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# Stories from the 'Big Heart of England': architects' narratives of the post-war reconstruction of Birmingham

David Adams



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### Abstract

The period of concentrated reconstruction within British city centres in the years following the end of the Second World War continues to attract the interest of a range of academic disciplines. Many studies of the post-war reconstruction of British towns and cities have displayed a particular fascination with nationally-important planners and architects and there have been some recent significant oral accounts that have sought to chart the influence of prominent architects in shaping post-Second World War urban environments. Drawing specifically on recently-collected oral history narratives from James Roberts and John Madin, two of the most important locally-trained post-war architects to shape the reconstruction of Birmingham (UK), this paper explores the extent to which their artistic visions for the heart of Britain's second city were tempered during the design and development process. These narratives point to both the production-side adaptations the architects had to make to their design intentions and also the way social practices of those using the buildings altered (and continue to alter) their original design conceptions. Bringing such stories into view works against some oral and biographical accounts which argue that post-war architecture is the result of the achievement of a single architect.

**Key words:** Birmingham, post-war replanning, interviews, John Madin, James Roberts.

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# Stories from the 'Big Heart of England': architects' narratives of the post-war reconstruction of Birmingham

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## Introduction

The period of intense municipal renewal and reconstruction within British city centres in the years immediately following the end of the Second World War continues to seize the attention and thoughts of a range of academic disciplines including planning historians, urban historians and planners (Shapely, 2010; Adams, 2011; Larkham 2011; Flinn, forthcoming). More particularly, much writing on the post-war reconstruction of British towns and cities has displayed a certain fixation with the individual contributions of nationally-important planners and architects associated with this period of urban change (see, for example, Cherry, 1989; Dix, 1981; Essex and Brayshay, 2005; Hall, 1995; Higgott, 1991-2; Jones, 1998; Lambert, 2000). Within this context, there have been some significant oral and biographical studies with prominent British (and European) architects and planners that seek, in part, to understand their design intentions behind the production of post-Second World War urban built environments (Voldman, 2000; Levine, 1996; Gold, 1997, 2007; Warburton, 2004).

It is argued in this paper that the use of oral history as a way for critically apprehending the importance of the individual 'visionary' contributions made by post-war architects should be approached with a degree of caution (cf Proctor, 2006). This paper draws explicitly on recently-collected oral history narratives from James Roberts and John Madin, two architects who have been widely acknowledged as having a profound influence on the post-war redesigning of the heart of Britain's second city (Foster, 2005; Larkham, 2007), to suggest that their artistic visions were fundamentally modified during the design and development process. This connects to what Sarfatti-Larson (1993, page 23) has referred to as the "state of heteronomy" associated with architecture and the way in which the making of buildings unavoidably involves the co-production of different actors fused into complex site-specific contexts. This is a perspective that is somewhat underdeveloped in some traditional accounts of architecture (Knox, 1984, 1987; Bentley, 1999; Imrie, 2003, 2007). Drawing inspiration from earlier studies within urban and cultural geography which examine the significance of social practices in shaping the meaning of architectural designs (Goss, 1988; Lees, 2001), this paper goes on to argue that oral history narratives have the potential to shift the focus of attention away from the individualist perspective of the architect. Taken in this way, it is suggested that these stories begin to highlight the range of social practices associated with the production and consumption of a building (Graham and Thrift, 2007; Edensor, 2011; Jacobs and Cairns, 2011; Strebel, 2011).

The example of post-war Birmingham is particularly significant in relation to discussions surrounding the production and consumption of Modern architecture: the vast programme of realised building projects that occurred during the mid-twentieth century is representative of how Modernist-inspired building processes and architectural ideologies coalesced to become part of the language of reconstruction in the years following the end of the Second World War (Adams, 2011). Of course, cities all over the world (and in the UK) transformed themselves with plans and buildings conceived within the vanguard of a modernist vision

and, whilst there has been much written about post-war Birmingham (see Borg, 1973; Higgott, 2000; Larkham, 2007) including an official history (Sutcliffe and Smith, 1974), there have been some calls for a reassessment of the influence of actors that shaped the design and rebuilding of Britain's second city (Adams and Larkham, 2012; Larkham, 2007).

Led by Herbert Manzoni, the city's Surveyor and Engineer (and its architect and planner in all but name from 1935 until the 1950s), the city of Birmingham perhaps represents perhaps an unusual example of post-war replanning in the UK – there was a period of intense activity that produced the reconstruction of large sections of the bombed city centre, an inner ring road necessitating a private Act of Parliament, and the continuation of large-scale slum clearance begun before the war – yet, unlike many other British towns and cities, there was no official 'plan' for the city, or even the heart of the city centre. Even though a wide range of architects was active in Birmingham during the reconstruction period, this paper specifically focuses on the work of James Roberts and John Madin, as their buildings dominated particular quarters of the 'un-planned' city centre, and their work has been acknowledged as being closely reflecting the progression of the Modern Movement between 1950 and 1975 (Clawley, 2011). In particular, they were responsible for the design of three of the city's most noteworthy and perhaps finest examples of modernist post-war architecture, the Smallbrook Ringway, the Rotunda, and Birmingham's Central Library.

In the following sections, I outline the importance of the role of different design professionals in shaping the two architects' design conceptions for these examples of post-war architecture. Finally, I use their narratives to explore how the pursuit of autonomy through design practice was fundamentally compromised because of complex project-specific contexts in which their designs were created and the types of social practices of those who used their buildings.

## **The research approach**

As has been suggested, Gold's (1997, 2007) biographical approach to planning and architectural history deliberately works through the use of oral history to elicit information from prominent post-war figures that would not be easily obtainable through 'official' archival sources, thus revealing highly-illuminating and informative accounts of how British towns and cities were reshaped during the post-war period (see also Levine, 1996; Warburton, 2004). The results have also been assiduously arranged to support the interview data: the views of those who were there – key players who and some lesser-known figures – who redesigned so much of Britain during the post-war period. The heavy reliance on interview material is a huge strength of this body of work and these accounts provide propinquity to the familiar narratives of the evolving profession, reconstruction changing to renewal, the rise and fall of the high-rise, decline of CIAM and Team X, and so on (Larkham, 2008). Although these narratives make positive advances towards exploring the inter-professional relationships that existed between different 'agents of change' in shaping architectural conceptions, it is argued here that oral history interviews have the potential to further explore *how* the actions of architects associated with the production of the built environment were entwined in complex ways (Larkham, 2011). Whilst Gold openly admits that the architect interview is "wholly unreliable" in terms of promoting a particularly individualist and visionary perspective (Gold, 1997, p. xxii), he also recognises that oral sources have the potential to further explore how the post-war transformation of British cities rested on a coalition of other factors in the design and development process (Gold, 2007, p. 14).

Anthony Sutcliffe's (1967-9) detailed interviews with prominent figures closely involved with the post-war reconstruction of Birmingham (including Madin and Manzoni), carried out as part of his official history commission, provide a useful starting-point for an exploration of how the city centre evolved during the mid-twentieth century. However, the interviews

conducted for this paper offered a space for a more reflective analysis. In this sense, the interviews moved more towards an approach which elicited more conversational and contemplative narratives (Portelli, 1981); by exploring and reflecting on the architects' personal backgrounds, training and major career episodes, the interviews were an attempt to capture their feelings about the changing landscape of Birmingham during the last sixty years. Of course, as with any oral history, these views are partial, biased or selective in that the interviewees might be promoting their own actions and establishing their own significance in this new history (Proctor, 2006). That the perspective of the present day informs the oral history interview is almost always apparent and this relates to wider criticisms that any retelling of the past is conflated into a more palatable component, hindering any effort to re-position the narrative into historical time (Hobsbawm, 1997; Thompson, 1988). This paper argues that the architects' oral histories of post-war Birmingham do not stand for 'pure recall'; rather, the ways in which urban change was remembered ensured that the narratives were contextualised in relation to how the design and development process evolved. Furthermore, at a time when the appearance of the reconstruction-era commercial heart of the city is being radically reconfigured once more, with refurbishment and re-cladding, and even demolition all having a cumulative effect (Larkham, 2007), it is suggested that these narratives provide an important insight into how and why these buildings came into being.

These stories – interpreted in a relational way, such that memories are located in relation to other past events – have, at least in part, the potential to expose what Sarfatti-Larson (1993, p. 23) refers to as the “heteronomous conditions” of the design and development process, in which the makings of the buildings involves the co-production of different actors that come together in a “creative synthesis” (see, for example, Sarfatti-Larson, 1993; Bentley, 1999; Imrie, 2003, 2007; Imrie and Street, 2009). The oral history narratives of James Roberts and John Madin are used to provide an insight (albeit highly localised) into the different ways in which both architects approached the task of rebuilding during the post-war period, thus revealing a dynamic unfolding relationship that cannot be separated from the specific context in which they were embedded (Imrie, 2003; 2007). This is a view that is arguably underdeveloped in some biographical accounts that represent post-war architects as the “heroic form giver” (Bentley, 1999, p. 28) deploying his or her creative talents to produce the built environment (see, for example, Levine, 1996; Warburton, 2004).

Research based in urban and cultural geography can be instructive in moving forward from this position. Knox (1984, p. 114), for example, has argued that the study of architecture, traditionally at least, given too much analytical attention to physical edifices created by architects, with the consequence that there has been limited analysis of the “social relations that surround the production and meaning of buildings” (see also Knox, 1987; Goss, 1988). Similarly, Lees (2001) has underlined the necessity of moving away from understanding buildings as cultural symbols in the urban landscape and to give greater critical engagement with the lived experience of architecture in order to provide a “thicker, more ‘real’ discourse” (Ford, cited in Lees, 2001, p. 78). In this sense, Lees suggests that buildings are not just “passive stages for the rehearsal and representation of predetermined social scripts, but a space that becomes alive and integral ... connected to and mutually constitutive of the meanings and cultural politics being worked out within it” (Lees, 2001, pp. 71-2). Her approach is also reminiscent of Lefebvre's (1991) distinction between lived and conceived spaces, and following Lees's call, a number of other notable studies have also explored the reality of a building is as much the result of the way spaces are appropriated by those who use (and maintain buildings) as it is the result of the ‘vision’ of the individual architect (see, for example, Jacobs, 2006; Graham and Thrift, 2007; Edensor, 2011; Jacobs and Cairns, 2011). Situated within this context, it is considered that Roberts's and Madin's stories can also begin to contribute to wider debates concerning the need to move away from the common conception of buildings as being the result of a single achievement of an all-powerful architect (Strebel, 2011).

The interviews were carried out in December 2009<sup>1</sup> and varied in length between three and four hours and supplemented by several detailed telephone conversations over a period of two months. With the permission of the interviewees, the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Supporting documentation, such as architectural drawings, plans, and photographs were also acquired where relevant. The interview transcripts are reproduced as Appendices 1 and 2. Unless otherwise attributed, all subsequent quotations are drawn from these interviews.

### **Different ways of seeing? The role of architects and other design professionals**

Any attempt to explore the architectural concepts behind Birmingham's post-war architecture is, to some extent, continually constrained by the messy working arrangements associated with architectural practice. As a qualified architect, Madin began his first practice, John H. D. Madin (1950-1962) from his parents' home in Moseley, and when asked to recall his specific involvement in the division of labour within his early practice Madin suggested:

"The key thing is that I always said to every client, "But if you want me to design this building I must design the whole thing. I don't want just to do the sort of plan and the exterior of the building I want to, I need to do the whole thing" and so with the Chamber of Commerce<sup>2</sup> for instance, I designed the whole interior, even the carpets and all the furniture ... I think that's the important thing is that you design the complete building including the furniture".

Whilst this is suggestive of a very hands-on and personal approach to the management of a building's design, Madin, however, suggested that, following the formation of John H.D. Madin & Partners in 1962, the evolution of the design concept involved a certain level of co-operation between different individuals and teams in his firm:

"Basically I had three teams. The design team – the initial design team, the people who did the detailed design and the working drawings, and the people who supervised the work on site.<sup>3</sup> So each of the buildings that I designed like the Birmingham Central Library – we had a team of probably ten people working on the initial concept ... being fed in with all this information which we'd been researching and some of these people were doing research as well as myself, you know, they were going off here and looking at things. So that was the design team. Then there was this working drawing team and dealt with the details, but I was primarily concerned because I like doing it, I liked [to act] as the boss so I could decide, I would design with this team. I had other people supervising and other people doing the detailed working drawings. But we all worked as a team obviously. I was designing it; but we all worked as a team and the ideas came up in the team as well as from me personally".

In a comparable vein, James Roberts, during his recollection of his ideas for the future Smallbrook Ringway – this was the first section of the inner ring road, which was opened in 1960 – stressed the importance of the influence of the design-related contributions made by others during the conception stage. Interestingly, three large sites were advertised in 1957 on the Smallbrook Ringway, and one of the offers, from John Laing

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<sup>1</sup> John Madin died in January 2012 as this paper was being prepared for publication.

<sup>2</sup> In the early 1960s, the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce building on the Calthorpe Estate, was one of the first buildings to receive the Royal Institute of British Architects' Bronze Medal.

<sup>3</sup> Clawley (2011) suggests that, during his time at the John Madin Design Group (1962-1967), Madin initiated every project and, even after the initial ideas were forwarded on to the 'Detail' section for working drawings to be produced, Madin remained vigilant over their development.



&Son, working alongside the developer Jo Godfrey and his company JLG Investments Ltd, proposed to redevelop the entire block of three sites. The south side of the ring road was designed by Roberts as sinuous and narrow office block with ground-floor shops and he suggested that:

“So having won the whole scheme [for Smallbrook Ringway and then the Rotunda] I had to allow [the developers] to be involved in the construction drawings which meant that I was ... down to just pure design. But [even] then, I wasn't given the full design scope and that in fact one of my assistants, a chap who [was employed] as a job architect for this scheme – a chap called Peter Bailey; he was a brilliant designer.... But the, the concrete illuminations on the front [of the Smallbrook Ringway] were part of [the developers'] proposal but they really ... they couldn't wreck the whole concept”.

The developer Jo Godfrey (operating as JLG Investments Ltd) also responded to the advertisement of a site at Moor Street / Bull Ring, and this eventually became the Rotunda (Larkham, 2007). The design of the Rotunda involved some very detailed negotiations with Godfrey and also Wimpey Homes:

“It started off as a smaller building but I spoke to J.L. Godfrey, the developer chap was in my office and I told him, “Look I think we can go a bit higher Joe with this Rotunda building”. He said, “What really?” and he was already paying the highest ground rent for the site. So the idea of putting some more floors on, that was very great idea for him. He said, “I'll ring up Wimpey straight away”, because Wimpseys was financing [the venture]. And so he rang up the managing director of, of a Wimpseys on the spot then and said, “I've got Jim Roberts with me. Yeah. And Jim's idea is to go a bit higher with that. What do you think about that?” “OK”. “Yeah it's alright. Yeah. OK. Right we'll do it, goodbye OK”.

In other words, it is suggested that the design concepts for three of Birmingham's most important post-war buildings (Foster, 2005) required a substantial collective effort and only the working details were likely to be the result of individual contributions. This sense of collaboration and teamwork within a post-war architectural practice is, to some extent, corroborated when we consider Peter Smithson's recollection of his wife Alison's work on the design of their reputation-establishing school at Hunstanton (completed in 1954), insisting that “who made what specific drawing isn't actually important, because it's a collective achievement” (Smithson, interviewed by Brodie, 1997). In his consideration of the vividly illustrated perspective drawings and colourful maps produced to accompany post-war reconstruction plans, Larkham (1997) has also drawn attention to the layered ways in which architectural images were produced: the concept was that of the eminent consultant, most of the images were drawn up by the perspectivist, and it could well be that very junior office staff would have set out the skeleton of the perspective, with a named artist adding colour and finishing touches (see Myerscough-Walker, 1958). It is thus difficult to discern whether there was a ‘truth’ underlying the images and, if so, whose conception is being examined.

Proctor (2006) suggests that collaboration within an architectural practice poses particular questions regarding the artistic purpose behind a building, and more problematically, he argues that the use of oral history does not easily assist with untangling the different contributions made by designers or engineers with potentially differing intentions – the architect either does not recall, or perhaps wilfully stifles, his or her individual role in favour of the outcome of the collaborative process.<sup>4</sup> This collaborative attitude was also prevalent elsewhere in the post-war period in Britain, with the popular culture in architecture of teamwork and, to some extent, the subjugation of individual freedom, embodied in the

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<sup>4</sup> Proctor (2006) suggests that Cedric Price, who described himself as ‘anti-architect’ of the Fun Palace project in East London (1965), actively dispersed authorship to other collaborators.

names of firms such as Architects' Co-Partnership, Team X, the nature of work in public offices such as Coventry City Council's Architects' Department where responsibility for a project was given to small groups of council officers, and collaborative projects such as the development of the CLASP industrialised system of construction (Bullock, 2002).

Whilst some traditional accounts argue that post-war architects had an isolated and personal set of views (Hasegawa, 1992; Bullock, 2002), these oral history stories suggest that the relationship between actors in the design and development process was substantially more blurred. Lefebvre notes that the process of producing space such as the post-war reconstruction of elements of Birmingham's city centre transcends the role of one professional, to the extent that the alleged freedom to design, as Madin and Roberts both point out, was influenced by contributions made by others – including the demands of the client (Lefebvre, 1991). These narratives also resonate with Sarfatti-Larson's (1993) contention that architects have to defer to the client and their requirements rather than working as autonomous visionaries. In this sense, client budgets determine the time that can be spent on the responding to requests for the cost-effective maximisation of rentable space underpin the architecture of a building (Faulconbridge, 2009). Madin, for example, has suggested that:

“Some architects and planners put themselves over as the great creator but this isn't really so. They rely very largely on their team. Many buildings are spoilt by architects designing a building their client can't afford and then having to cut back, so that underneath the desire to create fine buildings one must have a basic idea as to whether the client can afford it and whether he can ultimately pay for it” (J. Madin, speaking in the BBC documentary, *Six Men*, broadcast in 1965).

Interestingly, perhaps, these narratives also connect strongly with contemporary ideas of heteronomy embedded in the production of architectural designs (see for example, Imrie, 2003, 2007; Faulconbridge, 2009; Imrie and Street, 2009; Jones, 2009). Particularly arresting, perhaps, is how Roberts's and Madin's stories relate to Yaneva's (2009) pragmatist account of architecture and the notion of architectures 'in the making' as opposed to architecture that has already been 'made'. Following a detailed study, Yaneva shadowed architects and other designers in the office of Rem Koolhaas (OMA Koolhaas and Mau, 1995) as they 'made' the extension proposals for the Whitney Museum, New York. Yaneva's study reiterates in detail what Rem Koolhaas himself noted about contemporary architectural design practice: that it operates in a 'regime of complexity' and that any effort to tease out the original design intention is inherently compromised due to the ways architects are engaged, in complex, interdisciplinary teams of professionals in the negotiation of design outcomes (OMA Koolhaas and Mau, 1995; Till, 2009).

## **Tensions between ideal and compromised realities**

### *Compromised visions*

According to Proctor (2006), several biographical accounts and oral history narratives exploring post-war architecture tend to over-emphasise the creative and visionary role of individual architects and the importance of artistic endeavour in shaping their practices and designs. Warburton's (2004) biography of Ernő Goldfinger, for example, assumes that this architect's intensity of character and willingness to stamp their artistic personality on their projects justifies the use of a biographical approach in his architectural history (see also Levine, 1996). There are many versions of this argument, including Le Corbusier's contention that “the architect, by the arrangements of forms, realises an order which is a pure creation of his spirit” (Le Corbusier, 1986, p. 5; see also Le Corbusier, 1925). This representation of architects is, in part, reflective of what Sarfatti-Larson (1993) refers to as

the philosophy of architecture in which the creation of a 'pure' artistic vision is the central motivating force for architects (see Bentley, 1999; Vidler, 1999; Imrie and Sweet, 2009). For Sarfatti-Larson (1993, p. 14), however, architecture and its practitioners are caught in a "permanent contradiction" between, on the one hand, the pursuit of autonomy through design practice, and, on the other hand, the realisation that its making becomes inherently compromised because of complex project-specific contexts in which architectural designs are 'made'.

