# THE LIFE AND WORK OF SIR FRANK MEARS:
# PLANNING WITH A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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## INTRODUCTION

Sir Frank Mears has been acknowledged as one of the pioneers of Scottish Planning (1). His career encompasses the period of the emergence of statutory planning, the formation of the Town Planning Institute and the passing of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1947. From the mid nineteen-thirties until his death in 1953, he was planning consultant to numerous Scottish local authorities and many of the early techniques of Scottish planning were worked out in his office or with his students at Edinburgh College of Art, where he taught for many years. Several of that first generation of planning graduates whom Mears influenced later went on to take up prominent positions in practice in Scotland. Despite this, little has been written about him and he remains an obscure and enigmatic figure. There is no doubt that he has been overshadowed by his father-in-law and early mentor, Sir Patrick Geddes and by his more flamboyant contemporary, Sir Patrick Abercrombie.

Geddes' visionary ideas and boundless energy have earned him an international reputation as a founding father of modern town and country planning and Abercrombie's bold development plans for some of the major cities of the British Isles set the tone for much subsequent physical planning throughout the United Kingdom and beyond. With the exception of two

notable episodes in the twenties, it was to Scottish planning problems that Mears addressed himself and it was within Scotland that he ultimately gained pre-eminence. Nevertheless, he has subsequently suffered the neglect which Scots so frequently accord their native prophets, a fate to which his own modest and retiring nature must unfortunately have contributed.

This thesis attempts a critical assessment of Mears' career, seeking to identify the influences which shaped his approach to planning and examine the significance of his work, both in relation to the development of modern planning theory and practice in the United Kingdom and to social and cultural developments in Scotland and the wider world in the first half of this Century.

## Biography and Planning History

In recent years there has been a great increase in research in the field of planning history, much of the impetus for which has been provided by the planning profession's increasing preoccupation with the need to establish its own identity and origins. Gordon Cherry suggests that it is evidence of the growing institutional maturity of the profession that planners now feel the need "to get the record straight, to destroy myths and to bolster new

impressions" (2). For a newly emergent profession, the exploration of its own historical development provides the useful function of consolidation, helping to confirm its claims to being a distinct and coherent discipline, with its own progenitors, traditions and ethos. The concern may therefore be as much with myth-making as myth-breaking. Indeed, it may be argued that the construction of an established mythology is crucial to the maintenance of planning as a discrete professional discipline since its catholic appropriation of theory and methodology from a wide range of more specialized disciplines constantly threatens to undermine its coherence and identity. Recent work has focused attention on the myths which perform a similar function in sustaining notions of Scottish cultural identity (3). The study of the career of Sir Frank Mears provides opportunities for the critical exploration of both sets of mythology and the interplay between them.

Cherry distinguishes three different perspectives which have successively characterized the study of planning history since the emergence of the modern planning profession (4, 5). The first and most widely adopted, having its origins in the classical approach to the study of the history of art, is primarily concerned with the historical evolution of the techniques and performance of town planning. Espousing an essentially Whiggish interpretation of events, it places emphasis on the historical continuity and increasing

sophistication of man's attempts to shape his environment from ancient times to the present day. This standpoint was particularly attractive to the pioneers and propagandists of the modern town planning movement who were thus able to place themselves in the mainstream of progress towards an ever-higher civilization. Rampant 19th Century industrialization with its attendant social evils could be characterized as an aberrant and temporary state of chaos which could be restored to order by the rational application of modern town planning principles. This line of argument played an important part in the thinking of Professor Patrick Geddes, and Frank Mears himself repeatedly employed it in his analyses of the development of Edinburgh and other Scottish burghs from Medieval times.

Later, Cherry suggests, the perspective shortened, placing the focus on the history of modern professional involvement in town and country planning. Planning was seen as the product of a specific group of people associated with the British town planning movement and emphasis was placed on the particular contributions of certain key individuals such as Geddes, Howard, Unwin, Abercrombie and Buchanan. The work of Anthony Sutcliffe and Cherry's own detailed recording of the history of the profession are typical of this approach.

Most recently, planning historians have become increasingly

concerned with exploring the social, political and institutional factors which have encouraged the development of modern town and country planning. This approach places the study of planning history within the realm of sociology and political theory rather than traditional art history.

These three perspectives should not, of course, be regarded as rigidly differentiated or necessarily antagonistic. It is quite possible to combine them in an examination of the inter-relationships between ideas, individual action and social change to provide useful new insights into the evolution of the modern concept of planning. It is in this context that Cherry goes on to argue, perhaps too defensively, that biography can provide a valuable "fourth dimension" to the study of planning history. Nowadays, it seems to be necessary to justify the biographical approach as an academically respectable form of research. This is probably a result of the very necessary contemporary reaction against a biographical tradition which was content simply to chronicle the achievements of "Great Men"; itself part of a wider appreciation of the need for a more analytical approach to history in general. It is no longer considered sufficient for the historian merely to keep a record of momentous events and personalities. Explanations must be sought within the social, political and institutional environment in which they occur. However, while it might be reasonable to take the view that the broad

course of history is determined by the response of groups to the social forces acting upon them, the decisive role which individuals may play in influencing the nature of that response cannot be ignored.

In his recent study of Patrick Geddes, Michael Cuthbert has referred to the baleful influence of early biographers who, he suggests, either tended to uncritical hero-worship or sought to accommodate Geddes within the pantheon of British planning orthodoxy, indulgently dismissing his other multifarious activities and interests as the peripheral eccentricities of a colourful and wayward personality (6). However, it would be a mistake to regard every study which focuses on the contribution of an individual as irredeemably tainted with an unpleasant odour of Victorian hagiography or professional propaganda. The critical biographical study can in fact shed valuable new light on wider social phenomena. In this respect, it can be regarded as a form of case study, allowing abstract general theories to be examined in relation to specific experience. Like all case studies, biography tends to have a descriptive emphasis and relies on inferences derived from the interpretation of particular events rather than from wider empirical evidence, so that no very general conclusions can be drawn. Nevertheless, the interaction of the subject of the biography with contemporary ideas can frequently provide new insights into the important discourses of the period and

the relationships between them. It is from this standpoint that the present study attempts to identify some of the social, cultural and ideological influences which shaped the career of Sir Frank Mears and examine the influence which he in turn exerted on the development of town and country planning in Scotland.

## The Emergence of British Town Planning

The emergence of modern town planning in the United Kingdom is conventionally seen as a response to the unprecedented social and environmental problems which arose out of the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the nineteenth century (7, 8). The work of men like William Alison in Scotland and Edwin Chadwick in England helped to establish the link between housing conditions and public health (9), and growing pressure for improvments in urban sanitation led to the passing of the English Public Health Acts of 1848 and 1875 and the Scottish Act of 1867. Under the 1875 Act, model bye-laws were introduced, which set standards for the construction of new housing and streets (10), thus ushering in the "bye-law tenaces" which were to become such a familiar feature of English industrial towns.

Since the late eighteenth century, paternalistic industrialists had been experimenting with the construction

of model villages with the object of improving the physical and moral quality of their employees. David Dale's New Lanark (1798), under his partner-manager Robert Owen, was one of the first of these non-statutory philanthropic responses to the new industrial era, but later English examples such as Titus Salt's Saltaire (1853), Lever's Port Sunlight (1888) and Cadbury's Bourneville (1894) were to have a more direct influence on subsequent planning thought. A more abstract Utopian vision was provided by Ebenezer Howard's concept of the Garden City introduced in "Tomorrow: a Peaceful Path to Real Reform" published in 1898.

Another response to the industrial city was the growing flight to suburbia. As expectations rose towards the end of the century, the upwardly-mobile began to look for something more congenial than the stark monotony of bye-law housing. The better-off in their suburban villas had long been able to cushion themselves from the harsher realities of urban existence in an environment of leafy tranquility. Taking an idealized vision of Medieval community and craftsmanship as then inspiration, writers like John Ruskin and William Morris embued the suburban dream with a new social significance. Their ideas were taken up by the architects of the Arts and Crafts Movement and found expression in such developments as the cottage estates of London County Council. The culmination of this trend in Raymond Unwin's Letchworth (1903) and Hampstead Garden

Suburb (1905) may appear to justify John Nelson Tarn's assertion that "the British mode of planning was dominated by the suburb" (11). However, the garden suburb is essentially an English phenomenon, founded on a housing culture uniquely attached to the idea of the rustic village, the cottage and its garden, and deeply antagonistic to flat-dwelling. Experience in other parts of the United Kingdom was contributing to the development of different planning concepts which were, perhaps, more universally applicable. It is to these ideas that we must look if we are to understand the distinctive contribution of Sir Frank Mears.

## Patrick Geddes

Consideration of the dominating influence of Professor Patrick Geddes is clearly central to any assessment of Mears' work. Yet Geddes himself, despite his acknowledged importance as a founding father of the planning movement, is a notoriously difficult personality to come to grips with. His enthusiasms were diverse and idiosyncratic. He is still variously described as a zoologist, botanist, sociologist or town planner and during the course of his career he was all of these, though never exclusively or conventionally any of them. The sheer difficulty of categorizing Geddes within any of the conventional academic disciplines has discouraged a critical examination of his

ideas and this task has only recently been attempted seriously. Geddes' earliest biographers were devoted disciplines rather than critical academics and their work is essentially descriptive and often adulatory. Philip Boardman's "Patrick Geddes: Maker of the Future" and his later mammoth volume, "The Worlds of Patrick Geddes", provide a wealth of detail of immense value to Geddes scholars. However, their style is frequently anecdotal and some of their content is certainly apocryphal. Subsequent authors who have relied too heavily on Boardman as a source have therefore perpetuated some colourful, but highly dubious accounts of events.

Within the last twenty years, researchers have embarked upon a more rigorously academic appraisal of Geddes' theoretical standpoint. In seeking to identify the great contemporary intellectual influences which helped to shape his thinking, Helen Meller has provided many valuable new insights (12, 13, 14). As she points out, Geddes approached planning by a very different route from that of the Utopian planners like Ebenezer Howard and the practical architect-planners such as Raymond Unwin. The Garden City was a static, idealized vision which bore little relation to the historical evolution of large modern cities, while the architect-planners were limited to the development of relatively small-scale schemes within the constraints of contemporary housing economics. "What Geddes offered,

however, was both a philosophical and a practical understanding of the totality of modern city life in all its complexity" (15).

From his starting point as a natural scientist, he attempted to apply the principles of Darwinian evolutionary theory to the study of modern society, and in particular the city. But Geddes was too much the man of action to be content with a dispassionate academic analysis and, as John Hasselgren has pointed out, he subscribed to notions of social progress which had their origins in the 18th Century Enlightenment (16). He believed that in the context of human society, goals must be imposed on the essentially directionless evolutionary process and this is the significance of his frequent recourse to the gardening analogy. Mankind, he believed, should seek to shape the course of its own development just as the gardener sought to impose order and improvement on the natural botanical world. The objective was to gain sufficient understanding to enable the raw evolutionary forces which were shaping society to be harnessed and guided in positive directions towards the greater fulfilment of Mankind. Thus his aims were ultimately spiritual rather than material. In socialism he detected a naive utopianism which ignored the forces of evolutionary change, but his rejection of it was based as much on his dislike of what he saw as its mechanistic materialism (17, 18). Meller suggests that what he sought

"was nothing less than a new cosmology, a reinterpretation of the relationship between philosophy and natural science" (19). Although he early abandoned any sectarian affiliation, he maintained a lifelong interest in comparative religion and drew considerable inspiration from it. He fully recognized and was prepared to exploit the fact that his brand of scientific humanism, with its emphasis on the "life force", had affinities with eastern mysticism and the contemporary search for a unifying synthesis of world religions which found expression in the Theosophical movement.

In the emerging town planning movement Geddes saw a vehicle for promoting his conception of "Civics", which he defined as "applied sociology" (20). While he espoused many of the ideas of the English Garden City propagandists and made some attempts to put them into practice, this was not the area in which he was to make his most significant contribution. In Scotland, local authorities had responded to the appalling housing conditions of the major cities within the existing tenemental tradition. The improvement schemes which they promoted under local and general legislation were primarily concerned with slum clearance and street improvements and frequently prompted by commercial considerations. Little thought was given to the fate of the displaced inhabitants (21, 22). The objectives were essentially similar to those of Haussmann in Paris, even if the results were scarcely as

magnificent. As P.J. Smith points out, Geddes had ample opportunity to observe this urban renewal process in action during thirty years of living and working in Edinburgh's Old Town. He was forthright in his condemnation of its destructive impact on the physical and social fabric of the city, stating that:

> "The policy of sweeping clearances is one of the most disastrous and pernicious blunders in the chequered history of sanitation" (23).

His own evolutionary approach to environmental improvement, employing a practical methodology which he described as "conservative surgery" was developed in response to the conditions (24) which he found in Edinburgh and was subsequently applied with some success in India (25).

Geddes' other major contribution to planning was the development of the concept and methodology of Regional Survey (26). In this he was greatly influenced by the work of French social scientists who were already familiar with the concept of the region as a geographical and economic unit. Geddes believed that Le Play's formula for social analysis, which he translated as "Place, Work, Folk", held the key to understanding the evolutionary forces which shaped the character of any region. In the Edinburgh Survey, Geddes and his colleagues set about examining the

interactions between the environment, man and his occupations which had moulded the development of the Scottish capital. This he regarded as an essential preliminary to any prescriptive plan. From his Edinburgh work he was able to develop a generalized technique encapsulated in the formula: survey - analysis - plan.

While Geddes' international significance is now being actively reassessed, few recent researchers have shown any inclination to interpret his work within a specifically Scottish context. For Meller, Geddes' Scottish background and, in particular, his "love affair" with Edinburgh are important only insofar as they provided inspiration for the development of his concept of social evolution (27). In themselves, his attempts to stimulate a Scottish cultural revival have tended to be seen as little more than another manifestation of his eccentricity. Yet, in this aspect of his work in the Old Town he was anticipating the concerns which have exercised the minds of culturally-aware Scots ever since.

In his masterly work, "The Democratic Intellect", George Elder Davie has described how, during the 19th Century, the Scottish universities came under increasing pressure to adopt the conceptions of academic attainment which had evolved at the great English institutions of Oxford and Cambridge (28). To scholars trained under the English

system, the Scottish academic tradition, with its strong philosophical emphasis, appeared alien and anachronistic. The generalist approach of the Scots seemed ill-equipped to accommodate the rapidly developing scientific specialisms. A leading advocate of the importation of English academic standards and practices into Scotland was the biologist, Thomas H. Huxley, who served on the Scottish Universities Commission of 1876. During the mid 1870s, Geddes was one of Huxley's students at the School of Mines in London and must have been fully conversant with the contemporary debate over the respective merits of the Scottish and English university traditions. He himself had rejected the dry and unimaginative Botany course then on offer at Edinburgh University, and chosen instead the more stimulating academic atmosphere provided by one of the most progressive and controversial of English scientists. However, his subsequent studies in France exposed him to a continental academic tradition which, in according a central position to philosophy, retained affinities with that of his native Scotland. Geddes responded enthusiastically to the intellectual life of Paris (29). He found inspiration in the historic links between French and Scottish scholarship and his dream of reviving them later took concrete form in the establishment of the "College des Ecossais" at Montpellier. Indeed, Davie describes him as the Scot who "best kept up the French connection", and maintained, against the prevailing trend, a strong philosophical bias

in his teaching of biology (30).

As his correspondence with the writer and politician, R.B. Cunninghame Graham makes clear, Geddes lamented the steady decline in intellectual vigour which he considered to have taken place in Edinburgh since the golden age of the Enlightenment philosophers (31). In fact the many projects which he promoted from his Old Town base between 1886 and 1914 were designed to achieve nothing less than a Scottish cultural and intellectual renascence (32). His object was:

> "to restore to Scotland something of the older pre-eminence in the world of thought, to recreate in Edinburgh an active centre and so arrest the tremendous centralizing power of the metropolis of London; to replace the stereotyped methods of education by a more vital and synthetic form; and to encourage national art and literature" (33).

Hugh MacDiarmid, the dominant figure in the literary revival of the nineteen-twenties which came to be known as the Scottish Renaissance, was later to acknowledge Geddes as one of its early progenitors (34), and this view has been endorsed both by Ian Finlay in his history of Art in Scotland (35) and H.J. Hanham in his authoritative history of Scottish nationalism (36).

**Frank Mears**

It was the small but stimulating world of Geddes' "Scottish renascence" which Frank Mears entered as a young architect in the first decade of this Century. At the Outlook Tower and in projects at home and abroad he proved an invaluable assistant, providing the formal design skills which Geddes lacked at a time when the Professor's influence on the town planning movement was at its height. In his subsequent career, Mears was the planner who most faithfully attempted to translate Geddes' ideas on social evolution into practice. His perspective was therefore wider and his approach more all-embracing than most of the other architect-planners of his generation.

While Mears readily acknowledged his debt to Howard and did apply English garden suburb principles in his schemes for new housing development (notably in Dublin!), his contribution in this area was unremarkable. As an urban planner he was, like Geddes, most truly at home in the historical settlement, be it cultural capital or small Scottish burgh. His bias as a Pugin scholar is clearly evident in the importance which the Edinburgh Survey attaches to the medieval development of the city (37, 38). The research into the historical origins of Edinburgh which he began in 1908 was to become a lifelong interest and he

had articles published on the subject throughout his career. His reconciliation of the Garden City ideal with his own historical perspective is well illustrated by the following passage from an article published in 1928:

> "... our cities of dust and noise and slums, if not of our own making, have largely taken on their present form within the lifetime of people whom we have known. It is up to us to set them right again.
>
> So far as I have found there is only one book which helps to an understanding of the early medieval community, and that is "Tomorrow", by Mr. Ebenezer Howard, written apparently by intuition. Yet the lost handbook, which may have led to the great twelfth-century regional town planning period, can hardly have set up an ideal very different in its essentials. True, the problem then was not of escaping from towns, but of establishing communities, but these communities in practice were very much what Mr. Howard dreamed of. It is at least encouraging to know that once before in the history of our country such a scheme of reconstruction was successfully carried out on the widest scale" (39).

With Geddes, Mears believed that survey could not "be restricted to material conditions but ... must be extended

to cover analysis and appreciation of the best in the social life, past as well as present, in each locality" (40). This essentially cultural perspective fundamentally challenged the narrow technicism of the statutory planning system which was developing in the U.K. Mears believed that the task of the planner was to help each locality to achieve its full evolutionary potential by building upon the accummulated social experience which was embodied within its existing physical fabric. For this he required to employ "methods more akin to those of the gardener than of the man with the bulldozer" (41). Here, Mears is using that favourite Geddesian analogy in relation to the planning concept which the Professor also referred to metaphorically as "conservative surgery". Mears applied and developed the principles of conservative surgery throughout his work in the historic Scottish burghs and elsewhere, though he himself offered a rather different medical analogy when he suggested that what was necessary was the "physician's care rather than the surgeon's knife" (42).

