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The Modern Historic City: Evolving Ideas in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain.

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Abstract

It is generally considered that ideas in Britain about historic cities, and their appropriate management, changed radically between the period of the Second World War and its aftermath and the end of the 1960s, in reaction to comprehensive redevelopment and with the rise of the conservation movement. Plans produced in the early part of this period have been characterised as representing ‘clean-sweep’ planning. By the end of the 1960s, it is held, very different ideas prevailed. One of the key articulations cited to represent this shift is the four studies for the historic cities of Bath, Chester, Chichester and York, commissioned to consider conservation issues both in those cities, and in terms of the wider lessons that could be applied elsewhere.

This paper analyses the approaches used in conceptualising and planning for two of these four historic cities, Bath and York, with reference to both the 1960s studies and their 1940s precursors. It concludes that on the whole the 1960s plans for Bath represent a continuation of approach from the 1940s rather than a radical sea-change, with the emphasis still firmly on conceptualising the historic city highly selectively and in proposing high degrees of intervention. Changes are more evident in the plan for York which heralds a more inclusive and embracing conservation of place.
Introduction

Issues of how to balance planned modernity with the conservation of the character of historic city came to the fore in the 1960s. This was the decade that saw the first explicit legislative recognition of the importance of historic areas through the creation of ‘conservation areas’ in the 1967 Civic Amenities Act, following a flurry of activity by government and others on appropriate ways to plan the historic town. A huge range of work dealt with these issues in this period including international exhortations (Council of Europe, 1963), major conferences (Ward, 1968), official statements (Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 1967) and coverage in other key documents of the period (Buchanan et al., 1963).

Applied at the local level these concerns famously led to the four studies undertaken in 1966 for Bath (Colin Buchanan & Partners, 1968), Chester (Donald Insall and Associates, 1968), Chichester (Burrows, 1968) and York (Esher, 1968), each jointly commissioned by the government and the relevant local authority. As well as providing lessons for the individual cities their purpose was to inform more widely. The idea of the studies emerged from a conference in January 1966 convened by the Minister of Housing and Local Government, Richard Crossman. Originally intended to be five in number the fifth town, King’s Lynn, dropped out as it was unwilling to meet its payments. Bath, Chester and Chichester were all apparently reasonably keen, although Chichester insisted that the work was done in-house; York wavered until York Civic Trust volunteered to meet half the local contribution and the local authority also sought to circumscribe the terms of reference (Kennet, 1972). Yet part of the logic of the
selection of these cities was that they were more active than most in area conservation according to Palliser (1974). In Bath Colin Buchanan was chosen having undertaken a range of commissions in the city in the years immediately preceding (e.g. Colin Buchanan & Partners, 1965). In Chichester the study was undertaken by the County Planning Officer and followed the development plan which had recently been reviewed (West Sussex County Council, 1965). There was much pressure in York from the Civic Trust and other bodies for a more co-ordinated approach to conservation and a ‘Town scheme’ of grant assistance had been commenced in 1964 (Shannon, 1996), and Chester was one of the few authorities that used powers introduced in 1962 to make grants to conservation works from money raised locally through the rates (Kennet, 1972). These four studies of historic towns remain as often cited benchmarks in the development of thought about appropriate responses to the planning of historic towns (Delafons, 1997).

Prior to this period planners often saw conservation and preservation activity as very much at the fringes of mainstream planning. For example, the planning text book that Taylor (1998) regarded as key in the post-war period, *Principles and Practice of Town and Country Planning* by Lewis Keeble, saw preservation as a ‘subject on the edge of land Planning proper’ as late as the 1964 edition of his book (Keeble, 1964; 315). Yet there is an earlier group of plans that collectively form a major body of work on the nature of planning for historic towns and cities. During the course of World War 2 and in its immediate aftermath a whole series of plans (now collectively referred to as ‘reconstruction plans’) was produced for a wide spectrum of settlements in the UK. Stemming from the demand for comprehensive planning developing but frustrated during the 1930s, the case for planning was given great impetus by the devastation wrought on a number of towns and cities by German bombing and by an apparent willingness from the government to legislate for and to resource comprehensive planning (see e.g. Cullingworth, 1975). Urban areas across the country including major
commercial centres, small mill towns and cathedral cities undertook plans. Not surprisingly, badly war-damaged cities usually commissioned plans, but many were produced for settlements untouched by bombing and many for historic cities (Pendlebury, 2004a).

