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Citation for published version:

Fair, A 2021, 'University in the city': Percy Johnson-Marshall and the reconstruction of Edinburgh's South Side, 1961-76', *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 36, no. 6, pp. 1123-1147.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2021.1907772>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1080/02665433.2021.1907772](https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2021.1907772)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Planning Perspectives

Publisher Rights Statement:

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Planning Perspectives* on 30 March 2021, available online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02665433.2021.1907772>

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**‘UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY’: PERCY JOHNSON-MARSHALL AND THE
RECONSTRUCTION OF EDINBURGH’S SOUTH SIDE, 1961-76**

AUTHOR FINAL VERSION AS ACCEPTED 21 MARCH 2021.
THE EDITED AND PUBLISHED VERSION APPEARS IN *PLANNING PERSPECTIVES*,
2021, and is illustrated. Illustrations are not included here for copyright reasons.

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‘UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY’: PERCY JOHNSON-MARSHALL AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF EDINBURGH’S SOUTH SIDE, 1961-76

Abstract

In 1962, the University of Edinburgh proposed that the area adjacent to its central campus should be designated as a Comprehensive Development Area, with the planner (and university senior lecturer) Percy Johnson-Marshall showing how historic tenements could be replaced by a new urban landscape of slab blocks situated on an elevated pedestrian podium above new roads, creating a seamless continuum between the university and the city. They sit alongside contemporaneous ‘paper’ renewal projects, including SPUR’s plans for Boston Manor and the proposals of the 1963 Buchanan Report. Drawing on the archive, the article explores the genesis of the scheme, the terms in which it was presented to the public, and the reaction it gained. It also considers how and why the proposals were abandoned in the early 1970s. At its core, the article reflects on the often messy processes which shaped urban renewal in 1960s and 1970s Britain, the continuities of the period, and the value of looking to the specific local factors which explain why particular approaches were taken.

Keywords

Urban renewal; post-war architecture; conservation; rehabilitation; comprehensive development; Edinburgh; Percy Johnson-Marshall; university design

9034 words

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On 18 August 1962, an exhibition opened in the University of Edinburgh's Adam House (**fig. 1**). Its subject was the university's recently announced proposal that the area to the east and south of its central campus should be designated as a Comprehensive Development Area (CDA). Here, what the university Principal, Sir Edward Appleton, dubbed 'back street areas' would be replaced with 'fine new buildings' in an environment that was 'safe and easy for pedestrians' and which would provide 'a clear and uncluttered flow' for vehicles.¹ The idea had been brewing for two years, overseen by the prominent architect-planner Percy Johnson-Marshall. In collaboration with the city authorities and a private-sector development company, Murrayfield, Johnson-Marshall's team reimagined Edinburgh's south side as a new urban landscape of spacious roads, elevated pedestrian decks, and slab blocks. 'These proposals do not constitute grandiose territorial claims by the University upon the city,' declared Appleton.² Rather, he went on, the aim was to create an appropriate setting for the expanding university campus. Johnson-Marshall and Appleton both suggested that the scale of the project and its planned basis evoked Edinburgh's eighteenth-century New Town: it would be a '20th century' new town, 'a new town of a new character'.³ There were further historical resonances in Appleton's claim that the result would embody the idea of a seamless 'University in the City and the City in the University', an argument which recalled the foundation of the university by the city authorities in 1583 as well as the way in which the

¹ University of Edinburgh, Centre for Research Collections [hereafter 'UoE CRC'], GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/B/1.4, 'University of Edinburgh, Comprehensive Development Area 1963', 1.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 2-3.

university's eighteenth-century rebuilding had been part of a bigger urban project.⁴ The plans soon reached a wider audience, appearing in the *Architectural Review* and closing Johnson-Marshall's 1966 book, *Rebuilding Cities*, which was introduced by Lewis Mumford.⁵ However, a visitor to the projected CDA ten years later would have found little in the way of new development, and much in the way of planning blight. In time, a different approach was adopted, mixing limited new construction with rehabilitation.

[Figure 1 near here]

As depicted in print, and in models and drawings, the Edinburgh proposals contributed to contemporary debates about the nature of the modern city and the ways in which urban environments might be transformed. The years around 1963 saw a flurry of schemes in which the central areas of British towns and cities were dramatically reimaged with new roads and buildings, an approach dubbed 'urban modernism' by Simon Gunn and 'radical urban renewal' by Otto Saumarez Smith.⁶ Building on earlier reconstruction plans by the likes of Patrick Abercrombie and Thomas Sharp, these schemes were increasingly ambitious in scope and scale. At a time when living standards for many were rising, urban modernism was presented as a rational response to various developments: increasing traffic levels; a sense that existing, often industrial cities were inefficient and worn out; and a belief that the 'citizen-consumer' should be provided with new shops, workplaces, homes, and urban spaces.⁷ These ideas were encouraged by central and local government, being codified in the 1963 report *Traffic in Towns*, the lead author of which was the planner Colin Buchanan.⁸

⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁵ Johnson-Marshall, *Rebuilding Cities*.

⁶ Gunn, 'Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism'; Saumarez Smith, *Boom Cities*.

⁷ Kefford, 'Housing the Citizen-Consumer in Post-war Britain'.

⁸ Ministry of Transport, *Traffic in Towns*.

Urban modernism was given tangible form by a range of individuals and organizations. On the design side, Gunn has highlighted the contribution of technocrats like Bradford's city engineer, S.G. Wardley, while Saumarez Smith has explored the frequently lyrically expressed and beautifully illustrated proposals of architect-planners such as Graeme Shankland.⁹ The resulting plans were essentially 'top-down', reflecting a belief in the primacy of the expert. They were not necessarily blind to history nor the value of the historic built environment: some, in fact, took a sensitive approach, reflecting a common ground between 'modernism' and 'conservation' which frequently remains overlooked.¹⁰ Plans nonetheless presented urban space as essentially malleable, and while they sometimes sought to give spatial form to the idea of 'community', there was little recognition of the complexity of society in practice.¹¹ Proposals could be contested, even among modernizers. Florian Urban, for example, has pointed to the tensions in Scotland between those who wished to redevelop Glasgow entirely within the city's existing boundaries and those who favoured a combination of reconstruction and decentralization.¹² When it came to implementing plans, the constraints imposed by legislation and the wider economic context often limited what could be achieved, and its apparent 'success'.¹³ Private-sector development companies were frequently involved in what might otherwise seem like 'public' projects, first in delivering redevelopment and then in managing the new shopping centres and office towers which often resulted from it.¹⁴

⁹ Gunn, 'Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism'; Saumarez Smith, *Boom Cities*.

¹⁰ Glendinning, *Conservation Movement*, 200; Saumarez Smith, *Boom Cities*, 9-35; Gold and Pendlebury, "'The Spirit of Living Continuity'?"

¹¹ Gunn, 'Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism', 858.

¹² Urban, 'Modernising Glasgow'.

