Alas Smith and Burns? Conservation in Newcastle upon Tyne City Centre 1959-1968

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running title: Conservation in Newcastle upon Tyne City Centre 1959-1968
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Abstract

Modernist planning was at its zenith in Britain during the 1960s, after post-war austerity had passed and before disillusion and reaction set in towards the end of the decade and in the 1970s. It is a time often now associated with ‘clean sweep’ planning, where the only constraints on redevelopment were economic and conservation policy was restricted to the preservation of a limited number of major buildings and monuments. This article considers the re-planning of Newcastle City Centre in the period when planning in the city was led by T. Dan Smith and Wilfred Burns, from Smith assuming political control in 1959 to Burns leaving in 1968. It demonstrates that though modernist rationalism was the driving force in the city’s re-planning it co-existed with a conscious policy of conservation, born out of a picturesque design tradition.

Weep, Geordie, weep,
At the murder of your city;
Weep, Geordie, weep,
For the vandals have no pity.
Alex Glasgow¹

Introduction
The 1960s is an extraordinary period in the history of town planning. In many British cities it is the period when post-war redevelopment was in full swing. Planners were the key urban professionals directing the form of the built environment. It was the high watermark of modernist planning; by the end of the decade the writing was on the wall. Popular resistance to the reshaping of our towns and cities had grown, and this helped conservation to develop from an interest confined to art historian aesthetes into a popular movement, with the 1967 Civic Amenities Act and its introduction of conservation areas a landmark in this process.

In no city was there more evangelical zeal for the benefits of town planning than Newcastle upon Tyne. T. Dan Smith, elected as Leader of the City Council in 1959, created one of the country’s first free-standing Planning Departments and made it the most powerful Department in the Council. The City’s first Chief Planning Officer, from 1960 to 1968, was Wilfred Burns, brought in from Coventry (via a brief sojourn in Surrey) one of the leading local authorities in planned redevelopment in the 1940s and 1950s. These two figures dominated the political and planning agenda in Newcastle through this period. It is a period associated with redevelopment, and especially the famous Development Plan of 1963, and tags such as ‘Brasilia of the North’. It may therefore seem strange to be writing about conservation in the city centre of Newcastle in this period. However, it is a perhaps surprising story which demonstrates a more complex history than is often now recognised. Newcastle is a particularly interesting city to consider because of the high profile nature of planning in the period, and because though in contemporary terms it is clearly regarded as
historic, it is also relatively typical of provincial cities, and is not part of the category of quite exceptional places such as York and Bath.

The focus of this article is on the historic fabric of Newcastle and conservation policy and action. It is not within the scope of this paper to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the re-planning of the city centre in this period, though inevitably the discussion encompasses the wider planning framework within which approaches to historic buildings were situated. Research for this article is principally derived from documentary sources. This has been supplemented by interviews with persons active in the city during this period, though any interview material used has been checked against documentary sources.

Post-war City Planning and the Development of Area Conservation

The latter stages of the war saw a surge of evangelical zeal to rebuild the cities of Britain, partly prompted by war damage and partly by a wider move to reconstruct cities as part of the process of creating a new society. In the many plans produced at this time there is a particular preoccupation with the planned redevelopment of central areas and the accommodation of traffic. Cities such as Coventry devastated by bombing were urged by central Government to ‘plan boldly and comprehensively’\(^3\). However, in practice these ambitious plans soon dissipated in post-war austerity and progress was slow even in the cities most affected by the Blitz\(^456\). It was the 1960s before city centre redevelopment got into full swing in most British cities. The number of comprehensive development areas (CDAs) being considered by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government rose from fifteen in 1959 to seventy in 1963 (though
not all these were central schemes). Redevelopment schemes would usually entail some form of partnership between local authority and developer, though the lead partner depended on such factors as land ownership. This period also saw an architectural shift from buildings of the 1950s, which were often conservative in style, to bolder statements.

Hand in hand with the objective of redeveloping city centres was a preoccupation with the growth of traffic and indeed predicted growth in road traffic was a strong driver in the perceived need for redevelopment. This is exemplified by the Government commissioned Buchanan Report. Buchanan was at the time generally considered a sceptic on roads, but his report is now generally considered to be pro-road. A strong theme was the segregation of vehicle and pedestrian traffic, including through vertical segregation, and the creation of environmental areas without through vehicular movement. The scale proposed for primary urban roads was acknowledged to be ‘somewhat frightening’, though the underestimation of the environmental impact of roads and traffic is still held to be one of the main failings of the report and other thinking about roads and traffic at the time. Support is given for comprehensive redevelopment which ‘makes it possible, in particular, to apply the techniques of multi-level design, which not only yield much extra space, but open the door to the creation of new environments of the most interesting and stimulating kind’. In significant historic cities (the case study was Norwich) the emphasis shifts to limiting accessibility for ‘it is not a question of retaining a few old buildings, but of conserving, in the face of the onslaught of motor traffic, a major part of the heritage of the English-speaking world, of which this country is the guardian.’
The question of historic area preservation or conservation was only beginning to emerge at this time, and in that sense Buchanan can be seen as progressive. Keeble stated that the preservation of buildings ‘is a subject on the edge of land Planning proper’\textsuperscript{15}. An interest in the preservation of old buildings was until the 1960s essentially an elite preoccupation. It was also considered compatible with a belief in modernist town planning; for example Holford, Spence and Pevsner were all modernists who were involved in preservation\textsuperscript{16}. However, as the consequences of redevelopment in city centres became apparent so opposition to the demolition of buildings grew; the exemplars of this in the early 1960s were the Euston Arch and the Coal Exchange, both in London.