Collectively the plans are known for their uncompromising vision and self-belief in creating better, more functional places, despite the difficulties that might be encountered in achieving these goals. Existing British cities were held not to be working efficiently. Generally the key priorities were seen to be the need to improve access and circulation (for both people and traffic), to separate incompatible land-uses and to provide better quality housing for the urban poor (Abercrombie, 1943; Tiratsoo, 2000). In the early stages of reconstruction planning, radical restructuring of urban form was often proposed and in bomb-damaged cities there was little of the tendency to recreate historic street patterns and building forms found in many continental cities (Diefendorf, 1990; Hasegawa, 1999). Plans for historic towns and cities often included a detailed and sophisticated analysis of the development of a place, but older fabric was frequently characterised as redundant and with the exception of key architectural monuments quite often intended to be removed wholesale (Larkham, 1997), though recent research has shown a rather more complex relationship between some plans and the historic environment, which sought to reconcile the historic qualities of place with functional modernity (Larkham, 2003; Pendlebury, 2004a, 2004b).

This paper reviews both the reconstruction and 1960s government sponsored conservation plans for two historic cities, Bath and York. In some respects the plans from the two eras are quite different in scope. The 1940s plans were essentially for local consumption (although see Larkham & Lilley, 2003), whereas the 1960s plans were demonstration plans intended to have a wider relevance; the earlier plans covered the
city as a whole, albeit with a city-centre focus, whereas the 1960s plans focused on a particular ‘study area’; and, the war-time plans were intended to cover the spectrum of planning concerns, though in practice they tended to have an urban design/physical reconstruction emphasis, whereas the later plans had a specific brief to consider conservation issues. However, they also have much in common. Both sets of plans were ultimately grappling with the problem of sustaining the character of the historic city and reconciling this with the impact of modernity. Many of the pressures of concern in the 1940s, such as traffic, remained at the forefront in the 1960s. They are also interesting in that neither set of plans was having to fit within a prescribed statutory framework; authors were given considerable freedom to address the issues in their own particular way, which in three of the plans discussed here they did at considerable length.

Each of the plans is briefly described below. This is followed by a discussion of some of the key themes which emerge in the way that thinking about planning for the historic city had changed in this period. The focus of the paper is on the plans and how they conceived the historic city, rather than, for example, how much the plans were implemented. However, some brief context is given on how the 1968 plans were received and some of the key debates.

**Plans for Bath**

The 1945 plan for Bath was produced by Patrick Abercrombie in co-authorship with the City Engineer (Owens) and the Planning Officer for the Joint Area Planning Committee (Mealand) (Abercrombie, Owens, & Mealand, 1945). Abercrombie had been involved with Bath since he co-authored a regional planning scheme in 1930 and had been consulted in 1935 over what became the 1937 Bath Corporation Act. Bath Preservation
Trust had led opposition to the degree of change proposed (Bath Preservation Trust, 1935) and Abercrombie was in favour of a more conservative and conservationist approach (Abercrombie, 1935; Lambert, 2000).

Bath experienced significant war-damage, with at least some damage to 245 buildings of identifiable architectural or historic interest. Buildings of architectural or historic interest identified by the Bath Corporation Act and Abercrombie’s plan both focused on Georgian Bath. The plan was at pains to establish its sensitivity to the Georgian heritage of Bath, though much of the rest of the city centre was seen as ‘ripe for redevelopment’ and requiring ‘rejuvenation with a firm hand’ with, for example, much of the south of the city being identified for redevelopment (Abercrombie et al., 1945; 53) (figure 1). Georgian development was admired not only as architecture but as town planning and the objective was to provide a new plan to bear comparison to the eighteenth century developments and,

‘There was thus a perceived need not only to respect and protect the Georgian inheritance, but also to generate a new and contemporary townscape that serviced the requirements of the modern city. Planning was seen as a mechanism for accommodating and reconciling the demands of past and present.’ (Borsay, 2000; 181)

As with most reconstruction plans, road proposals were a dominant feature. The difficulty of accommodating traffic in Bath was compounded by the difficulties of topography, with the city surrounded by hills. In the centre Abercrombie advocated ten land-use precinets from which traffic was largely excluded, following the principles that had been developed by Tripp (1942).
The Georgian building stock was compared favourably with three other major repositories of Georgian domestic architecture, London, Edinburgh and Dublin – Abercrombie prepared plans for each of these cities during his career. The buildings in Bath were divided into four categories, essentially by historic period, early Georgian, the developments of the Woods, later Adam influenced development and ‘utility Georgian’. This last phase may be said to include all the later building which continued under the Georgian influence, gradually losing its beauty and appropriateness of detail, but maintaining its walling and window openings… is of great importance to the general appearance of Bath (Abercrombie et al., 1945; 64).

Utility Georgian was regarded in the Abercrombie plan as essentially of very good quality and generally worthy of retention. This did come with the major proviso ‘unless it must give way to essential major planning improvements’ (Abercrombie et al., 1945; 64).

