

The post-war rebuilding of Birmingham

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The problem



The second-highest tonnage of bombs dropped on a British city (one-tenth that of London; equal with Liverpool/Merseyside)

Added to pre-war identification of problem of slum housing etc





Widespread, though relatively minor,
damage – especially compared to France,
Italy, Germany and Japan!



Bomb damage as “opportunity”



THE NEW OPPORTUNITY

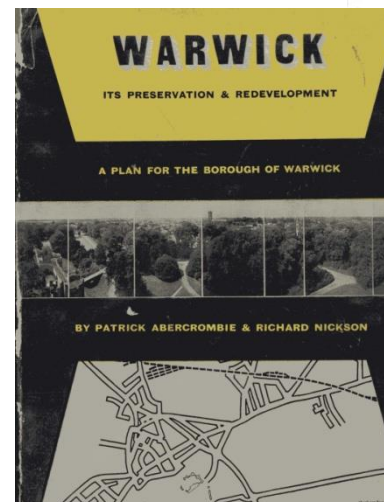
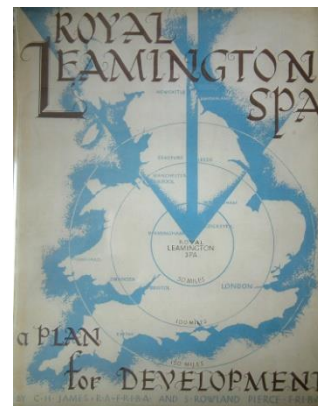
The destruction by bombing in London and many other towns again gives the chance for replanning. This opportunity must be taken. But planning must not be limited to damaged areas. The necessity for planning exists without bombing and every town must have its growth controlled. We shall have the same difficulties as in the time of Wren—divided authority, vested interests both in individual sites and systems of ownership, and the urgency for speed. To carry out a plan will need both faith and trust, and preparation now

Powerful personality

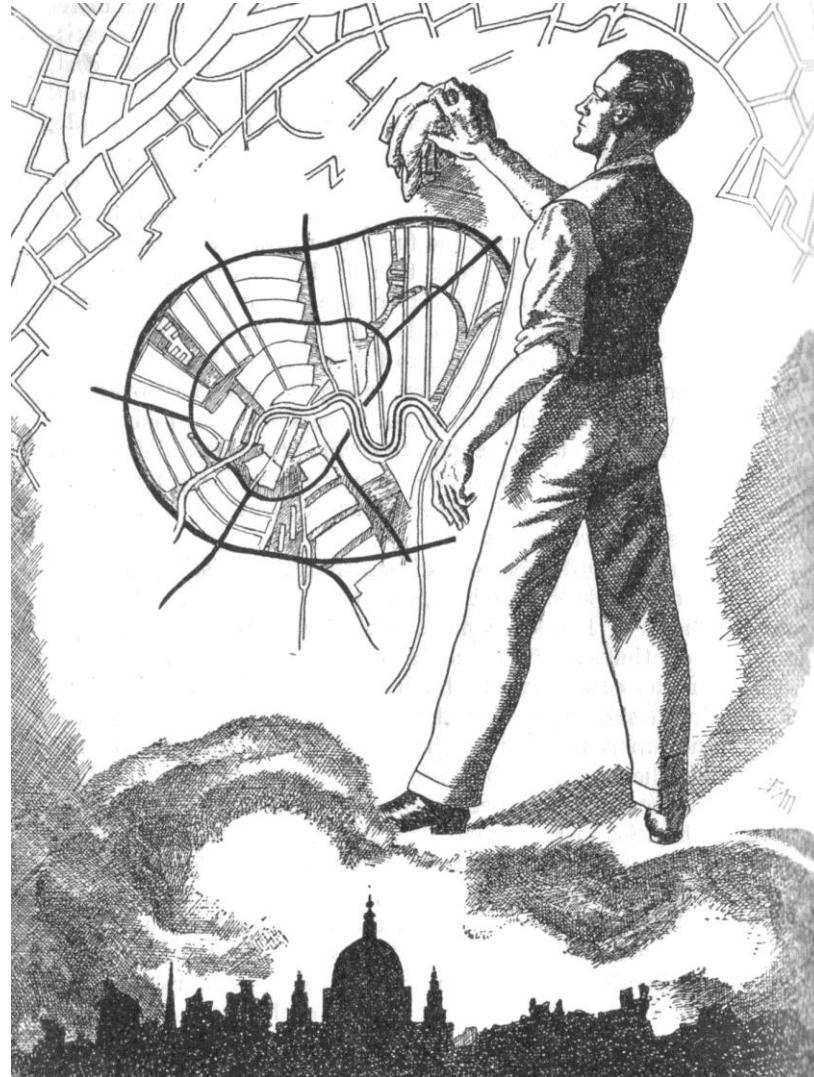
Herbert Manzoni CBE (City Surveyor and Engineer)