Also as the decade developed so did a concern for area conservation, with an initial culmination in the 1967 Civic Amenities Act, which created the system of conservation areas. Government decisions to place Building Preservation Orders on listed buildings had become increasingly influenced by group value and in 1962 and 1963 government guidance had placed stress on conserving the character of towns\textsuperscript{17}. A disparate series of study groups began working on what was generally described as ‘the problem’ of planning and historic areas, including ‘The Historic Cities and Towns Project’ which led to a conference and publication\textsuperscript{18}. The Council of Europe was pressing member countries from 1963 for greater action, which led to a conference in Bath in 1966 which urged the protection of historic areas, integrated with development planning\textsuperscript{19}. In government Richard Crossman, Secretary of State from 1964, supported by junior minister Lord Kennet from 1966, was instrumental in getting the conservation of historic areas on the agenda, despite civil service resistance. Though the Civic Amenities Act was a Private Members’ Bill, introduced
by Duncan Sandys, it is clear that its scope and form was influenced by discussions with Crossman\textsuperscript{20}. Coterminal with this legislation was the commissioning in 1966 of the four well known studies of historic cities, Bath\textsuperscript{21}, Chester\textsuperscript{22}, Chichester\textsuperscript{23} and York\textsuperscript{24}. It is notable that York were initially at least reluctant participants and a fifth town, King’s Lynn, declined to meet their part of the cost of a study\textsuperscript{25}. In the subsequent development of policy Kennet was keen to shift the idea of conservation areas away from the setting of important buildings to a more broadly based conception and to encourage local authorities to designate rapidly and extensively\textsuperscript{26}.

**Newcastle Prior to 1958: Some Brief Context**

In very simple terms the basic urban form of Newcastle in 1958 derived principally from two key eras of development; the gradual evolution of a typical medieval walled town plan, with a late Georgian ‘planned’ new commercial centre overlay; the latter principally the work of the speculative developer Richard Grainger, and executed in a remarkably short period of time between 1834 and 1840\textsuperscript{2728}. This has often been mistakenly considered the Grainger- Dobson plan; the local architect John Dobson was responsible for some of Grainger’s buildings, but nowhere near as many as was once supposed.

Thus the medieval plan of Newcastle works around key nodes such as the castle and cathedral, the river crossing and the Quayside. Grainger’s developments left the principal morphological elements of the town largely intact by opportunistically using what was largely backland and gardens, superimposing over them three grand streets, together with some lesser streets and adjacent developments such as the residential
Eldon Square and the somewhat isolated commercial Royal Arcade. This is obviously a very much simplified account of the evolution of Newcastle; for example some new streets were laid out in the eighteenth century to improve access to the river frontage and to improve east-west communications. However, the key point in terms of the context of this article is that significant changes to the basic form of the city were relatively few after 1840. Perhaps the only two key changes were the arrival of the railway to the city centre with the building of the first high level crossing of the Tyne in the 1840s and the construction of the New Tyne Bridge in the 1920s.

The first war-time plan, in common with other cities, was radical in intent, sketching out an almost wholly redeveloped city centre. Unlike many of its contemporaries prepared by consultants, it was written in house by the City Engineer and Planning Officer, Percy Parr, who was to remain in post until 1960. The subsequent Development Plan retreated from this radical vision and assumed an approach based on land-use allocation. Some significant road proposals remained, acting as ring-roads on the edge of the centre rather than through-town routes. However, little physically changed in the City Centre in the 1940s and 1950s, with the exception of the beginning of the construction of the new Civic Centre.

Thus at the heart of the Newcastle of 1958 lay a remarkable late-Georgian commercial centre, in essence largely intact, though soot blackened and subject to many incremental changes. The earlier history of the City was evident in the surviving medieval street plan, together with individual monuments and buildings such as the Norman Castle Keep, the medieval Cathedral, the monastic remains at Blackfriars,
sections of medieval City Walls, a few grand seventeenth century houses and so on (figure 1).

The qualities of the city had been increasingly recognised by this period. This was especially the case for the Grainger developments which had since their construction been a source of civic pride. For example, Thomas Sharp wrote in 1937 of ‘a remarkable manifestation of civic pride was displayed in the building of those spacious streets of dignified formal buildings whose now soot-blackened facades still provide an oasis of rather sadly tarnished grace...’31. The first edition of the Northumberland volume of the ‘Buildings of England’ series was published in 195732. Pevsner was certainly keen on Grainger’s work: ‘In what way Grainger and Dobson form a special distinction need nowadays hardly be emphasised. They have given the whole centre of the old town a dignity and orderliness...’33. Grey Street is described as ‘one of the best streets in England’34 (figure 2), the exterior of the Royal Arcade as ‘noble and reticent’35 and Eldon Square given favourable comparison to Nash’s work around Regent’s Park. Nairn, writing shortly before the arrival of Burns, is more passionate in style and very consciously celebrates the historic and aesthetic qualities of the whole city centre, not just the Grainger developments. He is also critical over the condition of many buildings and is anxious about the future, ‘this is or could be one of the great cities of Europe, and it must not be messed up by penny pinching or the wrong man doing the wrong building. Most of all, it needs a client as far-seeing as Grainger, and the natural choice is the Corporation itself’36. Subsequently in the Council for British Archaeology’s 1964 list of historic towns, Newcastle was considered to be one of the 51 of special importance37.
The Smith-Burns Era: ‘Brasilia of the North’

T. Dan Smith became Leader of Newcastle City Council in 1959. He had an obsession with the potential of both town planning and the arts as a means of improving people’s lives; a recurrent theme in his autobiography\(^{38}\). He often sought to encapsulate this with his image of ‘Brasilia of the North’, designed to convey modernity and progressive planning. Architecturally Smith consistently sought to engage leading national and international architects on projects in the city. In his autobiography he cited Le Corbusier and Jacobsen as his preferred architects. Jacobsen did work on an ultimately abortive hotel scheme in Newcastle. Others engaged included Basil Spence and Robert Matthew. In his planning views he was apparently strongly influenced by the then Professor of Town and Country Planning at Newcastle University, Joe Allen\(^{39}\). Early in his administration he was responsible for creating an independent Planning Department in the Council with its own Chief Officer, despite substantial resistance within the authority, and became Chairman of the Town Planning Committee\(^{40}\). Subsequently the department became one of the most powerful in the Council. The person chosen as the City’s first Chief Planning Officer, and appointed in 1960, was Wilfred Burns, who quickly became one of the most prominent British town planners of the period\(^{41}\). Smith was instrumental in his appointment; he had spotted him and been impressed on an earlier visit to Coventry\(^{42}\). Though there was some personal tension between the two men\(^{43}\), they are generally regarded as having had a compatible approach to planning, and a belief in positive, large-scale comprehensive planning.
Burns worked very quickly with his initially small staff to produce an interim plan in 1961\textsuperscript{44}, where the essential principles for the well-known 1963 Plan\textsuperscript{45} (figure 3) were set out. The basic principles of the plan are captured in a few key paragraphs:

‘It is, however, an historic town at the earliest crossing point of the Tyne; grafted on to its medieval core is a purpose-designed business and shopping centre which is probably the finest example of early Victorian planning in this country. This intermixing of development has produced a unique character for a commercial and industrial city; a character which is interesting and exciting and which must be preserved and enhanced. Little, in the way of development, has taken place in the centre of Newcastle since the Victorian expansion and the City is now faced with an enormous opportunity to create a City Centre on the most up-to-date lines.’

A key aim was to promote Newcastle as a regional centre, to be achieved by enhancing its retailing and commercial role. However, it was considered that ‘This increase of the City’s regional importance, and indeed the retention of its present position, cannot be successful unless the increasing numbers of moving and parked vehicles are adequately catered for.’

The means of achieving this proposed in the Plan was that ‘the expanded and redeveloped shopping centre based on a new system of traffic free pedestrian routes should be served by underground and multi-storey car parks and be enclosed by a system of urban motorways.’
‘As far as pedestrians are concerned, the plan is based on a new circulation pattern which will unify the old and the new parts of the centre. In the shopping centre, the plan proposes to lift the pedestrian on to a deck built over the whole of the redeveloped part of the shopping area so that he can be free from the moving traffic which will be at present ground level. Underneath this part of the shopping centre, and in a tunnel, will be part of the urban motorway system.’

Thus as early as 1961 a set of principles were developed which were to endure through the Smith- Burns era and for a number of years afterwards. The city centre was to be modernised and its role as a regional capital strengthened and to implement this major road developments were needed, including urban motorways close to the centre. Traffic and pedestrians were to be segregated, partly through multi-level circulation. The road system was intended to frame three major precincts in the city centre which would be pedestrianised as much as possible and traffic would be restricted to access for servicing and car-parks. At the same time the City is regarded as having a distinct character in need of preservation. No inherent conflict is perceived between these objectives; indeed they are seen as complementary as part of an approach which prefigures Buchanan. Indeed, part of the rationale for the road proposals was removing traffic from the historic core, and the City subsequently adopted the Buchanan vocabulary of ‘environmental areas’.

The 1961 proposals and 1963 Plan were received with acclaim. For example, Napper, a Professor in the Newcastle University School of Architecture wrote ‘To grasp the whole of this complex problem in so short a time, and produce such a clear analysis of it, speaks well for the future’. Napper commends the traffic proposals and states,
‘Dobson and Grainger’s development will be revived because it will no longer be choked with traffic and the intelligent proposals for commerce and trade will promote greater efficiency whilst rescuing an environment fast disappearing under traffic chaos. For the first time in a hundred years the city is positive in its attitude to medieval buildings, and Novocastrians will be able to enjoy seeing them as part of the continuing living tradition of a vigorous city’.

The City Redeveloped: ‘Let’s Build a City’

The proposals in the 1963 Plan envisaged both significant rebuilding and preservation. The proposals for rebuilding are here divided between those which were implemented and led to significant losses of historic buildings, and those proposals which ultimately never progressed beyond the drawing board, but which would have had a major impact on the character of the centre of the city. The two most well-known losses of historic buildings from the Smith-Burns era were both Grainger- Dobson; the Royal Arcade which was lost to a roundabout on the end of the Tyne Bridge (figure 4), and two-thirds of the originally residential Eldon Square, lost for the shopping centre which bears the same name (figure 5). The circumstances which led to the loss of these two groups of buildings are discussed below. The section then discusses other proposals in the 1963 Plan which would have had a major impact on the heritage of the City but which were not or were only partly implemented.

THE ROYAL ARCADE

The River Tyne defines the southern boundary of Newcastle and has always been a barrier to north- south movement. The Tyne Bridge was the route of the national trunk
road A1 until the construction of the Tyne Tunnel between 1961-1967\textsuperscript{50}, which brought traffic up the city’s main shopping street, Northumberland Street. The main east-west traffic route across Newcastle also came close to the end of the Tyne Bridge. Thus by the end of the 1950s there was a major problem of traffic congestion in this area. Prior to the Labour Party assuming control in the city in 1958 proposals had been produced for relieving traffic in this area. These proposals involved the loss of the Royal Arcade and the adjacent seventeenth century almshouses, the Holy Jesus Hospital. These proposals were heavily criticised and opposed at public inquiry by the Northern Architectural Association (NAA), represented by Napper. However, opposition was not based on the loss of historic buildings but on the crude engineering solution proposed; what was sought was a better architectural solution\textsuperscript{5152}. The demolition of the Royal Arcade was considered a significant architectural issue by the inquiry Inspector, but was not opposed by local opinion. Indeed the NAA’s alternative solution involved the demolition of both buildings.

In 1961 the City Council presented a new set of proposals, retaining the Holy Jesus Hospital and partly retaining the Royal Arcade. The NAA considered this scheme also to be unsatisfactory and that “the NAA has always considered that neither the Royal Arcade nor the Holy Jesus Hospital is of the first importance as a building and that their preservation could not be justified if to any extent they compromised the large-scale and imaginative redevelopment which this main gateway of the city demands”\textsuperscript{53}. In a rebuttal to the NAA, the City Council’s approach was defended by Ian Nairn\textsuperscript{54}.