The plan of buildings worthy of preservation identified four categories. The first two, ‘must be retained at all costs’ and ‘desirable to retain’ but ‘should not stand in the way of future improvements’ largely corresponded to the buildings that received protection under the Bath Corporation Act. Two further categories of Georgian buildings, ‘not worthy’ of preservation and ‘not likely to be affected’ were mostly additional buildings identified. Much of the modest ‘artisan’ housing, the subsequent destruction of which was to be the cause of so much controversy (Fergusson, 1973), was not identified as being eighteenth century. Specific proposals were made for a range of buildings including the Royal Crescent and the Pulteney Bridge. The Royal Crescent was suggested as a new Civic Centre, clearing away the accompanying mews and eventually
introducing an additional new civic building. This partly stemmed from an attitude that the larger Georgian houses were excessively large for contemporary needs, and this was seen as solving a problem of finding an appropriate use for one of the most important groups of Georgian buildings. This view was also found in a contemporary report produced by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (MacGregor, Sisson, Birdwood-Willcocks, & Lees-Milne, 1944), which included alternative schemes for dividing houses into a larger number of residential units. In the case of the Pulteney Bridge the intention was to widen the roadway, remove the shops and relocate the path in an arcade in the space created in order to achieve desired carriageway widths. The extensiveness of historic buildings, often deemed to be in poor condition, was considered a significant financial burden on the local authority and it was recommended it be given specific powers to raise a conservation fund to meet these costs.

No major change of function was proposed for Bath, though emphasis was placed upon developing the city as a destination for recreation and leisure. Attention was given to sorting out some undesirable arrangements and conjunctions of land use, for example, through relocating industrial uses. Issues of appropriate architectural style for new buildings were rather fudged with a variety of options being presented. The plan had something of a beaux-arts feel, and unusually for a plan of its era historically based neo-Georgian architecture was regarded as an acceptable solution (Pendlebury, 2004a)(Figure 2). The significance of materials (especially the local stone) and colour were emphasised.

Overall, despite the forgoing rhetoric about the significance of historic and Georgian Bath, beyond the medieval core and principal Georgian expansions large-scale redevelopment and transformation was envisaged. The redevelopment areas identified have a marked co-incidence with those areas later identified by Fergusson (1973) where
demolition had taken place. The plan was initially generally well received, the only significant dissent coming from the Bath Group of Architects who stressed the importance of the minor Georgian architecture and of the problems of planning blight that would arise from the long implementation period (Lambert, 2000). Although some specific proposals were quickly dropped, such as civic use of the Royal Crescent, other elements of the plan survived and resurfaced in subsequent plans and the plan was used to justify ad-hoc incremental proposals (Borsay, 2000; Lambert, 2000).

Buchanan’s 1968 report (Colin Buchanan & Partners, 1968) was a culmination of his work in the city and needs to be understood in relation to his other work in Bath. In particular he was the author of *A Planning and Transport Study* commissioned by the Council in 1965 (Colin Buchanan & Partners, 1965), following an earlier report on traffic in Bath in 1964. Traffic was the central preoccupation of the 1965 report. There was seen to be a terrible dilemma between relieving the city and its heritage of traffic and finding routes to achieve this that did not impact upon the heritage. The key elements of the historic environment were still defined highly selectively. Broadly the focus was again upon the medieval city core and the show-piece elements of the Georgian town, including the Circus and Royal Crescent. Again, extensive comprehensive redevelopment was proposed, or at least accepted, for most of the city centre to the south and west of the historic core and for more limited areas elsewhere. Vertical segregation of traffic and pedestrians was regarded as desirable for the larger redevelopment areas.

Different options were proposed to solve the traffic problem. All contained a tunnel to carry traffic from the west to east in the city, extended as a cutting through the residential area of Bathwick. There was also a proposed central cross-route in a twenty foot cutting, close to some of the Georgian set-piece developments (figure 3). The more
drastic traffic possibilities, not favoured by Buchanan, included a four-lane riverside route, skirting the historic core. Car parking, including for the core Georgian area, was to be provided through the construction of multi-storey car-parks.

The subsequent 1968 conservation study (Colin Buchanan & Partners, 1968) was limited in that it only dealt with a study area, defined by the City Council, of the part of the city that had been occupied by the medieval town. Thus, it did not include the Georgian expansion for which Bath is principally famous. The 1968 plans were demonstration studies of the practicality of reconciling preservation objectives with modern functionality and in the case of Bath the complexity of the central area was considered more representative of such problems than the Georgian set-pieces. The plan emphasised Bath’s importance,

‘in an English context Bath is one of the half dozen most precious small towns, for its architectural quality, for its historic associations and its contribution to the art of urban design’ (p 10).