Mear's approach was radically different from that of the design-oriented Master Planners of the thirties and forties (43, 44). As an evolutionist, he understood that elaborate Master Plans, no matter how compellingly attractive they might appear, lacked the flexibility necessary to cope with constantly changing circumstances. This understanding was central to his criticism of the kind of statutory practice

which was emerging. Geddes had taught him that the greatest value of a widely-based survey lay:

> "... in its power of setting free the mind from the belief, often unconscious and therefore the more dominating, that the surroundings of life have always been much as we know them today, and therefore that all that is required of the planner is a scheme which may regulate, and in regulating encourage a contrivance of the kind of expansion typical of the last twenty or thirty years" (45).

In his Plan for Perth, he drew the distinction between his own standpoint and that of many of his contemporaries in the following terms:

> "On the one side appear those planners who envisage a clean cut and firmly established solution which they imagine will bind their successors until its completion a generation or so hence; a solution too often based on the assumption that social, economic and traffic conditions will continue in the future along lines which lie within the past experience of the planner.
>
> Others of us may be willing to admit that our power to prophesy or to control our fellow men is limited and so will endeavour not so much to seek approval of a rigid

plan as to help in promoting an acceptance of continuing change through which better conditions for living and working may be achieved within a given community" (46).

The emphasis which Mears placed on flexibility and continual adaptation foreshadowed the debate which emerged in the nineteen-sixties as the planning profession became increasingly concerned about the rigidities inherent in the statutory development plan system.

Throughout his career, Mears promoted the Geddesian conception of regional planning. In relation to Dublin and its hinterland he wrote that:

> "Our problem goes beyond "town planning", Our problem goes beyond City Development. Our problem is that of balance of forces in a Region ..." (47).

Interwar statutory planning was primarily urban-focused. The concept of Town and Country Planning was not enshrined in the legislation until 1932 and very little rural planning had been initiated by 1940. Mears took a particular interest in the problems of the countryside and believed that much planning in the British Isles was too one-sided in its pre-occupation with the urban situation. He argued that:

"From the planning standpoint rural Britain can no longer be regarded merely as a reserve of "undeveloped" land useful only as providing space for the growth of towns or the recreation of their inhabitants. It is necessary that we return to the principle, as laid down long ago by Geddes, that country and town ~~and~~ interdependent, that neither can maintain health and permanent prosperity at the expense of its neighbour" (48).

This was a view which was shared by influential English planners such as Patrick Abercrombie, whose vigorous lobbying South of the Border led to the setting up of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) in 1926 (49). It was as a result of Mears' initiative that the Association for the Preservation of Rural Scotland (APRS) was established in the following year. Mears' plans for Peeblesshire (1946), Central and South-East Scotland (1948) and Sutherland (1951/52) were among the first to address the problem of rural depopulation, an issue which was to become one of the major concerns of Scottish economic planning in the post-war period and one to which the regulatory provisions of the statutory planning system had singularly little relevance.

By the 1940s, Frank Mears had become "the acknowledged leader of town planning in Scotland" (50), and was in a

position to influence both central and local government thinking on planning matters in that crucial decade. Yet in the last years of his life he was to become an increasingly stern critic of the comprehensive statutory planning system ushered in by the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act of 1947, arguing that it was inflexible, over-centralized, negative and excessively bureaucratic (51).

Christopher Harvie has described how a growing preoccupation with Scottish national identity in the first half of this Century led to a proliferation of institutions and organizations concerned with various aspects of Scottish life (52), fulfilling, at least to some extent, Geddes' dream of a cultural and intellectual renascence. Although in no sense a "political nationalist", Mears was very much part of this general movement within his chosen spheres of planning and architecture. For him, the essence of Scotland's identity lay in the traditions of her countryside and ancient burghs. He was a champion of Scottish vernacular architecture and, as has already been mentioned, played a leading role in the foundation of the Association for the Preservation of Rural Scotland (APRS). He was also involved in the setting up of the National Trust for Scotland in 1931 and, in 1935, became a founder-member of the Saltire Society. On a professional level, he helped to establish the Scottish Branch of the Town Planning

Institute and served on its executive for many years. In 1944 he was elected President of the Royal Scottish Academy, Scotland's foremost art institution.

In the following chapters, the various aspects of Mears' career will be examined in greater detail, and an attempt will be made to assess the significance of his work in relation to the evolution of planning theory and methodology and to social and cultural developments in 20th Century Scotland.

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24. These conditions were particularly severe. By the second half of the Nineteenth Century, Edinburgh's Old Town contained one of the most densely-populated slums in Europe with correspondingly high levels of disease and mortality. Sydney and Olive Checkland have written that:

> "... the condition of the Old Town, already bad by 1832, had by the mid century degenerated yet further, to become a fearful concentration of misery and vice. Bad harvests and trade depression brough uprooted people to add to the festering mass. There was a certain amount of middle-class fear that the barbarians of the Old Town might erupt from their lairs to threaten the life of the city. No new houses were built in the Old Town - the subdivision and overcrowding became relentlessly worse. The canyons of tall crow-stepped houses vacated by the middle classes had become places of gross human degradation, with narrow closes, passages, holes in the wall, cheap partitioning and hidden rooms. All of this was projected in dramatic detail by the Report of 1865 of Dr. Littlejohn, the first Medical Officer of Health. He described how in the Old Town the working classes and the paupers, with their human wastes, shared the confined space with the smoke, smells and effluvia of tanneries, breweries, foundaries and cow byres".

CHECKLAND, S. & CHECKLAND, O. (1984), "Industry and Ethos: Scotland 1832-1914". The New History of Scotland, Edward Arnold, London, pp.36 & 37.

In seeking to improve conditions, the public authorities were motivated by a variety of considerations. The slum areas were seen both as potential breeding grounds for disease, crime and insurrection and an affront to civic pride (SMITH, P.J. (1980), op.cit., pp.113 & 114). The official response was progressively institutionalized in technical public health initiatives. It was primarily on the basis of the Old Town's alarming health statistics that Dr. Henry Littlejohn instigated a programme of sanitary clearance schemes to eradicate "the chief plague spots of slums" under the Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890 (ADAMS, I. (1978), op.cit., p.162).

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# Part One

## The End of Empire

## Chapter One

## The Early Years.

## 1.1 Childhood and Education

Frank Charles Mears was born in Tynemouth in 1880, the eldest son of a medical family. At the time of his birth, his father, William Pope Mears, held a lectureship in Anatomy at Durham University. His mother, Isabella Bartholomew Mears, was one of the first women to be trained as a doctor and her family held progressive views on female emancipation. She had been born and brought up in West Lothian, where her father owned farms at Duntarvie and Craigton, near Winchburgh.

Frank had a difficult childhood. His father was regarded as a brilliant doctor but a very withdrawn man and his temperament was not improved by poor health. A strict regime of silence was maintained in the Mears household in order that he should not be disturbed. It has been suggested that this rather repressive family atmosphere left a permanent mark on the young Frank who was unusually quiet and reserved ever afterwards (1).

When Frank was about twelve years old, his parents went to China as medical missionaries, taking only their youngest daughter, Mary, with them. Frank and his brother, Bartholomew (Barty), were sent to a

Church Missionary Society boarding school in Surrey. Their sister, Louisa, was left with their mother's family in West Lothian, where the boys returned during the school holidays. The late Dr. Winifred Rushforth (nee Bartholomew), a cousin who remembered the Mears children from this period, believed that they suffered from a strong sense of being "<u>missionkinder</u>", abandoned by their parents, and that this contributed to their marked reticence (2).

In China, William Mears' health deteriorated to the extent that he and his wife were finally forced to return to Edinburgh where Isabella maintained the family by taking charge of the Tuberculosis Sanitorium at Woodburn House in Canaan Lane, Morningside. In Edinburgh, Frank attended George Watson's College until 1896, the year of his father's death.

Despite the strong medical bias of his family, there was never any question of Frank pursuing a medical career. It was recognized that he had a talent for drawing and in October 1896, when he was sixteen years old, an apprenticeship was arranged with the architect Hippolyte Blanc. Blanc was a personal friend of Frank's uncle, John Bartholomew, and architect to the Edinburgh Merchant Company (3), with which the

Bartholomew family had strong connections.

In Blanc's office at 25, Rutland Square, Edinburgh, Mears worked mainly on church architecture in the Gothic style. Two of the more notable projects with which he was involved were the Thomas Coats Memorial Church, Paisley, and the Edinburgh Village Asylum, Bangour. During this time, Mears was a part-time student at the School of Applied Art in Edinburgh where he was exposed to the traditionalist architectural training advocated by Sir Robert Rowand Anderson, champion of the turn-of-the-century vernacular revival. This placed emphasis on the measurement and drawing of historic Scottish buildings and their details, including windows, doors, plasterwork, furniture and fittings (4). After qualifying as an architect in 1901, Mears continued with Blanc for a year before spending four months in England and France on a study tour of Medieval buildings (5). In the Autumn of 1902, he was awarded a Medal of Merit by the Royal Institute of British Architects for a church design entered in competition for the Soane Medallion.

Between 1903 and 1906, he worked in London with architect R. Weir Schultz on the design of Khartoum Cathedral and restoration work for the third Marquess

Fig 1.1. The Coats Memorial Baptist Church, Paisley. One of the early ecclesiastical commissions on which Mears worked as apprentice to the architect, Hippolyte J. Blanc. Photograph by Mark Fiennes.

Bute, the Catholic philanthropist, romantic nationalist and antiquarian who did much to stimulate the revival of interest in traditional Scottish architecture (6, 7). In 1904, Mears was elected a Member of the Royal Institute of British Architects and in the same year he was awarded a Pugin Scholarship to study Medieval architecture and embarked on a four-month study tour of English Medieval houses.

In the Spring of 1906, Mears joined the office of Edinburgh architects, Sydney Mitchell and Wilson, (Mitchell had worked for Geddes on developments at Ramsay Garden), where he worked on designs for Gullane United Free Church, Colinton Church and an extension to the Victoria Hospital. Towards the end of 1907, he went back to London for seven months to complete the work on Khartoum Cathedral.

## 1.2 The Outlook Tower

Mears had first encountered the ideas of the early town planning propagandists while still a student when, in 1898 or 1899, he had bought a copy of "Tomorrow", Ebenezer Howard's seminal work on Garden Cities (8). However, it was not until his return to

Edinburgh in 1908, to work with architect Ramsay Traquair, that his career turned decisively in the direction of planning.

Ramsay Traquair's wife, Phoebe, was the foremost exponent of the Arts and Crafts Movement in Edinburgh (9). Since the 1880s, she had been associated with Professor Patrick Geddes in his attempts to foster an artistic revival in the Scottish capital and at his instigation had undertaken a number of major mural commissions around the city. Along with his sister, Louisa, and his brother, Barty, who had trained in medicine and was something of an antiquarian, Frank became involved in the work of the Outlook Tower, Geddes' unique "civic laboratory" on the Castlehill. He soon became Secretary to the Tower as well as chairing its Civics Sub-Committee (10) which sought to encourage the sort of popular, participatory planning which Geddes advocated by means of lectures, literature and practical demonstrations of environmental improvement.

In lectures during this period, Mears incorporated Howard's Garden City ideal and Geddesian evolutionary sociology in an exposition of the development of urban settlement in Europe and North America. With the aid of lantern slides depicting towns at various

Fig. I.2. Patrick Geddes.

periods from the Middle Ages to modern times, he illustrated his thesis that the garden settlement existing in close and happy relationship with its rural hinterland represented an older natural order which industrialization and overcrowding had temporarily overthrown. He argued that the best Medieval towns had been laid out on spaceous lines, with wide and stately market places, generous provision of gardens and careful sanitary arrangements. The modern conception of a Medieval town as overcrowded and insanitary was eronious. It had been cultivated by 19th Century historians who could not see beyond the decay and accretion of later centuries and the depredations of the industrial revolution. Paraphrasing the rather facile message of the Garden City propagandists, he claimed that:

> "It is now generally accepted that the cause of most of the squalor and industrial distress of modern times is mainly due to the complete separation of town and country, so that the population has come to grow into two distinct groups with separate ideals, and consequent loss in total efficiency. The Garden Village movement may be taken as one of the signs of an awakening of the towns towards a new unity and orderliness in life, the stretching out of a friendly hand

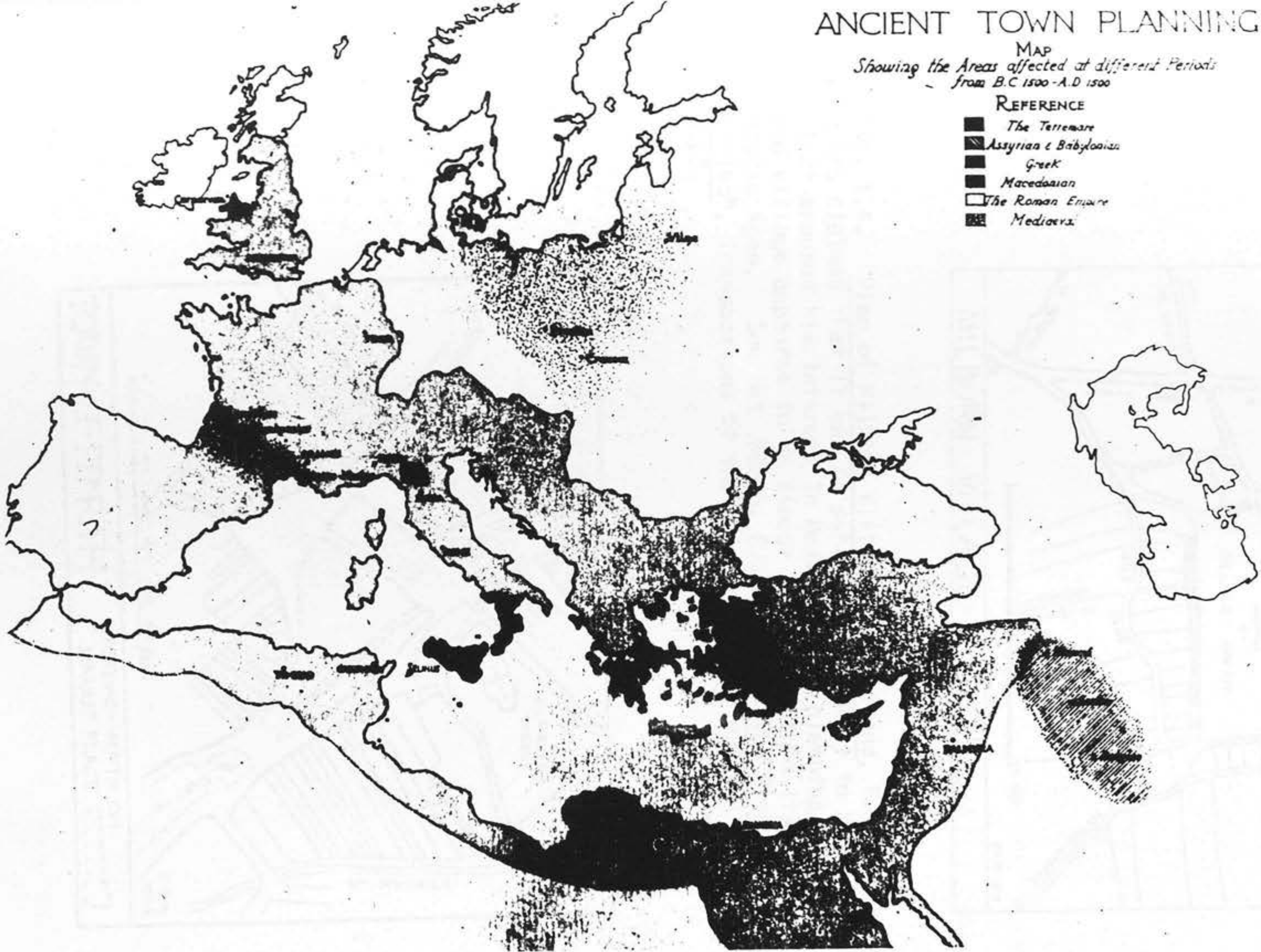


Fig. 1.3. <u>Ancient Town Planning</u>. The Whig view of planning history as exemplified in an illustration for one of Mears' lectures. Photograph courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Edinburgh.

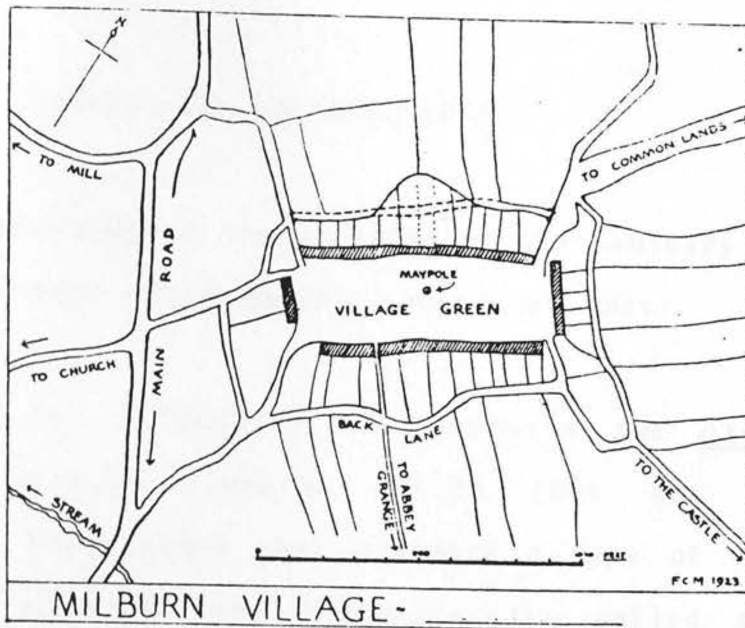


Fig. 1.4. Plan of Milburn Village, Westmorland, F.C. Mears, 1923. Mears claimed that it was an early holiday visit to Milburn which had first aroused his interest in Medieval town planning. The layout of the village appeared to be almost unaltered since its foundation in the Middle Ages. Source: MEARS, F.C. (1928), "The Planning of Medieval Cities", Transactions of the Edinburgh Architectural Association Vol. 9, p.83.

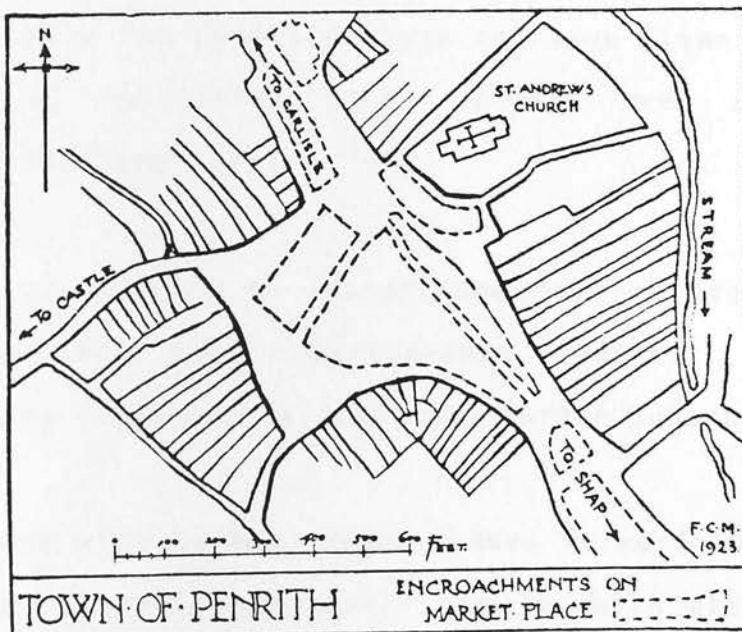


Fig. 1.5. Plan of Penrith, F.C. Mears, 1923. An illustration of progressive encroachment on the original open Medieval market place. Source: MEARS, F.C. (1928), "The Planning of Medieval Cities", Transactions of the Edinburgh Architectural Association Vol. 9, p.88.

towards the country" (11).