The scheme for this area developed into a long running saga. The principal western elevation of the Royal Arcade was to be demolished and constructed in a slightly
different location and the majority of the interior retained in situ. The portion to be rebuilt was demolished in 1963. However, it was never to be rebuilt, the Council claiming the stone had decayed irreparably in store. Meanwhile, they argued the interior had deteriorated beyond reasonable repair. Ultimately it was demolished in 1969 and partially replaced with a facsimile. Later Smith was damning about the plans he had inherited because of ‘the progressive plan to destroy ancient buildings without regard to their true value’ and claims the outcome as a conservation success, stating ‘we fought and won the battle for the preservation of the Royal Arcade, albeit in a pseudo sense’\textsuperscript{55}. The Holy Jesus Hospital was retained, albeit hard against the new motorway.

ELDON SQUARE
The proposals set out in the 1963 Development Plan for developing the shopping capacity of the city involved expansion westwards (the 1953 Plan had proposed an eastward expansion) and included the demolition of Eldon Square. The Plan described the impact of the new shopping centre as ‘equally as great as that which the schemes of Dobson and Grainger had in the past’\textsuperscript{56}. A promotional booklet\textsuperscript{57} produced at about the same time as the development plan has the following justification:

‘Eldon Square itself will be retained and used to a greater advantage as a major link in the chain of open spaces along the walkways of the pedestrian system. It is not proposed, however, to preserve the surrounding buildings. These were originally designed and erected by Dobson and Grainger as private dwellings, but have long ceased to be used as such. Their architectural quality has been considerably impaired by the alterations incidental to their conversion into offices and a club. They are,
nevertheless, listed as buildings of architectural or historic interest under the Town and Country Planning Act, 1962, and the feasibility of keeping them intact has been most carefully studied. But it was found impossible to incorporate them in the two-level shopping centre without such drastic further alterations to floor levels and facades as would defeat the purpose of the retention without producing satisfactory retail premises. The case for preserving them at any cost would, of course, have been stronger if the city had not possessed the much finer (and many times larger) group of Dobson-Grainger buildings extending from Clayton Street to Pilgrim Street, which the plan proposes to preserve as a whole, untouched by redevelopment.’

Again, this demonstrates that demolition was considered a significant issue. However, the demolition of one of Grainger’s earlier developments, 31 houses on Blackett Street, also removed to make way for the Eldon Square shopping centre, does not seem to have been the cause of any debate. These were more modest brick houses, of a form and type similar to much other early nineteenth century development in Newcastle, significant amounts of which were demolished in this period. Though they were not listed, they were included in the supplementary list of historic buildings of interest given to the Council by the Secretary of State.

Smith later referred to the ‘impressive elevation of Eldon Square’, but justified the demolition both by referring to the back of Eldon Square being ‘a ghastly sight; the old joke about Queen Anne front and Mary Ann back applied to Eldon Square’ and by the quality of architecture intended as replacement.
The public inquiry into the demolition of Eldon Square was held in October 1963. Though the desirability or otherwise of demolition was of enough significance to prompt some debate in the Opinion column of ‘Northern Architect’\textsuperscript{59}, such a decision was mostly argued to hinge around the overall plan for redevelopment and the quality of the replacement; neither the Northern Architectural Association nor the principal local amenity body, the Northumberland and Newcastle Society, opposed the proposals at public inquiry\textsuperscript{60}. Most opposition to demolition came from small businesses occupying the buildings. Approval to demolish was granted and it was subsequent to this that opposition to demolition really developed.

The Minister of Housing and Local Government, in whose name permission for demolition had been granted, Richard Crossman, was amongst those subsequently outraged at the decision, 'On 15 May 1965 during a visit to Newcastle he insisted on seeing Eldon Square "a beautiful Georgian Square which they were going to destroy for a shopping centre"... He was "passionately opposed" to the demolition but found that procedures had already been completed: "I blew up our regional staff in Newcastle and told them they were vandals for giving my consent."\textsuperscript{61}. Following a visit to Newcastle by the Royal Fine Art Commission in 1967\textsuperscript{62} they generally commended Newcastle’s approach to planning but wrote that 'The Commission particularly regrets the loss of Eldon Square'. Thomas Sharp\textsuperscript{63} wrote ‘... threatened disaster must be recorded, for the City Council has deliberately bought up its second finest example of monumental planning, the noble quadrangle of Eldon Square, for the sole purpose of demolishing it - a most blind and bitter action by the very authority itself which is charged with the conservation of the city's character and buildings'.

The castigation of the Council for the demolition of Eldon Square was able to develop as demolition was not fully effected until 1973. Ultimately one of the three sides of the square was not demolished as the Secretary of State refused to sanction the demolition of a non-conformist chapel lying to the rear of the terrace. This restricted the extent and form of the shopping centre proposals.

OTHER SCHEMES
The 1963 Plan also set out a series of proposals which would have had a major impact on the character of the City, but which were not to be fully implemented. First, it envisaged a major expansion of office provision in the city. The key spatial means of achieving this was seen to be the redevelopment of the Quayside area to the east of the Tyne Bridge (figure 6). Three key historic buildings/complexes were identified for retention, All Saint’s Church, Trinity House and the Custom House, otherwise the area was to be comprehensively redeveloped. The Quayside area forms a quite distinct part of the city as most of the centre of the town is set high above it on a plateau. By this time what was historically a working industrial river area was considered moribund. The proposals were seen as both integrating the Quayside with the town as pedestrians could enter high buildings near their top and vehicle servicing take place from below, and as a revitalisation of the Quayside. As Burns stated in the book he wrote towards the end of his time in Newcastle, ‘The riverside, the historic heart of the city, must be given a new life, and the former glory of land and water activities restored - albeit in quite a different fashion from that of its heyday’.64

Like all the Smith- Burns schemes, implementation was slow, and the only new offices were constructed in c. 1969, though comprehensive redevelopment remained
the objective until well into the 1970s. The Quayside was eventually regenerated in a very different way, first by Urban Programme funds and then the Tyne and Wear Development Corporation, combining the conservation of many of the buildings with some limited infill, primarily for housing and leisure uses.\(^{65}\)

Other building redevelopment was focused on individual sites. Though some historic buildings were lost, perhaps most damage was done to the city by clumsy efforts at dynamic juxtaposition and contrast. Some of these developments were part of a policy of creating a new ‘city wall’, ‘Every major entrance to Newcastle was to provide the sense of coming into a modern enclosed city’.\(^{66}\)