Drawing on Sarfatti-Larson's (1993) ideas, it could be reasonably argued that both James Roberts's and John Madin's architectural designs – at least for the centre of Birmingham – were shaped by a mixture of their personal artistic ambitions, the design contributions made by other design professionals, and the effects of certain other site-based constraints. James Roberts, for example, lucidly recalled how the bombing raids of 1940 had left a particularly deep and resonant impression and an imprint that seemingly informed his later architectural conceptions. He vividly remembered observing the bombing raids of 1940 when he was stationed as a "fire watcher" in the clock tower of Birmingham's Council House and how this had influenced his initial architectural design of the Rotunda.<sup>5</sup>

"I was up there [in the observation post when there was] one of the worst bombing raids Birmingham ever had and from that position I could see Coventry going up and you could see all the search lights going on over at Coventry and you could see all the anti-aircraft fire and all, and everything going on so that why I was able to say, "It's going for Coventry tonight, or they, they're coming here sort of thing". [In] those particular days the Germans used huge, ... phosphorus I think it is, flares, but they, they were big parachutes about ooh a good twenty foot, twenty foot big parachutes and these things they dropped over the centre of Birmingham which you don't hear about these days ... they put right up in the sky there and they, the whole of Birmingham was totally white and totally exposed, not a shadow in the whole place, the whole of the city was lit up. ...[and] part of the, part of the [initial designs for the Rotunda], well it sounds ridiculous [but] from the top of that Council House tower you could see the Lickey Hills, the clock tower [i.e. Birmingham University], and you could see right into the distance, right over to Coventry, right over to the south, big open spaces, and from the level I was at I thought, "Wouldn't it be a wonderful idea to get a vertical feature at the top of the Bull Ring at the end of the ring road" and from where you get a similar view that I'd got about the same level".

During the early war years, both Roberts and Madin also developed a burgeoning interest in studying architecture and their experiences of studying at the Birmingham School of Architecture also had a profound effect on how their respective architectural visions were moulded.<sup>6</sup> When asked whether the School was associated with a certain style or approach to architecture, both Roberts and Madin recollected the teaching of a particularly influential lecturer at Birmingham School of Architecture, George Drysdale,<sup>(7)</sup> and Roberts, in particular, could remember with deep affection Drysdale's disciplinarian approach to teaching of *Beaux-*

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<sup>5</sup> Returning to Birmingham following a time serving with the Royal Engineers in India and Iraq, Madin found the city to be in "terrible state, bombed out buildings, [with] sites in New Street and Corporation Street used for second-hand cars" (J. Madin, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Some years later, in an interview with Anthony Sutcliffe, Madin ranked the School as being 'one of the big three' [in the country], the others being Liverpool and the AA [Architectural Association] (Madin in Sutcliffe, 1967-70).

<sup>7</sup> James Roberts remembered George Drysdale's design for the church of Our Lady and Saint Hubert in Warley, West Midlands. He recalled it being a distinguished building of some considerable scale and with a "huge white cross on the campanile".

Arts architecture. More specifically, he recalled Drysdale's dictate of the need to "think big" and this proved to be hugely inspirational in shaping Roberts's later ideas. In addition, Madin recalled a particularly seminal moment in 1948 when a senior lecturer suddenly informed students that training in traditional architecture was being abandoned. Madin claimed that "this certainly had an influence on us [students], and the same reform was made in Liverpool and at the AA at about the same time" (Madin in Sutcliffe, 1967-70). Following this apparently significant episode, during his final year of studies Madin travelled through Scandinavia, and was tremendously impressed with the Swedish version of Modernism, especially the functional buildings he saw in Stockholm (Clawley, 2011; C. Madin, 2011), which had already informed British public architecture – most notably, perhaps, Norwich Town Hall and Wolverhampton Civic Hall.<sup>8</sup> He continued to travel extensively and the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, in particular, proved to be influential in determining his architectural visions – especially Wright's consideration for a building's relationship to its natural surroundings (C. Madin, 2011).

Despite his interest in Swedish Modernism, Madin pointed out during the interview that he was left incredibly frustrated by Herbert Manzoni's decision not to proceed with a comprehensive reconstruction plan for the heart of the city. On leaving school in 1940 at the age of 16, John Madin found employment with the City Council, and he was personally encouraged by Manzoni to pursue an architectural career at the Birmingham School of Architecture (Clawley, 2011). Some time later, however, this sense of cordiality appeared to diminish as a result of their divergent views on comprehensive planning. On several occasions, Manzoni forthrightly asserted that Birmingham's redevelopment plans predated the bombing raids of the Second World War, and for him, the relatively limited and scattered nature of the bomb damage ensured that there was no need for a city-wide reconstruction plan (see Sutcliffe, 1967-9; Sutcliffe and Smith, 1974). Madin believed that this was an approach that lacked foresight and vision:

"The city itself owned quite a lot within the ring road and I thought this was a great opportunity to produce a plan ... 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!"<sup>(9)</sup>

Madin was also keen to acknowledge that his original idea of having the Central Library dressed in Portland stone or travertine marble, set in landscaped gardens replete with fountains and waterfalls, was significantly transformed, and pre-cast concrete with a stone aggregate offered as an alternative by the City Council was adopted instead, leading to some later criticisms that the library was a 'concrete monstrosity' (Parker and Long, 2004; Foster, 2005; Gold, 2007). Curiously, perhaps, the failure of some of the concrete panels was also cited by the Council in 1999 as a reason to demolish the library and pass the site to a commercial developer (Clawley, 2011).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Of particular note, perhaps, was that during a later visit to Stockholm he was able to consider in some detail the progress on the twenty-year comprehensive plan published in 1952 (which was being worked on when he visited Sweden in 1949). See C. Madin (2011).

<sup>9</sup> A similar line of argument has been recalled in other accounts. In an interview with Anthony Sutcliffe, Madin suggested that "I said that there should be a three-dimensional plan, but [Manzoni] replied that it could not be done ... all that we architects have been allowed to do is to plan parts of the city centre. We are only pawns in a very big chessboard. ... Basically, Manzoni was road engineer. He was a fine chap, and a great friend, but it was his limitation" (Madin, interviewed in Sutcliffe 1967-9).

<sup>10</sup> There have been some fresh visual attempts to understand and communicate the library's original architectural concepts to a wider audience. Most notable was the small photographic

Whilst acknowledging how his earlier experiences of witnessing the aerial bombardment of the city centre had come to shape his initial design ideas, Roberts also stressed that the intentions for Smallbrook Ringway and the Rotunda were modified to suit the City Council's plans for the newly-constructed section of inner ring road:

“[The] horizontal emphasis [of the Smallbrook Ringway Centre] with this ring road, almost like a city wall and, and in the process of doing the link the two sites they were both very awkward and difficult sites, [and I tried my best to] make them into a really manageable site by linking the two and joining them together by bridging right over the road ... and the Rotunda, well ... nothing was proposed for that site, it was a triangular piece of land and because of that a square building would have been unsuitable”.

He also seemed reluctant to explicitly acknowledge whether certain architectural precedents informed the development of his ideas, preferring to speak more of the difficulty of proposing a scheme on a particularly narrow site – a restriction that forced Roberts to fundamentally alter his original architectural conception because of the limited land made available through the City Council's compulsory purchase of land adjoin the line of the ring road.

### *Compromised reality – social life of a building*

These narratives also serve as a reminder that architecture is, as Guggenheim (2009) suggests, a ‘mutable immobile’: something that is anchored in space but the original design intention is constantly being re-made through the social actions of individuals. This relates to Lees's (2001) argument that “both as a practice and a product, [architecture] is performative, in the sense that it involves on-going social practices through which space is inhabited” (2001, page 53). For example, construction and maintenance of a building can be considered as a kind of re-designing that subsequently re-works the design concept, and which, inevitably perhaps, results in a compromised reality. At a practical level, architecture requires on-going maintenance and repair, sometimes by the diverse social practices of the buildings users, at other times by individuals with specialist expertise – from engineering, heating and lighting, damp prevention, glazing, air conditioning and lifts / escalators, electrical wiring and plumbing (see, for example, Graham and Thrift, 2007; Edensor, 2011; Jacobs and Cairns, 2011; Strebel, 2011). James Roberts, for example, felt a sense of sadness that his detailed designs for the interior of the Rotunda were subsequently compromised by poor construction work of the central core by local contractors:

“[The Rotunda] was a bomb site but ... and there was a big Victorian bank on the corner of the next road along [High Street] and initially what I thought the idea is if we could, if we could bring that site into the Rotunda the banking site into the Rotunda then we could carry on a second stage of development along the New Street with the base of the Rotunda. So what we did was to put the, put the banking hall on the first floor with escalators up to it and I think it's one of the first few that had banks which were upstairs. ... It's a sad story, really. But that was designed really just as a, as a mushroom with just cantilevered out from the centre court and that is, it's a sad scheme but in fact, but in fact the when we got that, that banking, the strong rooms constructed I was invited to go over quickly to have a look at the site and there was a, a .... a minute crack had developed all round about ten foot from the centre core around the top of this strong room, concrete. And some critical reinforcing had been left out [by the contractors]! Now at that stage ... [the whole] thing was held up for

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exhibition, “Back to the Modern”, held in 2006, which celebrated the library's history which weaved together a blend of archive and contemporary photographs (Clawley, 2011).

quite a while and we had to, unfortunately we had to put ... in nine columns in, all around the exterior of this drum, and jack, jack the thing up and reinforce it! Well that took it over a year to do and at great expense; [I] don't know whether it was the engineers, whoever came to sort that out though we had big piles of work ... But then we could proceed [after the changes were made], but the point was it [originally] was like a mushroom, the other side of the mushroom was supposed to be rimmed, with no columns on the outside”.

Roberts’s story re-affirms the message that designed architecture should not simply be comprehended as being solely in the hands of the architect: it is also produced and re-produced by a diverse, arguably more modest and many-handed effort (Strebel, 2011). The mutations and subtle adaptations that result from the work of local contractors also connect with the ideas about collaborative approaches introduced the ways in which architects work when operating as part of a broader project team. In a similar vein, this also resonates with Jacobs’s (2006) recent suggestion that buildings are ‘made’ because of the way in which people, technology and maintenance processes interrelate. Additionally, these contractors who were responsible for the maintenance of the Rotunda – would, of course, have acquired specialist and detailed knowledge through training and by practical experience about the performance of building materials and systems. All too often, however, it is arguable that some traditional histories of post-war architecture under-play the practical knowledge of “ordinary inhabitants” who used architecturally-designed spaces (see specifically Llewellyn, 2003; 2004; Hubbard et al. 2003; Hubbard and Lilley, 2004; Adams, 2011).

By briefly extending this field of analysis to the context of post-war Birmingham, the oral history narratives reveal that the architects’ work was enmeshed within a broader context not only because of design-side strategies and other interventions, but also because of the social practices of people using their buildings (Imrie, 2003). The architects’ stories begin to highlight how buildings are “made” through the coalescence of design and consumption processes (Faulconbridge, 2009). At a simple level, the following elegiac vignette provided by John Madin over the decision by the City Council in the late 1980s to enclose and privatise the central atrium of the Central Library (Clawley, 2011) reveals how the building’s original design intention has been transformed (partially at least) to create a space to encourage shopping activities and social interaction (Lees, 2001):

“Well, while we're talking about [the Central Library] basically what the [city authorities] have now done to the central civic precinct which is beneath the library is disgraceful! I designed the library as a civic square with fountains and waterfalls; this [has] been closed off. The whole civic square has been filled with fast food, in the very heart of the civic centre of Birmingham!”.

“[The design for the Central Library] evolved from the need to protect the books! [And following detailed discussions with the City’s Librarian] the concept of the library was a centre of learning as well as a reference library and lending library! It was needed to interconnect various subjects or different departments so people who were interested in one subject may become interested in the other subjects so all the main reference floors were linked physically and visually and psychologically”.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> According to Foster (2009), John Ericsson, a surviving member of Madin’s detail design team, recalled that “Bill Taylor (the city librarian) wanted a cultural centre [for people], not just books. He could see a day when books would be phased out, and was interested in computers and so on” (Ericsson, quoted in Foster, 2009).

Interestingly, Madin's story also illustrates how the designs for the library originally incorporated some more sensitive considerations regarding the need to provide an intellectually stimulating public building for library users. Whilst Imrie (2003) argues that architects – and also academics – are too quick to subsume the role of users of space in the production of a building's identity, Madin's narrative suggests that concerted efforts were made during the to consider the library users' perspective. This tantalisingly points towards a richer understanding of the library thus "avoiding the flattening effect of imagining there is on the one hand a great designer" (Law, 2002, p. 136).

## **Conclusion**

Through exploring the history of Birmingham's city centre rebuilding, I have sought to explore the understandings of post-war change, embedded within the oral histories of two of the city's most well-known architects. As with other oral histories, a carefully-assembled exploration can add significant new perspectives to traditional accounts, usually based on plans and supporting documents, with some commentaries from those associated with developing and implementing them (Gold, 2007). It is argued that oral histories can assist provide a fuller appreciation, not only of what important changes took place to Birmingham's city centre during the post-war years, they also tentatively illuminate why these changes happened. This partially responds to calls that more consideration be given to the assemblage of key personalities, backgrounds, education and networks and other factors that were all influential in shaping reconstructed cities (Larkham, 2011).

Secondly, and more explicitly, the use of oral history prises open potentially interesting areas of enquiry, not least of which revolves around the need to move beyond traditional biographical accounts that cast post-war architects' practices as somehow external to broader development processes. By emphasising the interrelationships between the architects' practices, the City Council, and the "heteronomic" nature of the design and development process, this research makes cautious steps towards a non-reductive understanding of post-war urban change in the heart of Britain's second city. This is one which totalising identity of the omnipresent post-war 'architect' may be challenged, and data from Roberts and Madin suggest that in drawing attention to the interactions between different professionals reveals that these processes were messy and fused into specific project contexts. These contexts include, amongst other aspects of analytical enquiry, the milieu of professionals and the evolving ways in which they interacted in and through the course of developing detailed building outcomes. More broadly, therefore, this work makes some contribution to the understanding of the social context of architecture and the contingent nature of architecture as a practice.

Finally, the now-developing body of work on oral histories of post-war change deserves more integration into discussions about post-war planning and modernist architecture. It would seem worthwhile – where practicable – for a greater consideration of those individuals and groups affected by post-war planning and architecture, whose stories could be elucidated in similar biographical or interview-based ways. One extension of this position would involve the expansion of the rather narrow focus of some accounts, which typically consider solely the producers of architectural spaces, the isolated views of architects and planners themselves, as the central focus of study, to develop a relational analysis which critically explores the dialogue that existed between these producers of space and those who lived, worked and moved through these spaces.

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## Appendix 1

### James Roberts: interviewed on 11 December 2009 by David Adams

*(Where the recording is unclear this is indicated with an asterisk)*

Right so just for the benefit of the recorder Jim can I \* full name and date of birth please.

JR: Full name is James Arthur Roberts. Generally known as Jim by people or James professionally. I was born in 29<sup>th</sup> April 1922.

JR: Which doesn't make me very old but I don't feel old and I'm \*.

Allright. OK. And can you just give me a short of brief explanation of your familial setting I know we touched on some if it from the outset but if you could give me a brief description of your sort of family background.

JR: The family background I, I can tell you that on my mother's side she was a \* and she her father was quite a .. an active man in Kings Heath \* a councillor and an activist with all sorts of social interests which involved being in .. \* friendships with the Chamberlain family and three of the Chamberlain family lived in the Kings Heath area and the, other fairly eminent people also he, he got involved in London and Manchester parliament coz there was the, his period of time he was interested in fresh water, fresh sewage and all the problems that in the late 1800s 1867 to \* involved in everybody \* so he was involved very much in health but also in social, social activities... There was a chap called Major Cartland who lived in the village of Kings Heath as well. His house is now Major Cartland is in the centre of a park and it's a city park in Kings Heath and that's part of the \* family \* (noises) writers and things like that. But so basically I suppose DNA and genes there is something in his activities that have come on \* I don't know. But ... so that's as far as my mother's side and that family goes back to 1603 and it's a very interesting continuous line I suppose. But the ... so I'm my mother's side, my, my .... Sorry.

No. So we'll just stop it.

No. So.

JR: So this way you've got \*.

So you left school with virtually no formal education.

JR: That's correct yes. No GCEs no \*.

So what age were you when you left?

JR: I left school at fourteen.

Fourteen. Yep. What did you do after that?

JR: Then it was a question of, my father didn't really believe in education.

Yep.

JR: And I was given the job of office boy in his office in the centre of London.

OK.

JR: And that was, that was literally as an office boy and to that extent I used to keep the stamp book and seal the letters in, lick all the letters, and put the stamps on and keep the stamp book going.

I used to spend everyday regardless of the weather, sometimes taking fifteen, twenty letters all around Birmingham, living in central Birmingham I delivered by hand. And while I was outdoors I was asked to give \* if I hadn't \* half an ounce of St Bruno rough cut for somebody, and cigarettes for somebody else and make the tea. So I spent a number of years doing that sort of thing. And it was only I think when, once, at one stage there was \* one of my, my father had been, I think a good surveyor, working for a fairly \* of Birmingham but he got involved in the cinema world and .... his office, I never saw him a drawing anywhere but he, his office had two or three assistants and a secretary and they designed cinemas, some of the \* cinemas \* a lot of activity in the cinema world in Birmingham in those days. One has to remember that in Birmingham the chap who founded Odeon cinemas, he was a chap called Oscar Deutsch, and Oscar Deutsch I think he'd been a scrap metal merchant or something like, he made his money, his pile and he decided to go into, invest in cinemas. So my father was designing cinemas for the Odeon and for, two or three other circuits they would have been \* so quickly. And so one of my jobs as I graduated into something to do with (laughs) with \* architectural \* I had to cover, and it was tedious business in those days, but for the local authority needed I think about two copies all the drawings, one had, one copy had to be on linen, \* linen, and so those were the working drawings and so all colours I used were red for the walls, and the, the \* big scale drawings and green for the concrete and then I had to deliver them to the council and those were tedious things yeah. But at, they came a stage where there was a chap called \* Reg Bidmeed and he had studied as architect externally, so he probably had a reasonable basic education and took the external examination for the RIBA so he was, he was the prime chap in the office but he was a, he was a .... externally educated chap, not school of architecture or anything like that but my father had a top right hand man, a chap called George Berry, and he wasn't an architect at all but he was able to organise things, and a secretary. And that was basically it. But there came a time when Reg Bidmeed, \* the \* I suppose, he decided that it was about time I did something about something.

Right. Yeah.

JR: I don't think he actually \* had a good relationship with him, I don't think he actually got me by the scruff of the neck, but he did actually say, "Come on Jim. You can't go on like this". So it wasn't \* and it was more or less.

Sort of \*.

JR: He inspired me to do something about it like him in a way, get \* haven't got the. So Reg Bidmeed eventually went on to become one of senior partner in Harry Weedon's firm of architects and Harry Weedon did, almost the majority, not all but the majority of the Odeon circuit. He became a very top cinema architect and Reg Bidmeed became a chief chap, chief assistant for him and eventually became head of the firm when Harry Weedon died. Harry Weedon was a chap who lived in Moseley \* so I knew him and my mother knew him, and see him riding a bicycle in those, it was very much a different world in those days, and I lived in a different world still do now I suppose, rather quaint.

Well fascinating.

JR: So he.

Really spurred your interest (overtalking) So what sort of year was this then Jim, sorry?

JR: Well I don't.

\* (overtalking)

JR: It was just about, just before the start of the war so the beginning of 37 I suppose about that. And I could say something like that because we, I got a picture of myself filling sandbags \* water, filling sandbags looking at the car park as I got a newspaper picture, I'm one of the chaps filling sandbags when the war started. So it was just about a couple of years before that when I \* I was \*. So I think, so I then started going to this, the evening school of architecture, well evening school of architecture and I in fact got so inspired by it all and enthusiastic about it, I actually finished up by doing five nights a week at night school.