Greatest stress was placed upon the City’s visual qualities, for ‘in Bath as a whole the façades are very much more important than the interiors’ (p. 13). The existing listing of buildings was considered to under-represent group value and the role of buildings as part of visual compositions. Conversely de-listings were suggested, including some altered works by John Wood Senior, one of the key architects of Georgian expansion.

The study area was divided into four and ranked as highest importance, secondary importance, little importance and in need of large-scale renewal. With the first category preservation was held to be imperative. With the secondary areas the aim was to be to keep the best buildings and to conserve the general character, though ‘large-scale
renewal cannot be ruled out’ (p. 47). In the other areas the policy ‘must be the acceptance of change’ (p. 48). Areas one and two covered approximately 60% of the area. Thus Buchanan was advocating major change to at least 40% of the historic core, and possibly more. The inner road, previously in a cutting, was now covered in a tunnel. As proposed it involved demolition of historically significant buildings in Old Bond Street and Queen Street. Rebuilding to create general character rather than precise architectural form was recommended for Queen Street but in Old Bond Street the overall composition was to be re-established. There was a general strong recommendation that new build should not be neo-Georgian, except where completing a unified composition.

Overall two issues were held to dominate; finding new uses for historic buildings and addressing the problems of cars and traffic. The first was thought to be difficult but achievable depending upon major resources, imagination and determination, with the benefit of Bath being a University city with a consequent demand for flats that students might occupy. In dealing with traffic there was some discussion and study of traffic management, but notwithstanding this major road construction was deemed to be necessary.

The successive proposals for conserving Bath by Buchanan were strongly modernist in character. Though the significance of place was clearly articulated and preservation a key objective, it was a highly selective approach principally based around architectural quality and picturesque effect. Preservation was intended to sit alongside massive transformation and this was seen as compatible with sustaining the historic character of the city.
This vision was soon to be subject to a very public critique. Perhaps in Bath more than any other British city was there a fierce backlash in the early 1970s over how the historic city was being planned and managed. For example, Bath featured prominently in pro-conservation polemics of the period (Aldous, 1975; Amery & Cruikshank, 1975) as well as generating at least two texts specifically on the perceived destruction of historic Bath (Coard & Coard, 1973; Fergusson, 1973) and scathing comment on planning in the city in the professional press (Architectural Review, 1973). These were not necessarily aimed specifically at Buchanan’s influence in Bath. Fergusson (1973) directed most of his ire at the local authority and some of their other architectural advisors. He noted the constraints Buchanan was placed under by the briefs he received from the city and the pre-existing Development Plan and the way that some of his recommendations had been ignored. However, he did also note a letter by Buchanan to The Times in 1972 which seemed puzzled by the contestation over the redevelopment of ‘minor’ Georgian architecture and to implicitly support the local authority’s approach. Central to the critiques was the idea that the more modest Georgian heritage, ‘artisan Bath’, had been undervalued, ‘Every attack on a minor Georgian building is an attack on the architectural unity of Bath’ (Architectural Review, 1973; 280). Artisan Georgian buildings were argued to be important as part of the story of Georgian Bath, because of their spatial role in linking the grand compositions and high quality, serviceable buildings in their own right. The significance of Bath was believed to lie in its totality as an artefact, principally of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, rather than in the architectural set-pieces as such. This was compounded by replacement modern constructions that were at best indifferent. The tunnel proposal was particularly objected to (the Bath Corporation’s scheme was even more interventionist that Buchanan had proposed) and it was finally abandoned in 1976.
The details of the approaches taken to planning Bath by Abercrombie and Buchanan differed. The planning concepts used were developed and refined, so Buchanan deployed the environmental area concept he had developed rather than the land-use precincts favoured by Abercrombie. Buchanan viewed environmental areas as urban ‘rooms’, areas not free from traffic, but free from extraneous traffic and where environmental quality predominated over the use of vehicles (Buchanan et al., 1963). The detailed nature of proposals also changed. For example both plans included proposals for comprehensive redevelopment in the Walcot Street area. Abercrombie’s proposal was illustrated with neo-classical buildings, Buchanan’s with vertically segregated brutalism (Bath City Council, 1985)(figures 2 and 4). However, there was also a great deal of continuity of approach and underlying principles. For example, both had a real sensitivity and understanding of the significance of Bath whilst ultimately only considering it vital to retain the major ensembles of Georgian development. Both ultimately saw the potential and need for major redevelopment and change, especially in the south and east of the centre, including the loss of significant amounts of Georgian building. Both acknowledged the environmental problems of traffic but saw major road building as inevitable. Both, despite their sensitivity to place, were ultimately technocratic and sought to modernise by introducing a very clear twentieth century stamp to the city.