¹³ Flinn, "'The City of Our Dreams'".

¹⁴ Gold, *The Practice of Modernism*, e.g. 120-25; Gosseye, "'Uneasy Bedfellows'".

The present article augments the existing literature in three ways. First, by examining the proposals for Edinburgh's south side between 1961 and 1976, it demonstrates how the familiar, seemingly universal tropes of 1960s radical urban renewal – pedestrian decks, for example – were understood in one specific context. For Simon Gunn, post-war urban modernism was largely a response to 'dark images of the nineteenth-century industrial revolution and unfettered urban growth' which 'took root most strongly in the industrial towns and cities where the legacy of these conditions appeared all too visible', not least in the north of England.¹⁵ However, in Edinburgh a rather different set of preoccupations prevailed, reflecting the views of a distinctive alliance of individuals and institutions that included the city's university. The article explores in detail the particular terms in which redevelopment was proposed, not least the ways in which it was historicized through reference to 'Edinburgh' traditions. Second, by highlighting the university's role in the scheme, the article addresses not only the history of urban modernism but also post-war university design (and, indeed, university culture). Architectural historians have tended to focus on the 'new' universities with their greenfield sites (as well as Oxbridge).¹⁶ With a few exceptions, not least the work of William Whyte, the often less glamorous work of rebuilding and expanding central campuses elsewhere remains less discussed, although the University of Edinburgh's buildings themselves have been examined in some detail.¹⁷ Within this context, the extent to which the University of Edinburgh sought not only to reconstruct its own campus but also to tackle the surrounding area is especially distinctive, revealing something of its wider civic ambitions and nuancing our understanding of the ideas which underpinned the physical transformation of Britain's post-war universities.

¹⁵ Gunn, 'Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism', 869.

¹⁶ E.g. Muthesius, *Postwar University*; Harwood, Powers and Saumarez Smith, eds. *Twentieth Century Architecture* 11.

¹⁷ Whyte, *Redbrick*; Haynes and Fenton, *Building Knowledge*.

Finally, by taking a long view that encompasses not only the CDA of the 1960s but also the less dramatic, rehabilitation-led interventions of the 1970s, the article adds to our understanding of the apparent collapse of faith in urban modernization during that decade. As we shall see, the revised plans for the south side of the 1970s had little to do with a meta-narrative in which conservation inevitably ‘triumphed’ over comprehensive development during this decade, but rather reflected specific local factors that attest to the realities of planning in practice and the value of looking to the evidence when explaining how what appear to be wider trends played out locally. The aims and the personnel of the eventual South Side Local Plan demonstrate the continuities of this period as well as its ruptures. Echoing what Guy Ortolano has seen in 1970s Milton Keynes, the principal actors in Edinburgh proved flexible in their outlook, adapting their approach to the reality of the situation as they experienced it and demonstrating not only the vitality of planning at this time but also, perhaps, the Welfare State project more generally.¹⁸

The origins of the CDA

Ever since its foundation as ‘the town’s college’ in 1583, the University of Edinburgh has been located to the south of the centre of the city. At the end of the eighteenth century, new buildings were designed for the university by Robert Adam; they were completed to amended designs by William Henry Playfair and Robert Rowand Anderson.¹⁹ ‘Old College’, as this site came to be known, was conceived as part of a new urban infrastructure, including massive bridges connecting the Old Town with the emerging New Town, spanning the valleys of the Cowgate and the former Nor’ Loch to create a multi-level townscape. The university subsequently grew, expanding into the area around Old College and, after 1918,

¹⁸ Ortolano, *Thatcher’s Progress*, 21.

¹⁹ Haynes and Fenton, *Building Knowledge*, 33-86.

also creating a second, suburban campus, King's Buildings, for science and engineering.²⁰

These developments generated calls for a more planned approach to expansion, and in particular the 're-integration' of the university with the city.²¹ This ideal was embraced by the university authorities, partly to combat a sense that those based at King's Buildings were isolated, and partly in recognition of the generalist tradition in Scottish higher education, which a single, planned campus might embody.²²

A 1931 report for the city council by Sir Frank Mears was the first attempt to lay down a coherent plan, proposing a 'college mile' of new buildings leading east from Old College.²³ Though unexecuted, it established the principle that the university might seek to establish a claim on this part of the city. Further discussions took place in the mid-1940s, when Edinburgh began to increase its student numbers, like other universities in Britain. Amid continued pressure to consolidate on a central site, a report was prepared in 1946-47 by Charles Holden.²⁴ Holden's focus was George Square, a short walk from Old College; its eighteenth-century housing would be replaced by new, stripped-classical buildings on the lines of Holden's contemporaneous work at the University of London. These proposals were incorporated into Patrick Abercrombie and Derek Plumstead's wide-ranging *Civic Survey and Plan* for Edinburgh of 1949. However, Holden's plans were then set aside in favour of a new layout by Basil Spence. Amid debate about the architectural value of George Square's historic buildings, Spence in 1954-55 produced a scheme which preserved one side of the square whilst reconstructing the other three.²⁵

²⁰ Ibid., 115.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Fenton, 'Appleton's Architects', 16, 28.

²³ Haynes and Fenton, *Building Knowledge*, 115-16.

²⁴ Ibid., 148.

²⁵ Ibid., 154.

By 1960, the post-war expansion of Britain's universities was gathering speed, a development accelerated further in 1963 by the publication of the Robbins Report (which advocated a significant increase in university places and also the financial support offered to students). Although several sites around Old College were slated for reconstruction, George Square was to absorb much of this increase, with new buildings being planned for teaching and research. An adapted version of Spence's plan was implemented, despite much opposition from conservationists. The initial buildings were designed by Spence's Edinburgh office, as well as Alan Reiach and Eric Hall, and RMJM (the architectural practice run by Robert Matthew; **fig 2**). Trained in Edinburgh, Matthew had headed south in 1946 to become the Architect to the London County Council (LCC), before returning to Edinburgh in 1953 to take up an academic post whilst also developing a successful private practice.

