This paper sets a context of time and place for the May 2013 symposium on plans and projects in post-war Manchester.

1945 to 1975 is the time frame set by Richard Brook and Martin Dodge. It begins when the Second World War ends and ends when Mrs. Thatcher’s leadership of the Conservative Party begins. Historians give a lot of thought to the definition and significance of these things. In the lead-up to the millennium there was a debate between Giovanni Arrighi’s concept of a ‘long’ twentieth century measured by American hegemonic domination of the international capitalist system, and Eric Hobsbawm’s ‘short’ twentieth century measured from the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Looking at the long and the short of it, Jürgen Habermas chose the year 1945 as the point when the twentieth century spirit broke free at last from the forces of atavism and reaction. In art, architecture and music it was a moment of cultural acceptance of Modernism as the aesthetic of liberal democracy. In world affairs it brought the Yalta Conference, the uncanny
peace of the Cold War, and the launch of the United Nations. At the national scale, reconstruction in all combatant countries took a constitutional aspect that had been lacking in 1918, reconstruction as construction of a new social contract, the Welfare State. After a faltering start, the sustained economic growth of *les trentes glorieuses* - the three glorious decades of 1945-1975 - underpinned an unprecedented phase of what Habermas calls ‘socially domesticated’ capitalism:

The governments of OECD countries who . . . were in charge of three-fourths of world production and four-fifths of the world trade in industrial goods, had at least learned enough from the disastrous experiences of the period between the World Wars to be committed to an intelligent economic policy at home, focusing on stability and on the construction and enhancement of comprehensive social security systems.

The ‘never had it so good’ economy was buoyed by mass consumption and mass media.

A climate of technological optimism saw no need to question the judgement of scientists, doctors, planners and such men in the know. The 1969 worker-student riots called that bluff. On the street the technocratic spell had been broken: instead of ‘trust the expert’ the keywords of 1975 were civil rights, participation and community action. The Welfare State had become less deferential: the neoliberal challenge was soon to come. Meanwhile the OPEC oil shock brought a premonition of shifts in the global market-place, and awareness of long-term resource dependency. The post-modern era had arrived.
So back to 1945 in Manchester, the year of the publication of the City Engineer's utopian city plan. As a blueprint it echoed many previous calls for radical physical reconstruction, and had many parallels in other cities, responding to the 'plan boldly' challenge thrown at them by Lord Reith in his brief term as Winston Churchill's Minister for Reconstruction. Modern readers puzzle over the plan, marveling at its brazen disrespect for the existing fabric of the city. We need to begin with the place as it was in 1945, a mighty Cottonopolis past its prime, as in Tristram Hunt's *Building Jerusalem - The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City*. Maps and photographs reveal the extent of continuity. Somewhat knocked about by bombing, the Victorian infrastructure of streets, canals, railways and parks remained in daily use. So did the nineteenth century pattern of independent retailers, corner shops and local pubs. The twentieth century had made its mark, on Deansgate for example in the new architecture of Sunlight Tower and Kendall Milnes, yet it was Victorian-era mills and churches that dominated the skyline, and in the immense skirt of workers terraces surrounded the central areas of Manchester and Salford. That 'dark excrescence of an industrial age', the world of Robert Roberts' *Classic Slum* (specifically, Zinc Street Salford) remained largely intact. The nineteenth century city was an overwhelming all-pervasive presence, its townscape a *Gesamtkunstwerk* unified, as Andrew Crompton has observed, by the velvety blackness of soot pollution. The total environment inspired total rejection. Rowland Nicholas's clean-sweep attitudes were normal and legitimate, and had been widely promulgated through the interwar years under the political leadership of the industrialist Sir Ernest Simon. As Ewen McColl put it in a song for his 1949 play *Landscape with Chimneys*: 