Goodness.

JR: Now that would be five nights a week these days.

Five nights a week. Very intense.

JR: And that's the sort of pace I've done all my life since. I've actually always, coz I have no \* money, I think my mother had, I think the alimony, or something like my mother had to manage on, money was different then, it was five pounds a week, so there's no money available but my father was well off and he used to get cruises and this sort of thing. And I've got a picture up here, just show you (noises) of one of the early (noises).

Sorry.

JR: \* be it. \* for the \* (noises) \* it \* had to have a basic education. I had the basic education so I get to the school architecture so that they could \* arts school in the centre of Birmingham and I then had to do a year as boy for \* learn how to draw and that's one of the drawings there.

It's beautiful. Beautiful isn't it?

JR: \* That took, that took a year to do, almost a year and it was.

Gorgeous.

JR: But it's significant, it's not the only school of architecture \* there. But that was just on the basics coz I then had to do, had to have done a maths, history, everything, I did that by going to five nights a week and then all the work that was required to be done as homework I did on Saturday and Sundays. So again I did the same \* like I'd started \*.

Yeah. \*.

JR: And.

Beautiful \*. Gorgeous.

JR: And then. (noises).

Sorry. (noises)

JR: And I continued with that, I continued with that education for night school education and became a .. got my intermediate examination, I took the exams in the university external University of Manchester, and the, although I'd had no mathematics education, no education at all, in fact there was a local architect who was a, while I was \* teacher at the school called Stanley Madeley, Stanley Madeley and he was brilliant but I actually finished up by going to, \* calculus and all sorts of things but he in fact, his training was so good in static steelwork and structural engineering that, but a, ..... the eminent examiner, the external examiner at the \* for the oral questionnaire at Manchester University, the intermediate bit, he asked who had the teacher been, and I was happy to say it was Stanley Madeley at, because the \* papers who \* correctly \* and I got \*. But then the, the question \* wrong but the question was that to get from that period to a fully qualified architect and then .... got a accepted by the school to do a full time course but I had no money to pay for the full time course and my mother \* sure didn't have the money so I, I took .... I took a job at the Birmingham Post and Mail which was a job which lasted for six nights a week because the \* I think it was on Sunday, they didn't, the Birmingham Post \* on Sundays, and I worked from seven to eleven while I was at the day school, day school \* from day school I went \* I had beans on toast in the canteen \* at the school, and then went at seven o'clock and I popped in and I used, I became Birmingham Post and Mail's artist and as such that involved anything to do with, they wanted pictorial stuff and that carried during the war and I, I did all the, all their war maps so that as the, so I had to read the papers, \* more education of

course, and I had to read the papers and I had my own access so my \* used to advance the Russian front or the various fronts along and I always, as I say I always had a copy of the previous day's Times to check what they'd done \* keep \* now keep \* the Birmingham Post and they were really reading a rehash, my rehash of the previous day's Times sort of thing. But that was \* but I also was able to produce pictures of say Greek pictures so one could say, well, the picture here and I got the illustration somewhere but, the pictures there, pictures in the paper, it said, "This is a place near where our troops landed \*", it happened to be a photograph I'd got of a place in Greece by a river somewhere. \* not even, \* I didn't \* idea of where one usually \*. \*. So I had the, and this job, this job carried on but I started \* spent two years full time school of architecture at then I have to say that first two years it was it was hard work having no basic background but the, again another eminent chap who was most, had most effect on my life I think as an architect was a chap called George Drysdale. Now George Drysdale was a most formidable, not having been to Eton, Oxford and all these \* training and so on, to meet George Drysdale was quite a thing but at, as far as I'm aware the only thing I know that he designed was the Roman Catholic church on the New Northampton Rd, it's on the right hand side not far to Birmingham and it's got a huge \* hundred foot high white cross recessed into the tower. So he was a dramatic \* chap but he, his teaching was \* architecture was based on the old \* art principle, the old architecture. Which meant that you were, it was scale and I think this had a \* this is again if anything affected me most of this was it but we designed, we had to design or draw out all the Adrian Arch, triumphal arches and all the Greek and classical stuff and then as a schemes we did great big French styled assembly halls of massive scale and so it was, it was all classical all the time, huge and large, and that I think is one of the biggest influences to me, it made me think big, think not just over there but over the hall there you see. But George Drysdale he was such a formidable figure in the, the art school is still there but his room would be big enough, you had a classroom in it if it were modern times, that was his room, and he used to sit at a desk over towards the window, but you would knock on the door and he wouldn't hear a thing, you knocked several times, and eventually say, there would be a huge, "Come in" or something like that, and you'd go in and \* so he was a very tall articulate stick. He was grey haired, he had very black clothes on and he'd a real dominant fellow. But every, we had a design projects to do set up to do and \* school of architecture and when we'd finished the design course some of the designs took a month to do. They weren't sketch things like you get nowadays or \* appraisals they were took a month, six weeks on the thing. And I, I suppose \* not always, I've always been up for really detail, nothing \* just right and if it was a \* Greek, Roman or \* put the \* there, one goes this way, and one goes the other way and all the different things on the decoration, I'd put the lot in, not just a slapdash and that's the impression, I did the lot. So I, on one occasion I'd spent, I suppose a month doing this thing and when the, the, people who were learning me about, there would be about twelve people, small classes I suppose, but he would then, he, you would then go in at the end of the month, he had put the drawings for the for the students up on the wall, pinned them up on a great big blackboard and I was one of the first ones, as I went in, he, he'd, because every \* and we were standing there and he would listen to the different things, some got mentioned, some got stars, some got ticks and then \* what degree of ability you'd got I suppose. One of the early ones of mine he just had, emotional about it, ..... he had a great big red cross right across \* like that.

Oh. Crikey. Oh dear.

JR: And instead of criticising he just ignored it, he walked straight past it. He didn't comment on it. Now that \* so \* because my \* three days ago you know \* I had to \* more but that, that \* student. Gave me a top mark grade at \* got to be good.

You've got to be good to get the credit from him.

JR: No. And I, I did big deal \* and I never do because if you've got a good teacher, he was a brilliant teacher, but he was starting with very raw material. And at what I have found which is interesting because of being an \* chap I found almost invariable the people who got the stars, the mentions and everything else they got so, they got so competent, or so cheeky or so cocky, that they just didn't do a lot in their subsequent careers. I think because they'd, it had been all, they'd.

Too easy.

JR: Enjoyable \* got through alright.

Yeah. Not having to strive for it perhaps.

JR: Yes. And that, \* able to look back \* usually but that's an interesting thing. But and the other thing that show what a tough operator he was and I'd been going to Birmingham Post with a chap called, a chap called Hutton was the editor of the Birmingham Post at that time, and he was an eminent editor so I'd heard a lot about the printing of coz they, they were in the \* news people corporation Birmingham Post and Mail offices and works and there was all the printing going on and the noise of the presses and everything else and it was quite dramatic me going in to the \* and I was given instructions, what we want for tomorrow or tonight you see \*. And so I was there seven o'clock till eleven and it was eleven because that was when they stopped, they went to press on that. \* and I used to catch the last bus home until the war started and then I had to walk home to \* which is about a five mile walks so it was all pretty tough going.

\*. Strong work ethic.

JR: Yes. But, so the point was Hutton was a terrific guy to get to know, as the editor and so \* quite a bit of \*. But the unfortunately at this time the war, the war was on and so on and George Drysdale decided that at the end of the two years \* because he was \* you didn't of course have the the facility of, of being here for the five year course, you, at night school, evening school not the same and I think you have to do another year to get you up to standard.

Right. Yes.

JR: So my two years was \* three years.

So you did three years.

JR: So I had an extra year for design work on top of the other lot sort of thing. So that was, so but I did it. \* going on with this, I had been with my father's office from the age of 14 but that was just a, so he didn't believe in education and but he also was involved in cinemas, cinema work and I, I realised that, that although, he wasn't a \* competent architect but in those days you became, the idea, he couldn't when they made the registered architects came \* came in they made, they couldn't, people who were designing cinemas or offices for designing cinemas, they couldn't say, "You're not going to be an architect" so they had a separate class the RIBA formed originally called the licentiate class, so there was a LRIBA until the people who had been doing architecture died, and then there weren't any more LRIBAs licentiate members, there were LRIBA and then if you are a fellow or a senior, now I think you just put RIBA and that's it \* before \* down. But the, but my father was a LRIBA but he had this chief assistant, a chap called George Berry who was his right hand man, he wasn't a qualified architect and, but as the war started, war had \* jumping a bit of a gun here.

No that's OK yeah.

JR: The war had started so my father had decided that he'd originally been in practice as a surveyor was, the firm was called Satchell and Roberts and my, my father realised that either Satchell become a major in the army, my father again competitive spirit I suppose, I've got as well a long line of DNA and genes but my father decided he was going to join up and become a major so of course \* the war he joined up in the army and he became a district commander of Royal Engineers because he'd been in an engineers in the First World War so he was able to become a lieutenant in the First World War to a major in the second one and he had a, an area to look after which would make \* guns and all that sort, so he did the job but his idea of being a major in the war but to keep his rather \* Rover \* sports car and stay in Preston Lancashire, stay in a nice hotel and still do his job as a major in the army sort of thing to, he got it, \* think \* different in those days.

Oh crikey yeah.

JR: So while he was in the army then I'd qualified as an architect towards the end of the war and

there was his office was the, was this chap called George Berry and that was just moving on, not much work on and I realised that the things weren't as professional as I would have liked and that, so I had to decide I couldn't go on working with my dad as a qualified architect with his ideas of \* the Christmas presents were anything from the kitchen sink to kitchen cupboards, and drinks and booze and \* crates of grapes, anything you could imagine were given as pressies and I realised that this was the sort of \* subcontractors and people, it's not the sort of thing that, where I was \* aiming for.

\* behaviour perhaps?

JR: That's right. So I had to, I eventually decided to leave because it wasn't, I wasn't being, I couldn't do it my way and I couldn't do it his way or so on.

Yeah. Just. Sorry \*. No it's alright. It's fine. It's brilliant, brilliant stuff. Just to jump in slightly to your time at the school of architecture was there a particular consistent thread of education, was there a sort of \* moving away from the more traditional approach to learning towards embracing a more modernist approach to architecture or was it?

JR: Not, I think that it was, it was basically a very traditional form of training. I think it was the, it was, it was \* I think it was later on when it became a different sort that that's when I was asked to go back to the school of architecture as senior lecturer and that was a new era and but that was, as a.... the, the ... chap who took over from George Drysdale who's name \* and he, he asked me to go back as a senior lecturer to run a thing called "Life Projects". Now Life Projects was a very novel educational thing to do, I think \* if so it was initiated \* had thought of this sort of thing and what, what I did was to, I, at that time I got a \* place in New Street Birmingham at a temporary office with a couple of assistants but what I, then I had, I ran the senior lecturer's job at the New Street I got a little office, so I had an office going and a school lectureship but I was running this thing called Life Project which meant that in the third year everybody at the school of architecture in Birmingham took on a Life Project and that my project meant that it was a working men's club, it was a social, it was \* laboratory, think it was, even \* it finished up with the a row of cottages and three blocks of flats for Coventry Corporation, Life Projects. Now what it meant in the third year the students took on these real projects, real jobs and I, I had to ensure that they had the proper training in and abilities to do real working drawings in the school of architecture, real projects, and most importantly go on site meetings to talk the foreman and the people, because a lot of the people, they'd been to public school or whatever, which I hadn't had, they treated the bricklayers and foreman, very badly so especially showing them how to deal, how to be tactful and how to keep ensuring they got the right thing done at site meetings and things, so that was a novel form of bringing people up to date and since I was then at this time I was getting on to some really top design people, in fact the, in my small office, but I did the first office interior scheme for Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank in Waterloo Street, that was a new, they'd just come to England \* Bank then but I also did the first Olivetti showrooms in Birmingham and in those days the little Olivetti typewriter, and they were top, they were one of the toughest designers the Olivetti people, and so you had the real modern glass stuff and showcases and things \* and I designed the, their first warehouses in Birmingham. They arrived in Birmingham first in England.

What sort of time was this?

JR: Well it was \*.

That's alright.

JR: So many different things it was, it was, it was after I'd gone to, got the.

No.

JR: But it was an early practice, but I was, the sort of thing that I was then designing but it was an industrial warehouse and stuff but that was done where in those days it was new, you had all the services in different colours, not just in pipes, but all the gas and the electrics and so on were in different colours and so it was, it was a very modern type thing and I'd studied all the Olivetti stuff in Italy and so, and each time I did anything myself was to, I used to go to Italy, I used to go to the place



and find out and then come back and so I know what I'm talking about. So I was then going into really modern stuff but at the same time because of the way I'd been brought up I was also doing \* up at classical stuff \* but most unusual I was double handed in ancient and modern and. So that's \* thinking \*.

Yeah. That's good. Yeah.

JR: Left a gap somewhere I'm sure. But lots of gaps.

But just on, I'm jumping around here a little bit. So the can you remember what, it's bit more tangential perhaps, but what Birmingham, the centre of Birmingham, the actual physical form of Birmingham in the 1930s before the war, can you remember that?

JR: Yes indeed. I can remember, I can remember the Bullring where, where it was the Bullring and \* and, and the, the quite steep hill was like a \* Old Market Hall.

Which was bombed of course.

JR: Which was, what happened was the roof was burnt off.

\* support inside.

JR: But beside, because that's part of another story, the roof was burnt off, it wasn't just bombed, it's like these Iraq things where you say, forty five minutes you can \* but \* draw you off, \* bombed, it was hit by an incendiaries and the roof was burnt off and it's important if you want to go into more detail. But the, so the, the Bullring there \* as I recalled from those days there was Nelson's statue, it was surrounded by a railings which was composed of the \* halyards, the spears from all the fighting, the long spears and things, it was that type of very classical, it wasn't just any old railing, it was a special railing around it. There was Nelson there and the, the I remember the market hall before it was burnt, there was a very active and there was a basement underneath but it was a very active and busy almost rural little city with stuff that church there and the Bullring, the market and some of the thing that happened that since, since the war, Hitler did a lot of damage but I think \* the city \* Manzoni I got to know very well but he was, he was, he had no interest in architecture at all, aesthetics at all, just a \*.

An engineer wasn't he?

JR: And 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 city of Birmingham I think but \* what should have been a lot of tender loving care after the war. So the, I remember the first streets and areas were in Union Street in Birmingham just about where the present inverted pyramid which John Madin did now, there was, it was Union Street but it was, it was, there were a couple of very lovely pubs and they \* in the walls which we would have kept as fresh as "Wow they've survived". But also on the corner opposite the council house there's was a most wonderful Gothic building which sustained all the bombing and that was the reference library. Now I think photographs sort of, I haven't seen photographs recently of that but I was able to say pre-war I was able to go to the reference library and you know it was still there after the war but it had the most wonderful Shakespearean in itself as well, speciality of Birmingham a Shakespearean library, but it was a huge great big building where you went up a set of stairs with wooden insets in them and handrails but that was a building, if it was, \* Mr Manzoni knocked down after the war, it's escaped the war, he knocked it down because he put the ring road underneath it, the tunnel underneath it, so it came down. So that was one of the big tragedies that Victorian reference library has gone. And that that ought to be sort of, \* what he did to Birmingham, that's the other thing \* streets around Birmingham there were quite a lot left which should have been retained.

Can you remember anything of the bombing \* within the city centre, there were two, a couple of big sites \* where bombs \*?

JR: Yes. I've got a little file I can show you, of New Street as it happens. I knew it, New now but I \* several months ago I decided that it would be nice for me to have some pictures of central Birmingham because I'd, I'm just diversifying a bit from \*.

No.

JR: \* you \* refit it all. \* in lots of ways. \* was, I've got to go back to war now because this is bombing and.

Yes. Sorry.

JR: But the, the point of \* what came along conscription. Now I had callipers and boots, special boots, and I used to have to go into the, in Broad Street in Birmingham, there used to be a place called the Cripples Hospital, big letters, the Cripples Hospital, they went, you got \* if you did anything else \* worry about that, and I used to have my callipers hammered out in the blacksmiths' shop at the Cripples Hospital in Broad Street and boots made and everything was much more direct and not cushioned up by softened as we get now with everything. But the ... trying to think, trouble is old age \* I'm afraid I apologise \*.

No. No. \*

JR: But it's, you just the, asked, I was talking about the, we're talking about Birmingham and the pre-, pre-war Broad Street, just trying to, nipped off to something else then. I can't think why I was \*. Talking about the Cripples Hospital and the.... the.. can you get me back on to?

We were talking about the bombing in the city centre?

JR: Yes.

Bomb sites.

JR: ... It's very difficult to put things on.

That's OK.

JR: \*. It's coming slowly back.

\*. Fine.

JR: Yeah, it's a \* it's like things rusty \*. Oil for \*. But the, there's the.... the part of the, part of the bombing, that's right, there being \* that's right I remember being called up, that's it. Now I could have, I could have not, I could have said, "Well I'm a cripple" but I decided since I'd always been interested in boats and ships and that goes back to, that goes back to a holiday I must have been seven or eight at Hastings, where I'd, on the south coast, as a child I'd seen a fishing fleet out from Hastings and in those days fishing fleets had, had little funnels on them little ships, like little tug boats and they had tan sails, round sails and I remember seeing a fishing fleet out at Hastings in there near \* where it was and the .... that was the ... feeling that if I went did anything in the army rather than not going in the army I'd go in the navy.

Right OK.

JR: That was \* going about that thing \* (overtalking) And I've always been interested in boats and so on and I still, and now sort of, yachting and this sort of thing, but it started by seeing these little boats out at, but I thought well well I can't walk much, can't do anything coz of my callipers and so on so the navy, now if I can get in the navy then there'll be none of this rough stuff, marching around and parading so I actually, if I'd had more sense if my mother had said something \* "Jim you, you'd be more help with me at home than going in the army or whatever \*" but she didn't and that was it and they, so I, I went I think the other side of Birmingham over at Aston somewhere to a big Territorial

Army place but I, there's another one similar to that, up in Thorpes Street, there was an army barracks, Territorial Army place there as well, just up, just outside the Ring way. But, so and my brother who was three years and three months older than me so I left my callipers and boots at home and I put, went with my brother's shoes on.

Right. Right. Yeah.

JR: In other words if I wanted to get out of the army I would have gone \* I'll do this you know. But I went to the army and actually in this particular Territorial Hall I was, there was a medical officers' tables in the centre and there were various doors off and one was Army, Navy, Air Force, and we went into those to actually enlist. But ... so I went in to this place and I sat down and I was examined in a cursory way and then, not the examination you get these days, I was examined and I was found to be A1 (laughs) and right that's it, next chap coming along you know, and I headed off to the where it said Navy and the senior medical officers just happened to look around and I'd got half way there, he said, "Just a minute". Come back here.

Yeah. That sort of thing. Called me again. He said, "Something funny about your walk". And that's, so he said, "Let's have another look". Anyway I was made B1 on the spot, just there, A1 to B1 and I went off to the Navy and, "that way laddie". And I was headed to the Army one. And apparently Navy was A1 and I now know RAF was A1. Army was \*. And so I was headed off to the Army and B1 I was enrolled and that sort of thing and so right from the interview you go up to Prestatyn in \* Lancashire, up North, and there was a holiday camp at Prestatyn and turned into an army camp and I was \* little suitcase which \* sent your stuff back and you were you got to the army and, but of course then the having, having to into \* the truth about my feet I was \* my \* shoes on or \* I had to go \* my boots on which they ignored entirely, the army did, even though I'd got a calliper on but they, they just, "There's your boots. There's the \*" and it was just thrown at you in the war, you see, wartime, and "There's the uniform, there's that", and if there's was \* holiday camp they would have taken all the windows out of, all the glass out of the, they put asbestos in everything and it was, and there was in fact, they'd built a brand new parade ground, concrete parade ground and I'd got there and a heat wave as I, and there was a brand new white concrete parade ground and, and you were thrown this stuff and you were then, you were thrown a \* a bag, you had to go and, you had to go to a haystack or pile of hay and fill the thing with hay and that was your bed. It was \* it was tough sort of thing. So you got your bed there and picked that, and then you got the army stuff, which did fit or didn't fit, just army uniforms and that started a, what amount to 186 days of my service in the army. 186 days to \*.