**Plans for York**

The reconstruction plan for York was commissioned from another leading consultant, S. D. Adshead in 1943, though he was not based locally and he was dead by the time the report was completed and subsequently published (Adshead, Minter, & Needham, 1948). The degree of his direct involvement is questionable with much of the work probably
undertaken by his co-authors; the City Surveyor and Planning Officer (Minter) and another consultant (Needham). As in a number of other cities it was immediately preceded by a privately written plan, by the local worthy J B Morrell (Morrell, 1940). This plan effectively introduced some of the key ideas found in the Adshead plan, such as an inner ring road encircling the Walls and indeed Morrell provided the foreword to the later plan. It is also indicative of the strong tradition of voluntary action in York which led, for example, to part payment for the Adshead plan and the founding of the York Civic Trust in 1946 (The York Civic Trust, 1946). The Trust was to prove influential in commissioning the 1960s plan and later in opposing road proposals whose antecedents are found in these 1940s plans.

The Adshead plan was a much slimmer document than most of the major reconstruction plans, being essentially the brochure of an exhibition (figure 5) and thus perhaps geared to a rather different readership than the other plans under discussion. The report celebrated the historic legacy of the city and stated that it was vital that this inheritance be preserved, ‘maintaining its character as one of the world’s most beautiful cities’ while meeting ‘the requirements of progress’ (Foreword). This appreciation distinctly stopped with the start of the Victorian period; for example, there was discussion of rebuilding the railway station, one of the greatest of the nineteenth century, held to be in the way of road improvements, albeit it was expected that it would not be replaced for fifty years.

A survey of buildings by age, condition and architectural quality was undertaken, this last criterion being used to identify buildings for preservation. There was specific discussion of the need for action to preserve the Shambles area, work which did proceed in this period (Shannon, 1996). The picturesque quality of narrow streets in York was also highlighted, discussed further below.
The central focus of the report, however, was how to accommodate traffic. At the time there was no inner or outer bypass as such, for example, much of the traffic between the Yorkshire industrial heartlands and the Yorkshire coast passed through the city. As well as recommending an outer ring road, an inner ring-road, on average of 250 yards beyond the line of the medieval wall, was proposed. This allowed for the retention of the historic approaches to the Bars (gates) into the city (Lichfield & Proudlove, 1976), although in practice only Bootham was recognised as historic and important to retain. The inner ring road would

‘form the boundary to the “Central Area” separating it from the outer areas of the City, yet, at the same time, it will have the effect of knitting all parts of York even more closely together’ (unpaginated)

The proposals would have clearly done the former, although whether they would have achieved the latter is rather more debateable (Lichfield & Proudlove, 1976). Generally the space between the road and the Walls was to be cleared and then act as an inner

“”Green Belt” which will greatly enhance the dramatic effect of the Walls and provide new sites for public buildings set in gardens and new open spaces. The existing buildings should be cleared from the moats so as to show the full length of the Wall in all its impressive beauty…” (unpaginated).

Thus the historic city was to be separated from the surrounding urban areas and the Walls given a monumental presence (figure 6). This was a hugely interventionist proposal, would have entailed the removal of much property, a lot of which is now considered historic, and was fundamentally unrealistic in its ambition and scope
(Cummin, 1973). The Adshead report justified the radical nature of its proposals by referring to all the incremental changes undertaken in York in the previous 120 years, the cost of which had effectively been absorbed unnoticed, and positing that a planned approach to future change was preferable.

Within the Walls a range of approaches was taken to traffic, in part responding to the sensitivity of context. It was seen as desirable to remove traffic from the precinct of the Minster and there were proposals for the partial pedestrianisation of Stonegate, a historic street near the Minster, and Shambles, a famous narrow picturesque street, with no vehicles admitted after 10am. Stress was placed upon the importance of narrow streets in defining the character of the city and several streets were specifically identified for retention in their current form. Even where streets were held to be of no great architectural importance the general policy was to resist road widening, though in some cases it was suggested that a colonnade under the existing shops be introduced, allowing for some widening of carriageways. It was also proposed that Deangate be closed, a street running directly past the Minster that had been controversially opened in 1902. The cause of many campaigns by York Civic Trust, it was eventually closed, initially experimentally, in 1987 (Shannon, 1996). However, despite the ambitious and massive inner ring road proposals, perplexingly it was proposed that a through-route east to west and north to south be retained, and this would have entailed some widening plus a new road puncturing the Walls.