*I'm going to make a good sharp axe*
Sharpened steel tempered in the fire

We’ll chop you down like an old dead tree

Dirty old town, dirty old town

Now, the topic of our symposium is the chopping down of the old dead tree and the building up of a modern city, not dirty and old but clean and new in its municipal housing estates, its infrastructure of ring-roads and hospitals, airports and heliports, and higher education precinct. The entire story of postwar Manchester is epitomized in the 1972 building where the PWM symposium took place: built on the site of terraced houses cleared as unfit (whether they were is a question we’ll come back to later); designed by the professors of architecture and town planning as a podium and equipped with a spare lift shaft for the subsequent building of its high-rise tower; equipped also with still-visible abutments for walkway bridges to link across to Wilson and Wormersley’s shopping precinct, MBS, the Kilburn Building and the Maths Tower to the Hulme crescents and the upper-level system of the city centre.
But take a closer look at what was going on inside this building in 1975 and we find a shift in perceptions of time and place as striking as 1945’s. The most radical and innovative programme, launched in 1970 and unique in Britain, was the MA in Conservation, Vernacular and Historical Studies. Its original inspiration was the man after whom this lecture theatre is named, Professor Reginald Annandale Cordingley, not just a distinguished architectural historian but a pioneer of popular architectural education, vernacular studies and practical conservation. The programme was led by John Archer and Ron Brunskill and its students were mobilized in a grassroots activism that turned the tide of postwar planning, saving the Albert Memorial, Watts Warehouse, Liverpool Rd Station and Parr’s Bank from the wrecker’s ball, and narrowly averting the widening of Princes Street and Portland Street to six-lane urban freeways, crossed by high-level pedestrian decks. Another Owen’s architecture student, Rod Hackney, set up a ‘community architecture’ practice in Macclesfield while registered for his PhD under the supervision of Derek Dearden, saved the Black Road area from demolition and refurbished its dwellings in a scheme that
won the Government’s DoE Good Design in Housing Award for 1975. The project demonstrated both the power of community action, and the charm and liveability of recently-condemned by-law housing. Ever since the publication of Cecil Stewart’s classic *Stones of Manchester* (1956) Mancunians had begun to see their once-despised Victorian environment in a fresh light as legacy of functional innovation, technical daring and aesthetic liberation. Empowered by the 1967 Civic Amenities Act, the City Council responded to the new mood, designating Manchester’s first conservation areas around St Ann’s Square and Chorlton Green in July 1970, followed by Upper King St in November, the Albert Square and Cathedral conservation areas in April 1972 and St Peter’s Square in 1973. Extensive further designations in June 1985 would consolidate the city centre’s status as an outstanding example of surviving Victorian townscape. And so it remains thirty years on.
So here is our time-frame for today. It opens in a world of soot-blackened buildings condemned and it ends with those buildings reprieved, cleaned and polychromatic, and in between are the three decades - Manchester's short sharp twentieth century - of 'white light, white heat'. And now, forty years on, that moment of intense modernity is already history. Let me end with four witnesses who in their different ways help us to make sense of these shifts of time and dislocations of place: the painter Laurence Stephen Lowry, the photographer Shirley Baker, the script writer Tony Warren and the architectural historian Clare Hartwell.

First, the man who worked for Pall Mall Property Company from 1910 to 1952, studied out of hours at the Municipal College of Art and Salford School of Art till 1925, then chose as the principal subject of his art the back streets off Oldham Road: Rockford Road, Apollo Street, Liversey Street, Mozart Square, Butler Street, Elizabeth Street, Woodward Street, Kemp Street (formerly Prussia Street)
and Redhill Street. As L S Lowry explained to John Rothenstein, ‘it’s not too much to say that it’s only around the Oldham Road that I’m entirely alive’.

The prewar Manchester art establishment shunned these paintings, sharing his mother’s opinion that they were ugly, sordid and unnecessary; or as a local councillor put it, ‘insults to the people of Lancashire’. The first official recognition of Lowry by a local institution came only in 1945, when the Victoria University of Manchester awarded him an honorary MA. Our time frame corresponds exactly with Lowry’s final decades of celebrity and commercial success. He moved from Pendlebury to Mottram but each morning liked to be driven back into town to watch the clearance of the streets he had painted. Fellow-student James Fitton wrote this description after Lowry’s funeral in February 1976:

‘Boiled ham, potted meat and lugubrious, reminiscing relatives. In a melancholy mood I spent the rest of the day in a nostalgic pilgrimage wandering down Oldham Road, the source of his inspiration and of the visual detail he built into the composition of his paintings. The gap of fifty
years was devastating; it was now unrecognisable. No longer the rows of houses, which in retrospect seemed so warm and comforting, now replaced by monolithic faceless blocks. . . Even the mills had disappeared. It seemed to me that the cemetery I had just left was more comforting, and I realized that I had not only come to Lowry’s funeral but to the wake of that industrial era he had chronicled with such sympathetic authority and conviction’

Shirley Baker photographed those same scenes between 1960 and 1973. In Salford her territory was Regent Road, Hankinson Street, Ordsall and the docks. Her Manchester images were taken round Upper Brook Street, All Saints, Hulme and Moss Side. Introducing the street scenes, Stephen Constantine observes how her photos

‘impress upon us the rough textures of a strictly functional built environment. It is a world of brick and slate, of cobbles and flagstones, of cast-iron lamp-posts, of churches structured in back Gothic. It is angular
and the tones are grainy, grey, rust-red and soot.... And within this context Shirley Baker sees the people, her essential subject. If they can, they impose themselves upon their environment, override it, mould it to their use. They soften its roughness with their forms'.