Yeah. I'll bet yeah.

JR: But the, the, it's all disjointed but you can probably fit it.

No it's fine I can fit it all together.

JR: You can reword it or whatever. But it's difficult to put it all into age and everything else. But and I did square bashing and you know was, it was the people who gave the square bashing were what's left of the regular army, they used the regular army chaps to be instructors so just, so you had these chaps and they were shouting out, "Left right, left right, left right, left right" and "Get in lane there. Get in lane there. \* get in step", they were always shouting at you, cursing and swearing I remember. And they \* so loud the saliva coming out of their mouths when they shouted at you. And no I did all that, "Left right, turn, left right, get in step" everything for the whole \* and then I did the ceremonial march right in from the army camp into the town centre and you see this sort are you?

No. It's good. No.

JR: I feel it's bogging you down.

No. Not at all. No it's fascinating really.

JR: Story. Crazy story. So I did, nothing is normal for me because it was a march into the town and they didn't tell you anything by the way about, about, they, \* weren't interested, you were just \*

cannon \* really. But I did do was as soon as I got to the camp and I'd been in the camp, and before I did the square bashing so going back a bit more I went to see the major in charge of the camp and I said, "Look. \* marching \* sort of thing. Is it possible, could I, could I", that was Royal Corps that I'd been put into. "Could I be put into the Royal Engineers because I'm half way to be, that's right I'm half way to becoming an architect. I've got.

So you've got the \*.

JR: I've got my intermediate examination, \* architects so I can draw, so I can do quite a lot of stuff. Can I go into, can you, can I get transferred?" And looked at my papers. "No. You're B1. No. You can't take a trade anyway unless you're A1 so". I said I don't need a trade, I've got a professional qualification, intermediate RIBA. And you can't, you got to do a trade course first. So I was refused that. So I had tried. I got photographs of various of my projects to show them. They weren't interested. So again \* you're dealing with idiots. \* now \* Afghanistan now \* idiots \* and things. So I had tried to deal with the situation but. So eventually the, I did this, this march into town, they had a triumphal march with the band and I have to say this, they don't tell you anything, you just, it's ridiculous, we didn't in the war, it's part of life mad pattern I suppose, that I couldn't imagine because the music of the Royal Corps of Signals is "Dah dah dah dah" (a tune) and that was \*. And you sing it to, to what I thought coz nobody told me anything about it, they just ignored you, like if you want to be an architect and you can't do it. And so what it is in fact was "Begone all care. Begone" you sing this "Begone all care". \* But nobody told me, I thought it was "Beyond all care". And I thought, "Well what a silly tune. Beyond all care!" I know I'm beyond all care, but I \* sing \* triumphal. \* remembered \* tiny things. \* life everything. But anyway I did the triumphal march with the band and all the way into town and the people like they do when the dead bodies come back now they \* and then as I was about six foot one or two I was then put onto the main gate, main gate guard \* they \* they and the, I know I'm taking time but shall I go on a bit.

JR: \* interesting but it's not what you wanted is it?

No. It's all good stuff.

JR: But it helps to explain though why my complex life had, but so I was put on this main gate guard. Now to be on the main gate guard means it's pomp and ceremony and it means you're doing, you're doing, "Left right, left right, left right" you're walking along and you're stamping your feet and making a real noise about everything and \* watching at the main gate sort of thing. And so you stamp your feet hard, you stamp and you have all \* all we had, well I had, was First World war rifle ...

A Lee Enfield was it?

JR: Yes probably something \* the Enfield I think was \*. And what, what you did was, there was no ammunition, wartime, bombing going on in Birmingham and everything else, wartime, there was no ammunition in the camp at all except in the guard house there was one wad of five bullets in the guard house. It was kept in the guard house, that was special. Now I was on the main gate guard, I mean there was \* a thing about \* believe this and to give the right impression I had a halfpenny in the magazine. A halfpenny.

So it would make a sound?

JR: You also had the, the strap of your rifle came down so that when you did, "Bang, bang, bang" you bang the metal on metal. You also on the bottom of your rifle, that you've unscrewed the bottom of the rifle the brass plate or the bottom of the rifle so it was loose, so as you put the rifle down bang it went bang. So everything was going bang, wallop, crash, boom, bang. And so I, I did all that you see and main gate and you do all the pomp and circumstance and the civilians watching sort of thing and the, then after all that then I was put on parade, I mean this all over 186 days, oh in the, in the.

It sounds ridiculous.

JR: Yes well it was madness really.

...

JR: It is. \*. But the then I was put on parade and done all that \* the major came to inspect us and we had all this \*halfpenny and stuff and the major came along with the sergeant major and looking at me and he stood straight in front of me, the major did, and he, he looked at me and he looked at the sergeant major and he said, "Tell that man to stand up properly". And I said "I am sir", but the point is my feet, my army boots had gone over like because I hadn't got callipers on so both my army boots, and I was walking, coz I was walking like this you see.

Yeah.

JR: And all I could say was, "I am sir". And because I hadn't got the callipers on you see and my army boots had gone right over, bashed over \* banging on the. And the answer was, not to, oh, "Oh sorry about that and that". And major said, "Put that man on a charge". \*. I joined the \* to help the country you know \* and \* architect, they won't have me in the engineers, and they put me on a charge because I haven't stood up properly and up on a charge, and the charge was my permanent fatigues \* and you don't get fatigues for a week or what it was. So I spent the week making up the fireplace in the major's office and lighting it and getting rid of the ashes, take out matchsticks off the drive and cigarette ends and at one stage this was permanent enough to be, one stage I had another, another difficult chap to work with who had also been on a charge and \* he was a builder in \* and we were told to you know, not to, that the major's garden coz it was in Wales, he'd got a nice house to live in, the major's garden had got a beautiful garden and lawns and they were all weeded and \* so we were, the two of us were \* weed all those garden beds and do that and do that. And they were a terrible mess but this builder chap said to me, "Oooh. \*" how to encourage people who are trying to win the war.

Supposed to boost morale.

JR: So he said, "We're not going to dig, we're not going to dig all this garden and weed all that grass. \*". He said, "Look, \* in the kitchen garden there there's a huge", and there was great big mountain of stuff, of riddled soil. This was a builder for you.

Yeah.

JR: This great big mountain. These "We'll put, we'll get a barrow, we'll cover all those beds in, forget it all, we're not going to dig all those, \* we'll" and we spent half a day taking all this stuff that some poor old \* riddled \* that and we did all these \* at the end of the day. And there were one or two bits of rubbish and things \* and the chap the builder told me and it was learning about life this way, he said, "There's a lot of rubbish and brick and odd things, and he said, "Look, we do, we do it, when I'm out, when I'm \* street, if you got a \* you kick it around a bit". And so we kicked around and left any rubbish, and just went, we'd \* found places to hide it and chuck it probably. And that was but, then that was the sort of thing. Then the, in my \* then the other things well I was eventually put on to washing, I think it's, it's what I say, can make a story but it's it's so cross making I was then put onto cleaning out the shower baths. Now that meant that in other words, it's a holiday camp anyway so there was an, and it was a, big sheds with about fifty big shower cubicles, sort of shower baths so you get a whole squad of people coming in off route marches. They come in and they'd have showers in this thing so the shower things when you got, you got all the rubbish and plasters and muck that the came from people who'd and \* a very hot place the showers, so I had to clean those out every time and as soon as you cleaned forty out another forty came in. And they, \* doing that one, and they \* you think \* I was. I \*.

.\*

JR: And I, again I got pneumonia and pleurisy and then I got pneumonia and pleurisy and I was put in the army hospital and at which \* all my things like pyjamas and the things I'd brought from home were all pinched and stolen including, including the, most of my army kit, though I was in this hospital and I was then given, I think it was somewhere I went to, posted to Rhyll and I was given, chucked at

me, I was given in a \* I was given a blue jacket and blue trousers and a white shirt and that's it and you're, you're just like any chap who's been injured in the war and I was sent to Rhyll and I remember sitting on the sea front at Rhyll with my blue jacket and, rough stuff you know, not tailor made, just happened that if it didn't fit, no buttons on it, and you had it \* round your waist, and I remember that \* emotional thing \* you mention \* and the a little old lady came up to us sitting on the front at Rhyll just for a sitting up \* she came over and \* took my hand and she gave me a shilling. And good luck you know \*. But that was \* the war at that stage but you know, anyway that was the sort of life I led for 186 days and eventually I was, I was pushed out of the army, had to sign something that I wouldn't sue the army but it if you're, but it was, but I did during the war time the last thing I had to do before the, they, there was a \* by that time I got fed up with the \* and I was, I'd been excused on marching by the Mos because obviously \* marching but they didn't know what to do with me, because I hadn't got a hat, the, the quartermaster wouldn't give me another hat because to get a new hat you have to put the old hat in so I become a, a hopeless sort of how to deal with me. But they did decide in, I was sent to Prestatyn and I was at Preston where there's a headquarters, I was then put in an office but the idea of being excused all marching so I got a medical thing saying that I was. The, the and I was doing office just rubbish things, but the, the major there decided that can't have this thing, "Excused all marching. Why should you be excused all marching?" \*. And but I had to, in wartime, I think it was quite a strong thing to do \* but it was decided that nevertheless I was, that \* the little office scheme at this signals headquarters in Preston were going to go marching and I was one of the staff so I was going marching. And I .... did \* don't know where I got the old army boots that I got on, but I actually remember going into this parade ground at Prestatyn where there were six other people and it was clearly a thing to blast me out of the ground. And so I walked, didn't march, I walked into the centre of the parade ground with these other chaps and we were lined up and the order from the side was, "Left turn. Quick march". And I actually stood dead still, I didn't move and this is \* insubordination in a war and the other people in the office, six of them \* they went ahead and I just stood there at that ..... And you know \* (laughs) in war time and all the conditions but I, I got that, I got think \* marching sort of thing but it was bully and so they went on \* sort of thing and they said, they \* that lot and then they, there was one, "Clear off then" and that was me, "Clear off". I went back to the office and then they eventually put \* I was put into a medical and had to go to Manchester or somewhere, I had another medical and the, that, I was a, I had to sign a thing, I wouldn't sue the army and if I, and I was out.

You were out? OK.

JR: But a long story, but that's the \* it does.

No. That's fascinating. So what happened then then Jim? So you, so you?

JR: Now we come back to Birmingham \* (overtalking)

So you return, so you return.

JR: Now I came back to Birmingham. The war was still on.

You were discharged and you \* .

JR: Discharged from the army.

Returned to Birmingham?

JR: So being the sort of chap I am I joined the local defence volunteers the LDVs \* so you got, did a \* a LDV on the \* and that turned eventually into the Home Guard. Then it was, and I did do again, there wasn't the marching, it was bit like Dad's Army but we \* every \* every (noises) \*.

No. No. \* just thinking about Dad's Army.

JR: But I had taken my, when my dad left home he left his sporting gun, his double barrelled sporting gun at home so I took that in to give the Home Guard. This so \* and then so the war was still on so ... then I was, so I was in the Home Guard as the \* then ... the .... I then .... did with no

ammunition or that sort of thing I then, one of my duties was to man the railway bridge at Kings Heath. Just me, no ammunition nothing, you got a gun but nothing to put in it, \* war time and I \* landed \* there was nothing and I'd, \* walk along back and forwards along the top of this bridge, that was to show there was a guard there, an army guard you see.

So it was \*.

JR: A guard but there was nothing I could have done but we did have as part of the training course we did have a a pre-war German, not pre-war English machine gun but it had, by the time I had been stationed in Paradise Street in Birmingham, I, we were up from Kings Heath to Paradise Street Birmingham, used to be a showroom in Paradise Street, just by the town hall, by the council house, it was a, it was a wooden blocked showroom that had been a car showroom and that was taken over by the central part of the Home Guard which because by that time they'd realised I was half way to being an architect and they decided, "Ah hah. Yes. You could be useful". So they moved me into this centre of Birmingham, \* hence the bombing (laughs) and plate glass windows outside and the, in Paradise Street and there we, we had to bed down overnight and I was still going to the office in the daytime by the way, it was only the Home Guard that \* (overtalking) went in the evening but so many nights a week you went on to this town centre, and it was just the wooden block floor \* on the place there and you just lie down there but we did have a go at a, at a sand pit somewhere, we had a First World War Bren gun, not a Bren gun, some other gun, but it was a great big thing \* you get a barrel like that and it had tripod legs, three legs and I learnt to be able to take that thing apart, put it together in the dark because if you're going to use at night time you got to, it has to come apart and put it together again.

A Lewis gun maybe. I don't know?

JR: I can't remember the name, but it was a typical great big modern thing with things \* front and big legs and you had to push it like, it take quite a bit of heaving to get it \* but the \* we actually got as far as some ammunition but in a sandpit tell you what happened. You get behind this thing and you're "Baaaaah" and what it does, it the bullets go like that, it goes right in the air, it doesn't go in a straight line so you think how did we win the First World War, you see, the Second, it didn't go \* like it did, it took off. And then we didn't have, we did have a practice thing where some little army Bren guns were brought into the centre of Birmingham and I remember the hall of memory in Birmingham is still, there's still some little shrubs and things all \* well the last time I was there there were shrubs in the garden outside the hall of remembrance and we were supposed to be being attacked by the Germans arriving in the centre of Birmingham, it was little Bren gun carriers, real army chaps but they were coming into as part of a training course and we had decided, well if we, we haven't got anything to throw on them \* we'd been taken, we had a few petrol bombs in the sandpit to throw but we hadn't got anything else so we decide, if we going to see if we can hit these blessed things, so we had some small bags of flour and that \* such a \* with the \* regular army.

Right. Right.

JR: \* (laughs). Then we, it came to the centre of Birmingham \* been there from the centre of Birmingham then it was decided just you know all \* you've done some, so you know anything about building do you, architecture and \* Yeah. Well I suppose, hey you if you know that you, you must know about theodolites and things like that. "Hey we've got just the job for you, just the fellow we needed". And so I was, they decided I was put into intelligence, \* go for, what I was doing in \* (laughs) \*

\*. \* sure about this.

JR: And so what we've got is, we've got a on the town hall clock here and in Victoria Square there's a, there's a, we've got a little shed on the top of that and observation post up there and we've got another observation post at the clock at Edgbaston University.

Oh yes. Yes.

JR: So right. You're intelligence observation post now, get going. And so I was put on to the, on the top of the tower to be observation thing to \* to be a prior warning of bombing and \* during this was going on I had to report back to down below and what happened that in the council house below me about two storeys down in the council house that they had a telephone, a big telephone exchange, and that telephone exchange was a real proper war, whether it was pre-war or had been all the time I don't know but it was a telephone exchange and that telephone exchange was connected to Civic House which was a building on the corner of, maybe gone by now, it was the second front building on the corner of Great Charles Street and that was where the head of the fire departments was, or something there but \* the point was that ... my thing was to give early warnings in association with the university \* so give a fix on what was happening anywhere. So early warning for the fire brigade, for the army, and for the aircraft anything, or wardens.

So that was communicated by the telephone?

JR: The telephone so that then was distributed around. So that was my job now the fact that to, \* going from one thing to the other \* So I was standing there, but to get up there it meant that I did it for two or three nights a week and working during the day time as as a \* but do that two or three times a week and I used to have a just sheer black coffee a thermos flask of black coffee because I had to stay awake all night and walking in town and then stay over \*.

Just you on your own or?

JR: Just me yes. The top, and to, to, to \* so.

Responsibility really.

JR: To do the \* so if there was bombing and sometimes there'd been bombing when I got half, walked half way to Birmingham, don't think the buses stopped, everything stopped when a raid's going on and so if you're going into town I'd get as far as say the top of Bradford Street, walk from Kings Heath and I'd then have to on one occasion I did lie down on the road as close to what I thought was a wall. The next day I found it was a glass window I'd looked, a big shop window I'd been underneath it. But there you are I was going where there was an air raid shelter but that was full with people so I, you'd walk into town and then when I got into town I had to go into the, into the art gallery, the, that took the side entrance to the council house it looks across to where the new library is \* I had to go in there and then I had to go into the library at \* going up (noises) \* the postman sorry. I had to go into the art gallery which at that time, it used to have a glass roof so it was a great empty, it's still got a lot of \* wall \* that hadn't been blown out or it has asbestos sheets but it was just a whole empty great big art gallery. So I had to go \* by myself, had to get in there but then I had to, having been down to the telephone exchange to start with, two storeys down and sit high and low and so, and to get in and out again then you went out of the art gallery into the sort of art curator's or little office. Then in his office underneath there was just under the tower there was a hatch way like that in the wall and you opened up that and you climbed into that and then you went up various stairs and things in the tower and you eventually got as far as the, as metal staircase up to where the clock had, was, or is and from there onwards from the clock since there was that's where the clock man had to wind the clock or service it you had ladders, wooden ladders which went up like that and eventually coz the, the top of roof it's a tiled roof like that and there's just a little Victorian railing, it's about that high round the \* top \* about a five foot square piece at the top of the roof and what they'd got there is so the last ladder got to this and you pushed the lid of this thing \* the last ladder and you were in this little tiny hut, it's still there now. Little tiny thing with little, little aluminium roof, tin roof and \* up there and in the centre there's my compass standing on a thing like that in a, and a sighting thing and that's where \* stool sat on that you see and the side of you, very thoughtful I think, there are a big \* the idea was if something happened which you, you, the idea was that you could put this rope through the hatch on the top of this little shed, throw it down, and climb down. \* like security you see.

Goodness. \*.

JR: But, but (laughs)



Visualise the height. \*.

JR: And of course if you, if there a fire, if your place is on fire downstairs you jolly well use I suppose wouldn't you? But I now know that \* the tower is the safest place to be in in anywhere coz it's a weight pulls it down. As long as it doesn't get burnt at the top it's the best place to be so next time there's a war \*.

Yes. \* Find a tower.

JR: But one of the \* got the, so I'd been in touch with the \* before \* with the city and the city reference library to find out anything they've got about that particular time in, of the bombing and I've got the figures I can show you in a bit in a file. And ... because what I was up there one of the worst bombing things Birmingham ever had and it was and again from, from that position I could see Coventry going up and you could see all the search lights going on over at Coventry and you could see all the anti aircraft fire and all, and everything going on so that why I was able to say, "It's \* going for Coventry tonight, or they've gone this or they, they're coming here sort of thing" like they do and saw all the fire wood and \* on this thing. But and then those particular days the Germans used huge, they, for, phosphorus I think it is, flares, but they, they were big parachutes about oooh a good twenty foot, twenty foot big parachutes and these things they dropped over the centre of Birmingham which you don't hear about these days or I've not heard about it but and they, they put right up in the sky there and they, the whole of Birmingham was totally white and totally exposed, not a shadow in the whole place, the whole of the city was lit up like a great, you know, huge things and I know from being a\* right on the \* sort of \* war damage \* warden when I wasn't there I was at home in Kings Heath and one of them actually did eventually came right down \* just \* all \* parachutes in the \* you see. But one actually did come down in Portman Road in Kings Heath where I was doing a bomb \* warden thing. Coz you, you \* when you weren't up the tower you were in at home. And I know to put that thing out, even when it landed it was still alight when it came down we had to build a \* fire of sand about that high.

To, to \*.

JR: And then it was still seeping through the flames coming through all the time. So you get those big things in the centre of Birmingham and the, you were \* down over there and you, you talking to the chap two storeys down below.

On the wire yeah.

JR: And he could see, he was in \* coffee or something downstairs. He couldn't \* (laughs).

\*.