Key to the whole strategy, however, were the transport proposals, which included a strategy for strengthening public transport. However, it is the road proposals which would have had, and were intended to have, a drastic effect on the city. Essentially what was proposed was an inner motorway box, with restricted traffic circulation in the centre, an approach compatible with the principles developed in the Buchanan Report. The north-south motorway on the east side would run over the Tyne Bridge via the Royal Arcade roundabout, and on the west side over a rebuilt western bridge. The northern east-west route was to go under the shopping centre and the more limited southern link descend from east to west down the riverbank. Burns acknowledged that the successful insertion of motorways in city centres was difficult but argued that ‘A finely engineered multi-level junction needs to be seen as exciting new element to be added as a positive feature to the central area landscape’, and ‘The essential feature is that the road is not seen as a road - in spite of the very great engineering complications - but as part of the bigger thing that is the characterful City centre of tomorrow.’\(^{67}\)
In the event only the Central Motorway East, the continuation of the Tyne Bridge, was built in anything like the proposed form, and that with a lot of opposition in the very different climate of the 1970s. Again, it was sometime before some of the proposals were formally abandoned. If the proposed motorway system had been constructed there is no doubt that it would have had a massive impact on the environmental quality of the city. Furthermore, though the strategy was designed to protect the inner core of historic buildings, many more peripheral and modest buildings would have been swept away. For example, the St. Thomas’ area of nineteenth century housing to the west of the centre, now listed and part of a conservation area, would have made way for the western urban motorway. Ultimately this area was subject to a very successful conservation scheme in the late 1970s/early 1980s.

**The City Preserved**

As was noted above, the principle of historic preservation was regarded as an important part of the planning strategy for Newcastle from the 1961 interim statement and the subject of a specific report, 'A Plan for the Preservation of Buildings of Architectural or Historic Interest' in March 1962. Indeed, the number and grade of listed buildings in the central areas rose significantly following a request by the Council to central government for a resurvey in 1961-62. Both Burns and, perhaps more surprisingly, Smith seem to have had a genuine interest in preserving what they regarded as the best of the historic building stock. Along with the dramatic topography of the city Burns’ admiration is directed towards the ‘Grainger/Dobson area of classical splendour’ which ‘must be retained to the maximum extent possible, and
indeed some of its lost dignity must be restored.’ The Grainger commercial
development was viewed as successful town planning, an important contributory
factor in Burns’ respect for the area. Smith’s views as set out in his autobiography
have already been noted, though there is a degree of ambivalence in his admiration of
old buildings; his appreciation of the architecture tempered by the class relations
which produced it. However, as early as 1960, before the arrival of Burns in
Newcastle, Smith had made fairly strong pro-preservation statements, for example, ‘It
is not sufficient for the local authority to decide not to pull down historic buildings -
they must also decide not to let them fall down.’

In his annual report for 1961-62 Burns noted that ‘The Committee, after carrying out
a tour of inspection of buildings in the Central Area, agreed on a new positive policy
in respect of preservation by defining certain historic preservation areas and deciding
that steps should be taken to improve these areas by such action as removing
unsatisfactory signs and encouraging co-ordinated painting.’ Four preservation areas
were defined in the 1963 Plan. These were:

- ‘The Dobson/Grainger Area’, Though ‘the Dobson/Grainger buildings, apart from
  a few outstanding ones, may not be regarded as of comparable architectural
  importance to certain other buildings... it is this group of buildings which has the
greatest impact on the stranger to the City and which is probably the best
appreciated by the majority of inhabitants of the City.’ However, ‘part of Clayton
Street and the buildings around Eldon Square.. are, without any doubt, required for
redeveloping the shopping centre and cannot be integrated into the redevelopment
scheme’,

- ‘The Cathedral/Castle Area’ essentially defined by these key monuments,
• ‘St. John’s Church Area’, an area containing a heterogeneous mixture of buildings, ‘different from the other two in that it becomes an area for preserving old buildings simply because a number of them happen to be within this area’ including late Victorian and Edwardian work, and,

• ‘Guildhall Area’, part of the river frontage to the west of the Tyne Bridge, ‘this area is the historic centre of the City, though few buildings remain to show the City’s ancient history.’

All these areas contained buildings not listed at that time but considered worthy of preservation. Perhaps the most surprising is the St. John’s Church Area given its eclecticism and its inclusion of late Victorian and Edwardian buildings, still generally unfashionable and unvalued at the time.

These areas were seen as areas of 'positive' preservation, with policies for enhancement, but also restrictive development control policies. The main concerns at the time were visual. Thus from the beginning there was a policy of introducing a canopy on Grainger Street77 (figure 7), part of the Grainger development and a principal shopping street, in an effort to restore architectural unity which had been fragmented by the introduction of contemporary shopfronts and signage. This was paralleled by action on signs and adverts and the seeking of an Article 4 Direction for most of Grey Street. The introduction of parking meters to Grey Street was considered sufficiently sensitive that mock-ups were used before the work proceeded78. Stone cleaning was also promoted. Restrictive policies were introduced for the ‘Dobson/Grainger’ area, partly under pressure from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government in the wake of the Eldon Square decision. As well as a policy with a
presumption against demolition these included defining works which would ‘seriously affect the character’ of the relevant buildings, including:

‘The replacement of Georgian type glazing bars in the first and upper floor windows by sheet glass.

The blocking up of window openings.

The repair or replacement of stonework other than to the original detail or design.

The permanent removal of projecting mouldings, balustrades and other architectural details which may from the safety point of view require repair and/or replacement.’