[Figure 2 near here]

In December 1960, Matthew argued that the university's planning ambitions should be reframed to take advantage of the enhanced powers of co-ordination – and the funding – offered by Comprehensive Development Area (CDA) status.²⁶ This tool had been created by the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, allowing local authorities to acquire property in a designated area, potentially at low prices, and to co-ordinate development in accordance with an agreed plan. Matthew's idea was not only that the university should use CDA powers to support its own ambitions for expansion (not least by acquiring property cheaply), but also that it should look beyond its campus to take a leading role in replanning the wider area. Much of the housing to the south and east of the central campus – the city's 'south side' – was deemed to be in poor condition and not worth saving; it comprised nineteenth-century

²⁶ Ibid., 181.

tenements, for the most part.²⁷ Traffic, too, was a problem. Nicholson Street, the main thoroughfare, was already busy, and car ownership in the city had more than doubled between 1953 and 1963.²⁸ The university's engagement with these wider questions perhaps reflects a degree of confidence following the approval of its initial George Square plans despite vociferous opposition; perhaps there was also a wish to make amends for the loss of George Square.²⁹ Matthew's interest in the possibilities of a CDA drew on his experience in London, where as LCC Architect he had overseen the initial post-war replanning of blitzed areas in the east end. His enthusiasm for such a far-reaching scheme in Edinburgh also developed a theme he had explored as a student. In 1935-36, Matthew, shocked by slum conditions in the city's St Leonards area, had put together a theoretical scheme for its complete reconstruction with new five- and ten-storey blocks arranged on a *Zeilenbau* layout.³⁰

Matthew's name figures large in the early records of the CDA project.³¹ By the time that he proposed the idea to the university, he had already discussed it with members of the city council, including the Provost (the convener).³² However, the plans quickly came also to be associated with Percy Johnson-Marshall, who was appointed to prepare them in February 1961.³³ Johnson-Marshall had studied at Liverpool in the early 1930s before working for the public authorities in Middlesex, Coventry, and London, where from 1949 he was Senior Planner; during the 1950s, he had a particular responsibility for Comprehensive Development

²⁷ Patrick Abercrombie and Derek Plumstead, *A Civic Survey and Plan of the City of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1949), map 7; Fenton, 'Appleton's Architects', 62.

²⁸ UoE CRC, GB 0237/PJM/PJMA/EUD/A/1.1, 'Vehicles Licenced [sic] in the City of Edinburgh' [1963].

²⁹ Fenton, 'Appleton's Architects', 63.

³⁰ Glendinning, *Modern Architect*, 47-49.

³¹ UoE CRC, GB 0237/PJM/PJMA/EUD/B/1.2, note by Matthew, 'Comprehensive Plan for the Central Area of the University of Edinburgh', 5 June 1961.

³² Fenton, 'Appleton's Architects', 62-63; UoE CRC, GB 0237/PJM/PJMA/EUD/B/1.2, Report of meeting on 21 February 1961.

³³ UoE CRC, GB 0237/PJM/PJMA/EUD/B/1.2, letter from Charles Stewart to Percy Johnson-Marshall, 3 February 1961.

Areas.³⁴ A dedicated organizer, enthusiastic committee attender, and a member of the Communist Party until at least the mid-1950s, Johnson-Marshall believed strongly in the social value of architecture and the role of the architect-planner as a public servant.³⁵ In 1959, he nonetheless left public practice and moved to Edinburgh at the invitation of his former colleague Robert Matthew, taking on an academic post at the university. Matthew bought a house in Edinburgh which was leased to Johnson-Marshall, and also helped him to set up a private planning consultancy.³⁶ Its workload during the 1960s was diverse, including regional plans for southern and central Scotland, while collaborations with Robert Matthew's own office, RMJM, included proposals for the enlargement of Coleraine in Northern Ireland as a polycentric linear city.³⁷ Johnson-Marshall's approach – like that of Robert Matthew – was firmly within the tradition inaugurated at the end of the nineteenth century by the Edinburgh polymath, Patrick Geddes, in which planning would be preceded by careful surveys and analysis in order to root proposals in a firm understanding of the local context, with urban areas being seen in relation to their regional hinterland.³⁸ Johnson-Marshall's 1966 book, *Rebuilding Cities*, summarized his views as they stood at the time of the CDA proposals, demonstrating a firm belief in comprehensive planning and the need for 'radical and complex solutions',³⁹ and arguing for what Lewis Mumford in the book's introduction termed the 'civic nucleus' as a 'social and cultural stimulus' to urban citizenship.⁴⁰ In this respect, Johnson-Marshall's approach also reflected his earlier membership of SPUR, the Society for the Promotion of Urban Renewal, which was founded in the late 1950s and called for the

³⁴ Fenton, 'Appleton's Architects', 63. For a biography, see Fair, 'Percy Johnson-Marshall'.

³⁵ Glendinning, *Modern Architect*, 114, 121-22, 205.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 228-29.

³⁷ RMJM and Percy Johnson-Marshall and Partners, *Coleraine – Portrush – Portstewart Area Plan*.

³⁸ Glendinning, *Modern Architect*, 292, 304.

³⁹ Johnson-Marshall, *Rebuilding Cities*, 19.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

‘reinvigoration of urban living’, not least through high-density inner-city redevelopment.⁴¹

‘Architecture’ and ‘planning’ were thus intimately connected, and understood holistically.⁴²

Why did Matthew and Johnson-Marshall advocate a CDA in Edinburgh? In addition to their prior experience and interests, and their social commitment, there are various possible explanations. The university certainly had a long tradition of civic engagement, evident, for example, in the way that its Settlement had organized community-building and educational activities in the city’s new suburban estates during the 1930s.⁴³ In addition, the timing may be significant. Was the CDA perhaps at least partly an attempt by Matthew to create a long-running, substantial and prominent job, at the height of enthusiasm for ‘radical urban renewal’, from which Johnson-Marshall’s new consultancy might grow? Even if it remained unexecuted, it would serve as a showcase, a didactic distillation of Johnson-Marshall’s approach and beliefs which might generate further work elsewhere, not least because the proposals were widely publicized. In this respect, the project reminds us that the discourse of architecture relies as much on unbuilt projects and publications as it does on what the historian and critic Reyner Banham dubbed ‘actual monuments’.⁴⁴ The Edinburgh scheme might thus be seen as one of a sequence of notable, even didactic ‘paper’ proposals for radical renewal that also includes SPUR’s project for the reconstruction of Boston Manor in west London as a high-density suburb (1958) and the Buchanan Report’s famous reimagining of London’s west end as a contemporary urban landscape in 1963. Certainly Appleton wished for the CDA to be an exemplary piece of contemporary urban development, referring to ‘the setting of an example of Comprehensive Planning’.⁴⁵ Pragmatically, too, the CDA might

⁴¹ Gold, *Practice of Modernism*, 95.

⁴² Gold, ‘York: a Suitable Case for Conservation’, 98.

⁴³ See e.g. Fair, “‘A Social Revolution that has Come to Stay’”.

⁴⁴ E.g. Goldhagen, ‘Something to Talk About’.