JR: So but on that particular night I was on I wanted to find out every, tell the reference library this and they've, they've got quite a bit of information for it now but I gather there's no photographs left \* show you any time if you \* but you like \* but don't want to take too much time but I am \* I've got some a picture they've sent me of New Street in 1940, it was 1940 and 41 got the precise dates and it shows New Street where in a burnt out buildings and bombing just by \* the Rotunda is, that's what the Rotunda, that was a bomb site. But they haven't got the photographs that I've asked them for and apparently they will do another search and I've got the information, it probably over to you to get them I think because if you're interested in doing that because I've got them name of the librarian lady, the reference library. But she has sent me, I didn't realise but apparently on those occasions and I'll show you the lists in a bit, that there were things like two, you know with hear of an unexploded bomb somewhere nowadays being discovered they evacuate the whole area don't they until it's been defused but on those dates, coz I've been out to, \* this because the only thing they've got in the reference library apparently but they haven't been able to find this so far because when I was up, when I was there on this particular night in Victoria Square there was a .... a Lyons Tea shop in Victoria Square, like Lyons have these white things \* gold lettering all over England, you know tea shops, the one in Victoria Square and on this particular night, this is where I've been able to trace the date even for this, on the particular night I was just on the worst ones of the blitz the was a bomb

landed right in the front of the, of that tea shop and it, it hit a gas main. So the whole of front of the Lyons Tea shop was in flames and the, great flames going up just down coz I was up the tower, down there. There were also, I don't know if it's true but it's was such that I'm not sure whether there weren't anti aircraft guns in Victoria Square as well but there was so much going on and I remember fifty fires I reported on the phone in Birmingham that particular night. But one thing that was dominant and I. I think

How did you report them then? How did you report them? \*

JR: I was on the phone (overtalking)

\* the position. Did you have a map?

JR: Yes. No I was able, I would just talking to the (overtalking)

\* such and such.

JR: And sometimes you found that I did make one erroneous thing I thought the post, the post office, the GPO had down \* trying to think where it is, down towards St Pauls Square, had gone up but it was the flames through the windows from a \*.

So it was \*.

JR: That was the error. But I did.

\*.

JR: I did count fifty fires but one of things that I, that as \* but was experience there was actually saw a stick of bombs coming towards me. Now there aren't many people who are still alive \* that the but I actually saw it you you because they also put great big whistles on the end of these wretched things so they have huge great whistles so it went "Screeches" as they came down it wasn't just rush of the bomb it was this great whistles of the end that make it even worse. But I saw and I can give actual way it was coming, it was coming from the first one hit somewhere down the bottom of Stafford Street and you know a great whine \* and a great blast going up. The second one came and hit the, at that time there was a bridge connecting the Victorian post office in Victoria Square and the other \* there's Hill Street and the other side of Hill Street, there was a sorting office part of the post office. And there was a bridge connecting the two. The second bomb hit that right bang on as \* that was, I saw coming \* bang, that one hit the bridge. It just blew away you know it was just gone, or you know whatever it was, it was bit, right on the. The third one dropped right in the street below me in the, in I'm trying to think of the name of the road but it's .. \* it's at the back of the .. back of the the.

\*.

JR: \* House yes.

I know where you mean \*.

JR: But it's it's and the council house also had \* the councillors' extension at the back of that road which was then the gas department, it was all the gas department, that goes right through to Great Charles Street, it's a stone buildings.

Yeah. Right. OK.

JR: \* the \* school of art is over the other, other corner of the side. But this, this bomb, the third one landed right down you know it, I was coming \* a fraction of a second from hitting the tower really because it was right down, right down and that, and the next one went further on Great Charles Street somewhere down there, so a stick of fire bombs. And it was the night that the \* post office the, the Lyons Corner House was on fire down below and all the other fires going on. Now .... the, the blast

was so strong that apparently I didn't know until the, you know, \* a few days later that there was also apart from the stick of bombs there'd been even bigger one at the same time landed at the \*. So there was a, one of a stick but there was a \* thousand pounder or something, it was a huge one. Again now \* now the whole of the, the \* was blown right, all the glass from the \* went like that. The ladders I'd gone up had all been \* that and it, \* all \* fires and things going as well you see so you're stuck up there \* you can talk to the chap below but \* (laughs) \* better come down Jim you know. But to get down I had to sort of.

.\*

JR: I had to climb down, hook the ladders.

Back on to.

JR: Back to \* where they'd been \*, and gradually pull on them round to get the ladders back and I went down below. And when I got down below I had got blood all over my hand and immediately \* sounds comical now the people who were in the council house to look after injured people they were \* look at \* ooh \* you know and anyway it was all washed down eventually \* just a scratch on me. They were almost disappointed \*. So. So and them from, from there since all the buses were gone I, then after do that and the, you walk home in the morning sort of thing, there were no buses \*. And then back to town to do an office job at \*. But why I got I thought, well wouldn't it be nice to have some photographs of that \* the hole, in the road there \* know \* Harrow Road so well, was you could have put a certainly a single storey, single charabanc bus in it, it was that big. A hole in the road was a great big hole and the front of the columns and the, \* columns and the gas department was all in the that was all \* blew the whole of the gas department front off and it did, it was more on the gas department side than the, the art gallery side so that wasn't affected but the department had gone, that, .... I thought wouldn't it be nice to get, this is before you got in contact me, wouldn't it be nice to have some pictures of what I got involved in the war you know and but apparently the, the they think the reference library think that photographs weren't taken of that sort of thing, because although they've got one of New Street, but they didn't want to tell the Germans what they'd been up to so they didn't publish a lot of this stuff.

\* The press censorship wasn't there round in the \* the coverage.

JR: But I know the whole of the front of the gas department was blown out and they \* I \* love to have a picture of the \* face in \* in all this rubbish but they, they've shown me a lot of New Street at the time and they've found it because the shop in as far as the \* the tea shop was blasted and because there's only one record of the council house having a hit they've defined it to about one of five days. I mean Birmingham had five continuous days of this it wasn't just one night it went of the next day and the next day and the next day. And so I've got, \* they mention I think it's like, it's either two hundred or three hundred HE bombs fell on Birmingham that night and they \* countless \* incendiary bombs so you can see \* a sort of \* long story but I've got pictures of the tower but I can get a picture to show you if you'd.

Yeah.

JR: But I don't want to get out of order because there are so many other things you wanted to ask. I'm getting you out of order anyway.

No. Well if you, you \* say if you want a break Jim. If you, if you.

JR: Shall we have some tea or something and I'll. (break)

Part 3

JR: But I mentioned about the \*.

Yes. It was really fascinating about the \* yes.

JR: Hotel. But I mentioned to you the city of Birmingham decided that JL Godfrey hadn't got the backing or the means of carrying \* although we won the scheme and I'd been responsible for, to getting the thing through but JL Godfrey was forced to accept that the runners up for this scheme for this were John Laing and Co, they were basically experienced house builders and everything else and they would get better at financial backing \* carry thing on and since since my client hadn't got the resources at that time though he said done but then decided he hadn't we, they had to do a, it had to be joint scheme with the JL Godfrey, Laing.

Laings right. And the you say that you won a competition for the site?

JR: There was a national competition.

...

JR: And there was architects, developers and contractors who wanted to go in for it. So it was and I put a scheme into all three sites but John Laings had done the same thing but they'd got three sites, I, I, I composed the thing into a architectural conception for all three sites.

And what was the influence behind your architectural conception for the \* Ringway centre.

JR: Oh I thought it would.

Where did that stem from Jim?

JR: I thought first of all it was to get a vertical emphasis which I provided with the hotel element and a horizontal emphasis with this ring road, almost like a city wall and, and in the process of doing the link the two sites they were both very awkward and difficult sites, make them into a really manageable site by linking the two and joining them together by bridging right over the road. And.

What was the brief for the site? Was it offices and shops, retail?

JR: I think it was, it was left to the developers, I think there was nothing at that time, I think it was mainly the ring road was there, they got the sites left over after compulsory purchase \* awkward sites and they just wanted some development proposals put forward, you know the. But the, the ... the.

Interesting. What about the type of materials that were used for the Ringway centre?

JR: Well that.

Pre-cast concrete?

JR: No well it is, what is there is pre-cast concrete but in fact I'd proposed in those early days I'd great ... great deal of thought and feeling for the \* notion of the John Lewis store in London and that was by that the it's a well known \* Liverpool architect, it was a well known chap who had designed that and we had decided at that a glass and metal cladding, they \* similar to the John Lewis department store in London would have been appropriate to the scheme. And the trouble is that John Laings were .... just house builders and they decided that since they were involved in the thing, "Well we're going to cut costs. We're not going to do expensive, that sort of finish". And so we had the, the we had to incorporate John Laings, I think it was called \* something like that but just pre-cast concrete, concrete panels. We did get a slightly superior finish to the front of the building and the poorest at the back but it was, it was a cost cutting exercise rather than doing high quality building that I proposed with my client JL Godfrey but.

Were the ideas for the Ringway centre, \* are they communicated to the public in any way?

JR: Which ideas you're thinking of. I think of \*?

The design for the.

JR: No. I don't, in those days I don't think there were people just so delighted to get something going ahead and moving in the right direction but a, there way, the, the.

...

JR: But what was as far as I was concerned was important that the John Laings decided since they were going to use their materials they were going to build this and they were going to have a hand in the construction, or the design construction of it and not only that because of that, the city forced it on me I received only half fees. So having won the whole scheme I had to put up with a demoted quality and I had allow John Laings to be involved in the construction drawings which meant that I was, my fees were cut down to just pure design. But and then, and I wasn't given the full design scope and that in fact one of my assistants, a chap who'd, a job architect for this scheme, a chap called Peter Bailey, he was a brilliant designer, and he said, "Well I'm not prepared to compromise this rubbish that's been proposed", it was strong words of that nature. He left and went to work in Scotland. But the, in fact the, the concrete illuminations on the front were part of John Laings proposal but they really, they couldn't wreck the whole concept but they, the detail was a ruinous but a that was the city of Birmingham dictating to \* a winner of a national competition. But I'm afraid that the, my experiences of dealing with Birmingham, the way they treated me and my designs was pretty outrageous \* because I, I later came along with the idea of putting as, Ringroad going here I was proposing a glass, a glass box theatre on the other site just north of the, just opposite the corner to the Albany Hotel was a glass box theatre. The negotiation had gone quite a considerable way but that was eventually put out to competition or a competitor was allowed to come in and it was a chap called Colonel Seifert who put buildings in most of the city of Birmingham and he put an office block there. But it it had every, if \* the proper enthusiasm from the city we could have had a \* a designs were made, a model made for a glass box theatre on that site which at that time very much required. But having got that far \* having got that far I then was thinking, "Well where was this, what was happening with the \* and as we went up the hill and I thought wouldn't be it a good idea to have, have a \* vertical feature as you, as you approach up the hill round by the \*

\* to the \*.

JR: And carrying on.

Yes. So where did the inspiration behind the Rotunda, I'm sure you've been asked that sometimes?

JR: Well part of the, part of the , well it sounds ridiculous because during the war I manned an observation post on top of the council house tower and from the top of that council house tower you could see the Lickey Hills, the clock tower, you could see the Lickey Hills, and you could see right into the distance, right over to Coventry, right over to the south, big open spaces, and from the level I was at I thought, "Wouldn't it be a wonderful idea to get a vertical feature at the top of the Bullring at the end of the Ringroad and from where you get a similar view that I'd got about the same level". So it, it that was part of the inspiration \* the Rotunda but it did start off as a much smaller building.

Twelve storey wasn't it?

JR: It started off, yes, as a smaller building and it sounds unrealistic and strange these days was so much of my architectural practice and life has been so unrealistic \* unbelievable but I did actually decide that to one day when we'd still time to do something about it I decided that A why don't I go the whole hog, why don't I go up as high as I can get the view that I used to get. And I can say I spoke \* JL Godfrey, the developer chap was in my office and I told him, "Look I think we can go a bit higher

Joe with this Rotunda building". He said, "What really?" and he was off to cash and he \* already paying the highest, he was already paying the highest ground rent or whatever the, they'd agreed for a site in Birmingham for the Rotunda site anyway. So it was, and it hadn't been put out for tender to anybody, so it wasn't a competition \* he'd agreed to tender \* did lease or whatever. And so the idea of putting some more floors on, that was very great idea for him. But it is a fact that he said, "I'll ring up the", I think it was \* I think been on working with so long it was, I think it was a chap called \* came on later was a chap called \* but I think it was \* he rang up, \* said, "Ring him up. Ring up Wimpey straight away", coz Wimpeys was financing, they were the developers in this case and, and we'd had to work with John Laings development on the earlier one but JL Godfrey wouldn't having anything more to do with John Laings so, so it was Wimpeys. And so he rang up the managing director of, of a Wimpeys on the spot then and said, "I've got Jim Roberts with me. Yeah. And Jim's \* go a bit higher with that. Put it onto \* twenty four storeys \*. What do you think about that?" "OK". "Yeah it's alright. Yeah. OK. Right we'll do it, goodbye OK". And that's how it got to that height. So, so it's sounds ridiculous, people have said, "What influenced me?" and nothing influenced me, it was an idea of seeing a war time view and let's have it up there and \* something \* a nice vertical feature at the end of the Ringroad. So that's how the, a bit of background to the Rotunda.

So what \* did the designs for the Rotunda go through then, so that's a sort of \* at the bottom of that there now isn't there?

JR: Well part of the, part of the design of, of the Rotunda was that the, was to the \* it had been a bomb site, it had had during the war it had had a city restaurant which was a place for citizens of Birmingham to have free meals and you could get, you could get a whale steaks for instance there because there was no food anywhere so that \* tasted fishy they're meaty as a steak but you got meals like that, free meals, well not free but cheap meals because that was the only, so it had, it was a bomb site but in that way, wasn't advertised \* was able to offer a big high price for it and it went through \* the competition but one of the proposals that I had that is, to extend the site along New Street in \* this was the conception and there was a big Victorian bank on the corner of the next road along and initially what I thought the idea is if we could, if we could bring that site into the Rotunda the banking site into the Rotunda then we could carry on a second stage of development along the New Street with the base of the Rotunda so planning ahead all the time. So what we did was to put the, put the banking hall on the first floor with escalators up to it and I think it's one of the first few that had banks which were upstairs. We had a cash dispensary at the base but then we, then having got the higher building then we were able to, we put the, put the the strong room above the banking hall. It's like \* tells you don't put the kitchen below, you put it above, but in a, in a bank you usually have the strong room below and this time we've got the strong room above, so the banking, the strong room is in the air and that was a solid slab for the, which formed the base of the whole office building above. But that was designed really just as a, as a mushroom with just cantilevered out from the centre court and that is, it's a sad scheme but in fact, \* point but in fact the when we got that, that banking, the strong rooms constructed I was invited asked to go over quickly to have a look at the site and there was a, a .... a minute crack had developed all round about ten foot from the centre core around the top of this strong room, concrete. And some critical reinforcing \* had been left out. Now at that stage it was \* thing were held up for quite a while and we had to, unfortunately we had to put nine, I think VO22 or something like that, variation order, we had put in nine columns in, all around the exterior of this drum, and jack, jack the thing up and reinforce it. Well that took it over a year to do and at great expense, don't know whether it was \* Wimpeys, the engineers, whoever came to sort that out though we had \* so we big piles of work \* so it held up for a while. But then we could proceed, but the point was it was like a mushroom, the other side of the mushroom was supposed to be rimmed, with no columns on the outside.

Right.

JR: So very disappointment to me that had to be messed up.

Yeah.

JR: But the bank was happy and we eventually, and when that was built we were able to move

along New Street with the Rotunda extension and make a pedestrian way through to New Street. But the other thing was the depression for me is that I designed the top floor of the building was .

Revolve.

JR: Was to have a revolving restaurant there and in fact the top floor has.

\* where did the inspiration for that come \*?

JR: It's difficult to know because in those days we were, we were had \* the, the head of the game I suppose and my, I think there had been in Austria somewhere there had been a revolving restaurant somewhere in Austria but it wasn't the thing you did but I've tried on numerous occasions to get \* this revolving restaurant done and eventually I did succeed in Liverpool and the at the top of the tower there but the one in Liverpool was unfortunately it was ruined because the, it was let to a restaurateurs who decided to have a classical inside, a revolving restaurant with a classical inside, classical regency ironmongery and finishes and at the top they had a medieval fibrous plaster half-timbered bar and they charged double what they should have charged and it's closed and it's now used as a headquarters for Liverpool radio. But nevertheless I've tried on the various places and when I was \* appointed architect at Birmingham Exhibition Hall when it was in Broad Street I again had a revolving restaurant incorporated in that scheme. So I've been, prone to some crazy ideas but they are very exciting when you have them but ... I don't \*.

No. It's good \* and the plans for the Bullring do you want to talk me through the background to the Bullring \*?

JR: It's, yes, having that there wasn't any initiative from the city \* or the planning departments or architects' departments so the having got the Rotunda under way then it seemed it was a, a possibility of linking the Rotunda down through the part of the Bullring, down into towards the, the railway station on the going down past the church, the .. \* think of the name of the railway station. But.

\* (overtalking) Yes.

JR: And so the proposal was having for by the time and so Manzoni's ring road was the part that was elevated was to take the pedestrians under the, under the part of it into an open space and then go through it to New Street. But so we put a car park another scheme for JL Godfrey car park and an office block and a pub and further down past the station. But things seemed to have one thing led to another but basically we're doing that the, by that time the ring road had been completed at the, the original market \* which should have been restored and there was could have been restored but unfortunately by another \* error of judgement or purposely I don't know the ring road had to be \* that the, the west, sorry the east end of the Bullring, the market hall, demolished then put a temporary end on it in red brick which was quite out of kilter with the rest of the building meant the two sides had been ruined so although it had only, \* it had only had its roof burnt out during the \* could have had a roof put back but administration and lack of whatever it is, ability, or so on, meant that that it was, it was, it was demolished and market hall was demolished, it wouldn't be allowed these days but and what happened is then the city provided just temporary market stalls.

Inside the shell of the hall.

JR: No after the hall.

Oh sorry \*.

JR: No after the hall had gone. Then they put temporary sheds and things in the centre but there was no \* really suggestion of what should be done and I thought at that stage why doesn't, why don't I put forward an idea for, for a proper Bullring development and, and so I, I then proposed a proposal. Now that, that proposal was turned it, ... it was done at the time the there'd been ideas for a, a new New Street station and I, I set up a liaison discussions with the, with the British Railways which the city seemed to totally ignored and didn't take heed of at all but with British Rail, now at the time alright

what do you think of British Rail, the market \* design signal boxes and they did all sorts of things like that but British Rail it \* with me they organised a very sympathetic top skilled architect to work with me to design and integrate with me and my Bullring scheme a new New Street station. I had meetings with this chap on a number of occasions in London and that was moving ahead and so at my Bullring scheme was linked straight into and in a similar type of architecture, we'd got the same tastes of architecture so this, these, the railway architect, the signal architect, "Oh it's \* signal architects get on with this, the other things" but he got a top level firm of really good architects together to design Birmingham its new New Street station. Now that was linked .. with the scheme I'd designed and I, I designed a, in association with British Rail architects' department a bridge over the ring road linked to the new New Street station so that, and a similar architecture \* going in for both schemes and underneath the, underneath that ring road was the \* bus station so it was a complex situation but it meant a total integration with all the shopping in New Street and Corporation Street comes straight through, a spanking new, very beautifully designed New Street station into the Bullring centre. And that scheme ....was prejudiced because the scheme was ready to go out to tender and the, the .... city of Birmingham decided that they weren't getting enough money for the scheme. So they decided to put it out to tender instead of being a, my scheme, my ideas it was just like the original Ring wood, a few sites I started right up to \* the Albany Hotel and the Ringway centre they, they abandoned my thoughts said, "Right we want more money. Let's put out to tender". And so it was put out to tender and it, that is fully, it's fully \* (noises) in ... in a book called the "Property Boom" (noises)..... (pause) under \* on ...But what the city said, didn't put in into their brief, alright my clients they want \* all you see \* the price to the city wasn't enough so they went out to tender. But in fact the city of Birmingham put out to tender nothing, they ignored all the ideas of integrating with the British Rail and the top, \* British Rail's architecture. And John Laings, they both did, they did their scheme within a two or three weeks \*. My scheme had had a great deal of research, and had been \* myself. It had got all the thoughts \* into it. So but John Laings had put a bridge across where I got my bridge but it didn't go anywhere, and in fact for years you could see on the other side of the road where the British Rail thing, you came against a brick wall. So that they put out to tender not my scheme but, but with the detail requirements at much cheaper debased scheme which John Laings built. And \* it was a failure right from the start because they'd never built a shopping centre like that, they put all the wrong things into it, it was brash, even the floor coverage was black rubber and it never did it, \* in fact it cost I think Laings millions of pounds over the period that it was demolished and it was an outrageous scheme but, but the this is, this is development I suppose but ... But I ....So this is where I think \*

#### Part 4

JR: \*. Before, in a way I think I'm really saying we ought to do this another time.