Referring to the response of the sanitary authorities to poor urban housing, he argued that:

> "In attempting to determine the minimum which should preserve health (but not induce it) legislators have produced a type of dwelling and district now contemptuously called the "Byelaw Estate" - fulfilling the Law no doubt - but forgetful of the Spirit. The byelaws have largely done their work - and very useful work - and it is to prevent the spiritual squalor, which has too often accompanied their application - particularly in the case of working men's houses - that the Garden Village and town planning movement is now being taken up all over England and Scotland" (12).

As an example of enlightened housing management, he commended the Copartnership Tenants' Association being pioneered at Hampstead Garden Suburb (13).

Along with Geddes, Mears looked forward to a brighter and cleaner "neotechnic" age in which electric power and improved communications would free industry from the locational restrictions of the past, allowing its

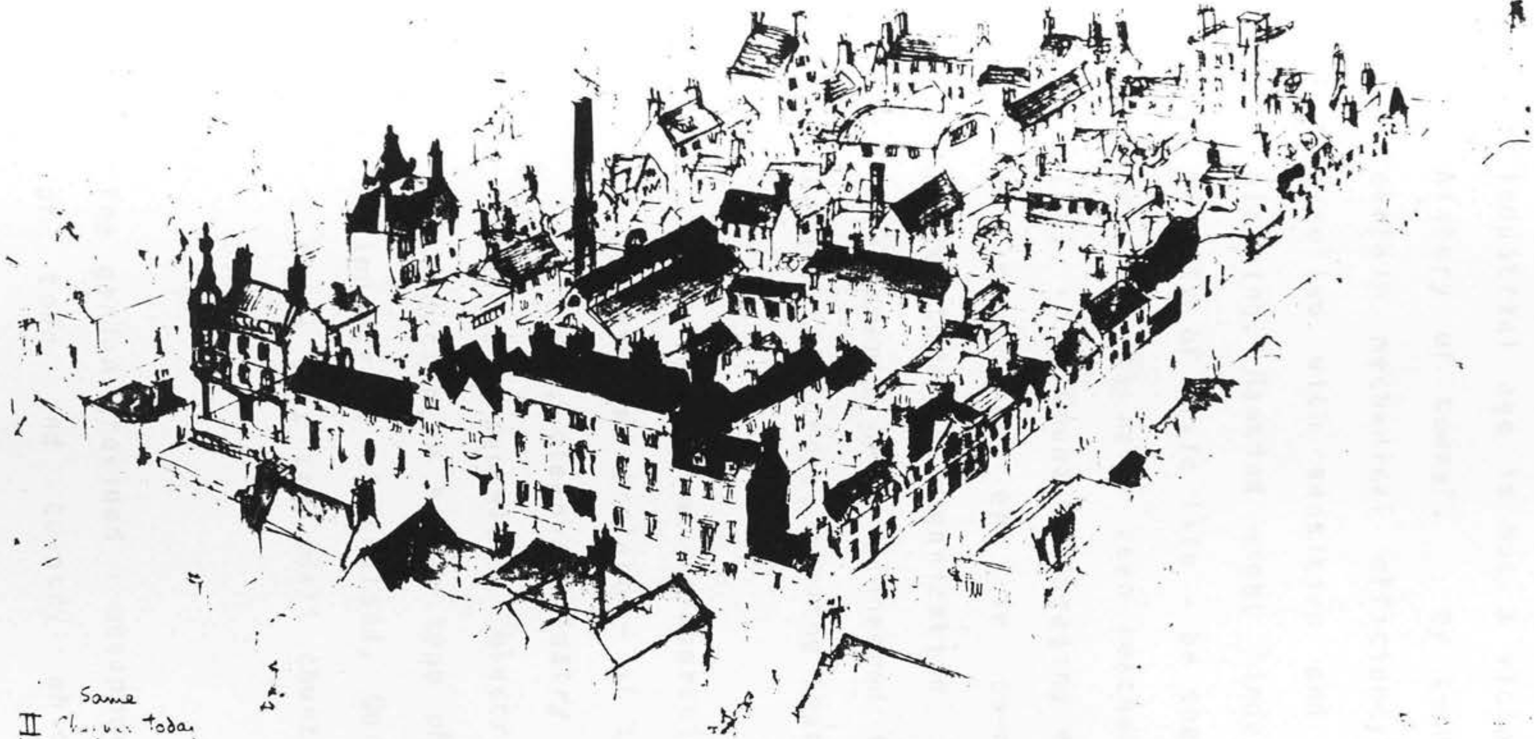

Fig. 1.6. Modern Urban Congestion, Salisbury. F.C. Mears, January 1910.
From a lantern slide.

benefits to be spread more widely throughout town and country and encouraging a revival of skilled craftmanship. He believed that "the smoky industrial age is but a vicious parenthesis in the history of towns". By combining "the best of a certain mechanical efficiency" in which that age excelled with sensitive and graceous Garden City planning, Mankind might "indeed hope to come to a dignity of civic life - be the town large or small - such as has never been reached in any previous age" (14). He found encouraging evidence of the dawning of this new era in co-operative systems of agricultural organization and hydro-electric developments being pioneered in some of the smaller nations of Europe, arguing that:

> "The lessons of co-operation in production - of Denmark and Ireland - of the immense development of finer, cleaner industry in Norway and Sweden - industry smokeless, electrical - demanding, and producing, a higher type of artizan than the coal industries of England, Germany and America, are signs that the small countries are not dead yet" (15).

The garden provided a metaphor for the reunification of town and country which Geddes and Mears

anticipated, and it was this symbolic significance which inspired the Outlook Tower's Open Spaces Committee to develop derelict plots in the Old Town as children's gardens during this period (16). Mears appears to have believed that the new age required a more co-operative economic order, as he argued that:

> "Gardens can be thought of in two ways, for beauty and recreation - or in the sense of finer agriculture - that of food producing, on which all our life and civilization is based. In this latter sense not just the town - but its adjacent countryside will be included in the term Garden City. Some gardens must be thought of as part of the economic system of the country. This becomes possible under the system of co-operation in production mentioned as so highly developed in Denmark" (17).

Mears was also influenced by North American parkway developments (18), and commended the example of Boston:

> "where by a careful survey of streams, woodlands and hilltops, the citizens have become possessed of a great system of parks of unique character and at relatively small cost. For it is easier to

preserve a pleasant spot that to carve one out of a slum at great cost. We must have open spaces in our towns ... but let them be linked up by tree-planted ways and stream banks to the permanent open country which we now realise to be necessary for health bodily and spiritual.

The last slide shows ... a hillside where the cares and worries of work may be forgotten - where noise and dust, the curses of city life - do not reach - a hillside such as is available in some degree for every place, large or small - and from which one gains a wider view - a feeling of a better future" (19).

It was just such a prospect which Geddes offered to the citizens of Edinburgh from his vantage point on the Castlehill. Mears was involved in the gathering and preparation of much of the material assembled for display at the Outlook Tower. Soon after taking up the post of Secretary, he began to assist Geddes in the making of a "Survey of Edinburgh" which sought to explain the historical growth of the Scottish capital in terms of the interaction between its geography, its people and their occupations; in other words, the basic Geddesian triad of Place, Folk and Work. This survey formed the basis for an exhibition which

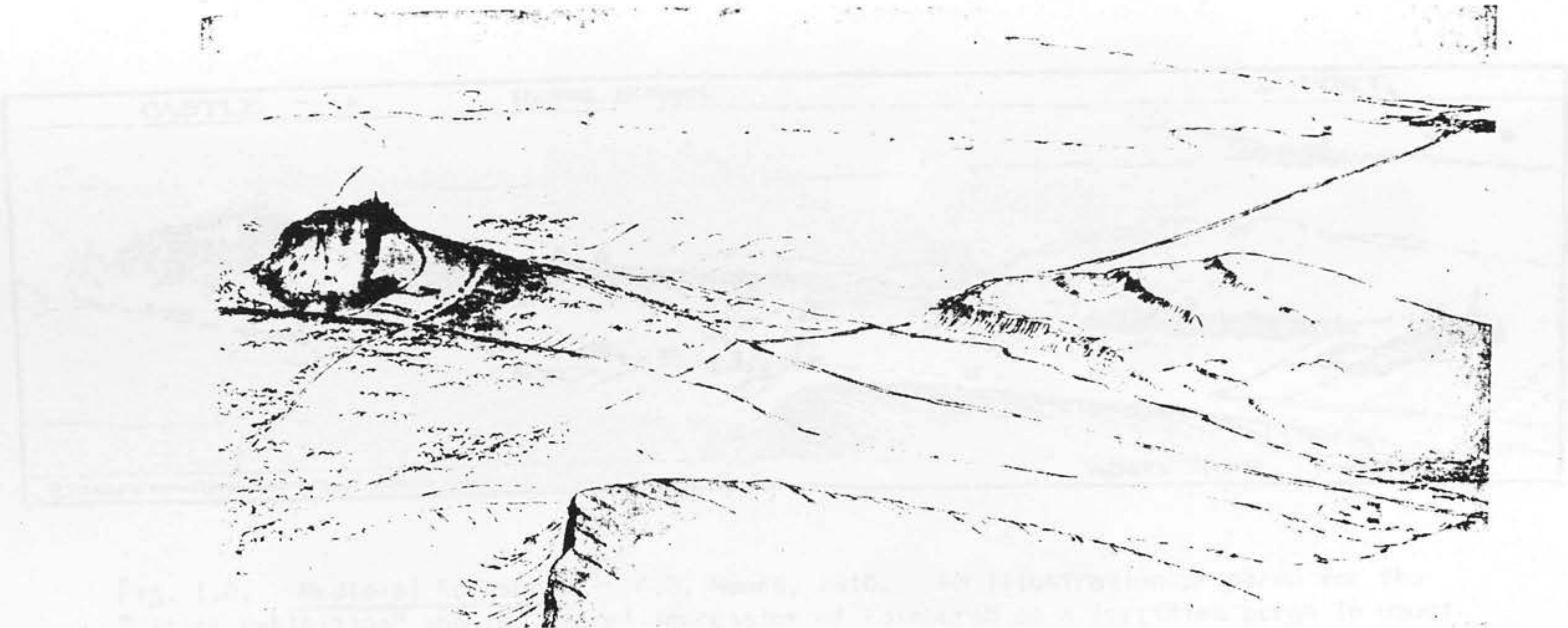

Fig. 1.7. Primitive Edinburgh. F.C. Mears, 1910. An illustration prepared for the "Cities Exhibition" showing Mears' impression of Edinburgh as an 11th Century hill fort, with early settlement on the Castle Ridge, the primitive road system and the beginning of Holyrood and Leith. Source: GEDDES, P. & MEARS, F.C. (1910), "The Survey of Edinburgh at the Town Planning Exhibition", The Builder, 5th November 1910, p.553.

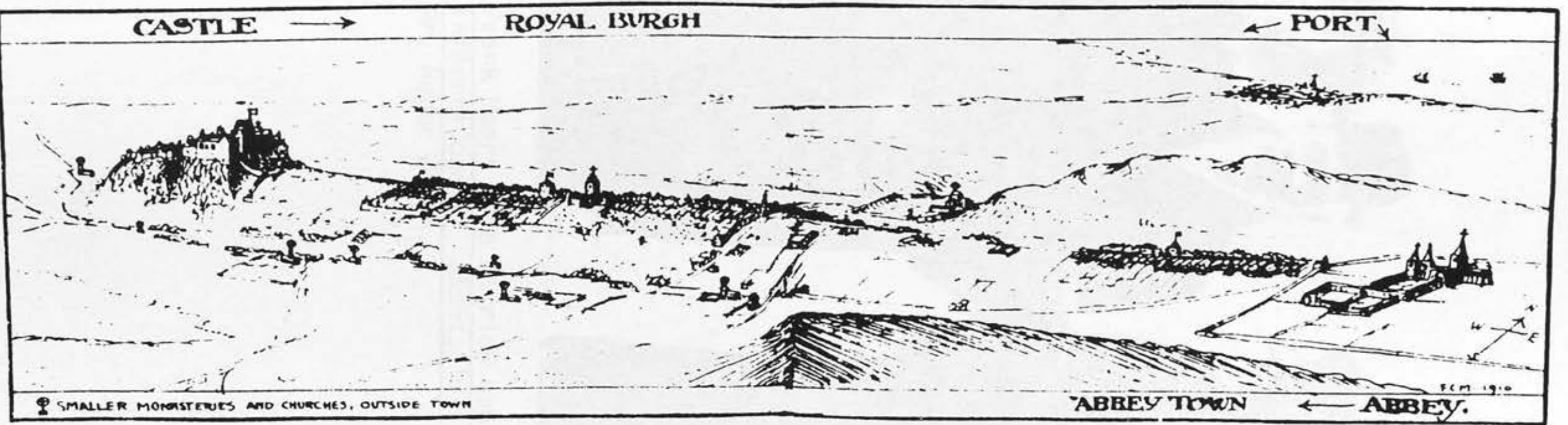


Fig. 1.8. Medieval Edinburgh. F.C. Mears, 1910. An illustration prepared for the "Cities Exhibition" showing Mears' impression of Edinburgh as a fortified burgh in about 1450, with Holyrood Abbey and the beginnings of the Burgh of the Canongate. Source: GEDDES, P. & MEARS, F.C. (1911), "The Civic Survey of Edinburgh", Transactions of the Town Planning Conference of the Royal Institute of British Architects, 10-15th October 1910, p.545.

Fig. 1.9. Frank Mears with Patrick and Anna Geddes at the "Exposition Internationale", Ghent, 1913. Photograph courtesy of Mr. Roger Mears.

was presented at the Royal Academy in London in conjunction with the 1910 Town Planning Conference of the Royal Institute of British Architects. At the exhibition's centre, the Edinburgh Room housed a remarkable collection of models, maps, sketches and photographs selected to illustrate the development of the city within a regional context. In surrounding galleries, exhibits from the Empire, Europe and the United States provided a global expansion of the theme. Idiosyncratic though it was, the exhibition proved an immediate critical success and was to have a lasting influence on the developing planning movement. What Geddes had by this time dubbed the "Cities Exhibition" returned in triumph to the Royal Scottish Academy in 1911 and, in a state of active evolution, went on to tour Belfast and Dublin later in the year. In 1913, it won the Grand Prix at the "Exposition Internationale" in Ghent. A selection of the many drawings which Mears prepared for the "Cities Exhibition" provided the illustrative material for "Cities in Evolution", Geddes' most substantial written contribution to planning theory published in 1915 (20).

## 1.3 The Edinburgh Zoo

It has been suggested that Geddes made unfair use of

Mears, accepting the credit for much of the younger man's hard and often unpaid work behind the scenes (21). However, there can be little doubt that the relationship was mutually beneficial. Mears was talented, but very shy and unassertive. Geddes' patronage opened many doors for him and brought opportunities and challenges which he could not have secured on his own. One such opportunity was provided by the commission to lay out the new Zoological Park at Corstorphine, on the outskirts of Edinburgh in 1913.

An earlier zoo had existed in the city at the eastern end of what is now Claremont Street. For a while it had been very successful, but commercial interests had gradually turned it into an amusement park and allowed its animal collection to decline until it was finally closed towards the end of the 19th Century.

The first attempts to re-establish a Zoological Garden in the capital met with little success. Despite the precedent, the prevailing wisdom was that an exotic animal collection would never survive the Scottish winter and that, anyway, the public would not pay to come and see it. The solicitor, T.H. Gillespie was one of a small band of enthusiasts who

refused to accept these arguments. In 1908, he was greatly encouraged and confirmed in his views by news of the revolutionary new animal park which had just been established at Stellingen near Hamburg by the imaginative German entrepreneur, Carl Hagenbeck. The success of the Scottish National Exhibition at Saughton Park in the same year further convinced him that a zoo would be a major public attraction (22).

Gillespie set about mustering support in business, professional and academic circles and on 4th February 1909 the Zoological Society of Scotland was established. At first it proved difficult to find a suitable site but, in the summer of 1912, the 74 acre estate of Corstorphine Hill House was offered to the Society. An appeal for funds was launched, supported by a lavishly illustrated brochure, but insufficient money had been raised by the closing date for the offer (23). The City Council was approached for assistance and on 4th February it agreed to purchase the estate outright and feu it to the Society.

Although lacking in funds, the Committee of the Zoological Society of Scotland was determined that the new park should be designed on the most modern lines. It was to be laid out according to the

principles pioneered by Hagenbeck at Hamburg and then being applied in new zoos in major cities throughout the world. The main objective was to present the animals in surroundings which approximated as closely as was practicable to their natural habitats. Bars and cages were to be largely done away with and the ditches and other barriers which separated the animals from the public were to be concealed as far as possible by landscaping. At the time, such ideas were still regarded as quite novel and their application at zoos like Hamburg and New York had captured the public imagination.

Patrick Geddes and his associates took an early interest in the Edinburgh Zoo project, the zoo being just one of a range of institutions for popular education which they were keen to encourage as part of the Geddesian strategy for social improvement (24). Professor J. Arthur Thomson, a life-long friend and a frequent collaborator with Geddes in his biological work, was a member of the first Council of the Zoological Society of Scotland. Thomas B. Whitson, an accountant who was closely involved with the work of the Outlook Tower, was the Society's Honorary Treasurer. In October 1912, "The Blue Blanket", a journal founded to promote the Geddesian concept of "Civics" in Edinburgh, carried a report on

the negotiations over the Corstorphine Hill estate and wished the promoters every success. It also contained an article by J. Arthur Thomson on modern approaches to confining animals in which there is a hint that the Aberdeen Natural History Professor was pushing for the appointment of Geddes as the Zoo's first Director (25). In the event, Gillespie was appointed as Director/Secretary in 1913.

The campaign to raise funds for the Zoological Park relied heavily on an appeal to national sentiment. In a letter published in the "Glasgow Herald" on 11th January 1913, the Society's President, Lord Salvesen, wrote that:

> "Scotland is almost the only country in Europe which does not possess at least one zoological garden; therefore the scheme should commend itself to all patriotic Scots, both at home and abroad" (26).

The Society was determined to "place Scotland on a level with England and Ireland and the countries of Europe and America" (27). It made a particular study of the finances of the successful Phoenix Park Zoo in Dublin and concluded that:

"... what Dublin can do with a population of at least 100,000 less than Edinburgh and Leith can certainly be done by the Scottish capital" (28).