⁴⁵ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/A/3.1, Transcript of address by Edward Appleton, 7 June 1962.

provide a useful flow of work for Johnson-Marshall's fledgling practice. The initial planning phase would last for a couple of years; the complete scheme could take up to two decades. Accordingly, Clive Fenton notes that the CDA had the potential to be lucrative for those who worked on it.⁴⁶ In this respect, Miles Glendinning has argued with reference to the largely abortive involvement of Robert Matthew's architectural practice with the proposed reconstruction of Edinburgh's main hospital during the 1960s and 1970s that, though 'frustrating' in its lack of progress, the job usefully provided a regular income.⁴⁷

The avant-garde nature of the University CDA project also fits into a broader pattern of research with which Matthew and Johnson-Marshall were involved. At the end of the 1950s, Matthew had created a 'Housing Research Unit' (HRU) within the university's Architecture school, amid broader enthusiasm for architectural research in the wake of the Royal Institute of British Architects' 1958 Oxford Conference (which decisively proposed that architectural education should take place in higher education institutions).⁴⁸ Later renamed the Architecture Research Unit, the group designed and built a number of housing estates in which were explored innovative approaches to layout and design, with construction being followed by what would now be called 'post-occupancy evaluation' in the hope of influencing policy and practice more generally. Johnson-Marshall was involved with the HRU and also set up a parallel Planning Research Unit (PRU) in 1962, whose initial work included a regional study related to Livingston new town.⁴⁹ Early in the CDA project, he noted that, if built, the scheme would provide valuable research material.⁵⁰ In essence, it would offer an opportunity to conduct a detailed 'live' investigation of inner-city

⁴⁶ Fenton, 'Appleton's Architects', 67.

⁴⁷ Glendinning, *Modern Architect*, 445-46.

⁴⁸ Garcia Ferrari, Glendinning, Jenkins and Taylor, 'Putting the User First'.

⁴⁹ Glendinning, *Modern Architect*, 229.

⁵⁰ UoE CRC, GB 0237, PJM/PJMA/EUD/B/1.7, Undated typescript by Johnson-Marshall.

reconstruction, distinct from both the HRU's smaller residential developments and the PRU's regional studies, with the findings from the early phases of the project informing subsequent developments and inner-city reconstruction practice more generally.

Progress was swift. By August 1962, the proposals were sufficiently advanced to be publicly announced. In the next section, we turn to consider them.

A twentieth-century new town: planning and presenting the CDA

In February 1961, Matthew and Johnson-Marshall were advised by city officials that they should prepare the CDA plans and paperwork, which the city would in due course forward for confirmation.⁵¹ The officialese of the meeting minutes makes the extent of the city's enthusiasm hard to discern, but presumably the officials recognized that they had little to lose and potentially everything to gain by letting the university shoulder the bulk of the planning work on a shared-cost basis; a final decision could always be made later.⁵² There were also meetings with two potential private-sector development partners, namely Murrayfield, and Cotton and Clore.⁵³

Johnson-Marshall provided a detailed explanation of the plans to the university's Development Committee in February 1962. He reported that the scheme presented an opportunity to create a strong relationship between the university and the city, a task which otherwise would be complicated by the variety of buildings present, the 'muddled and congested' street layout, and the city's 'historic and visual character'.⁵⁴ Johnson-Marshall's

⁵¹ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/B/1.2, meeting of 21 February 1961.

⁵² For shared cost: UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/B/1.7, typescript 'University Developments'.

⁵³ Minutes of the University of Edinburgh Development Committee and Report, 9 February 1962. Copy supplied by Clive Fenton.

⁵⁴ Minutes of the University of Edinburgh Development Committee and Report, 9 February 1962. Copy supplied by Clive Fenton.

last point would have been informed by the passionate debates that had already been generated by the proposals for the redevelopment of George Square.⁵⁵ He brought together an examination of the university's needs – including lecture halls, buildings for academic departments, and student/staff accommodation – with a discussion of the wider setting of the campus. With reference to the shopping area along Nicholson Street, Johnson-Marshall noted that change was already in the air. One department store owner was spending £500,000 upgrading their premises; development companies were apparently interested in acquiring sites. The perceived danger of piecemeal redevelopment was one of Johnson-Marshall's key arguments. Although he had earlier described the current situation as 'inconvenient' and 'muddled', site-by-site change would nonetheless replace the 'pleasant' character of what was there with an even 'less desirable muddle'.⁵⁶ The university's buildings might end up facing the back yards of new commercial premises.

Johnson-Marshall's remedy was framed in terms of integration: 'one overall urban design, to some extent a town college in a mediaeval town, but in a twentieth century manner, as it must be to receive sanction as a Comprehensive Development Area.'⁵⁷ Much of the area between George Square and Nicholson Street would be completely cleared. From the outset, pedestrian/vehicle segregation was planned.⁵⁸ A simplified road system would serve a multi-level structure, with pedestrians circulating on elevated decks and walkways above roads, service yards and parking, making it possible to walk from George Square to Old College and beyond without touching the ground or interacting with traffic (**figs 3 and 4**). As the model reveals, the townscape at deck level would have a predominantly horizontal character. With

⁵⁵ Glendinning, *Modern Architect*, 254-55.

⁵⁶ Minutes of the University of Edinburgh Development Committee and Report, 9 February 1962. Copy supplied by Clive Fenton.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/B/1.2, meeting of May 1961.

the exception of the arts and science towers already planned for George Square, blocks would be low rise, scaled to preserve the Edinburgh skyline. They were to be laid out in a regular fashion on the deck, essentially at right angles to the traffic routes below in a layout that emphasized the scheme's decisive break from the traditional corridor street. These blocks would contain shops at pedestrian level and housing above, potentially provided by a housing association rather than the city council. Stone facings would be used across the area, blurring the boundary between the university campus and the city beyond.

[figures 3 and 4 near here]

Johnson-Marshall also emphasized the pedestrian experience, which was conceived in visual and kinetic terms (**figs 5 and 6**). The proposals were planned to offer an immersive urban environment through their changes in levels and the provision of spaces of different sizes and characters, as well as viewing balconies. They would also enhance the setting of the few historic buildings that were to survive, such as Old College and the university's McEwan Hall (used for major ceremonial events). South College Street was to be widened to improve views, while a new 'Adam Square' was to be created opposite Old College, an idea repurposed from Spence's earlier plans which now would sit above an underground car park. The aim ultimately was a 'suitable academic atmosphere' and a 'new kind of shopping centre'.⁵⁹

Edinburgh may give a lead to the rest of Britain in planning for the motor car if proposals for the comprehensive redevelopment of 125 acres of the city's university

⁵⁹ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/B/1.1, 'University of Edinburgh Comprehensive Development Area' [June 1962 typescript].

area are carried out. Incorporating the most advanced ideas on vehicle/pedestrian segregation, it will be a 20th century New Town.⁶⁰

Alexander Duncan Bell's lively perspective drawings depict a contemporary townscape planned around people and traffic. At deck level, fashionably dressed young people wander among the shops, with the signage for the escalators and car park striking a particular note of modernity.

