREET
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: City Architect with F. W. B. Charles
Client/Developer: Coventry City Council
Commencement: 1967
Completion: 1978
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history: Dismantling of 16thc and 17thc timber frame buildings from elsewhere in Coventry and their re-erection on Spon Street
References: *Surveyor* 1967 Sept. 9, *AJ* 1975 Mar. 26, *Twentieth Century Architecture* 2004 no. 7

CROFT ROAD

Name: ODEON CINEMA
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect:
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: SKYDOME
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect:
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion:
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

Name: IKEA
Planning/Byelaw reference:
Architect: Capita Ruddle Wilkinson of London
Client/Developer:
Commencement:
Completion: 2007
Original tenant:
Current tenant:
Planning history:
References:

13. COVENTRY CHRONOLOGY

1930 – 1940

1930	National Provincial Bank	F.C.R. Palmer
1931	Corporation Street	City Engineer
1932	Lloyds Bank	Buckland and Haywood
1937	Trinity Street	City Engineer
1937	Hippodrome (demolished 2001)	W. S. Hattrell & Partners
1938	Donald E. E. Gibson appointed City Architect	
1939	Proposals for City Centre redevelopment – civic quarter adjacent to cathedral – model	
1940	May - Proposals exhibited – Thomas Sharp, William Holford visit exhibition	
1940	November 14 th – German raid destroys much of the City Centre, including Cathedral	
1940	December 4 th – Donald Gibson's paper 'Problems of Building Reconstruction' delivered at Royal Society of Arts	
1940	Plan	

1941 - 1950

1941	March – new plan presented to City of Coventry Redevelopment Committee	
1942	Third Model	
1945	Fourth Model – Market Street (Later Smithford Way and Market Way) introduced	
1946	Upper Precinct Levelling Stone laid	
1948	Broadgate opened - Princess Elizabeth Pillar commemorates	
1949	Lady Godiva Statue (William Reid Dick sc.1944; plinth designed by Edwin Lutyens; Audrey Ursula Beeching, niece of Dr Beeching model for statue) Listed Grade II*	

1951 – 1960

1951	Cathedral Competition	Sir Basil Spence
1951 – 1955	Upper Precinct; Market Way; Smithford Way. City Architects Department with companies' architects	
1951 - 1953	Broadgate House	C. A. Dept.
1953 - 1954	Owen & Owen	Rolf Hellberg and Maurice Harris
1954 – 1957	Police Headquarters	W. G. Sealey
1955	Arthur Ling replaces Donald Gibson as City Architect and Town Planner	
	Hotel Leofric	W. S. Hattrell & Partners
	Dolcis Shoe Shop	Ellis E. Somake
	Market Hall shown on plans as separate circular building. Market Street made pedestrian.	
1955 – 1964	Lanchester College of Technology	C. A. Dept. (F. Lloyd Roche)
1956	Cathedral foundation stone laid	
1957 - 1960	Lower Precinct Link Blocks	C. A. Dept.
1957 – 1958	Lady Godiva Café in Lower Precinct	C. A. Dept.
1957	City Market Hall	C. A. Dept.
	C. W. S. Corporation Street	C. W. S. Architects Dept.

1958	Model	
1958	Belgrade Theatre	C. A. Dept. (Listed Grade II, 12.06.1998)
1958 – 1960	City Architects Department	C. A. Dept.
1959 – 1960	Market Multi-storey Car Park	C. A. Dept.
1959 – 1962	Railway Station	W. R. Headley (Listed Grade II, 24.11.1995)
1959	Ring Road construction commenced	
1959	Locarno Ballroom	C. A. Dept with Kett and Neve (designers of Trowell Services M1 1967)
1960	Herbert Art Gallery	Herbert Son & Sawday (Leicester)
	Shelton Square	C. A. Dept. & Ardin and Brooks
	Coventry Evening Telegraph	L. A. Culliford and Partners
	M6 Motorway	
1961 – 1970		
1961	City Arcade	C. A. Dept. (Frank Burnett)
	A. E. U. Offices Corporation Street	J. Roland Sidwell & Partners
1961 – 1962	Orchard and Barracks Multi-storey Car Parks	C. A. Dept. (Orchard Car Park replaced by West Orchards Shopping Centre)
1962	Model	
1962	Cathedral consecrated	Sir Basil Spence (Listed Grade I, 29.03.1988)
1962 -1964	Coventry Economic Building Society	Redgrave and Clarke
1962 – 1966	Swimming Baths	C. A. Dept. (J. M. McLellan) (Listed Grade II, 2.12.1997)
1963 – 1964	Sainsbury, Trinity Street	Pick Everard Keay and Gimson
1964	Quinquennial Plan Review	
1965	John F. Kennedy House (demolished 2001)	Sir Basil Spence
	Smithford Way Terminal Block (Hillman House)	C. A. Dept. with Arthur Swift & Partners (also designers of Fingal County Council Building, O'Connell Street, Dublin)
	Bull Yard: Stage 1 Buildings	C. A. Dept. (Rex Chell)
	Martins Bank/ Royal Insurance	Hellberg and Harris
1965	Polish Ex-Service Men's Club	Roy Geden
1965 – 1966	Lanchester College Hall of Residence	C. A. Dept. (Terry Long)
1965 – 1967	New Central Library: Stage 1 (demolished 2007)	C. A. Dept. (Rex Chell)
1966	City Centre Plan Review	
1966 – 1967	College of Art and Design	C. A. Dept. (John Smith)
1968	Bull Yard: Stage 2- pedestrianisation	C. A. Dept. (Rex Chell)
1968	Lower Precinct Terminal Block - Mercia House	C. A. Dept. (J. M. McLellan)
1968 – 1969	Christchurch South Professional Precinct (New Union Street)	Hellberg & Harris
1971 – 1980		
1972	Hertford Street shops and offices	W. S. Hattrell & Partners
1974	Ring Road completed	
1975	Strategic Plan	
1978	Market Way Terminal Block - Coventry Point	The John Madin Design Group

1981 – 1990

1989	A46 Coventry Eastern By-pass	
1990	Cathedral Lanes Shopping Centre	Chapman Taylor & Partners
1991 – 2000		
1991	West Orchards Shopping Centre	John Clark Associates
	Upper Precinct Refurbishment	John Clark Associates
	M40 Motorway	
1992	Coventry University formed	
1994	Lower Precinct Refurbishment	Aukett
1997	New City Master Plan (?)	
1998	Coventry Unitary Development Plan	
1999	Phoenix Initiative (PI) Master Planners	MacCormac Jamieson Prichard (MJP)
2000	(PI) Blue Coat School restoration	Duval Brownhill (Litchfield) now Brownhill Hayward Brown

2001 -

2001	(PI) Priory Visitor Centre	MJP
2002	(PI) Ribbon Factory	PCPT Architects Birmingham
2003	(PI) Whittle Arch & Glass Bridge	MJP with Whitby Bird
	(PI) Millennium Place	MJP
2004	(PI) Motor Museum reopened	MJP
2005	Herbert Gallery Extension	Haworth Tompkins
2007	IKEA (16 th December)	Capita Ruddle Wilkinson
2008	Herbert Gallery Extension	Pringle Richards Sharratt
	City Centre proposals (Broadgate, Precinct, Market Way and Smithford Way)	Jerde

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135. 2008 Jerde Scheme; Plan; *Jerde*
136. 2008 Jerde Scheme; central Arena with library; *Jerde*

14. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & BIBLIOGRAPHY

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