The Corstorphine Hill estate comprised a mansion house surrounded by 27 acres of ornamental grounds well planted with trees and shrubs and a further 47 acres towards the top of Corstorphine Hill which was then in use as a golf course. The entire estate had a sunny, south-western exposure and the lower part was well sheltered from the wind. Gillespie had hoped that Hagenbeck would be asked to advise the Society on the planning of the park (29). Instead, probably at the instigation of J. Arthur Thomson, the Society's Council called in Patrick Geddes and his young colleague, Frank Mears. Immediately, Geddes and Mears set off on a study tour of continental zoos to gather ideas on layout and features. On their return, they submitted a plan for laying out the grounds at Corstorphine in such a manner as to preserve and enhance their natural beauty. Geddes, assisted by his daughter, Norah, prepared the general scheme for the laying out of the grounds, footpaths and roadways, while Mears' designed the animal houses and enclosures (30). Work was started in April 1913 and proceeded with some urgency in order that the zoo would be ready to open in the summer. To avoid

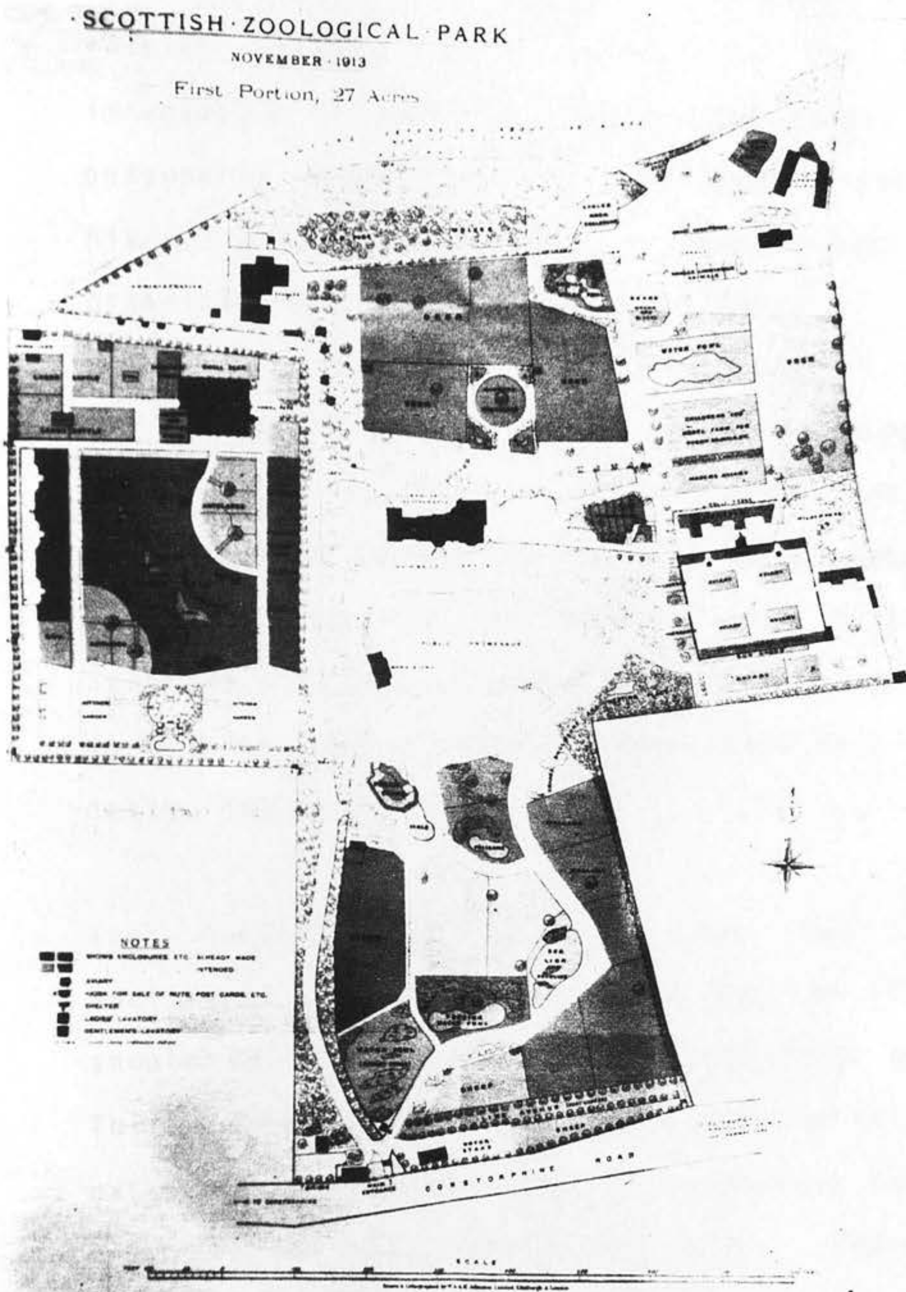


Fig. 1.10. Scottish Zoological Park Edinburgh.
General Scheme by Patrick Geddes and Frank Mears, 1913.

overstretching the Society's limited resources, initial efforts were confined to the 27 acres immediately surrounding the mansion house. Frank personally supervised the construction work, while his sister, Louisa, who had trained in horticulture, organized much of the landscaping (31).

The Society's minutes for the period suggest that while some Council members were enthusiastic supporters of Geddes and Mears, others, notably Lord Salvesen, favoured the work of the distinguished Scottish architect, Robert Lorimer, who was brought in to make alterations to Corstorphine Hill House and design the bandstand.

The Council had decided that two principal enclosures, the polar bear pool and the lion's den, should be quarried out of the underlying whinstone. This proved a more arduous task than anticipated and extra men had to be employed to complete the work in time for the zoo's opening in July. Mears' design for the polar bear enclosure took the form of a rocky promontory surrounded on three sides by a pool blasted out of the whinstone and on the fourth by a man-made cliff. On its completion, the Society was able to boast that it was "the finest in the world for the displaying of polar bears in natural

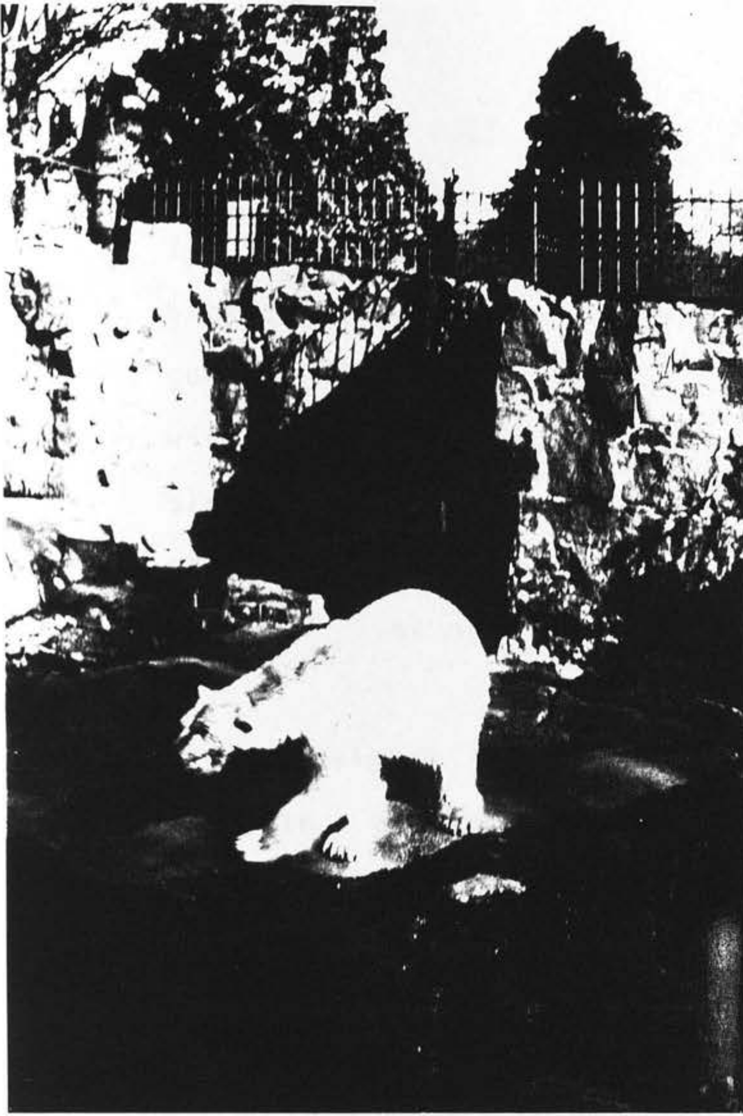

Fig. 1.11. The Polar Bear Enclosure, Edinburgh Zoo, 1914.

Fig. 1.12. The Sea-Lion Pool Edinburgh Zoo, 1914.

surroundings" (32).

The lions' den consisted of a broad shelf of rock backed and flanked by high, overhanging cliffs and guarded along the front by a concealed ditch rimmed with spikes. This open area was linked to indoor sleeping quarters by a concealed tunnel. Additional cages for lions and other large carnivores were provided close by.

Mears designed the Khan Restaurant and Shelter to resemble a caravansarai, evoking the exotic atmosphere of the Orient. Internally, it was arranged in a series of rising terraces with glass roofs supported by stone pillars. A central avenue was left open to allow camel and elephant rides to pass through it. Unfortunately, the building was not a success. The concept was suited to warmer climes and left visitors uncomfortably exposed to the snell Scottish winds. It underwent many subsequent modifications and served for a long time as a cafeteria before being converted for use as the Zoo's Education Centre.

Mears' monkey house was novel in design. It was built within the shelter of a high holly hedge and consisted of inner brick sleeping compartments, an

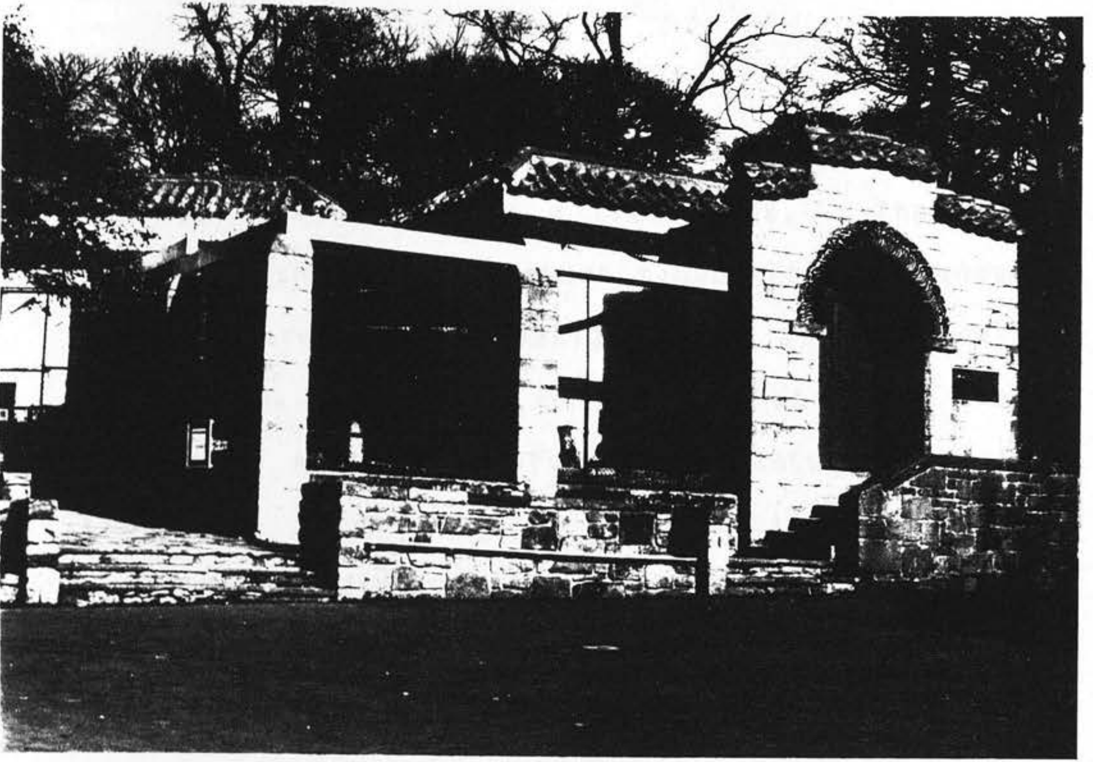

Fig. 1.13. The Acclimatization House, Edinburgh Zoo, 1914.

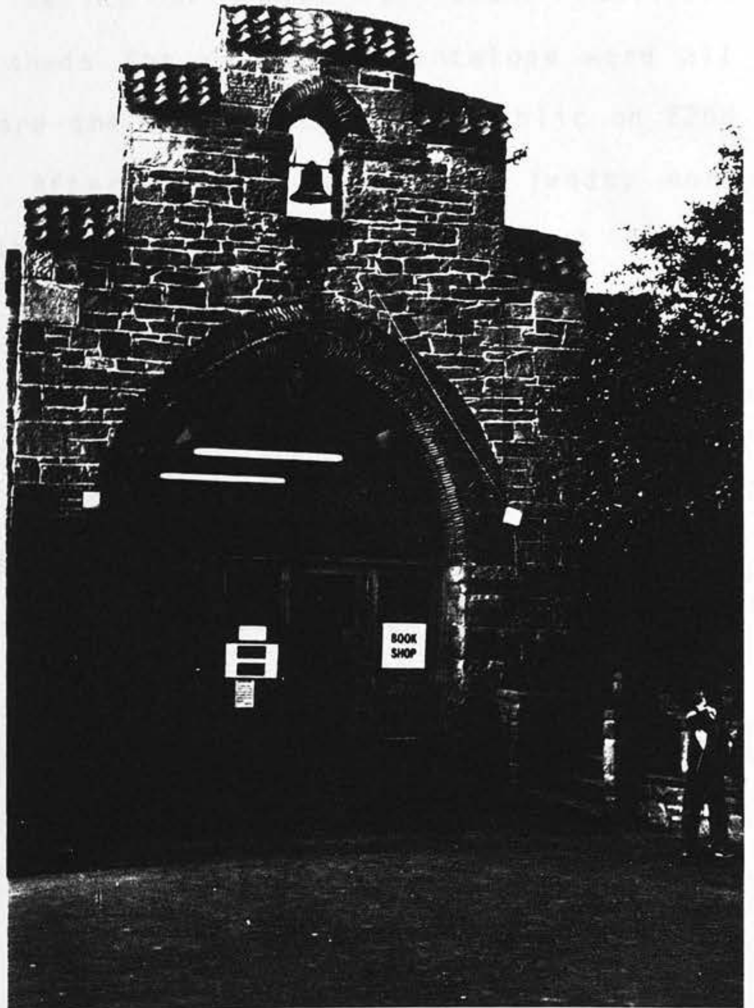


Fig. 1.14. The Khan Shelter, Edinburgh Zoo, 1914.

intermediate covered play area and a large, open outdoor cage containing a tree trunk. The roofed portion resembled an eastern timber-fronted bungalow and had verandahs and upright poles for the monkeys to play on. Gillespie considered that it was one of the zoo's most successful early features and felt that its simple timber construction created an appropriate atmosphere. However, the wood deteriorated over the years and the building eventually had to be demolished.

In addition to the main buildings and enclosures, a pheasant aviary, a parrot garden, a squirrel enclosure, a series of ponds for water fowl and paddocks and sheds for cattle and antelope were all completed before the zoo opened to the public on 22nd July 1913. After another appeal for funds, work resumed on the construction of additional animal accommodation towards the end of the year. A sea-lion pool, a brown bear enclosure and an elephant house were completed by early Spring 1914. Three outdoor toilets, two sales kiosks, additional antelope houses and a number of small cages for monkeys and birds of prey were also built.

The First World War did not have a very adverse effect on the zoo in the first year or so. Capital

expenditure was halted for the duration but a donation from Lord Salvesen enabled the construction of an Acclimatisation House. Mears had prepared the plans before the outbreak of hostilities, and the building was completed in December 1914. The design was influenced by the new small mammal house at London Zoo. It took the form of a covered gallery for the public flanked by a series of indoor cages which gave access to outdoor enclosures. The indoor compartments were at a higher level than the outdoor cages and arranged in such a manner than their floors provided covered sheltered areas to the outside (33). The building became a temporary home for the zoo's monkey collection when Mears' original monkey house was demolished.

After the War, development of the zoo was resumed with the erection of isolation and hospital quarters. An aviary for moorland and shore birds was built in 1921.

The Feu Charter which the Town Council granted to the Zoological Society of Scotland in 1913 had made provision for the future widening of Corstorphine Road. Under the terms of the Charter, the Society was required to give up a strip of land on the road frontage while the Corporation, for its part, was to

be responsible for setting back the boundary wall and zoo gates and for taking down and re-erecting the entrance lodge. Early in 1923, plans were prepared for the widening of the roadway and the extension of the City's tramway service and the Corporation entered into negotiations with the Zoological Society over the sharing of the costs of the scheme.

The Council of the Society had already asked Frank Mears to suggest an arrangement for the new boundary, gate and lodge to harmonize with the Carnegie Aquarium which was to occupy a site in the South-Eastern corner of the park. The original zoo entrance had been in the South-Western corner but under Mears' plan was to be relocated in the centre of the road frontage. The entrance itself was to be widened and a pair of gate piers and stone falcons, which had originally been brought from the old mansion of Falcon Hall in Morningside, were to be incorporated in the new design. The original plain lodge building was to be enlarged and turned into a feature of the zoo entrance.

In view of Mears' plan, the Town Council's Streets and Buildings Committee agreed that the Society should be responsible for executing the new entrance scheme and that towards the cost of this the

Corporation would contribute a sum representing the estimated cost of taking down and rebuilding the existing lodge and gates. The Corporation was to remain responsible for setting back the boundary wall (34, 35). The project was completed in 1924.

A Tropical Bird House and a Reptile House were built during 1925 and 1926. The two buildings run parallel to each other and are designed so that visitors are kept in a shaded passage while all light is directed into the display cases (Mears later applied the same principle in the Livingstone gallery at Blantyre). An Ape House and a baboon rock were added in the late 1920s.

A right of way from Corstorphine to Rest-and-be-Thankful at the top of Corstorphine Hill had run between the original Zoological Park and the golf course. It was extinguished under an agreement with the Town Council whereby the Society gave up a strip of land along the northern boundary of the estate for the formation of a new path. The way was then clear for the development of the rest of the park. In 1927, Mears was instructed to prepare a report and plan for the laying out of the higher ground towards the North of the estate. After consideration and some alteration, this was approved by the Society's

SCOTTISH ZOOLOGICAL PARK

Fig. 1.15. Scottish Zoological Park, Edinburgh. General Scheme by Patrick Geddes and Frank Mears, 1927.

Council and the Golf Club was given notice to quit its tenancy by May 1928. Little construction work took place in the park extension, the greater part of the area being given over to large paddocks for herds of grazing animals. However, several old quarries in the North-East of the estate were excavated to create rock dens for the bigger carnivores. This was the last phase of the development of the zoo with which Mears was associated.

Mears' long involvement with the zoo project provided him with many valuable contacts within the city's business, professional and political establishments and assisted him in developing a working relationship with Town Council officials. It provided valuable employment during the lean years of the twenties and helped to establish his public reputation as a distinguished Edinburgh architect and planner. The work carried out on Corstorphine Hill demonstrated his ability to arrive at imaginative and original solutions to a variety of problems on a limited budget. It combined appropriate geographical, historical and cultural references, local building materials and innovative design to produce a pleasing recreational environment which remains one of the city's major popular attractions to this day.