Right. OK.

JR: That's really what I'm saying because if I just show you a picture....

(interview ends)



## Appendix 2

### JohnMadin: interviewed on 18 December 2009 by David Adams

*(Where the recording is unclear this is indicated with an asterisk)*

Yes I'd really like to start John if I may for the benefit of the recorder, if I can have your name and date of birth please?

JM: My name is John. HD Madin and I was born on 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1924.

And can you just give me a very sort of brief explanation of the influence your parents had on your life, and how it has shaped your career choice I guess in the end and how influential were your parents?

JM: My parents were very influential inasmuch as on the one hand my mother was an artist and my father was a builder and a very well known cabinet maker actually and so that I had the practical aspects of \* aspects. I was brought up with these in fact and I decided to be an architect when I was twelve year old.

Really. Twelve years old.

JM: Because by this time my father had taught me how to lay bricks and do carpentry and so forth. And my mother had taught me to draw and design things so. So it seemed to me the quite obvious thing to do if you want to be creative is to be an architect and that's all how it all started.

Yeah. Fascinating stuff. So you were at the Birmingham School of Architecture didn't you?

JM: That's right.

Yeah. So how?

JM: Well there were two sections there. One was a, before I went in the army I did two years at the school of architecture and then I volunteered for the RAF coz I decided that we had to shoot down these Germans who were bombing Birmingham and everywhere else. And unfortunately after about four or five months training as a pilot I.

You actually trained as a pilot?

JM: Yeah. They discovered that I couldn't see at night properly.

Right.

JM: So I was told that I couldn't be a pilot. So I left the RAF and the next day I joined the Royal Engineers. So and then I served in the Royal Engineers for four years in India, Iraq and Egypt. And I, well it's a long story but basically eventually I was transferred to Cairo HQ and I was promoted to a staff captain and I was then put in charge of a development which the Royal Engineers were doing on the Suez Canal. So the reason for saying that is that I already had a year or so of practical experience having done two years at the school of architecture so when I returned back to the school of architecture in 1946 I think it was, I'd already had some practical experience as well as my earlier experience with my parents. So then I qualified in 1950 and I started practice straight away. That's a brief history \*.

OK. Can you just going back a little bit to the Birmingham School of Architecture, can you remember the type of curriculum? Types of things that were being taught in that period?

JM: Yes I think there were very practical, there was, the head was George Drysdale and they

were very practical architecture tuition I think. And I found it very easy for \* having had the experience when I went back to the school. So.

Having that sort of practical application in the field?

JM: Yes. So I awarded certain \* what they used to call in those days "stars" and, then I was, as I said I, I qualified in 1950 and started practice straight away.

Yes. Fascinating stuff. So James Roberts of course studied at the Birmingham School of Architecture, you were contemporaries. Did your paths cross at all?

JM: Oh yes. Very nice chap James. When you say did they cross? I think my approach was rather different to his and so we didn't have any competition as it were.

No. No.

JM: So no we didn't actually, but he had a relatively small practice in the end compared with mine which grew rather quite a large size.

\* yes. So did just to go back to the, so it was a very practical orientated type of learning at the Birmingham School of Architecture. Was Drysdale one of the key sort of influences for you or was he?

JM: Yes. I think he.

\* completely dogmatic \*?

JM: Yes. I found him very helpful practical chap you know as a head. And of course in those days there was also Manzoni in the, as the chief engineer at the Birmingham School of, at Birmingham City council and it was he who actually talked to Drysdale and recommended that I should take up, join a particular year, I think this was in sort of July and he recommended that I should start in the September.

Right. OK. So you had a sort of relationship between Manzoni at this point were you?

JM: Well I was the, the office boy.

Right.

JM: In Manzoni's office really to start with. And he then sort of recognised that I was interested and I had some talent I suppose. So he took me along to see Drysdale and introduced me and they took me on in the September. But there's interesting stories about Manzoni because ultimately when I came back from the army I was very keen on comprehensive planning and I suggested to Manzoni that within the \* which he had just created I said that there were only about three freehold interests within that area and what he should do is do a comprehensive plan for the whole of the centre of Birmingham within the ring road. And we talked about this at length and \* was the important thing about these free, as you probably know, most of our town centres are consist of numerous small freeholds.

Sort of fragmentary.

JM: So that is why London never got rebuilt because of all its freeholds interests whereas of course in Paris there was the Charles \* and so forth. But I thought here was a great opportunity for these \* Estate, Gooch Estate and then the city itself owned quite a lot within the ring road and I thought this was a great opportunity to produce a plan.

Comprehensive replanning.

JM: But he didn't go along with this and so I, I'd been frustrated for the last fifty years over this

because it there is still no comprehensive plan for the city of Birmingham even now at the present council say they talk about their big city plan but there is no plan, there is no drawings, there is no comprehensive development for the city. So but.

What do you think Manzoni's reasoning, rationale behind not embracing an all encompassing reconstruction plan was, do you think it was spurred by the bomb damaged?

JM: Oh no, no. I just think he 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. But going on from that and we can come to this later as you know I designed the \* Calthorpe Estate. Did you know that?

I did know that. Although my study areas is, well my knowledge of the Calthorpe Estate is \* (overtalking)

JM: Anyway the important thing is that when was I asked to design the Calthorpe Estate I recommended and designated an area of seventy acres near Five Ways for commercial development and here I was able to do what I hoped Manzoni would do in the centre of Birmingham so, and we have now today built, have you seen that area?

Mm.

JM: So you know we have these headquarter buildings set in a landscape setting coz I specified that they should only be a third of the any site covered by buildings and the rest had to be landscaping and car parking. So we had these individual buildings standing there in their own, their own splendour as it were. But that, I don't, well that, I now actually achieved what I tried to get Manzoni to achieve in the centre of Birmingham.

Fascinating stuff.

JM: So anyway that digressed didn't it?

No. No. That's really interesting. So you established a practice in 1950. Can you tell me a little bit about the context of your sort of practice?

JM: Well. You know having left the school of architecture I had actually already done some hard work before I'd left the school of architecture including building and designing a .. \* that building there \* I put \* and that's the Birmingham Citizens Building Society in Bennett's Hill.

Right. OK.

JM: So I as soon as I left the school of architecture I started building this and it so happened then that Shepherd Fidler Shepherd Fidler he was the city architect then.

He was the city architect.

JM: He saw the building and asked me to go and see him. And he gave me two small shopping centres to build, just like that.

Just on the basis of seeing \* the \* building?

JM: Well yes and talking to me and discussing it with me and he also knew a bit about the other background. So I think he realised that he wasn't taking too much of a risk. And so that went on from there. But and I worked with Shepherd \* a great deal in various town centre projects over the next \* until he retired, over the next few years.

Fascinating stuff.

JM: So that is how it all started really.

What was your relationship then \* building up on that point with the city council at this time?

JM: Oh at that time it, well you see I think what we have to remember is that we did then, in those days, have a city architect but now we don't have one. There is what they call a planner and you know who I mean is the head of planning do you?

I don't know actually. \*.

JM: Anyway the important thing is that they don't have a city architect so there's no one to guide the city on comprehensive planning of the city. When I say a planner I don't mean that planners can't do that but what I mean is that you need an architect to create the comprehensive developments I think in cooperation with planners and engineers and so forth. And so that I think is one of the problems at the moment. \* because as you know they are considering building this new library on a site which is too small, the cost of a 193 million pounds which is now just gone up by another 42 million I understand from the *Birmingham Post*. Did you read that yesterday?

JM: No. I hadn't seen the *Birmingham Post* \*.

...

JM: And so, and the building is a lot of nonsense really. It's just, it doesn't provide any better accommodation than the existing central library. And it's on a site (overtalking) which is too small.

I was going to say there's a recurring motif with the criticism of the libraries, them being too small to house the amount of books \*.

JM: That's right. And the site itself is too small and it's in the wrong place. But as we're recording this I \* qualify by saying that councillor \* has an idea, he wants to produce this new library simply so he can sell the Civic Centre site to allow a commercial development to take place. You know that I designed not only the library but also the Paradise \* the whole of the Paradise.

Sheridan [Shedden].

JM: That's right. We did that and I produced the, the design for Paradise Circus and we have photographs of the models if you want to see them. I did that in cooperation with Sheridan Shedden and it was approved by the city council and then of course part of it was the central library. But unfortunately, and that was opened as you know in 1974.

Yes.

JM: But unfortunately shortly after that starting in 1975 there was this economic depression.

\* precipitated by oil prices of course.

JM: So everything was cancelled. And although we'd virtually finished the main building parts of the library were still unfinished there and the area to the north and the south weren't completed. So they then put it on hold for about ten years I think it was, wasn't it, do you know the details do you?

Well I.

JM: Do you want me to proceed with this now while I'm talking?

\*.

JM: Or are we digressing?

We are, we're digressing, I mean more than happy for you to tell me \*. We are allowed to digress a little bit from the interview schedule.

JM: Well while we're talking about this basically what they have now done of course as you know, that in this ten years the lease of the central civic precinct which was beneath the library with an open shaft coming down \* which I designed as a civic square with fountains and waterfalls and so forth, they so they closed off the atrium to the civic centre with a sort of greenhouse glass type of covering. So they then reduced the amount of light getting into the reference library and then they filled the whole darn thing at the bottom with vast shoe shops, in the middle of the civic centre, in the middle of the civic centre of Birmingham. Extraordinary! Then they of course as you know they then went and sold off two sites where they have these black faced buildings adjacent to the library so one is an office block and the other is a hotel.

Hotel that's right.

JM: And those are completely out of context with the civic centre as a whole so that, and then of course things have gone to bad to worse as you know, \* Councillor \* wanted to move the library to East Side to put it with the educational buildings down there which is a crazy thing to do. I mean a central library should be in the centre of the city not where it is in fact. Anyway that all failed because it cost too much according to the council, about a 127 million I think it was. And .... then Councillor Whitby came on board and they decided to split the library and put it into two other places, the other civic centre there and that was abandoned. And now they have employed these Dutch architects to design the new library which as you know is a covered in sort of lattice work.

Yes. Chain mail effect isn't it \*?

JM: And in fact I've been asked now to check the library as and it doesn't provide the same accommodation as the existing library.

Crikey.

JM: And the existing library as you know costs 7 million pounds as it stands now. And now they're thinking of spending 100, gone up now, 240 million or something. But it, if we're talking about planning of town centres and planning in general such as Telford and so forth the problem is that you know one city council at one time approved it having studied it and gone into it in detail then there's things like a delay which is caused either by the \* a number of circumstances or other circumstances so a new council comes in and they think they can rather do better than their previous and so they then try to alter and the difficulty with planning it has to be a long term process doesn't it. I mean designing a new town you know the process of development goes on for forty years at least like the Calthorpe Estate I did a plan for the Calthorpe Estate for forty years. So if you're not careful what happens is that that successive councils or owners of properties or indeed in this case the corporations their members change and so the ideas change and they always think they can do something different, they want to change it, there's something which they can say is theirs and this is my \* is my experience not only in Birmingham but elsewhere. So and that is what is happened now of course. But of course there is growing opposition to this new library and the idea of filling these civic centre with commercial buildings is absolutely disgraceful. I mean can you imagine it happening in Paris or Stockholm or, can you imagine all this happening in the middle of city in Rome for instance. So that's where we are at the moment. And there's a report in the Birmingham Post only yesterday which you'd probably like to read in due course stating about the additional cost and I think now certain members of the council who have just been going along saying, "Yes sir. Yes sir", they're now realising that this is ridiculous project coz it doesn't provide any better accommodation and its costing this huge amount of money. I mean if we're talking about planning I think that is one of, you know having been doing this for fifty years that is one of my great concerns is that there is no continuity because and you do need continuity in long term planning.

Yes. Yes. \* very good point. Yes. Just to bring [you] back slightly John. To your early days at.

JM: At \*.

In the practice rather. Where, more particularly your design influences? What \*? What did your design influences extend from?

JM: What do you mean? Of architects who were in practice? Well of course the Corbusier in my young days was the man. And Frank Lloyd Wright was also a man who I admired enormously. And indeed I went to see him in America when I was quite a young chap.

Really?

JM: And \*. No. That was the kind of thing. Of course as you know I am a ruthless architect. At least that's what I.

\*.

JM: Yeah.

\* do you think that's a fair reflection?

JM: Well it's a question of how you interpret what ruthless means? And ruthless means my buildings that's alright. You know. But I, the word "ruthless" does tend to give other ideas \* and I don't think my buildings are ruthless buildings in the terms of being "brutal" you know. Still that is, entirely up to others to judge.

I guess it is an addition \* a factor here is that you design what the client wants of course to an extent?

JM: One designs what the client wants but you have to as the architect interpret what you believe is best for him and what he really wants you know coz most clients don't necessarily know in detail what they want. I mean as far as say the central library is concerned I worked very closely with the librarian, and I did research for six years over the central library in Europe and in America.

Really?

JM: Because even in the 1960s there was a movement towards electronic device for you know computers and so forth but that really happened in England so the only place to really try and find out what the future was was to go to America and so I studied these things in America which is quite helpful and useful. And then we slowly developed the central library based on this information which I'd gained from various searches and learning from the mistakes that had been made in the past and also of course there was quite a difference between the old fashioned library with its stacks of books all the way around and because this was a new era and there was a library really in my view should have been and is a centre of learning as opposed to just a place where you went and rented out books. You know it's a, and we do have as you know in the central library over five thousand visitors a day in the library. And anyway we could talk about the, the library in more detail. Where were we at the moment? You were asking me about (overtalking)

Asking you about influences, sort of your key influences that would have \*?

JM: That was it really.

So what about the sort of range of clients that came to you your architectural practice? Who were they and what your sort of relationships, how did you establish a relationship with the client, I'm really intrigued by that?

JM: Well I think the most important thing as far as relationship is trust, that the client trusts you. And having done this and other things other buildings I was then asked to design the Engineer Allied Employers building which is built in Edgbaston, Engineer and Allied Employers Federation, and my

consideration actually in terms of the building is once you're employed to do this you not only design the building as such but you design the interior in detail so in the Engineer and Allied Employers Federation I designed the interior as well including all the furniture and that was built completed in 1957 and I got the civic crest award for that so that was my first building actually. And that led to me building the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce building. And we had the, RIBA award for that. But if you say so, that in the one instance is the how things moved as far as the buildings such as headquarters buildings were concerned, one thing went to another and then at the opening of the Chamber of Commerce the chairman of the Birmingham Post and Mail was there at the opening and he said, "Would you like to do a building for me?" so now you remember that I built the Birmingham Post and Mail.

Since been demolished in 2005.

JM: And so I designed Birmingham and so forth and this is how things proceeded from you know. So basically one building led to another.

Yeah. So it's.

JM: Then we built the Shellmex and BP headquarters and, and then we did Industrial Securities, which you know do you?

Yeah. Certainly know the name yeah.

JM: And so forth.

And your architectural practice would have been quite sizeable at this time. I mean how many people did you employ?

JM: Well it, I started off in 1950 with myself then it grew quite considerably in the first ten years and I had about thirty architects, thirty people working for me. But I liked to concentrate on the basic design, the detailed design, so I brought in more and more staff to do the site supervision and that sort of thing and so forth. And so then I formed a partnership in 1960 I think it was with two of my friends from the, from my class in the university.

Oh right.

JM: Two very close friends. They were, they were Tom Hood and .. Tom Hood and Derek Davies I think it was. No sorry, Tom Hood and Del Smith sorry. I do apologise. They were my two colleagues which we actually did things together when we were studying. So I asked them if they'd like to join me so I gave them a little share of the practice. And then we had, so in fact \* my buildings that I built were in fact built in what was then called the Maiden partnership. Then things got even bigger and we had Corby New Town and Telford where you live now. Telford design and so forth and by this time we, I'd been asked to design Pebble Mill at One \*. That's sad story too because they've decided to Pebble Mill at One became so successful this is the reason I'm told that they, and it was too near London, there was conflict all the time so they decided to reduce the activities of the BBC and move it to Liverpool. But there again the BBC was the first combined radio and television centre ever to be built. And that meant me doing a lot of personal research as well in America and various other places but there was no, coz you see most television centres particularly in America and Europe were commercial organisations, it was only in England that you had the BBC as it were you see. So it, the sound and the commercial centres were always under a different management \* and leadership so there were never combined until the BBC came along and asked me to design this and said, "We'd like to put the two things together". But, so that, so I digress but you asked me how things progressed.

Yeah.

JM: Then of course having done the BBC I was asked to do another, a number of other television centres elsewhere. One in \* didn't come off because there was the 1972 invasion of there. And then I was going to doing one in Cairo and Gadaffi came in so that but I had designed one in Zagreb

Yugoslavia which was also a combined radio and television centre which was similar to the BBC really. So and I did that in cooperation with Marconi.

Oh right.

JM: So one thing leads to another you see.

A way of establishing your status and profile.

JM: Well I don't know about establishing it but it happens \*.

Fantastic. Just on the relationship with the client I mean. How much freedom did you have to actually implement sort of visions or was there a sense \*?

JM: Well of course the clients came to me having seen what I'd already done. There wasn't a great deal of problem there coz the reason why they asked me to do it was because they appreciated what I had done. But the key thing is that I always said to every client, "But if you want me to design this building I must design the whole thing. I don't want just to do the sort of plan and the exterior of the building I want to, I need to do the whole thing" and so with the Chamber of Commerce for instance I designed the whole interior, even the carpets and all the furniture. And so I've got some things which \* I don't know how much you're interested in that but and you know I think that's the important thing is that you design the complete building including the furniture.

Is there a, you talked earlier about the temporal dimension been sort of built and established and should last to the future, is the temporal, is the sort of a temporal dimension built into your projects?

JM: A temporal how do you mean?

Should last for a certain amount of time, should of 30, 40, 50 years time?

JM: Oh yes.

Should still be useable?

JM: Yes. That was the objective yes. But then you see you have different influences don't you? The reason the Post and Mail was, well, [demolished was] coz someone came along and decided that they wanted to increase the density by five times of the existing building and the local planning idiots they sort of "yes, you can do it". So there's five times or more accommodation on that site than was originally approved which has all this huge effect on not only the traffic and circulation problems at the centre of the city they have no idea the Birmingham council in relationship to what their decisions have on the impact of the city as a whole. I mean if you increase the density of the building by five times and you do that regularly all throughout the, the city and you don't improve the infrastructure then you're in the mess that Birmingham is now in which is pretty chaotic isn't it, I don't know whether you agree with that?

\* yeah. It can be, it can be chaotic at time. So that's the point of lacking an overall comprehensive redevelopment and reconstruction plan for the city centre?

JM: That's right.

Do you think with hindsight in the post war years was a mistake then?

JM: Well do you mean that we didn't do a comprehensive? Yeah it was absolutely disastrous. I mean Birmingham would have been a wonderful city. Because here was Birmingham in a ring road, on the hill, you know, it's perched up on a hill anyway and they could have been actually a fantastic city coz we had, in \* Coventry we had the cathedral in the centre there and there was tremendous opportunities for creating a wonderful city centre. And then of course they went for the civic centre. As



you know we discussed that earlier. It's the not only the lack of initial planning but it's also the lack of continuity or con-, continuing the agreed proposals although things have to be adjusted to meet changing demands.