Decision not to commission a city-wide plan



The contemporary view of the all-powerful professional planner



Poor communication from “officials”

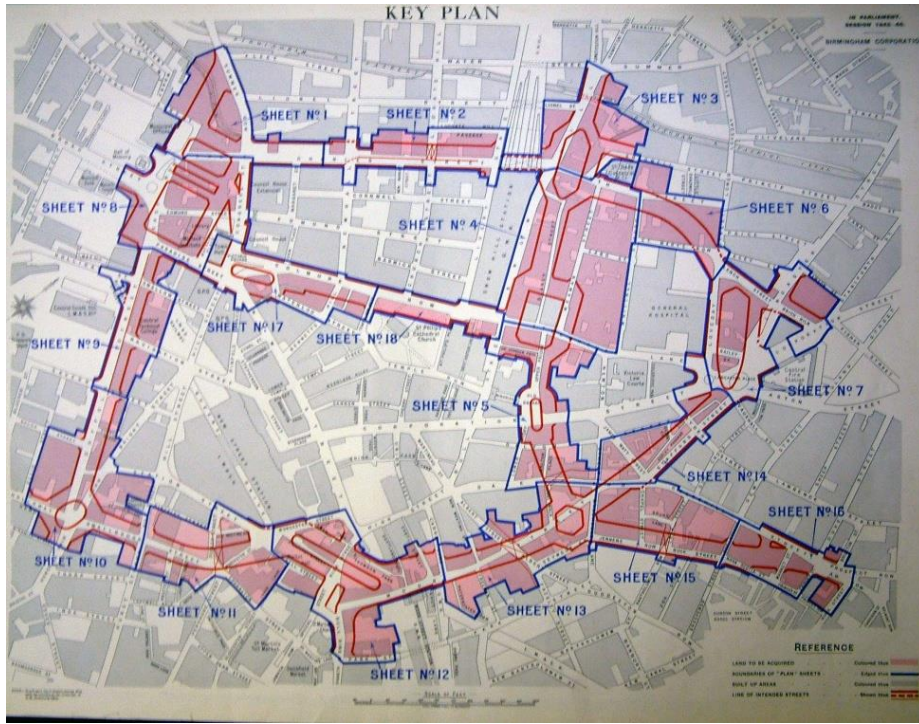


A local politician – chair of the Public Works Committee – writing in the local newspaper