## 1.4 Religious Symbolism and the Theosophical Connection

In the years preceeding the First World War, the Theosophical Society, which drew heavily on Eastern mysticism in its search for the essential Unity underlying the great world religions, was at the height of its popularity and influence. Although sceptical, Mears obviously had an interest in many of the movement's ideas and, indeed, it was an interest which he shared with other members of his family. His mother, Isabella Bartholomew, had been a medical missionary in China and subsequently collaborated with his sister, Louisa, on an English introduction to the philosophy and symbolism of the ancient Chinese classic, the "Yih King" (36). He himself had acquired a knowledge of Medieval religious symbolism in the course of his training as an architect, had been initiated into the elaborate ritual and symbolism of Freemasonry and, through Geddes, was introduced to Hinduism and, in 1908, attended lectures on Indian Philosophy by Margaret Noble, disciple of the Swami Vivekananda (37).

An Edinburgh friend, D. Graham Pole, was General Secretary to the Theosophical Society in Scotland and

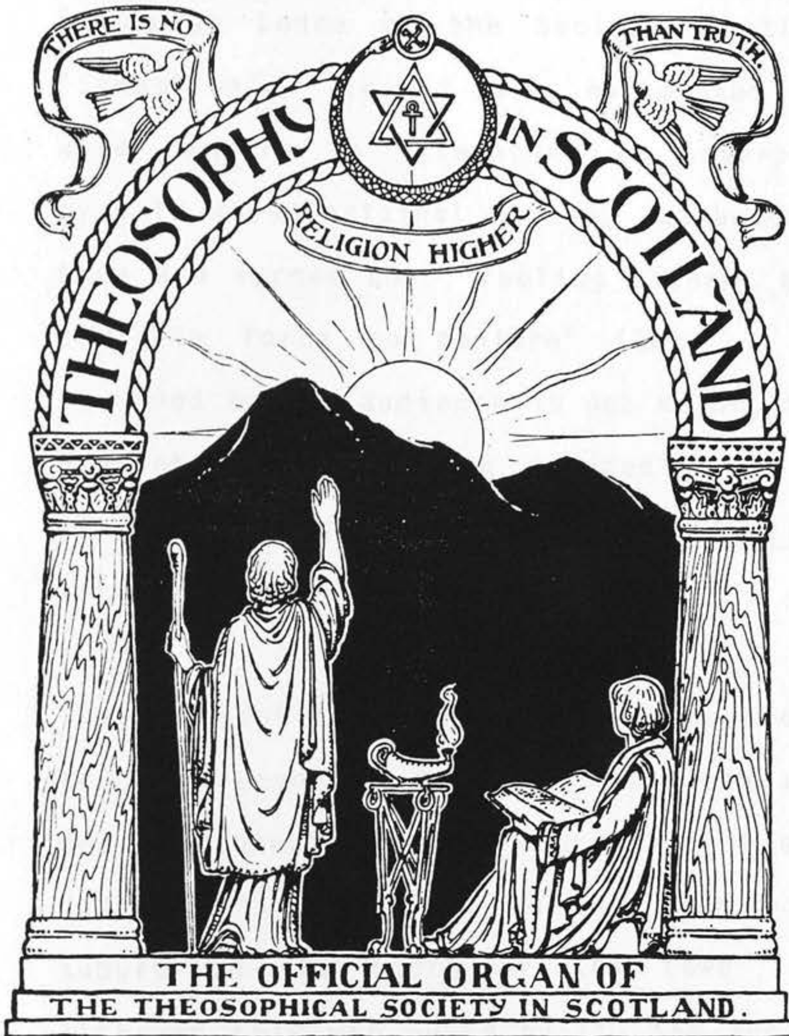


Fig. I.16. "Theosophy in Scotland", Mears' cover illustration for the official organ of the Theosophical Society in Scotland, edited by his friend, D. Graham Pole.

Editor of its magazine, "Theosophy in Scotland". Early in 1910, Mears was asked to address the Edinburgh Lodge of the Society on the subject of "Symbolism". In his talk, he pointed out that there were dangers in attempting to interpret religious symbols whose original meaning had become obscured by time and warned that "feeling without knowledge is a terrible force to conjure" (38). How this was received by his audience is not known, but it did not prevent him from being invited to provide a cover illustration for "Theosophy in Scotland" shortly afterwards (39).

The Theosophical Society had a particularly active lodge in Leven, and it may have been as a result of Mears' connections with the organization that he and Geddes became involved in the planning of a garden suburb to the North of the town in 1913 (40). Although this was never built, the subsequent layout of Kennoway - which, in the nineteen-forties, was intended as one of five new settlements across central Fife - was profoundly influenced by the Garden City movement.

Geddes does not appear to have been as directly involved with the Scottish theosophists as Mears was, although he had been a biology tutor to the

movement's leading evangelist, Annie Besant, during his student days in London and was to encounter her again in 1915, shortly after his arrival in India (41). There he had been engaged by Lord Pentland, the former Scottish Secretary, to show the "Cities Exhibition" and act as planning consultant to the Madras Presidency. However, in October 1914, the "Cities Exhibition" was lost on its way to join Geddes in Madras when the freighter, "Glen Grant", was sunk by the German battleship, "Emden". When Geddes heard the news, he wrote to Mears from Bombay, saying:

> "I know we can depend on your help in this disaster ... go to London and if possible to Paris, to buy and borrow plans and engravings etc., to make up some fair proportion of our loss" (42).

Mears, the planner H.V. Lanchester, and other collaborators rallied round Geddes in his moment of need and, remarkably, a new "Cities Exhibition" was assembled and opened in Madras in January 1915, only two weeks late.

Meanwhile, Mears had already gone to London to work with Edwin Lutyens on the design of the new English

Theosophical Society Headquarters in Tavistock Square. In December 1914, he wrote to Geddes, saying:

> "I have been able to do a certain amount in finding things and putting people on the track, but have been very busy indeed with office work. Early in October the Theosophical job suddenly came to a head, and I've spent about ½ my time here since. I'm in it on a basis of partnership with Lutyens, hence I hear with certain tremors of your crusade against him at Delhi. I hope you aren't at daggers drawn. I see your point of view quite clearly, yet one shudders to think of the results of the employment of perhaps any other architects there, than Lutyens and Baker. You will have seen the Calcutta Victoria memorial, and a few like productions before you get this. Lutyens seems to me to be the only architect we have who understands "fine" building. He unifies his work in a most extraordinary way. From what I know of him I see no need whatever for you to be at cross purposes.
>
> It is very much more difficult to get the sort of old prints we did before. Prices are up and many of the old shops disappeared ...

'Curious how things happen. You go to India, and come up against Lutyens [and] Mrs. Besant I suppose ...

You must be having the time of your life this trip. I begin to wonder whether a trip to India may come my way one day, from the way things are shaping here, but that's a long way off" (43).

Mears must have valued very highly the opportunity to work with such a celebrated English architect who included amongst his accomplishments considerable achievements in the Arts and Crafts style. His anxiety over Geddes' criticism of Lutyens was well-founded. As Michael Hebbert has pointed out, the Professor's penchant for aggressively attacking the errors which he perceived in the work of others frequently rebounded to his disadvantage (44). In an earlier letter, he had written scathingly of Lutyens' work in India, stating that:

"Delhi is wholly unspiritual - & with lowest standards yet reached by (in)-humanity for housing of humbler workers & of temporary ones - for which I am giving them the plainest speaking" (45).

The great imperial architect was indeed stung by Geddes' criticism, and he was apparently not alone. Early in 1915, Lutyens wrote that both the Viceroy and Sir Malcolm Hailey, the Commissioner for Delhi, were wildly angry:

> "... with a certain Professor Geddes who has come out here to lecture on town planning - his exhibits were sunk by the "Emden". He seems to have talked rot in an insulting way and I hear he is going to tackle me! A crank who don't know his subject. He talks a lot, gives himself away and then loses his temper" (46).

Annie Besant had engaged Lutyens to design the Theosophical Society's English Headquarters in 1911. The commission had arisen largely as a result of his wife's heavy involvement with the Theosophical movement and he had accepted it rather against his better judgement, for he was aware that the Society did not have sufficient funds for the grandiose building proposed. Construction was delayed as a result of Mrs. Besant's frequent requests for alterations to the design, but eventually commenced in 1913. However, by the Autumn of 1914 the project had become bogged down in disputes over finance and labour organization and Mears' arrival at this time

seems to have done little to resolve the situation. At the end of the War, the unfinished building was sold to the British Medical Association. It was finally completed in 1924 (47, 48, 49).

Mears was steeped in the tenets of Medieval religious architecture which invested all structural and decorative features with a rich symbolic meaning and this facility found ready outlet though his association with Geddes, who himself made liberal and often unorthodox use of symbolism throughout his multifarious activities. In the early twenties, Mears was once again called upon to make imaginative use of his knowledge of religious and cultural symbolism when Geddes became involved in the scheme to build a Bahai Temple at Allahabad. The commitment and detailed consideration which Mears brought to architectural projects of this kind are evident in his description of his design:

> "Arising central in the Temple and its surrounding courts and gardens - and so central to the Bahai Community in India - is a great though slender nine-fold pillar or tree of unity of life. Through its traceried branches spreading palm-like to the summit of the dome, the light admitted through the lantern which it supports streams

downward to the hall below. Again the worshippers looking upward will get a glimpse into a remote and brilliantly-lighted upper chamber which will seem the very source of the light.

From the outer limit of the branches the domed roof curves downwards to meet the arches of the nine apses (or vaulted recesses) surrounding the Hall. Between these apses are eighteen great pillars grouped in pairs to support the outer edge of the dome ...

Nine gateways or spaceous porches are provided, one opening into each apse and approached from the gardens by a wide flight of steps. The passageways leading from these porches are kept low, and through their pillared sides one may have glimpses into the sheltered cloister courts each with its pool and symbolic fountain. There is thus a gradation in increasing scale from porch and court to corridor and thence to apse and finally the great dome.

The apses open within into a circular ambulatory from which steps descend to the main floor. Opposite each entrance, on the line of the steps, stand small shrines or symbols, nine in all,

expressing the nine-fold ways of approach to the unifying ideal. To one entering the temple these symbols stand on the brink of visible floor, and give added mystery and dignity to the great tree rising in misty light beyond.

Care has been taken to guard in every way against the distressing effect of brilliant patches of sky seen direct through the windows - which blind the eye and destroy all colour and form in their neighbourhood.

The tracery of the crown of the tree is arranged so that the light striking down from the lantern chamber is reflected from polished upper surfaces onto the gilded underside, thus lighting the whole curved surface and thence diffusing to fill the interior of the Temple with a subdued glow.

In addition the walls of the apses are pierced at the floor level with openings to the fountain courts whence light reflected from the surface of the water may strike inwards and upwards to meet that coming from above.

Further illumination is provided by a ring of small tracened windows below the domes of the

apses each filled with symbolic pattern in jewelled glass. The interior of the Temple will thus be filled with a mist of pearl and amber light which will seem to come from the very structure itself.

A ceremonial spiral stairway is provided within the nine-fold central pillar giving access to the upper chamber and to the galleries of the lantern. In this upper chamber may be provided hidden music which will filter down as does the light through the tracery. Thus the dome, instead of as usual being a source of echo, becomes a great reflector distributing the sound ever downward to the worshippers below.

In this design it is believed that all precedent for design and construction of larger domes has been left behind. The central support admits of a span hardly to be attained by other means, and this in a truly economical way - in a way moreover which fully expresses the teaching of the Bahai religion. For here, rising to the full height of the Temple is the symbol slender yet strong of growth and aspiration, of unity in diversity, of central truth amid 9-fold interpretation. Western construction is united to Eastern forms and

proportion - for, lightly constructed in steel and concrete, the dome yet shows the low and well-set proportions of the Topes of early India. The roofs of the surrounding apses and the gates and corner shrines below modify its severe outline and unite it to the later architecture of India ...

The effect of height and scale is attained without as within by acceptance of the Indian tradition of graduation from small to great: the delicate detail of the angular stone roofs and apses - which again contrast with the great simple dome itself with its subdued patterning of coloured tiles. Above all the sky-piercing lantern continues the idea of the great tree within, and unifies the diverse elements below" (50).

The Bahais, like the Theosophists, believed that a greater Unity could be revealed through a synthesis which acknowledged and drew upon the rich diversity of human religious and cultural experience. It was an idea which held considerable appeal in the early years of this Century, not least because it appeared to offer a moral and spiritual justification for Empire. However, the Imperial ideal was dealt a mortal blow by the bloody struggle of 1914-18 and the world emerged from the carnage into a new era of

ascendant nationalisms.

## 1.5 The Great War

Mears married Norah Geddes in July 1915. The Professor urged his new son-in-law to join him in India but instead Mears joined the Royal Scots Regiment and volunteered for service with the Royal Flying Corps. He was sent to Roehampton School of Aeronautics where Geddes' eldest son, Alasdair, had trained the year before. On his arrival in France in August 1916, he was posted to a Kite Balloon Section near Albert. However, almost immediately, he was transferred to Alasdair Geddes' Section which was located nearby and, during the winter of 1916/17, Frank and Alasdair served together as Balloon Observers (51).

On one occasion, Mears had a narrow escape when the two men were forced to jump by parachute when their balloon was attacked by an enemy aircraft. Alasdair Geddes got clear of the balloon safely but Mears lost a few seconds in getting out owing to the violent swaying of the basket as the balloon burst into flames. His parachute became entangled in the balloon's handling guys and did not break loose until

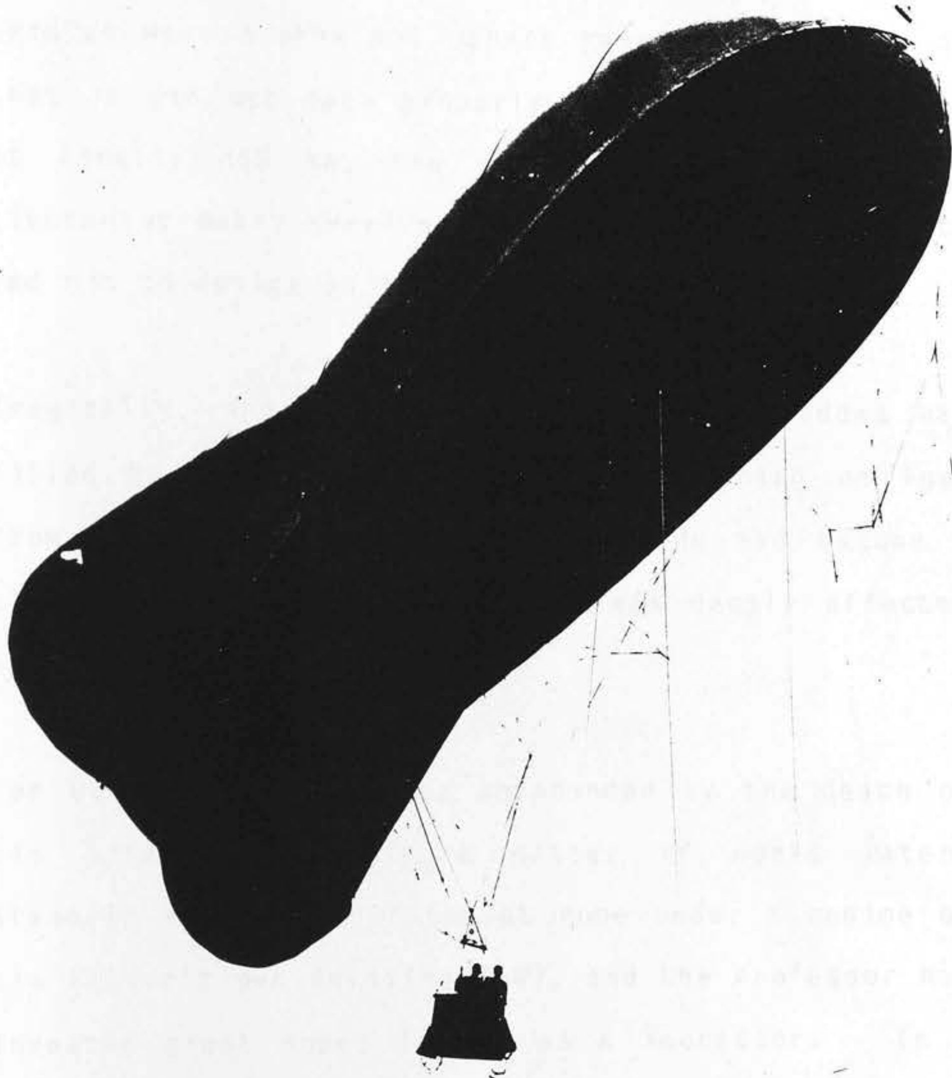

Fig. 1.17. Kite Balloon over France. Imperial War Museum Photograph.

he had fallen for some distance with the burning balloon. When the parachute came free, some of its bridles were broken and others remained entangled so that it did not open properly for some time. When it finally did so, the descent became normal and Lieutenant Mears survived unscathed. The experience led him to design an improved parachute (52, 53).

Tragically, shortly afterwards, Alasdair Geddes was killed by a shell fragment while returning on foot from a ground observation post. He had become a close personal friend and Mears was deeply affected by his death.

For Geddes, the loss was compounded by the death of his wife, Anna, only a matter of weeks later. Alasdair had been educated at home under a regime of his father's own devising (54), and the Professor had invested great hopes in him as a successor. In a tribute to Alasdair written later, Mears wrote that:

> "He understood as no-one else perhaps did his father's plans and followed his ideal of regenerating city life by bringing it into more direct contact with the country round, of making it possible for each child to have these nature experiences which are necessary to the

Fig. 1.18. Lieutenant Frank C. Mears, RFC, 1917.
Photograph courtesy of Mr. Roger Mears.

understanding of the metaphors in all great literatures:

"Plant again the fragrant closes,
That our children may love roses".

He saw the necessity of understanding not only the physical phenomena of a region but the occupations of the people, the thought and spirit of the place before a community could develop harmoniously with hurt to none but gain to all. He understood the weak places in his father's plans I believe. He suffered fools more gladly than his father perhaps, at any rate, I saw him at Oxford make intelligent to the uninitiated the philosophy and practice of Regional Study" (55).

Although there appear to have been previous clashes of temperament, following his double bereavement Geddes was to turn increasingly to Mears for assistance in his many and varied schemes (56). In a letter from the Front in August 1917, Mears reflected on the new conditions which would follow the cessation of hostilities:

"I don't see, much, what is going to happen after the war is over. I think it will largely depend

on what the people out here find they want to do when they get home. They certainly won't be on the look-out for any more wars. The open-air life will be a big factor obviously. I don't know whether earning a living will be a bore after having so much provided as a matter of routine. The politicians at home don't appear to have realized this point of view. They think they are the "Nation" which is going to absorb, by legislation or otherwise, all the working capacity of the crowd out here. Everyone who goes back home will have a mind washed free of a lot of ideas which are still held as gospel back home, but I don't at all know what is latent in them. There is, on the whole, a vastly increased store of physical and nervous force which will find outlet somehow" (57).