[figures 5 and 6 near here]

The official publicity which accompanied the 1962 exhibition developed these themes. An early statement was given in June that year by Edward Appleton.⁶¹ The university had no commercial interest in this development, he said. Rather, the aim was 'an institution built into the life of the city', whose physical setting was appropriate: 'in conformity with the essential nature of a University within a city'.⁶² The university owed its origins to the actions of Edinburgh's historic administration: now it would repay that debt. Appleton noted that the coming years would see a significant number of new university buildings on the central campus: 'such buildings should not only be well-built in themselves, but [...] they should also be built in the proper setting.'⁶³ 'Setting' was understood in practical terms ('a clear and uncluttered flow for vehicular traffic') as well as design and use: the new university buildings should be seen to best effect (they 'deserve to be seen'). 'Good modern buildings' were required, the implication being that piecemeal commercial developments might not live up to the architectural standards which the university thought appropriate. Some uses were thought

⁶⁰ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/B/1.7, Undated typescript.

⁶¹ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/A/3.1, Transcript of address by Edward Appleton, 7 June 1962.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/B/1.4, 'University of Edinburgh, Comprehensive Development Area 1963', 1-2.

to be especially appropriate, namely bookshops, restaurants, and cafés: a very particular vision of modern urbanity which left little room for the area's historic uses.

Johnson-Marshall contextualized these ideas with Geddes-like references to local precedent, citing Edinburgh's eighteenth-century New Town as a historic example of successful collaboration between the public authorities and the private sector.⁶⁴ In a physical sense, too, the proposals were presented in terms of 'old established Edinburgh tradition',⁶⁵ with Johnson-Marshall pointing to the upper walkways and elevated shops of nineteenth-century Leith Street and Victoria Street.⁶⁶ At the same time, the planning strategies which underpinned the CDA proposals were entirely in tune with the multi-level pedestrian/vehicle segregation of a growing number of schemes across Britain, not least the Barbican in London, the basic planning of which Johnson-Marshall had overseen while working in London,⁶⁷ as well as SPUR's Boston Manor project. A year after the Edinburgh CDA plans were unveiled, this planning strategy would also feature prominently in *Traffic in Towns*; significantly, Johnson-Marshall and Paul Boissevain had previously collaborated with that report's lead author, Colin Buchanan, on an unbuilt scheme for Berlin which was very much on these lines.⁶⁸ There are links, too, with Johnson-Marshall's experience during the 1940s of replanning central Coventry, which similarly was conceived as a rationally ordered, pedestrianized environment, albeit one in which cars were relegated to perimeter roads and rooftop car parks rather than being pushed below a deck. The Coventry precinct was

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁵ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/A/3.1, 'Progress Report to the Development Committee' [handwritten note by Johnson-Marshall].

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Johnson-Marshall, 'The University of Edinburgh'.

⁶⁸ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/B/1.7, Undated typescript; Johnson-Marshall, *Rebuilding Cities*, 116-20, 152-53.

dominated by shopping, but the aim in Edinburgh was a more diverse urbanity, animated through the inclusion of housing; in this respect, there are clear echoes of SPUR thinking.

Although the university's involvement in driving forward these redevelopment proposals was distinctive, it was not entirely unique. In 1958, the University of Leeds commissioned a development plan from the architects Chamberlin Powell and Bon, which proposed that a large area of inner-city housing adjacent to the university campus be replaced by a mixture of new buildings for teaching and research, set on an elevated pedestrian podium.⁶⁹ However, Leeds' plans were for an expansion of the university itself, rather than the construction of a new setting for the university, as was the case in Edinburgh. However, something of the greater functional complexity and spatial ambition of the Edinburgh proposals is evident in another contemporaneous scheme, namely Hugh Wilson and Lewis Womersley's mixed-use megastructural designs for the expansion of the University of Manchester along that city's Oxford Road.⁷⁰

Public interest in the CDA was high. The 1962 brochure sold out and was reissued in 1963. The local Chamber of Commerce's journal adopted a characteristically *laissez-faire* tone, suggesting that the scheme would 'rank with the best that Europe has yet produced' and contrasting its non-local authority origins with what it dubbed the 'negative' approach of statutory planning.⁷¹ Publications brought the proposals to national and international readerships. Percy Johnson-Marshall's overview of the CDA in the *Architectural Review* in July 1964 placed it in a longer historical context,⁷² while, as we have noted, it also formed the

⁶⁹ Chamberlin Powell and Bon, *University of Leeds Development Plan 1960*.

⁷⁰ Gosling, 'Precinct Centre'.

⁷¹ John G Gray, 'A Second New Town – or a Lost Opportunity?' – offprint from July 1962 Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce Journal, UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/B/1.7.

⁷² Johnson-Marshall, 'The University of Edinburgh'.

climax of his book, *Rebuilding Cities*.⁷³ Its inclusion in the book implied that it was the inevitable culmination of the centuries of urban history explored in Johnson-Marshall's narrative. To take things forward, a 'tripartite committee' was set up, bringing together the university, the city authorities, and the chosen private-sector development company, Murrayfield. The 1962 exhibition showed how an initial phase could be delivered within five years; the rest would follow over the subsequent fifteen years (**figs 7 and 8**). The university's own new buildings at George Square were planned in accordance with the CDA's principles, with connections ready for the planned podium, and using the kind of stone facings planned for the CDA more generally (**fig. 9**), while the mid-60s revision of the masterplan for the central campus (which included a proposed 'School of the Built Environment') similarly took the CDA plans into account.⁷⁴ However, the rest of the project soon began to unravel. In the next section, we consider its fate.

[figures 7, 8, 9 near here]

Rethinking the CDA

In November 1963, Percy Johnson-Marshall reported to the university's Development Committee that the CDA proposals were being held up.⁷⁵ The ostensible cause of the delay was the city's plan for an Inner Ring Road, which as proposed by the Corporation would cut through the northern part of the intended CDA by taking the line of Lauriston Place. In this way, it would compromise the civic square which Johnson-Marshall had proposed for a site next to the McEwan Hall. Johnson-Marshall had long favoured the Cowgate valley as an alternative central cross-city route (**fig. 10**),⁷⁶ claiming that it was better supported by traffic

⁷³ Johnson-Marshall, *Rebuilding Cities*, 372-74.

⁷⁴ Glendinning, *Modern Architect*, 293.

⁷⁵ 'Report to the Development Committee', 8 November 1963. Copy supplied by Clive Fenton.

⁷⁶ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/B/1.2, meeting with City Engineer, 16 May 1961.

data.⁷⁷ Johnson-Marshall reported that the city's road proposals were unlikely to be executed, but noted that consideration of the CDA had been deferred until a Road Survey and revised plan for the whole of the city had been carried out. There was, he continued, the potential for further delay thereafter as it seemed likely that a shopping needs study was also to be carried out. Johnson-Marshall raised the prospect of a never-ending series of studies resulting in the CDA project grinding to a halt: 'a good case could be made for a car parking study, followed by others down the years.'⁷⁸ The real cause of the hold-up, in Johnson-Marshall's view, was the existence of another CDA, at St James' Square in the heart of the city centre, where a new shopping and office development was being constructed: 'It is the opinion of the Consultant that the City Planning Officer is concerned lest the rapid and successful redevelopment of the Nicholson Street Shopping Centre might affect the proposed shopping centre in the St James Square area now being promoted by the City Corporation.'⁷⁹ Significantly, Murrayfield was also involved at St James Square.