These principles were evident in a notable planning case during the early part of this period. The Midland Bank sought to construct a modern office block on Grey Street, replacing a Grainger building heavily altered in 1910. The Council resisted the proposal for a modern building. Instead, on the suggestion of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, a facsimile of the original Grainger facade was approved, duly (though not entirely accurately) constructed a few years later\(^80\) (figure 8). Smith in his autobiography wrote of ‘Grey Street, that superb testimony to Dobson, which I was determined to keep sacrosanct. The Midland Bank wanted to insert a piece of modern architecture, and I felt this would be the end of the street. So I stuck my neck out and said ’No’. I was accused of carrying a torch for ersatz Dobson....’\(^81\). Planning powers were also used to preserve major buildings, a Building Preservation Order was served on the Theatre Royal after the theatre management expressed an interest in the redevelopment of the site\(^82\). With the introduction of the Civic Amenities Act in 1967 Newcastle was very quick to use the defined preservation areas as the basis for designating two larger conservation areas and was one of the first authorities in the country to do so.
The other strand of positive preservation activity in this period was a policy of acquiring and restoring some of the major historic buildings in the city. This included the Holy Jesus Hospital, the medieval monastic Blackfriars complex and Alderman Fenwick's House, a grand seventeenth century house. Again, however, implementation was slow. For example, restoration works on Blackfriars were not started until 1975 and not completed on Alderman Fenwick's House until 1998!

**After Smith and Burns**

T. Dan Smith relinquished control of Newcastle City Council in 1965, becoming Chairman of the Northern Economic Planning Council. Wilfred Burns left Newcastle in 1968 to become the Chief Planner at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. Both left before most of the key proposals of the 1963 Plan had been implemented. However, this Plan set the planning context for Newcastle in the 1970s. The city centre policies enjoyed cross-party political support. Much of what was implemented occurred under a Conservative administration. For example, it was 1973 before a start was made on the construction of Eldon Square shopping centre, though by this stage the architectural aspirations of the early 1960s had been lost and it had become an introverted developer driven project. The continuity of policy was subsequently emphasised by one of Burns' lieutenants, and his successor as City Planning Officer, Kenneth Galley. At this point most of the principles of the 1963 Plan remained intact, such as the creation of the motorway system and the extension of office development through major development down to the Quayside.
Fundamentally the principle of 'welding together a modern centre with the best of the old city' was still central.

However, the City Council did begin to realise that public dissatisfaction with the re-planning of the city centre was growing and, at the same time, self-consciously promote its record of conservation achievement. In 1975 the Council produced a report 'Conserving Historic Newcastle' for European Architectural Heritage Year (much of the contents of which were prefigured by an earlier committee report). In amongst the upbeat tone about conservation successes there is a note of defensiveness, 'Already, despite misguided publicity to the contrary, Newcastle upon Tyne has probably done more than any other City of comparable size to preserve its heritage."

Changing attitudes to conservation are evident in the early stages of work on a local plan for the city centre. The results of a public consultation exercise in 1976 revealed character and conservation as the second leading area of concern and interest after 'movement'. As well as a strong desire to conserve the character of the city 'It is clear that some respondents do not like a number of the things that have taken place over the last 15 years and have expressed this in various ways,' and the document admits that some recent developments are not sympathetic to their respective settings due to 'the four main short-comings of much modern development: enclosure tends to be lost, scale is excessive, buildings lack texture and designs do not relate to a regional context.'

**Discussion and Evaluation**
The image of planning in the 1960s and, in relation to this article, of Newcastle in particular, is of a process which focused almost exclusively on redevelopment or 'clean sweep' planning. However, the reality is more complex. It is clear that in Newcastle preservation was one of the major policy objectives of the planning framework created by Burns and Smith and indeed both men regarded themselves as sensitive to the character of the city and as committed to historic preservation. The Smith-Burns regime was certainly more conservation minded than much local opinion.

Newcastle's approach to conservation had two key strands. First, there was an objective of preserving major buildings. This was not unusual, Mageean states preservation as a key priority of conservation efforts in Britain until the 1970s. More unusual was Newcastle's emphasis on the protection and enhancement of areas, with specific designations, and its use of planning powers to achieve this objective. The introduction of preservation areas over significant parts of the city centre in the 1963 Plan, a policy in evolution since 1961, can claim to be an innovatory and progressive conservation policy. This was a highly visual approach, especially as applied to the Grainger developed streets, considered as a major nineteenth century example of picturesque town planning. Thus the insistence on the reinstatement of the grand composition on Grey Street and the attempt to create unity on Grainger Street through the creation of a canopy. These were combined with development control policies aimed at preventing incremental change. Other factors were not considered as important. The Bigg Market area of the city which best demonstrates the medieval morphology of Newcastle was not designated as a conservation area until 1970 and
there was an explicit policy of introducing service roads in morphologically rich areas behind principal streets.\textsuperscript{92}

Smith and Burns were both modernisers and preservationists. The re-planning of the city centre was certainly intended to be undertaken on comprehensive planning principles, but though there were elements of clean-sweep planning in their proposals they sought to do this surgically and with respect to the character of Newcastle. This is a combination which does not fit in comfortably with many histories of planning in the period\textsuperscript{93}. However, modernism in post-war Britain was influenced by enduring visual cultural traditions which placed stress on the combination of space, rather than the formal harmony of the individual building\textsuperscript{94,95}. This picturesque tradition is evident in the Newcastle planning documents of the early 1960s, with their emphasis on melding the best of the old with the new. Though Burns was careful to underpin his proposals with the mathematical models of the period, the proposals were always presented in a way which emphasised their visual qualities; particularly effective use was made of models. Burns visual preoccupations are evident in a number of his writings\textsuperscript{96,97} and Smith had a fascination with the visual arts. A visual emphasis is evident also in the often unsuccessful examples of dynamic juxtaposition. Taylor\textsuperscript{98} has described a shift in planning practice from the planner as creative designer to the planner as scientific analyst and rational decision-maker. Burns effectively straddled the two and with strong roots in the design tradition could accommodate the retention of historic buildings.

It is noteworthy that support for the approach of the Council came from Ian Nairn and that the City themselves commissioned Gordon Cullen to undertake some work\textsuperscript{99}. 
Though Nairn and Cullen were later taken up by the conservation movement their positions were compatible with the approach taken by Newcastle. Nairn was principally reacting against anonymous suburban sprawl and Cullen was promoting an analytical approach to the understanding of urban space. The strongly aestheticised approach of Burns and Smith would have had appeal to both. Furthermore, this is a period when a clear schism between conservationists and modernisers had yet to open. The tension which grew at the end of the decade between comprehensive redevelopment and the conservation of the relatively ordinary had not yet developed.