In 1918, Mears returned to Edinburgh to try to establish his own architectural practice. He was 38 years old and, although his early career had provided him with a rich variety of experience and opportunity, he found himself entering middle-age facing an uncertain professional and financial future. His upbringing had been in some respects priviledged but in others stunting and repressive. He came from a relatively prosperous professional and

farming background and was educated privately in England and Scotland. The Mears family ethos was both religious and intellectual and imposed demands of professional sacrifice and public service which were arguably emotionally damaging to Mears himself. He trained as an architect in Edinburgh at a time of renewed interest in Scotland's vernacular tradition and made a special study of religious and cultural symbolism in Medieval art and design. During his early professional career, he worked with several leading Scottish architects and with the celebrated Imperial architect, Edwin Lutyens, as well as securing the influential patronage of the Marquis of Bute. As a young man, he became involved in the social, artistic and educational activities of the Outlook Tower and became one of Geddes' most faithful and conscientious disciples. Michael Cuthbert has alluded to Geddes' messianic quality and his attraction for "young men in search of some morally-binding address" (58) and there can be no doubt that Mears' relationship with the Professor filled a deep emotional and spiritual need (Mears regularly addressed Geddes in correspondence as "father"). Mears' initial value to Geddes was as an architectural draughtsman and the ideas and skills which he brought to planning were rooted in design and aesthetics rather than social, economic or

political analysis (59). However, in the course of his career, the particular perspective which he developed combined the anti-urban ideology of the Garden City movement with Geddesian concepts of social and cultural evolution.

In the course of his work at the Outlook Tower and as a result of his involvement in the Edinburgh Zoo project, Mears made many valuable contacts in professional, business and artistic circles and in the city's administration. One particularly fruitful friendship established during this period was with Geddes' accountant, Thomas Whitson, who subsequently went on to become Edinburgh's Lord Provost and was a staunch supporter of planning initiatives throughout his political career.

Some commentators have observed that the group of enthusiasts which based its activities at the Outlook Tower was predominantly "middle class" (60) and argued that a fatal flaw in Geddes' social theorizing was the absence of any explicit acknowledgement of social class (61, 62). While there is no doubt a lot of truth in these assessments, they fail to fully grasp the particular social environment in which both Geddes and Mears operated. Edinburgh was not an industrial city and neither Geddes nor Mears included

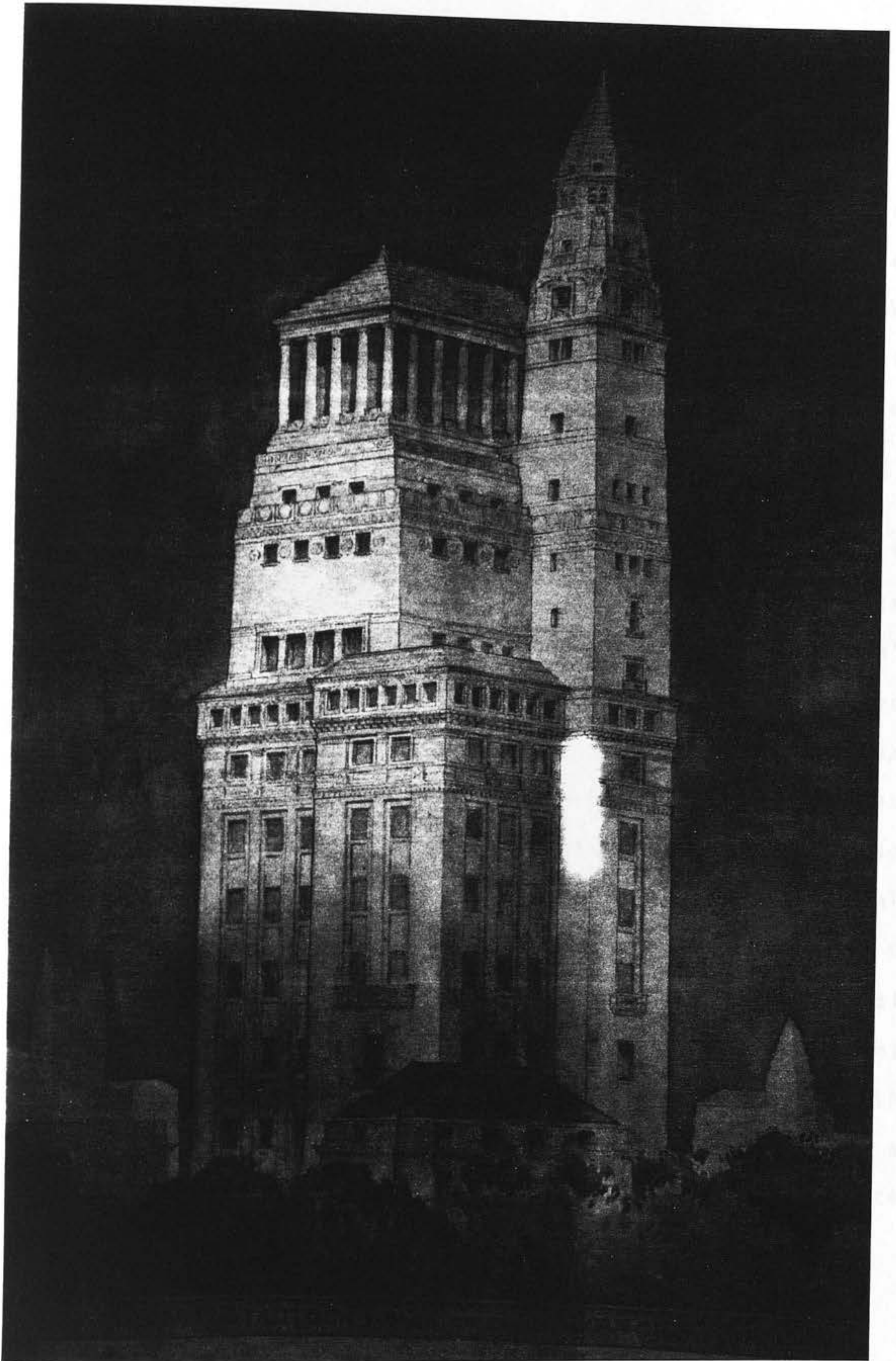

Fig. 1.19. Mears' somewhat tongue-in-cheek design for an American Outlook Tower.

any close experience of modern industrial society in their family backgrounds. They held on to an older, pre-industrial and particularly Scottish view of society which placed emphasis on station, rank, degree, skill and occupation rather than rigid class division and it was within this context that Geddes developed his occupational sociology.

Michael Cuthbert has drawn attention to the anti-imperial and anti-metropolitan basis of Geddesian regionalism (63). Geddes' knowledge of Edinburgh's post-Union history led him to the general conclusion that the excessive dominance of the great imperial capitals of the world was having a deleterious impact on the social and cultural life of the lesser cities over which they held sway. He believed that only with the removal of the Imperial yolk would it be possible for the subordinate cities to realize their full social and cultural potential and it was this conviction which drew both himself and Mears to the historic culture-capitals of Dublin and Jerusalem as they each re-emerged from a long period of enforced provincialism.

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2. Interview with the late Dr. Winifred Rushforth (nee Bartholomew), a younger cousin of Sir Frank Mears, on 13th January 1982. Dr. Rushforth, who died in 1983, remembered the Mears children's visits to the family farms in West Lothian in the 1890s.

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## Chapter Two

## Housing and Town Planning in Ireland.

## 2.1 The Cities Exhibition in Dublin

In 1911, Professor Patrick Geddes took the "Cities and Town Planning Exhibition" to Dublin to complement the Annual Congress of the Institute of Public Health being held there between 15th and 31st August. He had been invited by Lady Aberdeen, wife of the British Viceroy of Ireland, who was helping to organize the Congress in her capacity as President of the Women's National Health Association of Ireland. In early April, Frank Mears went to Dublin as the Exhibition's Assistant Director to make preparations for the opening in May. As always, the final few weeks of organizing and hanging exhibits was hectic. Additional Irish material had to be assembled from scratch and the arrangement of exhibits employed on previous occasions had to be altered considerably in order to fit the long narrow hall provided by the Royal Dublin Society.

In the 1890s, in furtherance of his Scottish Renascence, Geddes had encouraged what has been described as a "pseudo-Celtic" artistic movement in Edinburgh (1). Mears suggested to him that the Dublin showing provided an excellent opportunity to revive his "Celtic phase" and relate it to his current

Fig. 2.1. Geddes and Mears' patrons in Ireland, Lord John and Lady Ishbel Gordon, 1st Marquess and Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair, the last Viceroy and Vicereine of Ireland. Photograph courtesy of Aberdeen Journals Ltd.

planning concerns. Instead of relying on Eric Robertson, who had provided many of the illustrations for the Exhibition's other venues, Mears proposed involving artists of the Celtic revival in Ireland (2). However, he showed less sensitivity to Irish national sentiment in arranging to have the Exhibition Catalogue printed on the British mainland. Shortly before the opening, he reported to Geddes that:

> "... we've nearly blown the Exhibition sky-high, getting it printed by foreigners. There appears to be no doubt that we must print here" (3).

This unexpected turn of events involved Mears in a lot of last-minute reorganization and additional proof reading which he had hoped to devolve on Geddes in Edinburgh. Nevertheless, he found time during this busy period to lecture to the Women's National Health Association on the aims of the modern Garden Cities and town planning movement. As in his Scottish lectures, he used lantern slides showing the development of European settlements from the Middle Ages to the present day to illustrate his thesis that, first the exigencies of defence, and then industrialization, had progressively isolated the urban dweller from his rural hinterland, with deleterious results for both town and country. The

Garden Cities movement was endeavouring to bring the best aspects of rural life back to the towns. However, there was another side to the problem. Ireland had, in general, escaped the worst effects of rapid and unco-ordinated industrial growth, but she had suffered intense rural poverty. Mears followed Geddes in pointing to the work of the Irish agricultural reformer, Sir Horace Plunkett, as showing how the benefits of urban living could be brought to the country. His praise for the recent achievements of some of the small nations of Europe was calculated to appeal to his audience:

> "One need only think of Denmark, Norway or Sweden, or now Ireland, to see that things are happening in such so-called poor countries which may well once more alter the balance of Europe.
>
> The Norsemen, the Danes, the primitive Irish missionaries, the people of the Highlands, have in the past made no small mark on the world, and this in large degree in virtue of the nature of their respective fatherlands. The lessons of co-operation in production of Denmark and Ireland - of the immense development of finer, cleaner industry in Norway and Sweden - industry smokeless, electrical - demanding, and producing,

a higher type of artizan than the coal industries of England, Germany and America, are signs that the small countries are not dead yet" (4).

When Geddes arrived in Dublin, he found the local public health movement receptive to his socio-biological message. His advocacy of social and cultural advance through environmental improvement seemed to provide a practical prescription for alleviating conditions in some of the worst slums in Europe. The Women's National Health Association espoused his ideas enthusiastically and assisted in the establishment of an Irish National Housing and Town Planning Association which immediately embarked on a survey of Dublin. At the same time, the WNHA began a collection of housing and town planning exhibits for its own Health Exhibition (5).

The Professor introduced the idea of providing children's playgrounds on derelect sites in the overcrowded districts of the city, just as the Outlook Tower's Open Spaces Committee had been doing in Edinburgh. This was taken up in the national health policy promoted by Lord and Lady Aberdeen and Norah Geddes spent the best part of the next three years in Dublin, planning and organizing gardens and play spaces for children (6).

The 1911 "Cities and Town Planning Exhibition" was held in the Simmonscourt Hall, Dublin, between 24th May and 7th June. It was then transferred for a time to Trinity College before moving on to Belfast later in the year. The Viceroy and his wife were greatly impressed with Geddes during this period and became firm friends and supporters. They invited him back to Dublin in March 1914 to make plans for a greatly expanded Exhibition to be mounted in the city in the summer. The continuing political tensions in Ireland had convinced Lord Aberdeen of the need for comprehensive policies of social reform encompassing both the work of Plunkett's Irish Agricultural Organization Society in rural areas and a Geddesian approach to civic renewal in the towns. This reformist vision, promising the achievement of a new level of prosperity and wellbeing in Ireland by "non-political" means, was to provide the main theme of the 1914 Exhibition. The Viceroy announced a competition, with a prize of £500, for the best replanning scheme for Dublin. The competition was organized by the newly-constituted Civics Institute of Ireland and the judges were to be Professor Geddes, the American planner, John Nolen, and the Dublin City Architect, C.J. MacCarthy.

Geddes made arrangements for the "Cities Exhibition", which had by this time trebled in size, to return to Dublin in July. This time it was housed in the old Linen Hall which had been specially restored for the purpose. It was augmented by illustrations from many Irish towns, material from the continuing survey of Dublin, a display of Sir Horace Plunkett's agricultural renewal projects in rural Ireland and a Child Welfare Exhibit on loan from America (7).

The Professor brought with him a strong team of helpers from the Sociological Society, including Victor Branford, H.J. Fleure, Sir Charles Cameron and Mabel Barker. Together with Norah and Alasdair Geddes, they organized a School of Civics in association with the Exhibition which ran for three weeks, between 27th July and 15th August. Along with the Exhibition, the School of Civics lectures on "Geography and Nature Studies", "Primitive Occupations", "Country and Town", "The Industrial Age", "Civic Renewal" and "The Survey of a Great City" aroused a considerable interest. Just as the Celtic Revival had provided Irish intellectuals with a satisfactory reinterpretation of their nation's past, for some, Geddesian regional analysis appeared to offer new insights into the condition of contemporary Ireland which suited the prevalent mood of self-

conscious nationalism. However, one anonymous press report suggests that at least some middle-class Dubliners regarded the Professor as little more than "an amusing freak" (8).

Dublin was a city of great labour unrest in the years leading up to the First World War. In August 1913, the Employers' Federation initiated a lock-out in an attempt to break the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union. By late September, 25,000 Dublin workers had been made idle. Labour resistance was organized by the union leader, James Larkin, and the Edinburgh-born revolutionary socialist, James Connolly (9). In the Autumn of 1913, Larkin embarked on a fund-raising tour of the British mainland during which he addressed a mass-meeting in Edinburgh. After the rally, he accepted an invitation from Patrick Geddes to visit the Outlook Tower, where he made a great impression on the Professor and his colleagues (10).

In his evidence on behalf of the Women's National Health Association for the Departmental Inquiry into "<u>The Housing Conditions of the Working Classes in the City of Dublin</u>" in 1913, Geddes asserted that the housing crisis was "fundamental to the problem of labour since the house is the central and fundamental fact of real wages" (11).

He pointed out that the importance of Dublin as a port and distributive centre for goods from the British mainland had led to a very high proportion of the population being made up of the "casual labouring class". These people had been crammed into poor quality tenement property, creating appalling conditions of overcrowding and poverty. The need for an improvement in the housing conditions of dock-workers in the British Isles was a theme which Geddes returned to repeatedly during this period. In 1911, he had castigated the port authorities in London for proposing to spend £18 million on the docks " and not eightpence in providing housing accommodation for the dockers". He argued that great ports like London, Liverpool, Glasgow and Dublin should follow the example of their continental counterparts in Germany and the Low Countries in providing their dockers with "healthy houses and beautiful surroundings" (12, 13). Geddes met Larkin again on his return to Dublin in 1914 and, with the union leader's approval, he won an undertaking from Dublin Corporation that a large area of land on the edge of the city, but only about a mile from the port, would be made over for the rehousing of dock-workers in a new garden suburb to be called Marino.

Under the patronage of Lord Aberdeen, Geddes was able to approach many of Dublin's leading citizens in order to secure their active co-operation in the renewal of the city. He won the support of the Archbishop of Dublin for the construction of a new Roman Catholic Cathedral, a school and art gallery in celebration of the self-government promised by the final Irish Home Rule Bill then before the House of Commons. The proposed site for the new Cathedral was adjacent to the Four Courts and facing onto the major North-South axis of Church Street which Geddes called a "via sacra" since it led to the city's main religious institutions.

However, much larger events beyond Dublin were to confound these promising initiatives. On 4th August 1914, while the activities surrounding the "Cities Exhibition" were at their height, Britain declared war on Germany. The projects which Geddes had started were not abandoned immediately, as it was still widely hoped that the European conflict could be ended quickly. Indeed, on 10th August, Dublin Corporation resolved to ask both Professor Geddes and Raymond Unwin to prepare further planning proposals for central areas of the city (14). The "Cities Exhibition" and summer school continued as planned, but the selection of the winning Dublin town planning

scheme had to be postponed because the American judge, John Nolen, had cancelled his sailing on the outbreak of war. It soon became clear that any hopes of political, social or economic renewal in Ireland would have to be deferred while the British Empire rallied to the defence of "gallant little Belgium". On 18th September 1914, the Irish Home Rule Bill finally reached the statute book, but its implementation was to be delayed for twelve months, or until the cessation of hostilities, whichever proved the longer period. That same day, in a move which signalled his abandonment of Europe to the Imperial warmongers and jingoists, Geddes set out with his son, Alasdair, in search of nobler prospects and new beginnings in India.

In the latter part of 1914, Frank Mears was engaged with Edwin Lutyens in work on the English Theosophical Headquarters in London. He had expected to be called in by Dublin Corporation to prepare plans for the Marino garden village, but, when he had received no confirmation by 20th December, he supposed political difficulties had arisen. The expected resignation of Lord Aberdeen from the Viceroyship did not encourage hopes of a successful outcome (15). However, by 25th February, he was able to report smugly to Geddes that:

> "Marino is still on the books. Any day I may be asked definitely to get out a preliminary scheme. They have brought in a young Dublin man, as a means of greasing the track. He will I think be educable and knows the ropes" (16).

Mears gave expert evidence to an Irish Local Government Board inquiry into the scheme which was held in Kingstown (now Dun Laoghaire). He advocated that the site be developed at a density of 15 to 18 houses per acre and "bombarded them with large perspectives which they didn't know how to attack". In addition, he was confident of work on another housing scheme nearby. But by late 1915, hope of early developments in Dublin had been abandoned and Mears had volunteered for service with the Royal Flying Corps in France.

Meanwhile, plans were being laid for an event which was to have a dramatic impact on the course of Irish history. On 24th April 1916, a force of around 2,000 armed republicans, who refused to accept the suspension of Home Rule for the duration of the war, seized a number of key strong-points in the centre of Dublin and declared an Irish Republic. The Easter Rising lasted about a week, and, by the time it was supressed, 300 civilians, 130 British soldiers and 60

republicans had been killed. During May, the British Authorities executed 27 of the rising's leaders, including Larkin's colleague, James Connolly (17).

Geddes was greatly distressed by news of the insurrection. He had known some of the participants personally (18). Typically, he argued that the tragedy might have been avoided if more time, energy and resources had been devoted to his schemes of civic improvement (19).

## 2.2 The Dublin Planning Competition

In mid-June 1916, Geddes wrote to Alasdair that Lord Aberdeen had been persuaded to let the adjudication of the Dublin town planning schemes go ahead and he was accordingly leaving for the Irish capital on Friday 16th. The Easter Rising had brought a new urgency. The British Army had employed light artillery to force the republican garrisons from their strongholds and several public buildings, as well as a considerable amount of property in and around Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street) had been destroyed or badly damaged. There was now a conspicuous need for reconstruction, and the authorities no doubt saw the announcement of a winning plan as a means of diverting attention from

political grievances and raising the morale of the citizenry.