[figure 10 near here]

Matters were a little better by February 1964, when the city planning officer suggested that the CDA proposals were sufficiently detailed for submission to the Secretary of State for Scotland.⁸⁰ However, this submission never happened. One problem was that the extent to which the projected CDA would be affected by the city's roads plans remained unclear. Although it had been expected that the highways scheme would have been finalized, now it was reported that this work was expected to take several more months. The next hitch came in 1965 with the Quinquennial Review of the city's 1957 development plan. It was agreed

⁷⁷ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/A/1.1, Major Highways Working Party minutes, 9 March 1964.

⁷⁸ 'Report to the Development Committee', 8 November 1963. Copy supplied by Clive Fenton.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ 'Report to the Development Committee', 27 February 1964. Copy supplied by Clive Fenton.

that the area around Nicholson Street featured ‘obsolete development and bad layout’ and needed comprehensive redevelopment,⁸¹ and it was therefore included in the 1965 proposals as an ‘Action Area’, a designation created by recent Town and Country Planning legislation. However, in May 1968, the Secretary of State for Scotland concluded that ‘it was not a competent statutory planning proposal to delineate specific Action Areas on the maps forming part of the Quinquennial Review’.⁸² These areas were therefore removed. Instead, although the city authorities now approved draft plans for a CDA at Nicholson Street, it was decided that no formal submission to government would be made until further reports had been prepared.⁸³ These reports were to examine several aspects of the city’s development, including the potential location of tall buildings.⁸⁴ The biggest study, however, reviewed the city’s traffic proposals. The plans for a ring road had continued to attract debate, leading in 1967 to the appointment of consultants Freeman, Fox and Associates, working with Colin Buchanan. It was not until 1972 that their proposals were published, under the title ‘Edinburgh – the Recommended Plan’, recommending limited new road construction and an enhanced system of traffic management and public transport. (Johnson-Marshall had, in fact, been arguing as much for several years.⁸⁵)

In 1974, Johnson-Marshall reflected on the delays. In addition to the ‘new attitude to cars and car parking’ evident in the Recommended Plan, there had been other changes.⁸⁶ Murrayfield had been taken over by Ravenscroft Properties, and had decided to focus its attention on the St James Square scheme, given the wider uncertainties about the university’s CDA:

⁸¹ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/C/1.1, ‘South Side District Plan: Feasibility Probe’ [1974].

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/C/2.3, City of Edinburgh South Side Local Plan: Volume 2.

⁸⁵ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/A/1.1, Note of June 1964, and Working Party on Major Highway Planning – Memorandum on Car Parking, 12 January 1965.

⁸⁶ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/C/1.1, The University in the City: Memorandum by the Planning Consultant [13.12.73].

Thus, the essential reason for inviting the commercial developers to join the Joint Co-ordinating Committee was negated, i.e. that of providing a new covered pedestrian shopping and cultural centre, with high environmental standards, connected to, and providing exceptional services for, the staff and students of the University [...].⁸⁷

Furthermore, the city's shopping consultants had recently recommended that Nicholson Street should no longer be considered a major shopping destination, thus ridding the CDA of one of its main functions.⁸⁸ Instead, the street's shops would serve local needs; the wider role previously intended for the area would eventually be taken by a new suburban mall to be built near Cameron Toll. Finally, university space needs had changed. The national pressure for expansion had lessened, and government money for new university buildings was by the late 1960s increasingly hard to come by.

All of these developments were accompanied by a changed attitude to architectural conservation which now began to undermine the certainties on which the 1960s ideals of urban modernism had been constructed. In Edinburgh, as we have seen, conservationists had mobilized at the end of the 1950s in response to the university's proposals for George Square. By the end of the 1960s, they had assumed critical mass and growing influence, not least in the wake of the two-hundredth anniversary in 1967 of the creation of the New Town.⁸⁹

Although the reconstruction of the south and part of the east sides of George Square had gone ahead, further proposals for new buildings attracted fevered debate; the demolition of some properties on George Square's north side was ultimately balanced by the retention of others.⁹⁰

In 1969, a joint report by the university and Percy Johnson-Marshall fought back, suggesting once more that Nicholson Street was worn out and that it presented the opportunity to 'create

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Glendinning, *Modern Architect*, 468-77.

⁹⁰ Fenton, 'Appleton's Architects', 73.

a contemporary University environment'.⁹¹ The university also pointed to its role in architectural conservation elsewhere in the city, such as the Lawnmarket, essentially arguing that this work balanced the losses of the projected CDA.⁹² However, the critique continued, increasingly within the university as well as outside it. An article in *Country Life* in late 1969, written by a university lecturer, called the university a 'cuckoo in the nest' of the city on account of its designs on the south side.⁹³ In 1973, the booklet 'Forgotten Southside' set out a damning assessment of 'the sad neglect and seedy dereliction' affecting the area and quoted suspicious residents who believed that the university was taking over, while the university's rector (and future prime minister) Gordon Brown convened a working party examining university planning and development.⁹⁴ By this date, figures hitherto primarily associated with new building, such as Robert Matthew, were also recasting themselves as champions of preservation.⁹⁵ In addition, recently introduced streams of government funding made large-scale rehabilitation a more attractive option than hitherto.⁹⁶

In July 1973, it was decided to abandon the 'outdated' CDA proposals in favour of the new processes laid down of the 1972 Town and Country Planning Act.⁹⁷ This piece of legislation provided a range of tools, all of which were thought relevant: district plans (dealing with piecemeal development over time); area action plans (AAPs, covering comprehensive plans for improvement); and subject plans (themed around particular issues). The subject plan in this case would deal with conservation, the AAP with areas where development was expected within the next decade, and the district plan with the whole former CDA. A Joint Co-

⁹¹ UoE CRC, GB 0237/PJM/PJMA/EUD/B/2.2, 'Conservation and University Expansion' [January 1969].

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Fenton, 'Appleton's Architects', 70-71.

⁹⁴ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/C/2.2, 'Forgotten Southside', and accompanying press release.

⁹⁵ Glendinning, *Modern Architect*, 468.

⁹⁶ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/C/2.1., South Side Local Plan: Review by the University's Planning Consultant, May 1975.