It's a flexible.

JM: But as long as the plan is flexible as you say and every plan should be reasonably flexible within the context of the restrictions which are needed for the environment and also from practical sources you know.

I mean what. \* probably impossible to answer but what do you think the motivation was behind not adopting this overall reconstruction plan? Do you think that the council had enough ownership of land within the ring road to actually control development?

JM: Well they didn't. They (overtalking) two thirds of it within the ring road was owned by two well known estates, one was the Calthorpe Estate and the other was the \* Estate I think if I remember rightly and the city did have a small part but not a \*.

Not enough to shape?

JM: Yeah. And that included things like council houses and so forth.

Yeah. \*. Yes. So \* moving on a bit \* civic centre proposals. I believe your also had designed schemes for the Ladywell centre.

JM: That's right.

Can you tell me a little bit about the context behind that \*?

JM: No that was the Gooch Estate you see. And .. what had happened is that I, I was designing or had designed, no I was designing the Calthorpe Estate \* Richard Calthorpe and so the Gooch Estate decided it might be a good idea if I did something for them. So that's how it evolved. But it wasn't the same as the Calthorpe Estate anyway, nowhere near the size and it wasn't so easy because there was so many already existing leases although quite a lot of it was still on the lease basis 99 year lease, but they they sold off parts of the leases at for a freehold, to freeholds, so it wasn't a very easy thing to do really. But it was something which quite interesting but not really satisfying from my point of view.

What was, what was contained with the Ladywell centre?

JM: Well we had mostly there were, well we had the Alexander Theatre as you know in that area and I rebuilt that - partly rebuilt it. And then the idea was to provide for recreational facilities and then shopping and so forth was the basis.

Where did that that belief that there was a need for recreational facilities come from?

JM: I think it was partly the owners of the Gooch Estate and partly myself and partly the city architects coz we felt that alright we the city had \* had but it didn't really have sufficient recreational facilities in the city. So those why I think it happened. I think every city needs recreational facilities but whether that was the right place for them nor not I'm not sure.

What was the, the can you talk me through the design of the Ladywell Centre the key features of the design?

JM: Mm.

If you can \*?

JM: Well I don't think there was any key features in the sense that you know like with the Calthorpe Estate and town centre. Because we had to fit these existing buildings in so there was no key features as such but it was just an effort to provide recreational facilities close to the city centre.

And we've mentioned of course the civic centre proposal. The civic centre area a long historical lineage hasn't it? After the First World War it was earmarked wasn't it, the civic centre?

JM: That's right.

Competition in 1926.

JM: That's right. And then nothing really happened or much. I think they built Baskerville House and that, and there was another recession I think and it stopped that and as we've seen later subsequent councils didn't proceed with the original plan, so they didn't go on with that plan then I think there was another effort following that. Then I came along and I rather asked me to do the one for the Paradise Circus and indeed for the whole of, I did this whole thing right the way up Broad Street too you see. I mean I've got some illustrations of that if you're interested but the, it's doing it in terms of words it was, .. a great opportunity I think for the city of Birmingham and it's all been lost really largely now. But I still think that if Councillor Whitby goes or we can rid of Councillor Whitby I recorded this but I when I say, "we" I mean the councillors and there quite a lot of councillors now are concerned about the future, once that happens then I think it's quite possible to still to create a marvellous civic centre as was originally intended by Councillors Whitby's predecessors.

Yeah. That's interesting. Just to jump back to the civic centre proposals. I've been through my notes that Shepherd Fidler, the city architect put forward, a master plan for the civic centre in 1950s and you yourself and Sheridan Shedden came along ...

JM: That's right.

Can you tell me a little bit more about that sort of shift?

JM: Well I wasn't involved in the, at the earlier project at all. It was just that I was simply asked to if I would interested by Sheridan \* and I thought this was a tremendous opportunity for the city although I already know it had already failed about twice I thought this was a great opportunity to do this and I didn't realise of course there was still going to be yet another recession in this, in this 70s but no this seemed to be a great opportunity to do this.

Yeah. Can you remember how your \* Sheridan was different from the one put forward by Shepherd [Fidler]? Was it formed in 60 foot column with a restaurant on top?

JM: Did that.

Is that right?

JM: Yeah. I think that was it originally. But ... I, it was, it didn't go very far that plan you know it wasn't, I mean I built a, and I can show a three dimensional model for the thing and I must say that one of those things that I think is absolutely vital most lay clients can't read plans can they? And so.

\* .

JM: So whether you're talking about an individual house build a model for them and let them actually sort of walk around it you know. I know we have different techniques now but then.

\* .

JM: Yes. But and it's the same with planning, I think one must appreciate the whole concept in the spaces which you're creating and well we all know this I don't have to say this, you know this, but one of the ways of getting the client to understand this is by building a pretty large scale models so that

they can actually walk around it with their minds you know and they either approve it or they don't. And so I did build a the models for this civic centre which I must say I was very pleased \* the council approved unanimously it wasn't a question of you know one party saying yes, and the other party saying no, the whole thing was supported and so was the library at the time. But there it is things change don't they? But I do think that the idea of using models and perspectives to interpret what you're trying to do to the lay client is very important. You agree with that do you?

Interesting. Well these \* interesting point John. These ideas models proposals were they ever communicated to the public?

JM: Oh yes there was exhibitions of it \* we, by the city council \* proudly exhibited what they were going to do for the city so we had a series of exhibitions.

What as the attendance like at the?

JM: Oh this was not just a day's exhibition it was a continuous exhibition so well I don't know.

This was for the civic centre proposal?

JM: That's right.

Right.

JM: I don't know how many.

People.

JM: Visited it.

The library's probably got the records.

JM: But it was a continuous process of people visiting it.

So it was there was quite an attempt to communicate these sorts of ideas across to the public.

JM: So could they comment and influence any changes or was it more that the city council put in for, this is what's going to be?

...

JM: Oh yes I think, I think we had somewhere there who \* sort of \* whether they had to listen to what people were saying and they produced records of what people had said I think but I can't, so long ago, I can't remember. But that was a concept.

It's obviously consultations is a very big thing these days with any strategic project \* that they involved \* the six months before.

JM: That's right.

Any major schemes.

JM: And it's a great thing. Once someone, they commented and if you make alterations you know to follow people's needs wishes, but as far as this civic centre was concerned it was trying to match and be a complementary to what was already there which was a town hall, museum and market \* and the council house.

Civic functions were there.

JM: And this like the library was linked up with pedestrian walkways and fountains and lakes and so forth running all the way through to between the central library and the council house \* museum. There are really is town hall and museum and council house was further away on the other side.

So there was, an arena, a sort of crucible of civic functions. And by this time.

JM: No I mean a city needs a civic centre and we never had one. They and now they're about to try and say this, destroy the concept of having one now. How by putting these commercial buildings right up against the town hall, and museum and art gallery.

Maybe \* sort of emphasis I suppose.

JM: Well every city needs the civic heart doesn't it, a civic centre? Well all those functions which are needed by the citizens of the town can go and are looked after and all the facilities are provided there. Like the library with five thousand visitors a day. And like the museum and art gallery, that's a marvellous you know it quite well do you? I mean that has a wonderful amount of attendance was well and now also \* redone up the town hall which is but that wasn't sufficient on its own it needed to have other facilities this is why we planned the civic centre which is now going to be a shopping centre.

And at this time in the early 1960s the central library had taken, virtually taken it's final form. In the early 1960s. Is that right?

JM: No the central library wasn't completed until 1974 but.

The, in the civic centre proposals the library actually been factored in that \*?

JM: Well it was designed as part of.

Of the scheme. Yeah.

JM: The whole concept. The library was part of it and it was part of the original model.

Yes.

JM: It so happened I designed the whole thing and I was asked to design the library as well but it was all part of it.

Yes so moving on to the, on to the library I mean we have talked in some detail about this, again you spent some time in the USA studying libraries there, is that where the real influence for the design came about?

JM: Well it isn't just the design, it's trying to determine what's needed for as a centre of learning that's what I always call it really, what is needed for the reference, what is needed for the lending library, what is needed so it can be a centre of learning and you put all these things together and what eventually evolves is the building which you've created. And that is I think it grows it creates itself through all the needs that you discover over time. Same as a television or radio centre you know you have your, going back to that, you have sound and then you have your television, then you have a programme like the Archers, so I created a studio especially for the Archers with steps up so you go (noises) steps up in the studio so you can.

Fascinating. You entered into some discussion the city librarian did you?

JM: Oh yes.

Bill Taylor.

JM: Yes. He was excellent. Super. It wasn't a question of me entering into discussions with him, we worked together with our arms round one another for years actually. He was a first class man. In

fact much of the library in many ways are really due to him.

Right. What were his ideas then?

JM: Well you can see what they are by looking at the library. I mean we worked together to create a, he wanted to, or we, both our ideas was to get away from this historical idea where you had a library, you had a series of books round it and some tables in the centre and you just, but that's not enough for today's library, there, it has to be a centre \* and what more particularly it was important we had to design it very flexibly so it could meet the changing needs which I could see were coming up from America with the electronic use and this is what's happening now, it's slowly changing you know, and the use of actually books is reducing and it's more electronic and so if you, have you been to the library recently?

\* really.

JM: Have you been recently?

No. Not recently.

JM: When did you last go?

Probably years ago now.

JM: Oh.

Good few years.

JM: Where do you live. You live in?

We live in Stafford.

JM: Ah I see.

Well you were originally from \* weren't you?

JM: Shropshire. South of \*.

South of Telford.

JM: Ah. So yes but I, you don't actually live in Telford?

No I work there.

JM: See so that would .. you could imagine having to design something where you expected five or six thousand visitors a day. Now OK you have a one of these supermarkets of all round, what do you call them now? With escalators all the way up the building.

Department stores.

JM: Department, sorry. Department stores. And of course you do have a lot of movement there and that's why the central library.

(interruption)

.

JM: Sorry. Yes. There was a need for this flexibility and so all these \* reference floors were designed (noises) \* reference library as a central atrium and then the library's designed round like this

you see. So all these floors are basically very flexible although of course we had to redesign them to meet the particular needs of the time. But all these there were ....

OK.

(interruption)

.....

JM: So the whole structure was built on four principle columns you see. And so that it could be adjusted as time went on and the entire floor levels were a duct, the whole thing was a duct underneath. So when they came to plug in their computers in ten years time which I thought they might and which they have done you know they can plug them in anywhere you see so \* (noises).

That's amazing. Fascinating. Yeah. And who, was it, \* bus station underneath as well?

JM: Yeah. Yeah.

\* with the ring road I take it.

JM: That's right. The idea was that there was always these problems of how you got to the civic centre you see so I designed this bus station underneath so you got out of your bus and went up an escalator and you walked straight into the central library and the other parts. But they never used it because at, at the time the city already had their own bus service and almost at the time when I, or after I was, was building it they abandoned it and so they had a different \* type of service which I would think was run on a sort of commercial basis but that didn't matter because in any case I planned it so it could be used for archives anyway so it, they just didn't use it. The only trouble is now as you know, once you've been there, is they've filled the civic square as you know with, with fast food shops and the basement is now used to, for storage for the fast food shops about. And one of the excuses for building a new library was of course there wasn't enough space for archives yet there was a space here being used by the fast food shops and the \*.

Interesting. Yeah. Can you tell me something about the types of material that you used on the exterior?

JM: Of the library?

Yeah.

JM: We ought to switch that off for a moment.

OK. Yeah.

JM: \* let me \* I'll start off. But there's a certain point here where we have to switch it off.

Just let me know and \*.

JM: No it's OK. It's, I \* originally conceived it to be cladded in \* marble or Portland stone and when we at the, at the stage of final stages of design Mr Alan Maudsley, the city architect convinced the council that he could make arrangements for the cladding which I, which \* were already planned for and they gave him permission to go ahead and organise the cladding of the building which was all against our wishes but being as I was only the architect and the city council made the decisions and they gave Maudsley permission to go ahead and arrange the contract for the cladding. Do you know the rest of the story?

I, I certainly know some if not all of the detail surrounding Alan Maudsley's dealings?

JM: You know that he was eventually dismissed?

Sent to gaol wasn't he?

JM: That's right.

\* unfortunate yes.

JM: And so, you asked me what about the cladding of the building you have the answers there.

Fine. Yep.

JM: But I would still love to see it in [Travertine] marble such as I've used on other buildings like the Engineers and Allied Employers Federation for a civic building.

Yes. It needs.

JM: \* absolutely fantastic to have a finish like that. So that's the sadness of the whole thing.

Yeah. Just on the, I'm sure you've been asked this hundreds of times, but the actual shape \* architect, the inverted diamonds, the ziggurat, where did that come from?

JM: Well the object, I know I'm accused of copying America but with a central library where you have all these precious books you, you need really to have a either glazing which is completely sun proofed as it were and in those days you, you it wasn't so readily available so the idea was to have your \* with the \* windows underneath the stairs.

Yeah. OK.

JM: That was the idea.

I see.

JM: Well that also had an advantage because the book stacks could be underneath.

Right. So they wouldn't be exposed.

JM: Yeah. Well no not only for that but it meant you could use most of the external walls for books whereas if you have just, if you just had glazed you couldn't do that.

Right.

JM: So that we calculated that there was a sufficient light from these clear \* even though they were under the stepped ziggurat because in the middle you had a glazed, a completely clearly glazed area because that was all open until they covered it up and put all the fast food shops underneath. And so that is the concept. But I know I'm often accused of probably what has happened in America but it's a very practical solution. And so there we are. That's the answer to. You already knew about that.

Well from what I've read. Boston City Hall is often cited isn't it as an influence.

JM: That's right. Yes. Actually I've never seen the Boston City Hall but of course I I don't know how it all happened but it's certainly wasn't, "Oh what a good idea. We'll build a Boston City Hall". It evolved from the need to protect the books.

Yeah. Yeah. So you, so the actual, the design of the building was yours. In terms of how the, the drawings for the building sort of evolved through time was that given to sections of your architectural practice, were different teams responsible for elements?

JM: Oh yes. I mean.

But yours was the main conception?

JM: Basically I had three teams. The design team, the initial design team, the people who did the detailed design and the working drawings and the people who supervised the work on site. So each of the buildings that I designed like the central library we had a team of probably ten people working on the ... initial concept being fed in with all this information which we'd been researching and some of these people were doing research as well as myself, you know, they were going off here and looking at things. So that was the design team. Then there was this working drawing team and dealt with the details and \* sufficient but I was primarily concerned because I like doing it, I like \* as the boss so I could decide, I would design with this team. I had other people supervising and other people doing the detailed working drawings. But we all worked as a team obviously. I was.

So you see elements \*.

JM: Designing it. But we all worked as a team and the ideas came up in the team as well as from me personally. I must say quite a lot of ideas I always dream up at three o'clock in the morning. I do \* wake up do you?

Yeah. I often wake up.

JM: I often wake up at three o'clock in the morning.

Have to write something down next to my bed.

JM: Having gone to bed, having gone to bed thinking about a problem I find I wake up at three o'clock in the morning and the solutions there sometimes you know. So you quickly get up your pad out, draw it and then go back to sleep again. You find that do you? Do you wake up in the middle of the night?

It sometimes helps to put down on paper doesn't it \*?

JM: And the thing is unless you put it on paper you can't go to sleep again. But once you put it on paper you go off to sleep, I've done that.

Or forget it (laughs)

JM: It's true. Very true.

Is that the answer?

JM: Fine yeah. Fine.

...

JM: I mean you, one can't claim the that you designed everything yourself because but it is a team job but people ask me why nearly all my buildings are relatively same type of building you know, residential developments and my commercial developments they all have the same kind of basic philosophy behind them and that is because I was able to and lead the team and do this on all of them because there were, I, you know, oh. No way you know that but you have \* the RIBA are writing a book about me. Did you know about that?*[This was later published as Clawley, 2011.]*

Um. Don't know if I was aware actually.

JM: Well they are writing. In fact one of the authors was here yesterday. That's why you've got all those files along there. And this is one of things we were discussing yesterday. He said, "How is it you built so many buildings and they're all have the same character? You couldn't?

Same hall mark?



JM: Possibly have designed them, you know, been designed them all?" So I explained it to him this is how we did it with the me. But I didn't like to \* supervision on site I think that was, needn't be there and the detailed work in drawings all I had to do is inspect them to see if they were alright \*.

Yeah. Right.

JM: \*.

Who were, who was responsible for the actual ... building the contractor for the central library? Can you remember? Was it McAlpine?

JM: Yes it was \*. It was. They were very good. Yes.

Interesting.

JM: They work very well with us. Of course it was quite unusual, and I can't just remember the name of the structural engineers which were.

\*.

JM: \* that's it. Well done.

Gold star for me.

JM: But it was a building with these huge columns so we could have this flexibility so \* the whole buildings \* designing with these four huge columns which is quite exciting for them to do actually, they were it was the first time that I think they'd ever done it, on such a large scale.

And again was there any lines of communication back to the public as to what the library was going to look like or?

JM: Oh we had exhibitions of it. Of the library as it was designed. I also built a model of the library and the model was shown to the public. Yeah. But that was in fact also part of the overall civic design you see. So we had the model for the, the whole thing and then eventually we built in what in the model more detailed model for the library itself.

OK. Can you remember any public reaction to these models? Difficult to?

JM: I mean I was almost embarrassed because people were so enthusiastic about it, it was. I mean the only time we have any criticism is now.

For a period of reflection?

JM: Well no, of course they want to pull it down and develop the site commercially. I mean that is why we're having this, apart from Prince Charles who said it's.

\* incinerator.

JM: Incinerator. Well of course he's made such remarks about other buildings and the other building, I didn't get it, had a gold medal shortly after he made this comment. So .

Take it with a.

JM: He's quite outspoken.

Outspoken with a dose of salts. Influence.

JM: The trouble with Prince Charles is that I think he tries to cover too many subjects and he's not

a principle of one you know, in that sense.

Not a specialist.

JM: And you recorded that too. But it's alright. Don't worry. I mean, we think that that is .

Judicious editing.

JM: I think that is a fact, one needs to be an expert on architectural planning, one needs as you have to study planning \* and architecture in detail and you just don't do it in five minutes, it takes many years to understand.

OK.

JM: Right.

So you say you can remember some positive public reaction to the central library?

JM: Oh yes. It would never have got built if it hadn't of been. And of course the great thing is when it actually opened there was tremendous enthusiasm about it. People going, you see I had these escalators in the middle of the library and the reason for that was that we knew that we were going to have five, six, seven thousand visitors a day there and you couldn't cope with that number of people in a practical term with just lifts.

No. Of course.

JM: And also they, the concept of the idea of the lift was part of an overall concept whereas \* as the library was a centre of learning as well as a reference library \* lending library it was a need to interconnect various subjects or different departments so people who were interested in one subject may become interested in the other subject so all the main reference floors were linked physically and visually and psychologically \* you \* psychological connection together and the using the escalators was such a easy way of doing it coz people could move up through one floor to another through another floor to another and they could appreciate that there were other things going on in the library as well which may well have interested them. And but on the other hand also if you're \* trying to move five thousand people around a building a day it, it's much better to have an escalators but I those escalators mustn't be so big that they sort of dominate the whole thing. That is why I made them so that you just had one person standing there. You didn't have a group of people. You know like in a, in a store you tend to have a whole family \* everywhere.

\*. No. Some interesting detailing in the interior of the library as well. There's a war memorial isn't there?

JM: That's right.

Is that yours?

JM: Well it was suggested that we should put it in, it wasn't my idea and I was asked to find a space for it. What \* other things about the library?

No that's the only thing I can remember from what I read, interesting features and there's a mural as well isn't there of it?

JM: There's a mural. And also we took the spiral staircase out of the old library and used it to go for the six and the seventh floor.

I've been to the seventh floor.

JM: Which I'm now criticised for for you know not having my escalators going up there.

