

Rebuilding the City: the Percy Johnson-Marshall Collection

Research Symposium : The Man-Made Future: Planning, Education and Design in the mid-20th Century

University of Edinburgh, Department of Architecture, 5th - 7th September 2003

CALL FOR PAPERS

"Modern architecture, like modern painting and sculpture, had to start the hard way. It began by tackling the simpler problems, the more utilitarian buildings like low-rent housing, schools, office buildings, hospitals and similar structures. Today modern architects know that buildings cannot be conceived as isolated units, that they have to be incorporated into the vaster urban schemes. There are no frontiers between architecture and town planning, just as there are no frontiers between the city and the region. Co-relation between them is necessary. Monuments should constitute the most powerful accents in these vast schemes." Josep Lluís Sert, Fernand Léger and Sigfried Giedion, 'Nine Points on Monumentality', Point 5 (1943)

Fired by the mission to build a better world on the ashes of World War II, post-1945 architecture in Europe was focused vigorously on the urban context. The architectural interventions, which ranged from patching the existing urban fabric, to comprehensive reconstruction, or the construction of new towns on green-field sites, were guided and managed by a new type of professional, the city planner.

In the British context, a preeminent exponent of city planning was Percy Johnson-Marshall. A student at Liverpool University of Charles Reilly and Patrick Abercrombie, Johnson-Marshall worked on the replanning of Coventry with Donald Gibson until 1941, when war service interrupted. Returning to postwar Britain, he was employed by the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, where he helped frame the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act. Moving to the London County Council as Senior Planner, he was responsible for London's Comprehensive Redevelopment Areas, which included the showpiece Lansbury Estate, conceived as model housing for the Festival of Britain. He was also active in national and international architectural and planning organisations, ranging from the RIBA and RTPI, to the MARS Group and the International Centre for Regional Planning and Development, of which he was a founder member.

Moving to Edinburgh in 1959, Johnson-Marshall pursued an academic career as Professor of Urban Design and Regional Planning at the University of Edinburgh, and also founded Percy Johnson-Marshall and Associates in 1962, which produced everything from regional plans to detailed schemes for town centres across the world. In the 1960s and 1970s, he was also active on the international stage as competition

juror, Vice-President of ISOCARP, a UN consultant on human settlements, and chairman of the Congress on Planning for Metropolitan Cities, held in Mexico City in 1968.

On his death in 1993, Johnson-Marshall left a huge collection of material on urban design, planning, and architecture, which is currently being sorted, identified, and accessed into the Special Collections of Edinburgh University Library, aided by a major grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Board.

The Man-Made Future: Planning, Education and Design in the mid-20th Century will reflect both Johnson-Marshall's professional activity and the content of the collection.

Five themes have been identified:

I Scientific Humanism and post-war perceptions of the "Boffin"

II Ekistics and the Environmental Movement: the Science of Human Settlements

III Visualising the Planned Future: The Presentation of Information in graphic images

IV Educating the Planners: the Creation and Education of a Profession

V The Totally Planned Environment: New Towns, New Universities and Reconstruction Areas

Papers that address any of these themes are invited, addressing either the wider context of postwar planning in Britain within these five broad categories, or exploring specific case studies. Explanatory texts and indications of the holdings of the Percy Johnson-Marshall collections related to the five themes can be found on the project website:

www.johnson-marshall.lib.ed.ac.uk.

The proceedings of the symposium will be published, and abstracts placed on the website.

Professor Iain Boyd Whyte

University of Edinburgh &

Getty Grant Program, Los Angeles

Abstracts of circa 300 words, for papers of between 20 and 30 minutes duration, should be sent by 1 June 2003.

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