Eight competitive schemes had been received for the replanning of Greater Dublin, and the judges met to make their decision at the end of June. In August it was announced that the plan prepared by Professor Patrick Abercrombie and Sydney and Arthur Kelly of the University of Liverpool had been selected as the winning entry. While the designs and report prepared by Abercrombie and his team were undoubtedly the best, the adjudicators did not envisage that their scheme should ever be implemented as it stood, as they did not consider that there had been opportunity to conduct an adequate survey. As a consequence, the proposals for new thoroughfares and road widenings were unnecessarily extravagant and would have involved considerable destruction of the existing fabric of the city centre and dislocation of population. In their Report, published in October 1916, the judges emphasized that in reaching their verdict, they were not necessarily endorsing all or any of the particular proposals contained in any one plan. Each entry contained proposals of merit, and the judges called for discussions involving government, the Corporation and the public with a view to translating the best of these into practical schemes for implementation.

Fig. 2.2. The Phoenix emblem of the Civics Institute of Ireland.

CITY OF DUBLIN NEW TOWN PLAN
GENERAL DEVELOPMENT OF INNER AREA
REFERENCE KEY
ABERCROMBIE, KELLY AND KELLY

Fig. 2.3. The ambitious plan for the remodelling of Dublin's Inner Area put forward by Abercrombie, Kelly and Kelly in their winning entry in the Greater Dublin competition. Source: The Architectural Review Vol. XLI, Jan.-June 1917, p.21.

In their Report, the adjudicators gave an Honorable Mention to the scheme prepared by C.R. Ashbee and George H. Chettle of Chelsea, stating:

> "No other Report expresses a fuller and more comprehensive grasp of civic problems. Its sympathetic appreciation of historic growth and architectural traditions, its understanding of present deterioration, and this both in its causes and its consequences to the condition of the people, its appeal for Civic Survey, and its lucid indications towards this, and the fine spirit of hope and ardour with which its many able constructive proposals are put forward, make this a volume well worth completion and separate publication, and one which should be read not only in Dublin but by city improvers everywhere" (20).

However, it was to be six years before the publication of even the winning plan could be contemplated.

Geddes returned briefly to Dublin in August 1919, shortly before making his first trip to Palestine, but the unstable political situation militated against any significant progress on civic renewal projects. Irish opinion had hardened following the stern repression of the 1916 Rising and in the General

Election a few weeks after the Armistice in 1918, de Valera's Sinn Fein routed the moderate Irish Nationalist Party. An Irish Republic was once again declared and the Dail Eireann met in Dublin Mansion House, although the British Government refused to recognize its authority. In early 1919, a terrorist campaign organized by the Republican leader, Michael Collins, was launched against the British authorities. For the next two and a half years, a guerrilla war raged between the Irish Republican Army and the forces of the British Crown.

## 2.3 Garden Suburbs

Despite the troubles, however, some suburban housing projects were initiated. In September 1920, Mears was called over to Dublin by Messrs. MacCabe and Griffiths of the Irish Local Government Board to prepare layout plans and perspective drawings for new housing schemes. The developments were to be on garden village lines with densities as low as 4 houses to the acre. As much as a third of one site of 40 acres was to be given over to woodland and recreational space. Some of the housing was to be for ex-servicemen returned from the Great War and some was to be built under a £250,000 direct labour scheme

organized by the Local Government Board, whereby the construction workers themselves would subsequently occupy the houses.

Because of the post-war shortage of bricks, the houses were to be erected by a cheap and novel method involving a light steel frame and plaster of Paris slabs protected on the outside by cement. Once the frame had been put in place, the roof could be added immediately, allowing the rest of the building work to be completed under cover. Mears prepared designs for a number of different types of house to be built according to this system, the patent for which was held by a company established by one of his collaborators, Mr. E.A. Aston. It was hoped that improved site plans, together with the new cheap method of construction, would allow progress to be made with schemes which had been held up because of cost.

Mears was kept very busy with his Irish housing projects for the next year or so, the construction of the first scheme beginning in the Spring of 1921. Although the Local Government Board appears to have been very pleased with his work, some difficulty arose about this time over his official position in Ireland. Such problems were encountered frequently as a result

of the informal approach to consultancy work adopted by Geddes and his disciples. On this occasion, a satisfactory solution seems to have been found.

As well as the housing schemes in Dublin, Mears worked on at least two others in the North of Ireland. Through Geddes' old friend, Alec Wilson, he became involved in laying out a site near Lisburn for Barbour's Thread Combine. He also prepared plans for a garden village for ex-servicemen on a site of 100 acres in Belfast (21).

On 27th October 1920, shortly after a visit to Dublin, he commented on the political situation in Ireland in a letter to his father-in-law:

> "Its best not to say much about conditions in Ireland - as names creep in - but, with some efficiency, there's so much ineptitude. I find old loyalist friends all now "agin the Government" though hating the violent Sinn Fein gang to the full. This will make settlement much more difficult later, except that a good many Ulstermen are also getting fed up, and so <u>that</u> "bloc" may split in favour of some "All Ireland" regrouping" (22).

However, it was not to be. In late May 1921, in their biggest operation, the Dublin Brigade of the I.R.A. attacked the beautiful Eighteenth Century Custom House on the quays of the Liffey, which was by then the headquarters of the British administration in Ireland. The 120 or so republicans were quickly overpowered and captured, but not before the building had been gutted by fire. By this time the fighting had reached a stalemate and both sides were looking for a political solution. On 11th July, a truce was signed between the Crown forces and the I.R.A. In London on 6th December 1921, after months of difficult negotiation, an agreement was signed known as the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The Treaty established an Irish Free State under the Crown but made provision for six of the Ulster counties to opt out of the settlement, which they promptly did (23).

Geddes was jubilant about the news of the founding of the Irish Free State and with characteristic but ill-founded optimism he wrote to Norah:

> "Among my notes this morning's vigil are a few on Ireland - the sub-conscious mobilization of past experience and thought stirred by the great news of the Irish Free State in yesterday's paper.

There for instance will be the garden as well as pasture of Britain against the coming Viennification of London; there too the next development of the common civilization from "Anglo-Saxon" in its debased imperial sense, and even from "Anglo-Celtic" to Celto-Anglian, for the isle which civilized us of old has now to do it again. She will return good for our evil more than ever, and by far! ... Rising now to the world of ideas - education, literature, arts, sciences - what possibilities! Education no longer stinking of Whitehall in its primary, of public schools in secondary, of London and Oxford in higher! The recovery of Trinity will only be a beginning, the renewal of Catholic education may also be in Ireland. And think of the old faith recovering the cathedrals for centuries polluted by State worship!" (24).

## 2.4 The Greater Dublin Reconstruction Movement

With the promise of a return to normality, plans were set in motion for the reconstruction of Dublin. In late Spring 1922, Professor Abercrombie visited the city and at last arrangements were made with the Civics Institute of Ireland for the publication of

his planning report. It was intended that C.R. Ashbee's report be published as a second volume.

On 10th May, the Marchioness of Aberdeen wrote to Mears to inform him that, "in order to stimulate a movement for getting a Civic Survey of Dublin", it was proposed to hold an Exhibition of Civic Surveys which had already been carried out in other parts of the world. The event was to be held in August, during the week of the Irish Games. Abercrombie had agreed to provide his plans for Sheffield and Dr. Nolen had been requested to send material from the United States. Mears was asked to provide examples from Jerusalem and other foreign cities. The Marchioness informed him that Abercrombie had visited his housing scheme at Killester, in the North-West of the city, and had been "delighted with it" (25).

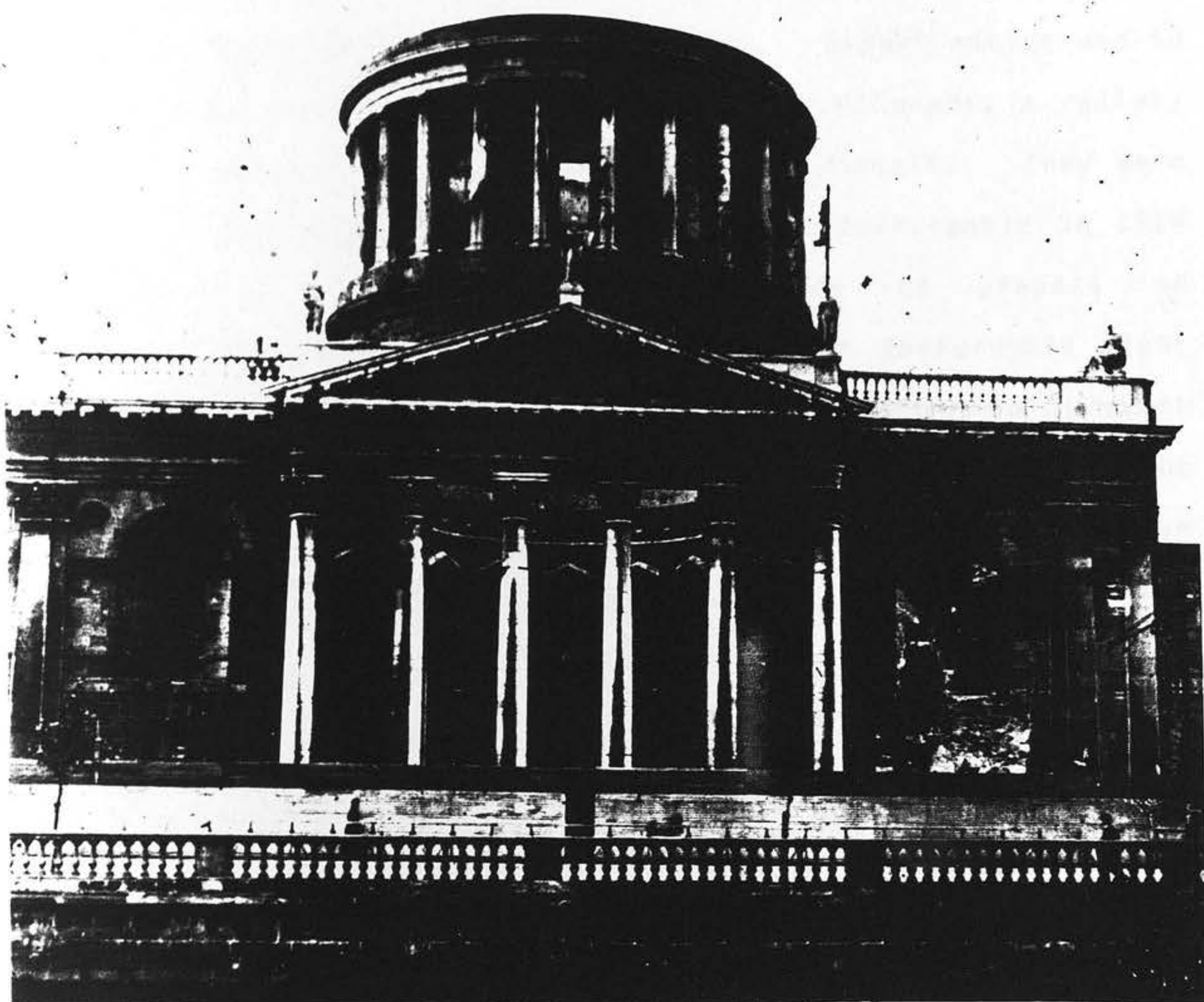
However, the Irish troubles were far from over. Hard-liners in the I.R.A. had refused to accept the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty which required members of the Dail to swear an oath of allegiance to the British Crown. In April 1922, leaders of the anti-Treaty faction had occupied and set up headquarters in the Four Courts in the centre of Dublin. When, in June, they rejected an ultimatum to surrender, Michael Collins ordered Free State forces to open fire on the

garrison with light artillery borrowed from the British Army. Yet another of Dublin's proud public buildings was virtually destroyed and the Irish Civil War had begun. Fighting and its attendant destruction continued and one writer commented ironically on its results:

> "There is nothing like a revolution for the architects' trade. Lovers of civic beauty who have visited Dublin from congested industrial cities in England must have wished for risings and ructions at home. The insurrection of 1916 resulted in the destruction by fire of large blocks of shabby old buildings that are now being replaced by up-to-date edifices which are changing the streets in which they stand from backward by-ways into prosperous business thoroughfares. The fighting of the summer of 1922 involved the destruction of the upper end of Sackville Street just when the lower end had been rebuilt, so that practically the whole of Dublin's principal thoroughfare will be rebuilt, and not before it is needed" (26).

Plans for reconstruction were underway almost as soon as the fighting in the capital had died down. Mears was in Dublin in mid-July (27) and by 15th August he

- GREATER DUBLIN RE-CONSTRUCTION MOVEMENT. -



- Central feature of Four Courts - for Art Gallery. -

Fig. 2.4. The shell-damaged Four Courts building, 1922. Greater Dublin Reconstruction Movement. Photograph courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Edinburgh.

was able to report that a group of citizens, including his friend E.A. Aston, had formed a committee to plan the reconstruction of North East Dublin, East and North-East of Sackville Street. Expert advice was to be provided by an architect named O'Connor, a railway engineer named O'Neill and Mears himself. They were agreed that the plan prepared by Abercrombie in 1914 was impracticable and proposed to prepare an alternative. It was thought that Abercrombie might be brought in at a later stage in order to "prevent the appearance of a split" (28). However, the Liverpool Professor soon heard of the new initiative and wrote what Mears described as a "peevish letter about hole in the corner methods". Writing to his father-in-law, Mears justified the decision not to involve the Dublin prize-winner in the initial stages of reconstruction planning in the following terms:

> "The situation is that Abercrombie's plan is quite impracticable from its extravagent costliness, and as it makes a "civic centre" its focus, and this centre where no-one will accept it, it has resulted that no-one has been able to risk bringing him over. That is, had his plan offered any opportunity for making a start at some point in the central area, he would naturally have been consulted right away. As it is, it has been

> felt that if some proposals of more geographical and normal character were put forward independently on the excuse of the change of situation, both destructive and governmental, then he can be invited to meet the N.E. Dublin Committee's advisers, he coming through the Civics Institute, and so the hands of all are strengthened" (29).

The two men had not met at this stage, although both had made repeated visits to Dublin. Mears was anxious to establish his own credentials as a Dublin planner, but his vehemence and defensive tone suggest that he himself held some doubts about the propriety of the North-East Dublin Committee's decision not to consult Abercrombie. He returned to the theme later in his letter to Geddes, stating:

> "As regards Abercrombie, he really ought to remember that the very people he is annoyed with are those who made his winning design possible. He seems to consider that I have butted in, but I was there before he had ever thought of Dublin and have had a fairly continuous connection (except for the war time) since. He is also talking large about the need for civic survey - as if we didn't know something about that. Incidentally,

> I think I can call myself a Dublin architect if £300,000 of housing counts.
>
> The situation is unfortunate as none of the competitors had a scheme which had any real economic efficiency, and I'm afraid if Abercrombie sticks out for his supposed rights he will be told why things are going as they are. If he is reasonable they are willing and anxious to have his help. The trouble is that he must, whatever happens, find that his plan cannot be worked, and least of all in a now impoverished country" (30).

Geddes appears to have agreed with many of his son-in-law's criticisms of Abercrombie's Plan, putting its weaknesses down to the lack of an adequate survey. In a letter to Norah at about this time he wrote:

> "Certainly I knew Dublin far better than Abercrombie etc. - knew his plan was impracticable. So were they all, more or less, and this was the best one for educating the public to what town planning schemes - and drawings are like! We had no option but to decide as we did: but we did not recommend its carrying out ... I told Abercrombie privately his survey was less adequate than it should have been" (31).

In the Liverpool Professor's defence it has been argued that Geddes was unaware "of Abercrombie's eighty pages of minutely handwritten notes from a personal survey *in ambulando*, lasting two weeks, undertaken to supplement published information" (32). However, it could be argued that this only makes the plan's alleged grandiosity all the less excusable. In fact, in their competition entry in 1914, Abercrombie and his colleagues had complained to the adjudicators about the absence of a traffic survey on which to base their road proposals. It seems that their ambitious remodelling of the city centre, with many new thoroughfares and extensive road-widening, was justified by the assumption of a considerable expansion of Dublin's population to 2,000,000.

In 1914, the Survey of Dublin being carried out by the National Housing and Town Planning Association was still incomplete. With neither the necessary survey information nor the time to acquire it themselves, the planners had little choice but to rely heavily on their own arbitrary assumptions as a basis for formulating their proposals. In a competitive situation, there was a strong temptation to select assumptions which provided scope for ambitious and eye-catching schemes. Because of the lack of survey information, the Competition's organizers made it

clear from the start that the object was only "to elicit Plans and Reports of a preliminary and suggestive character" (33). Abercrombie freely acknowledged this and later argued that his Dublin Plan should be regarded as an example of an "Advisory Development Plan", the primary purpose of which was "to make the future of growth as comprehensible as possible" (34). His explanation contains a side-swipe at his critics:

> "It is impossible to overestimate the value of these prophetic glimpses into the future, which not only have the practical use of suggesting future policy in the provision of public services such as electricity and water supply (in addition to actual town and country planning schemes) but give some play to the public imagination, without which public support becomes lukewarm. But they also have a danger: the timid, unimaginative and above all the so-called practical man is inclined to suppose that larger scale plans mean immediate large scale constructional works. Planning of course means the preparation for the works when they are required" (35).

By September, the group of "representative citizens" who had formed the North-East Dublin Committee had

widened its horizons and, under the chairmanship of Alderman (later Senator) James Moran, became the Greater Dublin Reconstruction Movement. In an interview with the "Irish Times", the Movement's Honorary Secretary, Mr. E.A. Aston, explained why new plans were needed. He pointed out that, in the eight years which had elapsed since the preparation of Abercrombie's Plan, many important changes had taken place. The General Post Office, the Custom House and the Four Courts had been destroyed, and the raising of finance had become more difficult. In the light of these altered conditions, the new movement had appointed an expert committee, "including town-planners of international reputation, and several well-known Irish engineers and architects" who were at present engaged upon the preparation of comprehensive plans for the reconstruction of the city (36). It was acknowledged, however, that many of Dublin's problems remained the same as they had been in 1914, and the Reconstruction Movement's experts did derive many of their proposals from ideas originally put forward by Abercrombie and some of his rivals in the Dublin Planning Competition.

Abercrombie's Plan had boldly stated:

"Dublin today presents a similar spectacle to

Paris prior to the operations of Napoleon III and Haussmann; it is a city of magnificent possibilities containing features of the finest order, but loosely correlated and often marred by the juxtaposition of incongruities and squalor. As at Paris, central areas which should be of first-rate commercial importance are occupied by slums, and streets of noble architectural dignity are tenement-ridden. But, more fortunate than Paris, Dublin is to be remodelled during a period of greater town-planning enlightenment, when architectural effect and traffic conveniences are not alone regarded as the chief essentials. Hygienic housing and adequate park provision, those two aspects neglected by Haussmann, are now given their proper place, and these four elements will compose a city that is worthy to be the capital of a modern country" (37).

Abercrombie was a sincere admirer of Haussmann. Later, in "Town and Country Planning", he wrote:

"It is fashionable to belittle Haussmann; nevertheless, his work, in which he straightened up and completed the disjointed units which had been left after two centuries of spasmodic but artistic planning, forms the best example of

> clear-headed logic in town modernization. The city has a unity of conception in plan, in architectural treatment and in landscape design ... which cannot be denied" (38).