Overall the Adshead plan (though how much of it was Adshead’s work is questionable) represented one end of the spectrum of plans of the period. Though it has some understanding of the historic character of York and its picturesque qualities, it was highly interventionist in its proposals, often strived for monumental effect, for example, in terms of its proposed treatment of the Walls and in seeking to create a grand civic
centre of public buildings. At the other end of the spectrum are some of the plans by Thomas Sharp with their stress on enclosure and lesser degree (although still considerable) of proposed intervention (Pendlebury, 2004a, 2004b).

Traffic was the issue that continued to dominate planning debates in York for the next thirty or so years. However, as Hargreaves (1964) and Nuttgens (1976) described, and as Esher (1968) was to audit, there were also many more localised conflicts over individual buildings and streets, some resolved with a favourable outcome from a conservation perspective, some not. Esher detailed the, for the time, considerable efforts made by the Corporation at conserving buildings in the City. However, the rate of attrition of listed buildings between the completion of the first list in 1954 and the study period was demonstrated. In thirteen years 31 buildings had been added to the list but 63 demolished, with the total thus dropping from 652 to 620. Despite the positive efforts at conservation more fundamental problems of use and redundancy and environmental quality needed to be tackled.

Esher was not warmly welcomed to York:

‘I was smuggled into the Guildhall by a back door for fear I might meet the Press, then told by Mr Burke (railwayman and leader of the Labour Council), in his solid Yorkshire drawl, “we don’t like consultants here”. The Conservative boss was if anything more unfriendly.” (Brett, 1985; 163)

His study (Esher, 1968) set out five objectives for the City:

1. ‘That the commercial heart of York should remain alive and able to compete on level terms with its neighbour cities, new or old.
2. That the environment should be so improved by the elimination of decay, congestion and noise that the centre will become highly attractive as to a place to live in for families, for students and single persons, and for the retired.

3. That land uses which conflict with these purposes should be progressively removed from the walled city.

4. That the historic character of York should be so enhanced and the best of its buildings of all ages so secured that they become economically self-conserving.

5. That within the walled city the erection of new buildings of anything but the highest architectural standard should cease.’

The report started with a sophisticated and lyrical analysis of the character of the city. For example, in describing the form of the city,

‘The streets themselves are often no more than slits in the dense texture of buildings, or alleys running off under low openings to dwellings and workshops giving on to tiny yards’ (p15).

This townscape analysis related quite closely to the qualities identified a few years earlier for York by Pace (1961/62). Emphasis was place on the richness of the propinquity of buildings of different styles and periods in forming the character of the city.

A key element of the proposals was to make the walled city liveable. Gone were the proposals to sweep away modest Victorian housing and the emphasis was firmly on increasing the number of people living within the Walls. At the time of the study the residential population was 3,500, a figure that represented a long decline as commercial and industrial development had displaced people from the centre from the nineteenth
The target was to increase this to 6,000. Measures proposed to achieve this included first, removal of some (but by no means all) industry from the walled city, with a focus on relocating industrial uses which generated significant traffic or that made a noxious neighbour. Some comprehensive redevelopment was also envisaged, but focused on low-grade industrial use and was very modest and surgical when compared with Bath. Second, the potential for the re-use of vacant upper floors was emphasised, and there was a study of the Petergate area specifically on this issue.

Another key theme for making the city more liveable was the management of traffic, including some pedestrianisation, although greater emphasis was placed upon restricting access to vehicles to the historic core more generally through the use of permits. Car parking was to be principally provided by four multi-storey car-parks, two within the Walls and two without. The proposed car-park outside of the Walls to the north was intended to enable the retention of buildings on the south side of Gillygate, intended for removal as part of the Morrell/Adshead plans (figure 6) and only finally reprieved in the 1970s. The most brutal in its impact would have been a car-park spanning Piccadilly, on the south side of the centre. Novel means of achieving local circulation were proposed with electric vehicles suggested for bringing shoppers in from the multi-storey car-parks and for making deliveries during the day. Other management proposals for the walled city (very little by way of new road construction was proposed) included the prevention of cross-town traffic, and the narrowing of one of the major nineteenth century streets, Parliament Street (figure 7). Esher’s terms of reference precluded him from considering traffic proposals for the city as a whole. However, he was very sceptical about the inner ring road that was being proposed immediately outside his study area, just beyond the Walls. His objections were made both on amenity and functional grounds. It was considered that such a road and its associated works, such as roundabouts and junctions, would dwarf the City Walls and
‘above all the Bars, whose impressiveness is dependant on the contrasting scale of the small buildings in their vicinity’ (p. 53).