(laughs) Yes. Really interesting stuff. And can you tell me something about the, \* another contentious issue, trying to skirt around the contentious issue.

JM: No, no don't bother.

The ATV tower in the civic centre? What happened there? Can you remember that? \* came in didn't they?

JM: Yes.

Then the sale of the site?

JM: Oh yes.

Yes. And that \* wrecked the whole scheme \* the quote from the \*. Wrecked the whole civic centre scheme?

JM: That's right. It was all completely out of scale. Completely dominated. You know we had the civic centre, with the town hall, museum, art gallery, and the council house, to a certain scale.

Yes.

JM: And to put in a commercial building which would fight this concept, it was completely out of scale with, I mean if you're going to have a tower block then put it somewhere in the heart of the town, town centre but not within ... or adjacent to the civic centre. That's. But of course it's getting worse now, they actually putting these things right in the middle of the civic centre, with this new, you know Argent is planning to put these new commercial buildings in once they've knocked down my library.

Interesting. Good. Excellent. Thank you very much. Another building that sparked, certainly sparked my interest was the National Westminster Bank. Another quote unquote an example of "brutalist architecture". Could you tell me a little bit about the context for that building?

JM: Well in actual fact this was one of the very early buildings that actually had the concept that instead of just going to a counter and doing your business it had a glass screen through which the business was done, and then on the outside you had a tables and chairs where managers and \* could come and talk to the clients. So that was the fundamental, it was one of the first new, going to many banks now you see.

\*.

JM: Yes. Well this one of the first one to do it. But as far as the overall concept was concerned as you know you have Connaught[ie Colmore] Row with these Victorian, mostly Victorian buildings which are four storeys high or so, so what I did there was to put the building at the same height as the others along the road and then I put the tower way back.

Stepped back isn't it?

JM: Stepped back. So the idea was that the scale of these buildings, I mean coz I was asked to build a big building there you see and so ... anyway \* of meeting the clients' need and also keeping in scale with the rest of the building was to do it like this and then you had a courtyard in here if you remember. So that is that and as far as the general external appearance is concerned well that's ... I had this recessed and moulded concrete which is an alternative to other buildings which I built which are entirely glazed. But that's the principle design \* coz the council house is just down here isn't it?

\*.

JM: So I can't really say much more than that \* one either likes it or doesn't. But and but what they're now trying to do don't know.

No I don't actually.

JM: They've just given planning permission to do that.

Oh crikey. No I didn't realise that at all.

JM: Oh yeah. Four times as big as my building and the actual tall building is right on the back of the pavement. So it's it's not a, there's a \* here's the my building there with a my other buildings stepped back there you see. But what they've done is that they've now the proposed one so they can put forward four times as much space in, they actually put the whole building from the main, from the back of pavement. So these buildings \* the Victorian buildings are sort of in scale like this.

Overwhelmed.

JM: Right. Can't believe it.

JM: So there you are. There's an argument about this at the moment with this \* Twentieth Century Society and people like.

And what about the design influence for the National Westminster Bank, did that stem from any particular belief or \*?

JM: No.

\* really to meet the client's needs?

JM: Well it.

Certainly \*.

JM: The actual building itself, the bank itself I, I had a brief from them, what they wanted to do and in this case they wanted to have this seats and chairs outside you know in \* not outside but on the as a hall in front of the actual place where you paid your money in you see. That was their brief. Then they required \* had \* making this as their sort of regional centre offices, that's why it was such a tall tower. So I just tried to meet their requirements and at the same time do it in such a way so we didn't wasn't out of scale with the existing buildings in Connaught[Colmore] Row.

Interesting.

JM: But I mean this elevation treatment and so forth evolved, I built a lot of other buildings like this.

Right OK. Interesting. Interesting features \* building.

JM: \* .

Yeah. The doors to the banking hall. Yeah.

JM: That's wasn't my.

Triangular room.

JM: Yeah.

Triangular \*.

JM: That was my basic idea but in actual fact we got some sculptors in to do this I think. Can't remember exactly how it was but it was all part of the basic design \* design team.

Right. Interesting stuff. And gold leaf on the ceiling.

JM: That's right.

Is that true?

JM: Quite frankly that wasn't my idea. It it's something that evolved and \* wanted to make this very special so it was decided ultimately to this gold leaf. But I wasn't very enthusiastic about it. But it's, I don't know, it's \* isn't, or \*. And it, it seemed to be appreciated by people although other people criticised it as being over opulent you know.

The building, the banking hall retains sort of its original features, light fittings and windows and.

JM: That's right.

Interesting stuff.

JM: That was another wish of the client.

That's fantastic, fantastic John. I think that's covered all the buildings \*.

JM: All the buildings you \* liked. (noises). \*. Big cupboard. These are what I had for this (noises). You didn't mention \* Metropolitan House?

\* Metropolitan House.

JM: \*. do those.

Thank you. (noises)

JM: These happen to be here of course. We were doing the ... about my book \*.

Yeah.

JM: That was the first plan for, that was.

That's \* new town.

JM: \*. But then I decided that, sorry. OK. I decided that once I designed this I went back to Sir Keith Joseph, and said, "Look we have these houses \* open \*. It's going to be a terrible conflict because you're going to pump into the \* new town and they're going to feel that they are being cheated by the fact that money's not going to them". So ultimately.

They were incorporated.

JM: They were incorporated.

Right.

JM: Let's how it ended up.

\*.

JM: But you know the concept was that instead of having a grid system as they have in many of the new towns.

\*.

JM: This series of \* the idea, I dreamed up as I was driving back from my first meeting with Sir Keith was that the idea was to have a necklace you see. And on that necklace would hang villages and because most people love living in villages don't they, they don't want to live in a big town. So the concept was you had a sort of necklace with three with villages hanging on the necklace on both sides and each group of villages, three together so with a village itself was a small village and everything was pedestrianised at the side, it all, all the cars were kept out and you could just walk through the village, the children could go to the preparatory school which was in the centre of the village, and the shopping was in the centre of the village and so that you were completely free to go and walk through your landscape and gardens right to the town centre, to the village centre. And you had the primary school there as well and then I, what I did as I designed three villages together so that they could be grouped together and the secondary school could be serving three villages together and in that with that group of buildings I built another building which was like the the town, the village centre building and in that I designed the inside so you had a kit so you could have this useful three different or four different religious, religions and what you did is you wheeled out the kit for the Church of England and then when, when the other religions wanted to have a service there that was taken away and of course, and so because in a place like this you just couldn't have Church of England churches and all the other churches in the same sort of village or in the same group of villages so that was the concept there. And the whole thing was designed around this town park with the town centre at the top of it and the town centre was designed to be built, the covered \* was designed to be built on top of four layers of car parking two of which were under the ground and two above with escalators serving the mall above and with landscaping all around.

So they obviously didn't take all of those ideas on board?

JM: They didn't take any of them.

But it's dominated by car parking all round isn't it?

JM: It's absolutely disgraceful. And the reason for that is I don't waste time. I said to the minister, "This is what we need to do" and I said, "You're providing all the roads for the system so you can at least provide the car parking \* which the developers can put the .. shopping mall. And I couldn't get Sir Keith Joseph to agree to this. And then we tried to get developers to do it in this way but it meant a huge amount of capital expenditure if they, to start with before they could actually built it. But I wanted this, the the council to actually build it and then lease the top to a developer if necessary. But it never happened and now as you say it's absolutely disgraceful. What happened was in the end the local, the council let the site off to a developer to build a mall and now we have this \* but the good news is that I think they are going to change it. I.

They've some proposals on the mall at the moment but I think they're working through them, again because of the economic climate whether all of the ideas come to fruition its.

JM: The idea in fact is to build a multi-storey car park. Of course, my idea was if you put this mall on top and you could have restaurants and so forth with it you're looking out over the town park, that was the idea.

Yes. They're trying to give more emphasis to the town park I think and have more restaurants and bars in that area so yeah, they're thinking about it forty years later but.

JM: It's still going, as I say you design things and.

People take some of the ideas and leave others and.

JM: Well it's economic circumstances generally. Sir Keith Joseph and the rest of them were all absolutely enthusiastic about it but they couldn't find the money to do it so it never happened.

Do you want to \*?

JM: No. No. You're right. Course West Bromwich as well, the town centre and the \*.

West Bromwich is another thing. (noises)

\* that's an interesting question. Who was responsible for these eye level perspective drawings then?

JM: Oh. I had a very good, I had two very good people in the office. One was very good at doing perspectives and the other was, I had, someone to make models. So we, hence, I didn't draw these. But I had, he wasn't an architect he was just a.

But the public needs that understanding they can't just look at a plan they need \*.

JM: That's right yeah.

\*.

JM: That's the plan for the town centre and the model, model come up any moment actually. Here it is.

Right. Yeah. .... Amazing. So you had a chap to design the models for you. Seems \*.

JM: \*. .... That is, you know, that was the idea with this interior thing. And the thing stepped down. And the escalators going up and you see you can see from one area to the other coz not only did I have these escalators going up to open space I had an atrium on each floor so you could see through from one floor to another. As \* illustrated here..... There you are.

Yes.

JM: So it wasn't just a office block with floors. The whole thing was integrated visually and. That's another library. \* the school \*. There's so many of them. That's the AA building. This is West Bromwich. That's the heart of the shopping centre there. That interesting story about West Bromwich. I was asked to redo the, redesign the High Street there and I saw the council and I said, "Look. You can't just do that because with the amount", this was forty years ago, the amount of additional traffic, it will destroy it. So we did put a ring road round and then we, we left the high street just as it as a pedestrian street basically but they said to me, "Oh no we can't do that. We can't lose the High Street. Marks and Spencers and Woolworths and so forth. They won't want to go somewhere else". So I put in this mall here at the back here right. With a car park there and car park there and a bus station there and with the mall here coming through to the high street. And so in order to prove this to the local council I went to Marks and Spencers, and I said, "Look, here is a design. There's a bus station, there's, and this is going to be a covered mall with a pedestrian facilities", and I said, "Would you like to have accommodation there?" and they said, "Yes. Yes", and I did the same with Woolworths". And so I went back to the council and said, "Look. You got Marks and Woolworths ready to move in. Are you going to do it?" And so they said, "Yes we'll do it". And so that is why it's like that.

Yes. Yes. \*. ....

Right do you want me to turn it round.

JM: No it's alright. It's for you to see really. This is the Masonic Temple. .... That's an interesting building coz it was a building built without windows. Coz a Masonic Temple \* windows. That's Alexander Theatre. Oh these are, won't get into this, but marinas which I designed. .... Oh this is small things. \* The golf club. That's my second big building I ever did.

Oh yeah.

JM: That's....

\*.

JM: That's the. .... This you've already seen. So these go \* and these over here were television studios. And that was the admin building. And that was the car parking. And you \* remember \* Pebble Mill at One do you?

Vaguely.

JM: It all took place in the entrance hall. I designed a big entrance hall, and on the first day we had Princess Margaret came to open it. There were so many people there and there was so much publicity the next day they had another meeting there and another meeting and so forth. So that the whole of the entrance hall which was designed to be an entrance hall became a studio. That was why you had Pebble Mill at One.

\* the \* *[Birmingham Post and Mail building]*

JM: Sorry yes.

That's the \* man with the \*.

JM: And then of course underneath was all the printing presses.

That received very favourable reviews didn't it?

JM: I did yeah.

\*.

JM: In fact \*.

\*.

JM: \* shouldn't \* embarrass but he said it was the best modern building in Birmingham.

I've seen that quote yeah.

JM: But you see you don't produce newspaper any more on printing presses. And that's what I talk about designing inside, I think it's very important. So that's the Yorkshire Post up in. The Yorkshire Post came to the to see the Birmingham Post and Mail and then they asked me to design a newspaper building for them. So this is the centre of West Bromwich. ... Then I think interesting thing is banks. In these days this is in the 50s you know you had a street with old Victorian houses and they converted, mostly converted the lower ground floor into a shop or something right. To actually put this in the middle of all that was terribly outrageous but it worked and I then designed banks for the Barclays, Lloyds, Westminster, sixty banks and with these things that happened in different, this was over in Wigan I think \*. There you are. There's your \*. ... This is the entrance hall.

Yeah. Fascinating. Yeah.

JM: This is Coventry. Coventry \* it's right in the very centre of Coventry. My instructions there was to design a centre point for Coventry you know. Like a flag pole really in the middle of Coventry.

Right. Fascinating.

JM: That's the down by the \*. This is the Massey Ferguson. I designed buildings, something like a Post and Mail for them, and they decided, this was out in Coventry and they decided it was too expensive so I had to redesign a very economical building much to my disgust and so I built that for them. And that's Henry \* and Henry \* as people knew I worked with to design \* House with fully glazing. That's Shellmex and BP. So I did all the interior design for that too. That's the CEBB



Central Electricity Generating Board Headquarters and that's in Broad Street with these sculptured panels on the front and that's the Metropolitan House. And what is always interesting is I tell people we started off with very simple buildings because when I studied practice in 1950 the rent you could get for a commercial building was £7 per square foot per year, £7 per square foot per year. By the time I got round which was twelve years later to designing Metropolitan House they were getting £35 per square foot per year so I was able to build something a bit more elegant. Well a not so you know, not so simple in form. Because the earlier ones were very very simple buildings but they had to be because you couldn't afford, the client couldn't afford to build anything else at this low rent. But nevertheless \* one has to realise in the 50s Birmingham centre was still in a state of chaos. They were buildings which are half demolished, buildings which were completely demolished and those which were still used as offices were mostly in old Victorian buildings so the girls were, had to go to and work in their jerseys and scarves and so forth and so on the, I remember this so well, this was in 1951 they came on the first day to this new building I'd designed all dressed up in their scarves and things and then they went up and the next day they all came dressed up in their beautiful dresses. I think that was the most wonderful thing to happen you know, the environment was different and they reacted to it. You know \* office girls and people like that.

Interesting.

JM: That's my own offices \* Birmingham. And these are the simple buildings that I was talking about. ... There you are, that's a very simple building you see compared with Metropolitan House which is still earlier.

It's very contrasting yeah. ....

JM: These are council house which we've done. ... This is Corby New Town. I know \* find this interesting.

No. No.

So is that a kind of a \* Estate.

JM: That's a \*.

\* yeah.

JM: But what was interesting is that you know I was designing Calthorpe Estate and we had an exhibition for the \* new planning of this, of course you're not interested in outside really are you? Basically what happened is I was designing the new town of, the Calthorpe Estate, on Calthorpe Estate the city council had decided that they were going to increase the density of the housing all round Birmingham to a certain level which meant in fact that you had to have, you, they had all these little terraced houses at terrific density on the site. But the Calthorpe Estate was a wonderful area, with landscape, with big old Victorian houses with landscape areas and so the chairman of the estate.

\*.

JM: That's it. The chairman of the estate asked me if I would plan, do a, asked my advice about it and so because the city \* were insisting on increasing the density which if it had been done elsewhere around the city it would have destroyed Edgbaston completely. So what I proposed is that you, we had a high density building like this, you see there, and low, and medium density which was three storeys high and then a low density which was the detached houses. So these were the medium density and those we took out the old Victorian houses which had gardens of two acres and I put these back in their place basically, I mean that's what it really amounted to, so we kept all the landscaping and we kept all the Victorian gardens and we just put these houses, these things and then in amongst the, in the old landscape and then near the open spaces I put the tower blocks and then in other parts we have this low density of individual houses. .... Then as I said we did, developed seventy acres with commercial development which you know we have a, .... this was my first building. Right.

Yep.

JM: And then we had Shellmex and BP and the Chamber of Commerce \*. That's the concept you see with the. All within this small \* old Victorian garden.

Right.

JM: This was my original plan for the business area you see.

Yeah.

JM: We just only covering a third of the land with buildings.

Yeah. Yeah.

JM: But when I produced this brochure I hadn't got as far as building anything by then \*. So that that was there. Oh I see. When I, we had this exhibition over this thing yeah. And the Sir Keith Joseph came to the exhibition, I don't know why, how he got there, or who invited him and he saw what I'd been doing and he said, "I'd like you to come to London and see me tomorrow". And I said, "OK I'll pop and see you". And he said, "I have a problem with Corby New Town". It was being developed you see. "I wonder if you would look at it, see if you could replan it for me". So that is how I got to build, become involved in Corby New Town. But it was a difficulty because quite a lot of it had already been built. But anyway I did that and then I'd been working on that for a month or two and then I had another telephone call, and he said. "We're going to build a new town near Birmingham. And we've chosen a site up in Shropshire near there. Would you like to come down and look at it with me?" So we flew over there and looked over Telford area and he said, "That's the place that I think we should build this". And of course it was an awful mess you know.

Full of coal fields and \*.

JM: You remember all that?

Well I've learnt about it over the years.

JM: But you remember that that's was what it was like?

Yes.

JM: And that's why I, I dreamed up this idea of the necklace you know, round the thing. But coz looking at it from the air you know you could look down you could see that was the obvious thing to put a necklace round and have all little villages, not to put a grid right across the whole thing so? Oh you know about the devastation, the at that time, at the beginning before they?

East Shropshire Coal field developed the area.

JM: What was absolutely fascinating too that when we were doing our little survey we found all sorts of bits and pieces going back to the industrial revolution. I mean a farmer had, I, his pig farm \* making cast iron laying in this farm yard and I said to him. "How long have you had that?" He said, "Oh I don't know. \*. I remember great grandfather \* been there". And so I said, "Well would you like to sell it because it belongs to way back to the industrial?" "Oh", he said, "I don't want it you can have it". And so what I did then, we discovered hundreds and hundreds of these bits and pieces which nobody who lived there really felt that they were of any importance.

Gosh.

JM: So I found an old quarry and we, as we collected all these things we put them in the quarry to start with and then the minister, or Sir Keith, I couldn't persuade him to do anything about it, you know, and so I can't remember his name now, but the sheriff of Shropshire, I went to see him and

said, "Look do you think you can help because we've got all these bits and pieces and there are more turning up everyday. Could you?" and so we formed the Ironbridge Trust. That's how the Ironbridge Trust which you've heard of probably, got formed. And it was the sheriff who was so good at that time. He and then we formed the trust and we opened the trust as a \* some old \* you know down by the river and opened the office there. And that's the beginning of the Trust.

It's probably where the University of Birmingham is located now in there?

JM: Right on the river near, near the down by the Iron Bridge.

Oh there is the museum there.

JM: Yeah.

JM: But it was the old one was right near the bridge, you know, the original one. And so anyway that's the story. But it was amazing to see that these local people didn't appreciate what they had. All these old iron pig \* and things. Basically they didn't think they were of any value at all.

\* values \*. Yeah.

JM: Well I mean not physical but historical value.

Historical value yeah. Artefacts. \* amazing. \*.

JM: I think you want to get on.

Well I think that's covered everything that we needed to discuss John. What are the next stages for you in the next \* plan of attack in terms of the central library then?

JM: You can turn those pages over while we're talking. Sorry.

\* commit.

JM: Is that still recording though?

It is.

JM: It is recording. It's alright. Carry on.

I can turn it off if you want.

JM: No. No. No. No. What's my, about the library. Well of course it's not just me as you know it's the friends of the library and the Twentieth Century Society have been trying to stop the present council from doing what they're doing at the present time. And they are currently they've got their lawyers working on all this because they think that the minister you know has been mislead over this. They don't believe that she really has been provided with the right information at the right time. So they're looking into it and we shall see how it goes. But there's also this other thing that's happened in the last few days and that is that .. apparently the cost of the library is gone up now from £193 million, from a £193 million to over £200 million. And certain members of the council are getting very concerned about that. Considering that the original library cost £47 million and we could do all the repairs and so forth for about £20 million \* spend this sort of money on a library which is smaller and in the wrong place is absolutely crazy just simply because they want to sell the site for commercial development.

And \* public support for that if it's going to cost?

JM: That is where, the *BirminghamPost* there was an article in the *Birmingham Post* today actually which was talking about this and it does appear that some members of the council who've been afraid

I think to challenge Councillor Whitby are now getting round to the idea that they should do that.

[Interview ends]