The product, 1945-1973

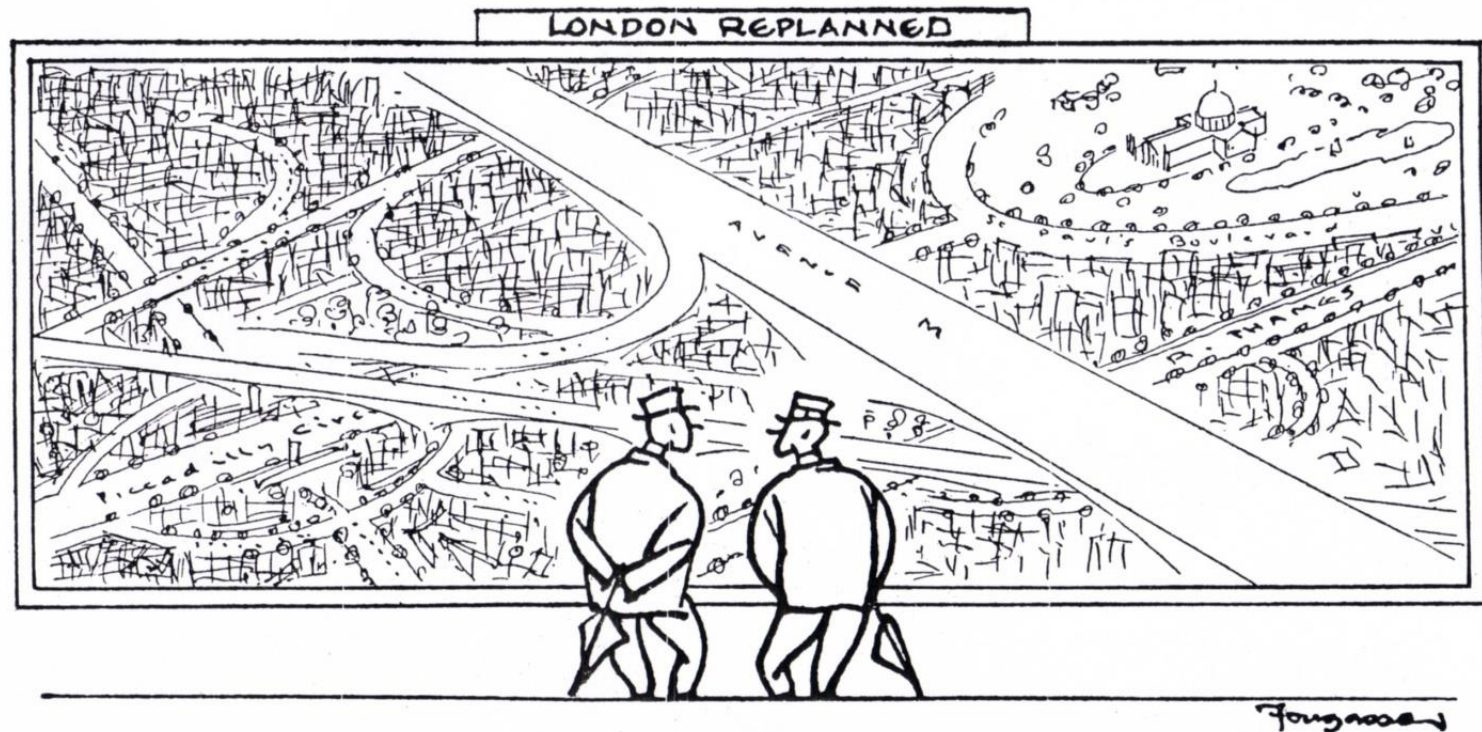
Ring road as “armature” for new city core

Piecemeal inner-city rebuilding



The dominance of roads and cars

influencing the post-war reputation of the entire city!



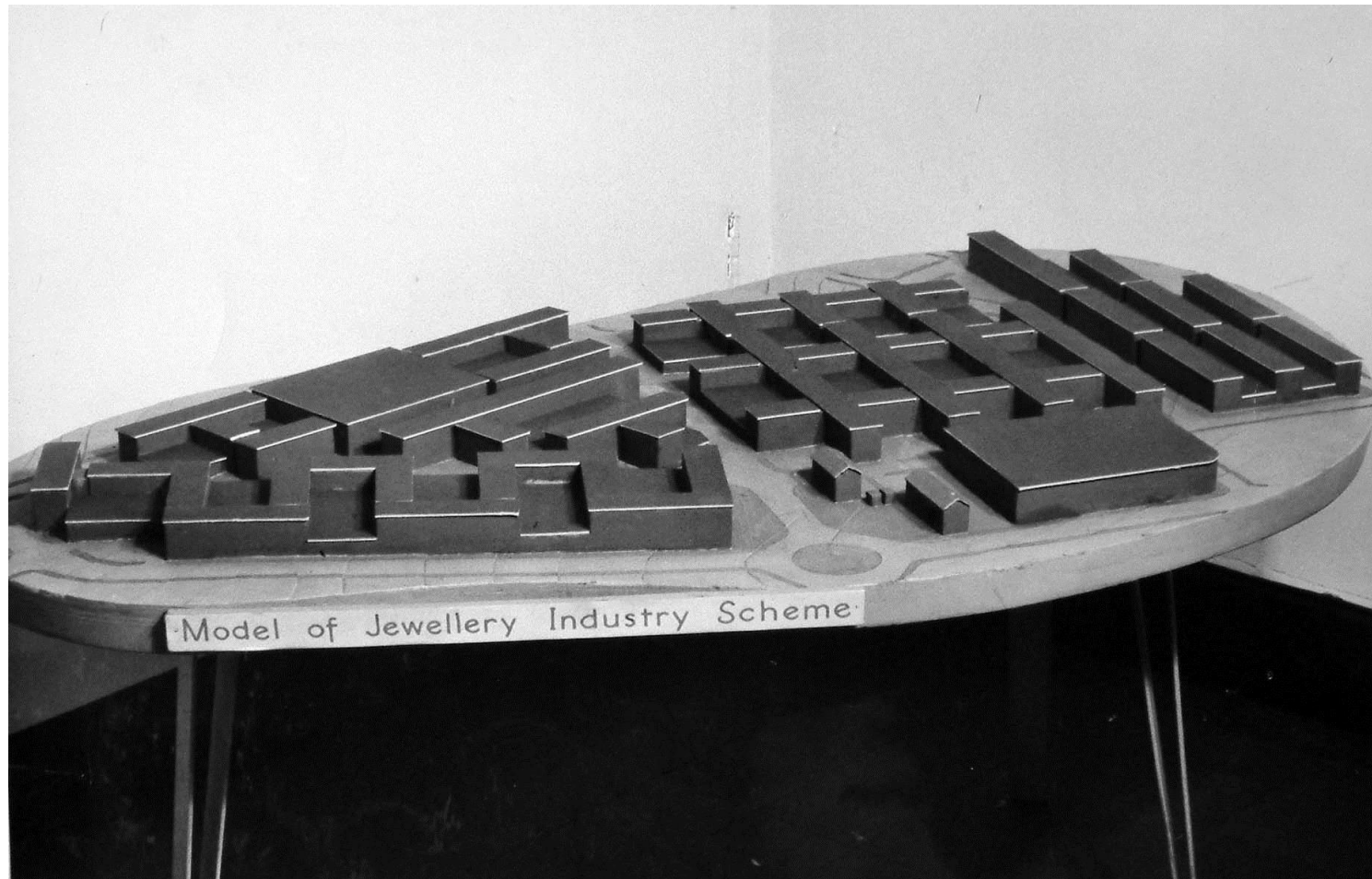
"Well, anyhow, there'd be no harm in giving it a trial."