Similar scale cities were of course grappling with similar issues of redevelopment and provision for cars at this time\textsuperscript{100}. However, though the issue of historic buildings and areas had assumed a dramatically increased importance by the end of the 1960s there were few cities who explicitly recognised this as early as Newcastle. Conservation did not evolve as a significant issue in Liverpool until significantly later\textsuperscript{101,102}. In Leicester, a city associated in this period with a strongly conservation-minded Chief Planning Officer, though conservation was one of the rationales for dropping major road proposals in 1964, specific areas for protection were not designated until after the 1967 Civic Amenities Act had created the national system of conservation areas\textsuperscript{103}. In 1966 Bristol identified eleven areas of architectural or historic interest, though confusingly also identified seven of these as redevelopment areas\textsuperscript{104}. Though significant work had been put into conservation in major historic cities such as Chester these efforts were usually focused on key historic features and not systematically supported by planning policy\textsuperscript{105,106}. In 1972 Aldous\textsuperscript{107} was lamenting the number of historic towns and cities which were still to designate any conservation areas.
Perhaps some parallels can be drawn between Newcastle and Bath. Though the Bath
study by Buchanan\textsuperscript{108} obviously recognised the historic nature of the city it was at the
same time highly interventionist in character\textsuperscript{109}. Furthermore, the focus for
conservation effort was again highly selective; though the key showpieces of the
Georgian city were protected, much of the more modest Georgian fabric was cleared,
leading to extended conservation campaigns throughout the first half of the
1970s\textsuperscript{110111}. This also illustrates a difference between the two cities, Newcastle didn’t
have as significant a conservation lobby within the city, nor the external attention
which Bath generated.

Thus though Newcastle’s conservation policies may have been pioneering, they were
limited in scope and subsequently were not adequate for the changed climate of the
1970s. Local disillusionment had certainly set in by the middle of the decade, though
distress at the loss of historic buildings was often bound up with a wider critique of
the objectives of 1960s style comprehensive planning. A special issue of the RIBA
Northern Region’s Journal in 1974 was sufficiently contentious that the contributions
of City Council officers were withdrawn; perhaps not surprising when the lead article
started “‘Newcastle? Oh yes, it was a very fine city but I hear they’ve ruined it.’” Over
and over again I have had this said to me in other parts of the country and abroad.\textsuperscript{112}

Though there was some lament at the loss of historic buildings, including some of the
more modest Victorian and Edwardian street architecture\textsuperscript{113}, more attention was given
to the impact and quality of new development, in terms of the loss of grain and
richness caused by land use segregation\textsuperscript{114}, the plans, only ever partly implemented, to
lift pedestrians on to an upper deck across the northern part of the city centre\textsuperscript{115} and
the environmental impact of roads and the realisation of the Central Motorway East\textsuperscript{116}. That there was a wider public disenchantment with planning developing, and a growing concern for conservation issues, was acknowledged by the City Council, as described above.

A more recent evaluation of the aspirations of the 1963 Plan, and the notion of the ‘Brasilia of the North’, concluded that this was evidence of a parochialism and insularity which they were purported to oppose, and though acknowledging that the 1963 Plan pays more attention to conservation issues than is normally credited, identifies its main mistakes as being ‘the demolition of Eldon Square and the Royal Arcade, and the alignment of the central motorway (east) too close to the city centre.’ Furthermore, ‘The situation was made worse by the over-zealous (if routine) demolition of ‘outworn’ Georgian and Victorian buildings…. and by harsh juxtapositions of old and new architecture based on the modernist principle of dynamic contrast’\textsuperscript{117}.

The planning proposals promoted by Burns and Smith were designed to have a major impact on the city. Of the redevelopment which took place it is the loss of Eldon Square and the Royal Arcade which are now most frequently lamented. Given its location at the end of the Tyne Bridge the demise of the Royal Arcade was probably inevitable, and as has been shown, it was Smith- Burns who wished to retain it in the face of opposition from the Northern Architectural Association. It is unclear whether the subsequent fiasco over its partial retention and rebuilding was an act of bad faith or poor project management. The loss of Eldon Square was more avoidable. It is clear that the City knew the significance of its actions from the lengthy self-justification in
its promotional material. However, its push for a rationally planned centre was not balanced by a significant conservation lobby in Newcastle in the early to mid-1960s\textsuperscript{118}. Much of the controversy over Eldon Square was generated some time after its effective fate had already been sealed. It is also clear that a strong planning case was made for the development of shopping facilities in the city which had public support; in 1981 Esher\textsuperscript{119} was still writing about the Eldon Square shopping centre as a major ‘morale booster’ for Newcastle.

During the same period much more modest historic fabric was lost of the sort which today would enjoy statutory protection. Most of this took place virtually without comment and it seems was generally accepted and considered appropriate as part of the modern planning of the city. More catastrophic on the character of the city would have been the major office expansion and the necklace of urban motorways proposed. Again, this would have resulted in the loss of much modest historic fabric but their principal detrimental effect would have been in the creation of a large crude monolithic office development, versus the richer and finer grain regeneration which has taken place, and an environmentally catastrophic carving up of the city for the car. In this latter respect the Newcastle plan made the same underestimation of the impact of roads that is found in the Buchanan Report.

**Conclusion**

Planning in Newcastle in the early to mid-1960s under T. Dan Smith and Wilfred Burns was first lauded, then criticised and ultimately vilified\textsuperscript{120}, paralleling a national and international loss of faith in the ability of the ‘expert planner’ to rationally re-plan
the city. In terms of the conservation of the city what appears as a progressive and enlightened approach in 1961 seems insensitive, brutal and even philistine by the time of the eventual demolition of Eldon Square in 1973. Attitudes towards redevelopment changed rapidly in the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, whilst during the 1960s disquiet at some of the demolition developed, these were voices of an architectural elite, and it is well into the 1970s before there is any evidence of significant popular disquiet at the changes in the city\textsuperscript{121}. Unhappiness at the loss of the old went hand-in-hand with dissatisfaction with the form and quality of the new.