In addition to making the walled city more liveable Esher considered that York had nowhere near reached its potential as a tourist city and that there was some potential for commercial development. However, the report was very sensitive to the issue of scale and large multiple stores were to be only allowed in limited locations. Other elements of the study included a re-evaluation of the listing in the city, with the purpose of adding many buildings of townscape value. Though it was acknowledged that some of these would in turn be lost as part of the natural evolution of the city, it was indicative of a more inclusive approach to what was considered worthy of protection and retention. Furthermore, though it was made clear that this was a planning study it was also acknowledged that the contribution of historic buildings was not essentially visual, that fabric was significant too. Overall, though the report was not without its solecisms, such as the brutal multi-storey car-park proposed for Piccadilly, there was a feel of a fine-grained sensitivity to the City. It feels like a study worked out from street-level (and indeed has lots of photographs of people animating space, figure 8), rather than technocratically using plans and models.

Esher’s study generated much publicity (Esher, 1969) and was generally very well received in York (Lichfield & Proudlove, 1976; Nuttgens, 1976; Palliser, 1974) and continued to be a touchstone in the city for many years (Shannon, 1996) and indeed was still being seen as a significant reference point by developers, the local authority and objectors at the public inquiry over controversial proposals to extend the Coppergate shopping area in 2002. Although the Council’s report on the Esher proposals was described at the time as ‘ill informed, misleading and tendentious’ (Anonymous, 1969;
409) the local authority ultimately accepted most of the proposals (with reservations about costs) and Esher was subsequently engaged to help implement the redevelopment of the Aldwark area, one of the major areas of new housing within the Walls. However, the Council pushed ahead with proposals for an inner ring road, which were bitterly contested. New amenity groups prepared to challenge the authorities more directly were formed and the road proposals were ultimately defeated at public inquiry (Cummin, 1973; Lichfield & Proudlove, 1976; Palliser, 1974; York 2000, 1972).

The two plans for York did show some continuity. For example, both stressed the significance of narrow streets in the historic centre to the character of the City and the need to make these a tolerable environment for the pedestrian through, for example, pedestrianisation. However, what is more striking is how in other ways there was a fundamental shift. In particular, the degree of intervention seen to be necessary and desirable for redevelopment and for accommodating traffic was vastly scaled down. The view in the Esher report was that massive road proposals in or adjacent to the walled city would inevitably be to the detriment of the character of the city and therefore other means of managing traffic must be used. Beyond the traffic proposals there was also a major revaluation of the scale of intervention desirable. Essentially with the Adshead plan it was a case of identifying buildings and areas of particular quality and redeveloping much of the rest; with Esher of keeping the fabric of the city unless there was a particular need to redevelop. With Adshead the overall result would have been something of a de-intensification of the use of the historic core, with Esher the intention was to intensify the residential use of the area in particular.

Discussion
The 1940s plans produced for Bath and York were part of a determinedly progressive wave of enthusiasm for planning that soon dissipated. Associated with proposals for large-scale redevelopment, few can be said to have been implemented in any meaningful way in a period of post-war austerity. The particular plans under consideration here had as their lead-consultant two of the senior and relatively elderly figures of the town planning profession, Abercrombie and Adshead. Raised in the beaux-arts tradition, though they had a clear sensibility of the picturesque and an appreciation of the visual qualities of the street, they lacked the more nuanced sense of townscape most evident in the Esher plan of the works discussed here. This was preceded in the 1940s by some of the work of Thomas Sharp, who set out ideas about townscape that became very influential (Pendlebury, 2004b).

Thus, one can also see important enduring legacies for historic cities in the plans of the 1940s. There was for the first time a body of planning documents that specifically recognised the significance of the historic city as a whole, albeit working to what would now be considered a narrow definition of what comprised the historic city (Pendlebury, 2004a). The emphasis on character that was used has proved to be extremely enduring and indeed forms an important element of the later plans and the cornerstone of the national designation of protection of historic areas, conservation areas, introduced by the Civic Amenities Act, 1967 (Larkham, 2003).

The 1960s plans considered here, and also produced for Chester and Chichester, were specifically commissioned to consider conservation issues with the aim of not only informing policy and action in those cities but in the country as a whole as part of a rise in consciousness about the need for new rational strategies for managing change in historic cities and a growing awareness of the detrimental impact of engineering-led solutions to traffic problems and of unchecked commercial development. Nevertheless,
in addressing conservation issues these plans perhaps inevitably considered a much
wider range of planning issues and, in the case of Bath at least, still proposed large-scale
intervention and change in the urban fabric. Interventions suggested for York, though
rather less and more surgical in nature, were still significant.