The dominance of roads and cars

influencing the post-war reputation of the entire city!



Researching process and product now:



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Untapped resources still exist in archives (BMAG store) – though no idea of where this is meant to represent!

Researching process and product now:



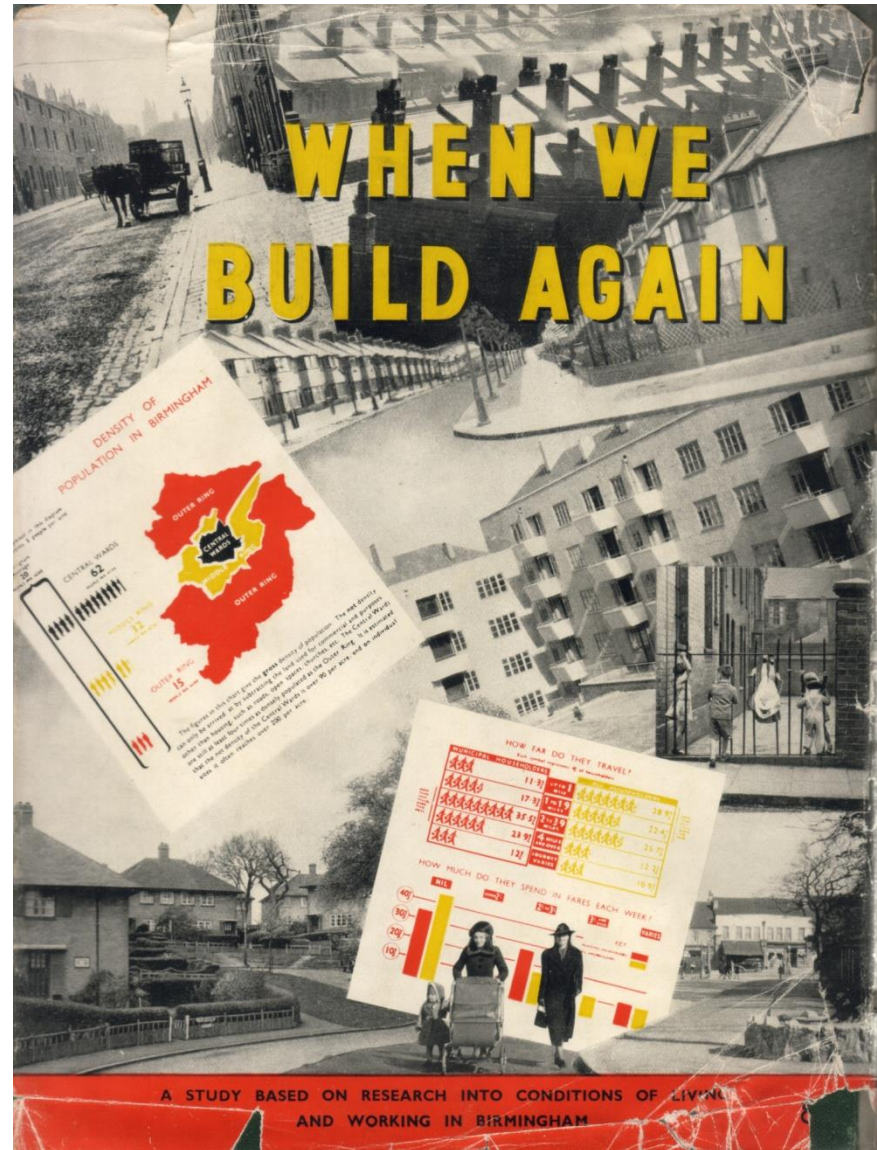
Untapped resources still exist in archives (BMAG store) – was Birmingham really close to getting a Liverpool-style cathedral in 1946? Need to access Diocesan archives!