A crucial factor was the slowness of the implementation of the 1963 Plan; indeed one consequence of the slowness of implementation is that many of the proposals which would have had the biggest impact on Newcastle were never implemented. Delays in implementation meant that those proposals which went ahead were often much modified. The Royal Arcade became a fiasco and Eldon Square shopping centre instead of being planning led, with the highest architectural aspirations and the input of Jacobsen, became an introverted developer-driven project.

So were Smith and Burns the vandals of Alex Glasgow's poem? In the context of the beginning of the 1960s their proposals for Newcastle city centre were ambitious, sophisticated and sensitive to the character of the city, especially when set alongside the contemporary plans of other cities. In retrospect, their ideas and the 1963 Plan displayed many of the faults of planning of the period. The vision was over-ambitious and unimplementable. It sought to comprehensively plan towards a defined end-point, a master-planning approach subsequently discredited. The car was over-provided for and there was an over-segregation of land-use. The quality of development which
occurred did not match the genuine aspirations that Smith and Burns had, nor did it
match the quality of at least parts of the stock which it replaced. Though Newcastle
was recognised as a historic city theirs was a far more selective view of the historic
nature of the city than is now encapsulated in listing and conservation area
designation. Ultimately, with the benefit of hindsight, one can only be thankful that so
few of their schemes were implemented.

Notes and References

   London: Croom Helm: p103
3 Sir John Reith, then Minister of Works and Buildings, cited in Ravetz op. cit. p37
7 Ibid.
10 Ward (1994) op cit.
11 Buchanan et. al. (1963) op cit. p196
13 Buchanan et. al. (1963) op cit. p198
14 Ibid. p197
20 Delafons (1997) op cit.


City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne. (1945). *Plan: Newcastle upon Tyne*. Newcastle upon Tyne.


ibid. p220

ibid. p249

ibid. p249


The Civic Trust (c. 1966) *op cit.*


For example, he was a member of the Government’s Planning Advisory Group in 1964-65 and President of the Royal Town Planning Institute in 1967-68.

Esher (1981) *op cit.*, though the appointment was decided by the full Council and Burns was only narrowly ahead of the next placed candidate, 32 to 29 votes, (City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne Minutes May 25 1960).

Smith (1970) *op cit.*


City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne. (1963) *op cit.*


For example, for the Jesmond area, *Journal of the Town Planning Institute* (1966), Environment and Communications in Newcastle 52, 4 162-163


‘Let’s Build a City’ is the title of Smith’s chapter on planning in his autobiography, Smith, D. (1970) *op cit.*


City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne. (1963) *op cit.*: p73

City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne. (c. 1964). *Central Redevelopment: The Eldon Square Area*. Newcastle upon Tyne: p18-19


City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne. (1964). *Council Minutes 11/11/64*.


Though more recent analysis has suggested that the form of Grainger’s development owes more to entrepreneurial practicalities than a conscious effort at town planning, Faulkner, T. (1990) *op cit.*

For example, 'Newcastle is a fine city. When one looks at the wonderful buildings still standing after 136 years - buildings that formed part of the John Dobson major central area redevelopment scheme - it is hard to realise that at the time they were being erected working men were engaged for six days a week for a daily wage as low as 4/- for carpenters, 4/6 for stonemasons and 1/8 for labourers. And they were returning to homes which contained no amenities at all, not even water in the house.' Smith, D. (1970) *op cit.*: p46


City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne. (1963). *op cit.*: p 72-73

At the time of writing grants of 80% are being given for the removal of canopies.

Burns W (1966) *The relationship between town and traffic planning, Journal of the Town Planning Institute, 52*, 4 175-183

City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne. (1964). *Council Minutes 11/11/64*: p554


City of Newcastle upon Tyne (1975) *Conserving Historic Newcastle: A Planning Guide*, Newcastle upon Tyne

City Planning Officer (1973) *The Conservation of Urban Character in Central Newcastle upon Tyne*, Newcastle upon Tyne

City of Newcastle upon Tyne (1975) *op cit.* p27

City of Newcastle upon Tyne (1977) *City Centre Local Plan: Report of Findings*, Newcastle upon Tyne

ibid. p9

ibid. p15


This is perhaps an irony in the city where M. R. G. Conzen worked, one of the leading exponents of an urban morphologically based approach to urban conservation.

e.g. Ravetz (1980) op cit.


115 Danby M (1974) op. cit.
117 Allsopp B (1974) op. cit.
118 Danby M (1974) op. cit.
120 Allsopp B (1974) op. cit.
121 Danby M (1974) op. cit.

Though this is typical of many British cities it was not universal; for example the demolition and redevelopment of the Georgian George Square in Edinburgh by the University was (unsuccessfully) contested by amenity groups in 1959. Hague C (1984) *The Development of Planning Thought: A critical perspective*. London, Hutchinson
122 Esher (1981) op cit.: p 179
Figures

1. An Ordnance Survey Map of 1940 showing the urban form of Newcastle, largely evolved by the mid-nineteenth century.

2. Grey Street today.

3. The Central Area Policy Map from the 1963 Plan.

4. The Royal Arcade
   a. Illustration of the Royal Arcade (reproduced courtesy of Newcastle Libraries and Information Service)
   b. Model of the proposed 1960s scheme
   c. The implemented scheme
   d. The retained Holy Jesus Hospital

5. Eldon Square
   a. Old Eldon Square shortly before demolition (reproduced courtesy of Newcastle Libraries and Information Service)
   b. Model of the proposed 1960s scheme
   c. The implemented scheme

6. The Quayside
   a. Model of the proposed 1960s scheme
   b. The regenerated Quayside today

7. Section of the Grainger Street canopy

8. The Midland Bank (now HSBC), a facade of c. 1969 agreed c. 1964