Thus though the two sets of plans have rather different antecedents they shared many
things in common. All were essentially masterplans in basic approach, and all were
grappling with problems of reconciling the historic city with modernity. All advocated a
balance between the conservation of historic character with the continuing evolution of
the living city, albeit the balance suggested between plans varied significantly. The
challenges in achieving this changed relatively little over the twenty or so years between
the two sets of plans. Top of the list was the growth of traffic, a concern in the 1940s
and a major headache by the 1960s. Provision had to be made for vehicles and
pedestrians had to be able to enjoy historic areas free of excessive numbers of vehicles.
The need for cities to be functioning modern places and the need to rationalise land-use
to some degree was found in all the plans, but at the same time, though the emphasis
varied between plans, there was a recognition of the richness of mixing different uses
considered to be compatible neighbours. The need to find new uses for historic
buildings whose original or existing uses were obsolescent was another recurrent theme.
Generally plans for both periods had a clear ideology that new buildings should be
clearly contemporary in style (Pendlebury, 2004a). The Abercrombie plan for Bath was
unusual in allowing for the possibility of new buildings closely following historic
precedent, possibly because of the historic unity of building style in the city.

The differences between the four plans considered in this paper are more evident
between different location as between different decade, and in particular between the
Buchanan and Esher plans. They did have similar concerns. Key problems, especially
traffic, were shared. Stemming from their brief, they were more directly concerned with
the conservation of historic fabric than their predecessors – finding new uses for historic
buildings being a particular concern. They were also more preoccupied with the
resources needed for sustaining the historic city than the 1940s plans, produced at a time
of optimism over what planning would be able to achieve; although, again antecedents
are found in Abercrombie’s plan for Bath which discusses the need to find new uses for
historic buildings and the resource implications of preserving buildings. Buchanan and
Esher also shared some similarities of outlook. For example, there was the same rhetoric
about the need for progressive planning and the same distaste for pastiche or historicist
architecture. Modish 1960s solutions are evident in both. Buchanan advocated vertically
segregation in Bath and the Esher plan contained brutal multi-story car-parks.

However, though it is difficult to directly compare reports, there are distinct differences,
not least in the nature of the cities under consideration; Bath with its formal architecture,
albeit in part laid out on a medieval plan, has a quite different character to the dense
heterogeneity of York. There was a selectivity in identifying the historic city in Bath
reminiscent of the 1940s plans. In York the historic city was conceived more inclusively
and extensively and as a more intricate series of intimate visual relationships.
Approaches to dealing with traffic were also quite different between the two plans.
Buchanan was, of course, the most famous writer on traffic in the 1960s. In the
_Buchanan Report_ (Buchanan et al., 1963) and in earlier writings (Buchanan, 1958) he
had displayed a deep ambivalence to the rise of the motor car and its impact on urban
life; he believed roads to be necessary but recognised their destructive qualities. He saw
the need to contain the use of road traffic but also the need for extensive new urban
roads and it was this balancing act between management and provision he sought to
achieve in his work in Bath, seeking to minimise and mitigate the impact from what
would inevitably be a major intervention in the urban environment. The City of York
was also proposing major new urban roads, but Esher challenged this in terms of both
the aesthetic impact a ring road would have had as well as its functional logic. He was
signalling an approach with a greater emphasis on the management and containment of
traffic. These differences of approach became one of the major environmental
battlegrounds in many cities in the late 1960s and 1970s. It is tempting to ascribe the
differences in approach in part to the professional backgrounds of the consultants,
Buchanan an engineer used to solving difficult technical problems vs. the aristocratic
sensibility to tradition of the architect Esher.

The 1940s plans were an important first major wave of plans to consider how the
demands of the twentieth century might be reconciled in historic cities. In many ways
the 1968 plans represented an evolution of approach, rather than the radical sea-change
that is usually now assumed. ‘The balanced approach’ of protecting the parts of the city
identified as historic and intervening with roads and redevelopment to achieve modern
functionality elsewhere was still evident. However, there is no doubt that they were
commissioned on the cusp of period of great change in attitudes towards places,
planning and conservation and the role of people (and traffic) in each of these. This was
not very evident with the Bath report, which seems to represent the old technocratic era
of high intervention, an approach which in Bath was to effectively collapse under a
storm of national and local criticism in 1973. At York, though, Esher produced a report
where the balance had firmly swung to a more inclusive and embracing conservation of
place. Nearly forty years later Esher is still considered a major benchmark in
conservation-planning in York, whereas in Bath it is the reaction to modernist planning,
*The Sack of Bath*, that is the touchstone (Harrap, 2004).
References


Council of Europe. (1963). *The preservation and development of ancient buildings and historical or artistic sites*.


Bath Preservation Trust.