Researching process and product now:

Reassessing the production and impact of key publications

BVT archives (much destroyed; some in city archives)

West Midlands Group archives (Birmingham University)



Who built post-war Birmingham?

David Adams

Birmingham School of the Built Environment

Researching process and product now: *residents'* perspectives

- 'Walk alongs' with residents who had lived and worked in Birmingham during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.
- Re-evaluation of previously-collected 'oral history' interviews Birmingham residents.
- Interviews with post-war architects, James Roberts and John Madin (Birmingham).

See Adams (2011, 2012a, 2012b).

Researching process and product now: *residents'* perspectives

Bombing as an “opportunity” to rebuild?

“The *Birmingham Despatch* that used to be on the corner of Corporation Street ... [I can remember that] they did a series of artist impressions with what they were going to do with the Bull Ring [and other areas] [I] think er people like my mum and dad were looking forward to it [B]y the '60s there was no rationing, and people were wealthier and [Harold] Macmillan said ‘you’d never had it so good’ [*sic*] and it was true in a way” (Steven born 1949, interviewed 19.04.08).

Researching process and product now: *residents'* perspectives

Bombing as an “opportunity” to rebuild?

“... [I]t [Birmingham city centre] was all very tatty ... if you were coming in to Birmingham from the south; if you were coming up the A38 from Bristol or somewhere like that, it wasn't a particularly salubrious area to see ... [people] would have the niceness, and come over the Lickey Hills and through Northfields ... [but] it would get progressively worse as got through Selly Oak and through to Bristol Street, it got worse and worse as you came into town” (Steven, born 1949, interviewed 19.04.08).

Researching process and product now: *residents'* perspectives

Reactions to the “product”?

Mood of public **excitement** and **curiosity** towards the development projects:

Peter, who was born in 1930, recalled that there was a feeling of **enthusiasm** towards the extent of the rebuilding during the 1960s:

“[It had gone] from Victorian and bombed buildings if you like, to suddenly these vast building projects. Not only these buildings but also the inner ring road because this came about in chunks, and with each section ... you know, brilliant! You thought, “what has happened here?!” ... there was these great façades of glass and concrete” (Peter, born 1930, interviewed 07.03.08).

Researching process and product now: *residents'* perspectives

Reactions to the “product”?

For others, however, their ‘mental map’ of the city was, to some extent, disrupted by the newly-erected buildings:

“All the change that took place, so quickly – [points] that Needless Alley was a joy, all little shops, erm, yes, very old, ‘Victoriana’, all haberdashery, poky little shops, specialist music shop that you hardly dare to go in, that you daren’t go in but they brought it all down and they put all these bigger and much taller modern buildings in” (Kathleen, born August 1950, walking interview 24.05.12).

Researching process and product now: **professional** perspectives

John Madin on Manzoni and the “process” of re-planning?

“I suggested to Manzoni that there were only about three freehold interests [within the city centre] and ***what he should do is do a comprehensive plan for the whole of the centre of Birmingham within the ring road***. But I thought here was a ***great opportunity***. ... But he didn’t go along with this and so I, I’ve been frustrated for the last fifty years over this ... ***I just think [Manzoni] hadn’t got the architectural concept experience to realise what you could do with a three dimensional master plan for the centre of the city***, I just don’t think he realised how important it was to do this!” (Madin, interviewed 2009).

Researching process and product now: **professional** perspectives

James Roberts on Manzoni and the “process” of re-planning?

“Manzoni I got to know very well but he was, he was, he had no interest in architecture at all, [no interest in] aesthetics at all, he wasn’t interested in people or pedestrians. It was cars, lorries, getting things through and out again and so he did considerable damage to the heart of Birmingham I think but there should have been a lot of tender loving care after the war” (Roberts, interviewed 2009).