⁹⁷ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/C/1.1, 'South Side District Plan: Feasibility Probe' [1974].

ordinating Committee was set up. On the one hand, its focus was familiar: there was reference to the ‘twilight’ status of the area, and to traffic problems, with traffic levels being reported to have increased by 60% since 1961.⁹⁸ At the same time, the actual strategy adopted would be quite different from that of the previous decade. The technical working group reported that the ‘retention of the maximum practicable number of buildings’ would be key to their approach.⁹⁹ Whereas the CDA proposals had envisaged the retention only of certain showpiece buildings, shown to new advantage, the everyday grain of the southside was now prized:

Part of the process of the study will be to stop unnecessary demolition and so preserve the historic character of the South Side. Without a conservation policy, the area would be left with just a few buildings of outstanding merit but without any supporting buildings of a contemporary age.¹⁰⁰

This shift in emphasis was not unusual. In Bath, for example, there was at this time growing appreciation for ‘modest’ heritage and the everyday streetscape, as well as the city’s architectural set-pieces.¹⁰¹

In addition, in the light of the recent Skeffington Report’s emphasis on the need for public involvement in the planning process, a more collaborative approach was now envisaged in Edinburgh. An exhibition was proposed, as had been the case in 1962. However, whereas the earlier exhibition had been intended to encourage ‘everyone’ to ‘subscribe to the doing’ by publicizing the scheme,¹⁰² now the intention was to gather residents’ views to inform the

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Pendlebury and Strange, ‘Urban Conservation’, 369.

¹⁰² UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/B/1.7, partial typescript lecture by Johnson-Marshall, n.d.

actual planning process itself.¹⁰³ Accordingly, a South Side Advisory Panel (SSAP) was proposed, bringing together current and prospective residents, and people with a special interest in the area.¹⁰⁴ There was also talk of forming street associations, something which was then being done in Edinburgh's New Town, while another proposal comprised the creation of an official city council committee including members of the public in a non-voting role. Finally, there would be a

Planning Workshop, open through the period of the Study, when [sic] small meetings and exhibitions could be held, information obtained, and suggestions and opinions passed directly to the planning team. The Workshop would establish an official presence in the area and demonstrate recognition of the need and desire to obtain the fullest possible public participation in the preparation of a new plan for the South Side.¹⁰⁵

The 'workshop' – which echoed the kind of consultative approach taken by Ralph Erskine to the redevelopment of Newcastle's Byker Estate – was set up in a shop on Nicholson Street in the spring of 1974, following a public meeting addressed by figures including Percy Johnson-Marshall and Nicholas Fort;¹⁰⁶ the latter had become Edinburgh's Depute Town Planning Officer in 1951 and succeeded Tom Hewitson as City Planning Officer in 1973, leading a series of heritage-oriented initiatives.¹⁰⁷ It was planned that the South Side Advisory Panel would take over the running of the Workshop from the city council, but this proved more difficult to engineer in practice than had been hoped. Nonetheless, the venture proved useful in ascertaining local opinion, even if that opinion was fairly predictable: 'the planning team

¹⁰³ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/C/1.1, 'South Side District Plan: Feasibility Probe' [1974], and report 'Public Participation (In Relation to the South Side District Plan)', 1 November 1973.

¹⁰⁴ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/C/1.1, City Planning Memorandum, 12 November 1973.

¹⁰⁵ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/C/1.1, City Planning Memorandum, 12 November 1973.

¹⁰⁶ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/C/1.1, Revision of Draft Study Programme/Progress Report, 6 May 1974.

¹⁰⁷ 'Nicholas Fort', Dictionary of Scottish Architects.

have already become aware of a deep, abiding distrust of the University and the Corporation (jointly and individually) in the South Side'.¹⁰⁸

The new district plan was produced by a team combining members of Edinburgh's planning department and Percy Johnson-Marshall's consultancy.¹⁰⁹ The latter's lengthy engagement with the area was thought to be important; consistency was valued. On the way to the new plan, an 'ideas study' included drawings, apparently in Johnson-Marshall's hand, which identified sites for rehabilitation and conservation, as well as new construction; the latter was largely to follow the historic street pattern.¹¹⁰ The subsequent 'South Side Local Plan' began with a detailed survey, highlighting that there remained a substantial though aging population in the area despite the decline associated with planning blight and slum clearance.¹¹¹ It noted the shift in attitudes towards rehabilitation and conservation of recent years, and also discussed the impact of (and opportunity presented by) administrative reform, in which the former Edinburgh Corporation would be replaced by a two-tier system of local government during 1975. A range of proposals was put forward, intended to reverse the process of deterioration and create 'planning confidence' (**fig. 11**).¹¹² At their core was the wish to create an environment satisfactory to the existing community, as well as 'the possible future community'.¹¹³ The newly created Lothian Regional Council and Edinburgh District Council would take the lead in delivery; despite public participation, this was still a 'top down' process. Perhaps most significantly, a large Conservation Area would be designated as a priority action. Traffic management would balance local needs with wider city requirements.

¹⁰⁸ UoE CRC, GB 0237/PJM/PJMA/EUD/C/1.1 'Revision of Draft Study Programme/Progress Report', 6 May 1974.

¹⁰⁹ UoE CRC, GB 0237/PJM/PJMA/EUD/C/1.1, Inter-departmental meeting minutes, 19 September 1973.

¹¹⁰ 'University of Edinburgh / Nicholson Street area: Ideas Study by the Planning Consultant', 1973, Copy supplied by Clive Fenton.

¹¹¹ UoE CRC, GB 0237/PJM/PJMA/EUD/C/2.3, 'City of Edinburgh South Side Local Plan' Volume 1, 26, 32, 97.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 202.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 203.

Through traffic would be funnelled along main roads, limited only by considerations of pollution and pedestrian safety. There would be enhanced provision for public transport on Nicholson Street itself, and a degree of pedestrianization where possible; cars would be excluded from ‘cohesive residential areas’ in a restatement of the kind of precinctual planning that had figured large in the Buchanan Report. New institutional buildings would be limited. The area’s primary function was understood to be housing, and the maximum number of homes was to be provided in a mix of new and rehabilitated buildings. Housing was understood to be central to the area’s planned revival; different tenures would be offered. There are echoes in all this once again of Patrick Geddes, and in particular Geddes’ late nineteenth-century programme of ‘conservative surgery’ in the Old Town, i.e. selective redevelopment and rehabilitation for academic and civic uses. It was as if one strain of historic Edinburgh urbanism – the boldness which earlier had led to the Adams’ bridges or the creation of the New Town and which was evident in the 1962 CDA proposals – was being replaced by another, no less Geddesian in inspiration but rather more conservative in its interventions.