Shirley Baker’s street scenes show us the human dimension of slum clearance, the public life of the traditional terrace, the onset of blight as properties were boarded up, the keeping up of appearances by families who remained, then the arrival of a rougher population of squatters, tinkers and handcart men, the emptiness of cleared sites, and again that sense of a lost warmth and comfort that gave the lie to the official discourse of Manchester’s postwar modernisation.
So to the first episode of Tony Warren’s soap opera *Coronation Street*, broadcast by Granada TV on 9th December 1960. It was radical in the social realism of its characters and their setting, a cobbled terrace typical of thousands. The studio set was modelled on Archie Street Salford and was intended to undergo the same transformation as its real-life counterpart.
Warren initially wrote twelve episodes plus a 13th that would see the street bulldozed if the series didn’t take off. In fact the bulldozer arrived in 1968 to demolish the mission hall and factory for a modern housing estate. Tony Warren had intended the entire street to be cleared and the characters relocated in Salford-style tower blocks, but Cecil Bernstein and the Granada executive team insisted on low-rise maisonettes that would allow the terrace to be retained while introducing new characters. This experiment was unsuccessful because the soap’s budget couldn’t stretch to an enlarged cast, so in 1971 the modern housing was demolished and replaced with a community centre and warehouse, Vera Duckworth’s workplace. There was some unhappiness in official quarters with this unregenerate industrial setting; Harry Kershaw, who wrote, edited and produced the soap, recalled being woken up at 3 in the morning by the TV reporter of a national daily to comment on reports that the Government regarded Coronation Street as portraying a bad image of the North-West and holding back regional development. But the cobbles were firmly part of the brand, and when the warehouse site was eventually redeveloped in 1989, Coronation Street went full circle with the building of neo-vernacular pitched roof brick dwellings, under the influence of Salford Quays, complete with corner shop, *The Kabin*, and neo-Victorian cast-iron lamp standards.
So to my final witness, who may not be speaking in today’s unfortunately mono-gendered line-up, but whose architectural guide to Manchester is the one book of which it’s safe to say every speaker has a well-thumbed copy, and probably ninety-nine per cent of the audience too. Clare Hartwell is a graduate of the ‘John and Ron’ M.A. programme at Owen’s with its philosophy of architectural history as a branch of applied scholarship, essential for collective memory and responsible management of our built environment. With the help of her *Architecture of Manchester* pocket guide and updated Pevsner volume for south-east Lancashire, coauthored with Matthew Hyde, we can locate the legacy of postwar plans and projects in time and place xiv. It’s impossible to read them without being impressed by the quality of the postwar contribution, especially to the architecture of education, science and technology, of which more later, and also the religious architecture of this last age of faith. Postwar modern had an
integrity and optimism that’s missing from Victorian pastiche lamp-standards, and a public-spiritedness that matches Juergen Habermas’s characterization of the era, so remote from the property world of neoliberalism. Its qualities deserve respect, which is why we are increasingly likely to find the Manchester Modernists and the 20C Society fighting alongside the Victorian Society and SPAB in the struggle for Manchester’s architectural heritage. The white towers and concrete infrastructures have become assimilated into the fabric they sought to replace. With the forgiveness of time let’s now celebrate the rich contribution of those three decades to the palimpsest of original modern Manchester.

2 Phrase coined by the French economist Jean Fourastié in his book *les Trente Glorieuses ou la Révolution invisible* (1979)


6 Andrew Crompton (2013) ‘Manchester Black and Blue’ *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 89, 1 277-91


9 Cecil Stewart (1956) *The Stones of Manchester* London: Edward Arnold. The book was a spin-off from his 1956 PhD *Some Great Victorian Architects and their Work in Manchester* supervised by Professor Cordingley.