[figure 11 near here]

Conclusions

Edinburgh University’s planned CDA demonstrated the classic features of early 1960s ‘radical urban renewal’, namely a belief that the inner city could be comprehensively replanned as an apparently rational landscape of roads, pedestrian decks, and new buildings. The proposals which replaced it, meanwhile, embodied the kind of more nuanced approach that came to the fore in the 1970s. Yet while showcasing the application to a particular area of ideas that were in wider circulation, potentially for didactic reasons, neither scheme was

simply an expression of the *zeitgeist*. Both were framed as responses to specific ambitions which reflected not least the involvement of the university; in the case of the 1962 CDA scheme, these ambitions included a desire to improve the setting of the campus as well as the potential for the CDA to be a ‘live’ research project. For Percy Johnson-Marshall, meanwhile, the proposals demonstrated his (changing) view of the modern city, shaped by the inter-linked practices of Planning and Architecture. They combined pragmatic and more poetic motivations, namely the need to manage traffic, a belief in the ‘civic core’, and a SPUR-like dense, lively urbanity. This last quality is conveyed well in the impressionistic perspectives of the scheme, and was even recognized by some of its critics. In 1973, the booklet ‘Forgotten Southside’ concluded that the proposals had some merit in their intention to create an integrated urban neighbourhood, but that they were misguided in seeking to demolish a swathe of the inner city to achieve that goal.¹¹⁴ The extent of the envisaged scheme may now seem incredible, but it echoed contemporaneous examples elsewhere in Britain. Within Edinburgh, the partial reconstruction of George Square during the first half of the 1960s served as a prototype for the CDA, testing all of its physical features: raised pedestrian circulation, stone-clad new buildings, and subterranean parking (**fig. 12**). The transformation there was dramatic, as conservationists lamented, and made it seem entirely plausible that a bigger scheme could yet follow. Such a radical intervention was presented as the latest embodiment of the planned urbanism of Edinburgh’s eighteenth-century New Town. It was thus possible to see the scheme as one with an appropriate local, Geddesian pedigree but which simultaneously was ‘modern’ in its ambitions and form.

[figure 12 near here]

¹¹⁴ UoE CRC, GB 0237/PJM/PJMA/EUD/C/2.2, ‘Forgotten Southside’.

Despite its much-publicized launch, the CDA did not proceed beyond the initial perspectives and models. As ‘Forgotten Southside’ noted, the CDA assumed an ‘air of legality’ but in fact was never adopted, reflecting ‘a sorry history of unlucky misfortune and incompetence’.¹¹⁵ In this respect, although the lack of progress meant that the south side never quite yielded the research projects that were initially anticipated, it nonetheless offered a salutary lesson in the messy reality of planning in practice in 1960s Britain, as well as the shifting terms of the debate. During that decade, it was not unusual for major schemes to grind to a halt as a result of the sometimes glacial pace of local (and central) government processes, as well as the stop-start nature of public funding.¹¹⁶ Many dragged on into the 1970s only to be decisively derailed by economic retrenchment and changing fashion.¹¹⁷ In Edinburgh, the ‘university’ origin of the proposals hardly helped them, given the city council’s stronger commitment to comprehensive developments elsewhere. As the south side scheme became mired in wider debates concerning traffic, shopping, and conservation, the city authorities showed little interest in progress. In 1971, the university’s staff newsletter included a lengthy article by Johnson-Marshall which laid the blame jointly at the doors of the Corporation and Murrayfield/Ravenseft: ‘both from the City and the developer’s side there was reluctance to proceed far with the detailed proposals’, he wrote.¹¹⁸ Johnson-Marshall’s perspective was not surprising, but even the local authority concluded that its actions had been unhelpful, with Volume 2 observing ‘the inability of the Corporation to take decisions of major importance relating to local and/or strategic problems affecting the South Side’.¹¹⁹ In other words, the abandonment of the 1962 proposals was not the inevitable consequence of a wider loss of faith in urban modernism, but reflected a specific set of local issues.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Gosseye, “‘Uneasy Bedfellows’”; Sharr and Thornton, *Demolishing Whitehall*, 215-48.

¹¹⁷ E.g. Edinburgh’s planned ‘opera house’, for which see Fair, *Modern Playhouses*, 150-54.

¹¹⁸ ‘C.D.A. Plans Hang Fire’, *University of Edinburgh Bulletin*, 8/1 (October 1971). Copy supplied by Clive Fenton.

¹¹⁹ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/C/2.3, ‘City of Edinburgh South Side Local Plan’, Volume 2, para 1.1

In 1978, Edinburgh's Civic Trust, the Cockburn Association, welcomed the 'thoroughly commendable' new plans for the city's south side, which it saw as 'putting into reverse the unfortunate post-war planning history of the area.'¹²⁰ They were certainly different in emphasis and more participatory than the earlier CDA proposals: urbanity was created by the existing streetscape and was something in which the existing community was understood to have a stake, rather than something to be created from scratch. Nonetheless, as that aim for urbanity shows, there was a degree of continuity, in terms of some personnel and also broad objectives, such as the need for good-quality housing and the desire to manage traffic, as well as the way that – like the CDA – the new approach could be historicized in 'local', Geddesian terms, in this case the tradition of 'conservative surgery'. In addition, some of the former CDA proposals were retained, at least for the time being, such as a 'Bridges Relief Road' (a by-pass for Nicholson Street), while other aspects of Johnson-Marshall's plan were finally enacted, including the new public square adjacent to the university's McEwan Hall.

While the local authorities were ascribed (or ascribed themselves) a key role in the revised proposals, Edinburgh University, too, sought to remain involved. Johnson-Marshall proposed the creation of a 'Town Trust', bringing together the local authorities, housing associations, and the Scottish Office.¹²¹ Indeed, Johnson-Marshall's team thought the university might need to become even more involved than hitherto. Oversight and co-ordination were

just as important within a conservation-based concept as [...] within that based on a greater degree of redevelopment. Comprehensive management will be required, and the possibility of some new organisational machinery should be considered. The

¹²⁰ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/C/1.2, Cockburn Association comments on South Side Local Plan, 1978.

¹²¹ UoE CRC, GB 0237 PJM/PJMA/EUD/C/1.2, Percy Johnson-Marshall memo, 22 October 1980.

University should reaffirm its interest in achieving an integration of town and gown.¹²²

One might conclude that what really mattered to Johnson-Marshall were the ideals of planning, order, collaboration and process, rather than the physical forms of any particular outcome. Recalling the ‘dynamic social democracy’ that Ortolano has seen in contemporaneous Milton Keynes,¹²³ Johnson-Marshall’s approach evolved in response to the changing situation, just as earlier he had shifted from public-sector practice in London to academia and consultancy in Edinburgh. The terms in which success was defined and the form that the planned environment might take had moved on, but, for Johnson-Marshall, planning as a practice was as valid as ever if progressive urban change was to be enacted. There thus remained the potential for a renewed university/city partnership, involving a range of individuals and organizations in shaping Edinburgh’s built environment, and invoking once more the historic ‘university in the city’.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the staff of the Centre for Research Collections at the University of Edinburgh for making archive material available during the difficult summer of 2020, as well as Clive Fenton for lending documents from his personal collection, and Miles Glendinning for helpful discussions. Edinburgh City Archives and the Centre for Research Collections at the University of Edinburgh kindly gave permission for the reproduction of historic material. *Planning Perspectives*’ two anonymous reviewers made useful suggestions for improvement, while John Gold provided welcome encouragement and editorial guidance.

¹²² Percy Johnson-Marshall Associates, ‘University/Nicholson Street: 1973 Review’, 18. Copy supplied by Clive Fenton.

¹²³ Ortolano, *Thatcher’s Progress*, 21.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflicts of interest were reported by the author

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