It was just such a unity of conception which Abercrombie sought to achieve in Dublin. However, Mears was unimpressed, commenting that:

> "It is a perfectly cold, hard and reactionary scheme in essence and with all the surface attractions of that sort of thing" (39).

When, in early 1923, Abercrombie's Plan was finally published, Mears wrote to his father-in-law suggesting that he should send his congratulations to the Civics Institute but, at the same time, call attention to the paragraph in the Adjudicators' Report which warned of "the danger of this sort of Haussmann plan" (40). What Mears appears to have been referring to was a statement by the judges in 1916 which cautioned against assuming the need for extensive remodelling of the city centre. They had pointed out that there was also a case for "in the main accepting the present trend of the city, and the location of its public buildings ... rather than extensively altering these" (41). This was essentially the strategy favoured by

Mears, although he realized that years of destruction and the needs of the emerging Irish State would make it necessary to expand and reallocate accommodation for public business. Both by temperament and training, he was a restrained and remedial planner. He sought to facilitate the most desirable of existing trends rather than to impose a rigid new pattern. Plans had to be flexible enough to meet changing needs. Rather than accepting that a new age of "greater town-planning enlightenment" had arrived, he preferred to believe that planning as a discipline was still in its infancy, and wrote that:

> "Our problem is not to remodel Dublin on American or Parisian lines, but to attempt to so guide development and renewal that the coming generation, which we believe will understand these matters better than we, may find the way so far prepared" (42).

In order to plan for Dublin, it was first necessary to consider the city within its regional, national and world context. Mears asserted that:

> "Our problem goes beyond "town-planning". Our problem goes beyond City Development. Our problem is that of the balance of forces in a

Region where social traditions of extraordinary variety are in being, side by side" (43).

The Dublin Region was bounded on the South by a mountain mass, on the West by great peat bogs, on the North by cultivated lowlands approximating in parts to fen country, and on the East by the open sea. Using the Geddesian triad of "Place-Work-Folk" as the basis of his analysis, he argued that this varied topography was responsible for the presence of "every gradation of primitive occupation and tradition ... almost at the gates of the city" (44).

Dublin was "a city of ruralized not industrialized character". The Georgian city had not been "the product of a commercial plutocracy, but of a class which still held touch with the country". While, during the 19th Century, Dublin had taken on some of the surface characteristics of the industrial age, it was not primarily an industrial city, but "rather a centre of administration, education and distribution". Mears argued that the problem had to be considered along with that of general Irish development. In the past, the development of industry in Ireland had been restricted by dependence on imported coal. Mears believed that, in the future, electricity generated by water power would facilitate decentralized industrial

development, making the concentration of industry in the capital unnecessary. He pointed out that the city already contained 1/10th of the population of Ireland and posed the following questions:

> "Even allowing for considerable increase for Ireland as a whole, can we expect this one city to absorb a larger and larger proportion?
>
> Are we to prepare for a great and busy industrial and commercial city, with highly specialized and urbanized population, or for not very great increase in actual population, but great improvement in social conditions?
>
> Is Dublin of the Future to become increasingly metropolitan and urban, surrounded by a great system of parks and playgrounds, or can we envisage a city more and more closely inter-built with its economic hinterland?" (45).

Mears was clear about which course the Greater Dublin Reconstruction Movement should pursue, stating that:

> "Cities are in a constant state of change and we cannot assume that Dublin, now struggling from ruin and disorganization, will look in the future

to the ideals of this exploiting age for her rule of life.

Dublin is the Capital of a rural civilization, her beauty tarnished a little by industrialism: if she is to preserve her individuality, indeed her usefulness to Ireland, she must renew her youth as showing country and town in harmonious relation.

Her housing tragedy, her labour difficulties, rise directly from the divorce of country and town during the last century - economically dependent on an industrial civilization, she has become too much an importing centre for the basic coal, iron and manufactured goods. Her "unskilled" transport workers are really good countrymen who have lost their way. If she now turns West instead of East, she must set the civic stage to this end. Not for her the formal glories of bureaucratic Paris or the super-transport plan of Pittsburgh.

We have to prepare for a new possibility in civic life - to leave the way open so far as may be - not to bind the future by stage scenery in stone and lime however attractive and magnificent this picture to ourselves.

If I am right, then our preliminary enquiries start, not with the "Civic and Traffic Centre", but with the 30 or 40 square miles which embrace Greater Dublin" (46).

"Dublin is not an industrial city calling for more and more "dormitory" suburbs with their parks and golf courses. Her immediate growth must be planned in relation to the rural outlook of her people and in view of the great body of "unskilled" labour within her borders" (47).

"On these grounds, we accept the rural associations of Dublin, we concentrate and simplify the mechanical and transport services, we suggest the rejuvenation of decaying areas by providing centres of civic and administrative activity.

We do not assume that the prosperity of Dublin will be akin to that of American commercial cities with shops, offices and stores ever increasing. Therefore we do not advise the making or remaking of a single new street beyond those necessary for urgent traffic reasons, since there are not enough firms in the city to occupy the new frontages.

Dublin already suffers too much from an over-

weighted retail business. Too many people attempt to "take in washing". Increase of shopping streets, whatever their apparent valuation for rates purposes, will not be a true index of Dublin efficiency. It must be remembered too that Dublin has no great hinterland of smaller busy towns on which she may live in part, as happens with so many large towns in England, and the recent political changes have driven out or impoverished a very large class whose expenditure did much to keep up the existing shopping centres. It follows that widened streets will not be rapidly built up with business premises, and, if they are made, recoupment must be sought in other ways" (48).

It was on these arguments that Mears based his claim that:

"Abercrombie is a very fine chap for the commercial industrial Midlands of England, but he doesn't understand Dublin a little bit" (49).

Abercrombie's Plan involved the creation of a new city centre to the West of Capel Street. This he believed to have been the point of the original crossing of the Liffey and therefore the natural "objective, at

present thwarted, of the greater number of radial roads" (50). He proposed to restore this area to its former prominence as the hub of the city's traffic system. Mears and his collaborators strongly disagreed with Abercrombie's strategy. They believed that Dublin's importance as a port inevitably drew its focus eastwards towards the sea. In all ports, the tendency was to move seawards, as ships became larger and required deeper berths.

> "Thus the centre of gravity of the Port of Dublin now lies practically 1½ miles East of its old location, and the whole of its activities are carried on upon ground reclaimed and raised above the old estuarine mud" (51).

The Greater Dublin Reconstruction Movement proposed that this trend should continue, with the provision of new docks beyond the Alexandra Basin. However, Mears conceded that the effect of this development on natural scour and deposition in Dublin Bay would have to be carefully considered before the details were finalized. Initially it was suggested that 100 acres of land between Clontarf and the North Wall Extension be reclaimed to provide deep water berths for ships and a new industrial area. The cattle market could then be transferred to a new site at Fairview from

which cattle brought by rail from the Irish countryside could be shipped to U.K. ports (52).

Abercrombie had suggested that new residential districts should be created on the Western outskirts of the city by filling in undeveloped areas at Grangegorman, Dolphin's Barn and Crumlin. However, Mears argued that there was unlikely to be sufficient industrial development in the West to justify the provision of large areas of working class housing there. It was important that Dublin's large unskilled labour force should be housed at locations with easy access to the centre of employment around the port. In such a situation, Mears suggested, they could combine their work with allotment gardening, after the manner of dockers in many continental ports (53).

Mears argued that development should be concentrated on the coastal belt to create what he called a "crescent city" centred on the Poolbeg Lighthouse. Instead of "an immense conurbation round the old nucleus", Greater Dublin should be thought of as a group of communities spread round the 18 miles of coastline of Dublin Bay, backed by a rural hinterland containing many hamlets and villages. The wedges of open land to the West of the city could then be left

Fig. 2.5. Sketch plan for the Greater Dublin Reconstruction Movement showing proposed harbour extensions, new housing at Killester and Marino, and new road, rail and tramway proposals. Photograph courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Edinburgh.

unbuilt, providing the urban inhabitants with ready access to the countryside for recreational purposes.

> "The present decay of Western Dublin will hardly be neutralized if it be completely imbedded in an extended city. Better leave, as far as possible, ... approaches to the country for rural or recreative uses, planning the large housing developments nearer the docks and the sea. Thus the coastal belt will combine good access to work with sea and country and the western districts will have a better chance of normal renewal" (54).

Under this strategy, the centre of the transport system had to be based on the lowest point of river crossing in order to provide adequate communcations between North and South. As Mears explained to his father-in-law:

> "The real Civic Centre of Dublin is ready-made at O'Connell Bridge and 20 Abercrombies cannot move it upstream away from the Port and busy streets. We have a general scheme also for general central development, and in this I am insisting that the back-bone of the city is Dame Street - College Street - O'Connell Street" (55).

Owing to the destruction of buildings, public business in the city was being conducted under extremely congested conditions. The Dail met at Leinster House and the National Museum, necessitating the closure of the National Library. The Law Courts, driven out of the Four Courts, sat in Dublin Castle, which was already overcrowded with Government offices. Accommodation at the City Hall, where municipal business was carried out, had been inadequate long before the recent troubles. The Greater Dublin Reconstruction team therefore proposed a comprehensive scheme for the redistribution of public functions. They suggested that the G.P.O. should be rebuilt as a new City Hall and municipal offices. Dublin Castle and the old City Hall site should be redeveloped to house the Courts of Justice and the new National Cathedral. The Dail and Government Offices could be transferred to the former Royal Hospital building at Kilmainham. Finally, the surviving central portion of the Four Courts building was to be turned into a Municipal Art Gallery, with the rest of the site levelled and turned into public open space (56).

One of the principal objectives of the scheme was to spread public functions along the length of a central grand highway running from the Custom house, past Trinity College and the Castle out to Kilmainham.

In this way it was hoped that the vivifying effect of major public institutions could be diffused throughout the city. Mears argued that the careful allocation of sites for national and civic buildings in run-down areas would encourage the reconstruction of surrounding properties by private enterprise, thus relieving the City and State of a substantial burden of expenditure which they could ill afford (57).

The need for renewal was felt to be particularly acute in the decayed western area of the city and it was for this reason that Mears favoured the former Royal Hospital Building at Kilmainham as the new seat of Government. The former Royal Barracks site was briefly considered as an alternative but it was decided that its position opposite the Guinness Brewery made it inappropriate (58).

The Reconstruction Movement appealed to a spirit of progressive nationalism by asserting that the most forward-looking of modern states had already discovered the utility of removing their centres of government from overcrowded central areas to more spaceous accommodation elsewhere. The location of the Dail and Government offices in 40 acres of wooded ground at Kilmainham would thus put Ireland in the forefront of world developments (59). Less

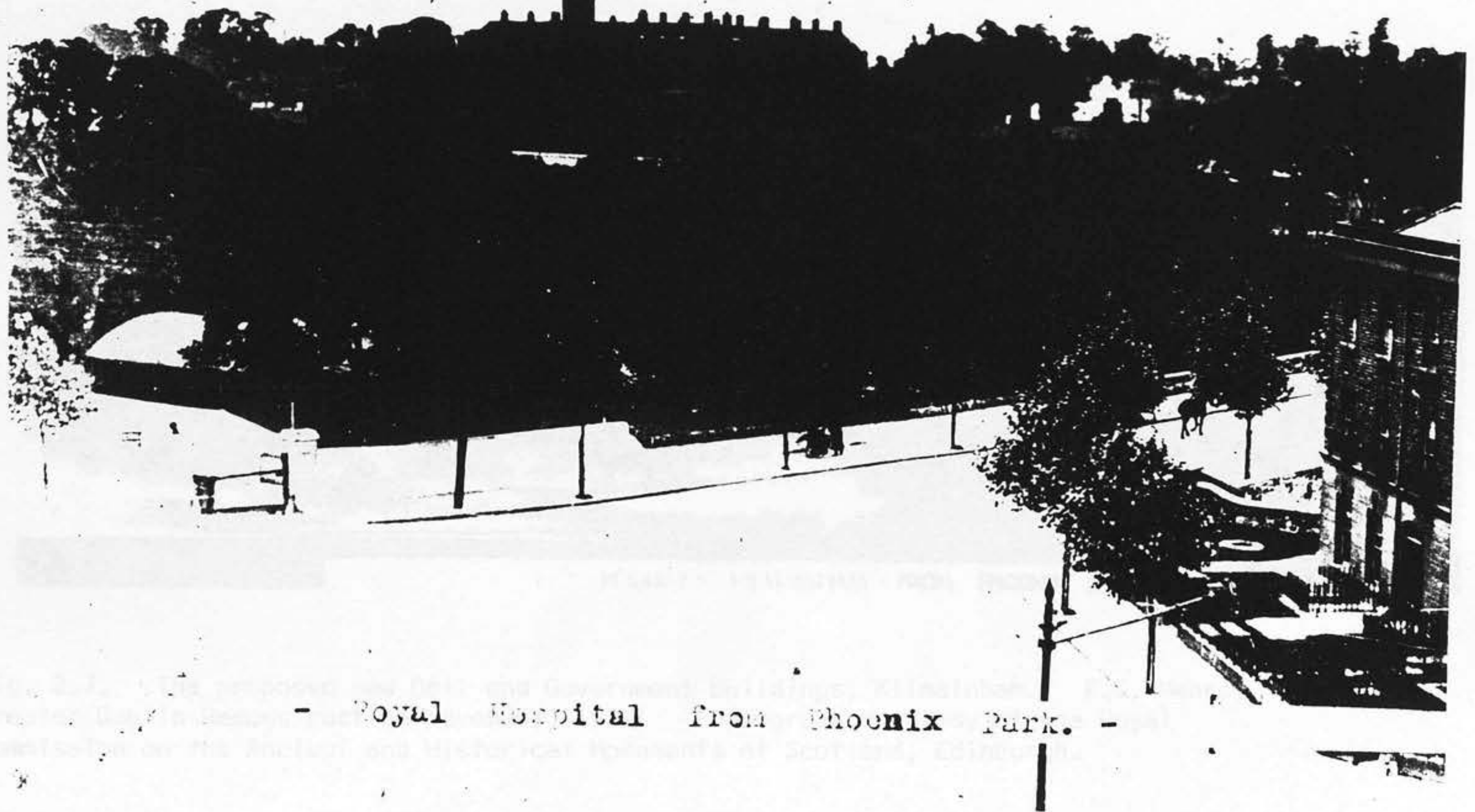



Fig. 2.6. The Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, where the Great Dublin Reconstruction Movement proposed to locate the new seat of Government. Photograph courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Edinburgh.

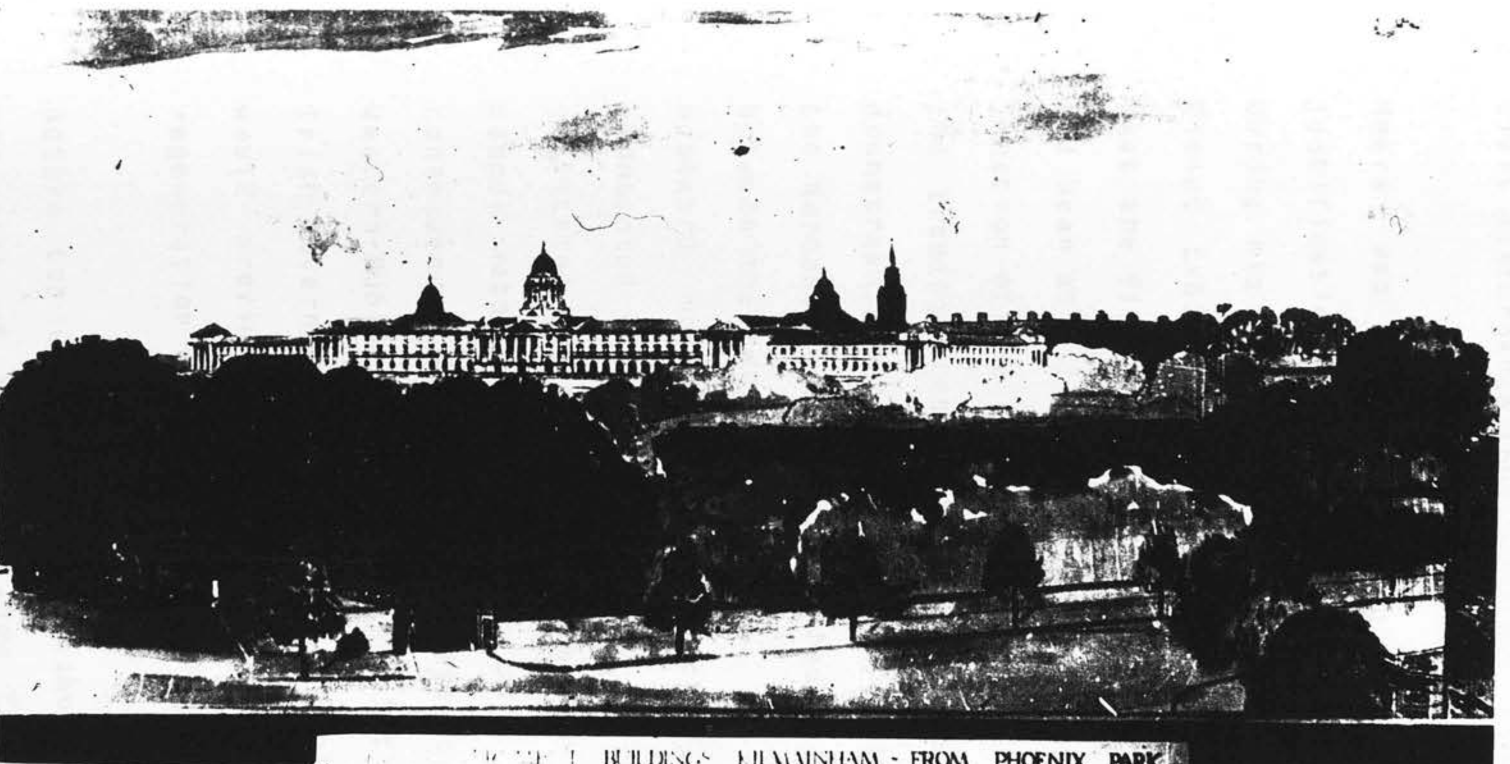



Fig. 2.7. The proposed new Dail and Government Buildings, Kilmainham. F.C. Mears, Greater Dublin Reconstruction Movement, 1922. Photograph courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Edinburgh.

publicity was given to Mears' view that the site also had the advantage of being easily defended in times of civil disturbance (60).

Mears was also able to provide a historical justification for the selection of Kilmainham. During his preparation of the Dublin exhibit for the Cities Exhibition in 1911, he had become convinced that the first important Celtic settlement in the area had been at Kilmainham, on the high ground between the junction of the Cammock and the Liffey. A Norse port and trading station had only later been established downstream, nearer to the modern city centre. Under the Normans, a market place had grown up on the ridge between the two settlements. In later centuries the eastward movement of the city had become more pronounced as commercial and industrial activities gravitated downstream to sites with good access to the deeper water of the growing port facilities. One consequence of this shift had been the decay of Western Dublin. Mears argued that the restoration of Irish Government on the site of Dublin's Celtic origin would provide a suitably symbolic stimulus to the regeneration of the West of the city (61, 62, 63).

Before the Great War, Archbishop Walsh had promoted the idea of building a new Catholic Cathedral in

Dublin. The site favoured by Geddes was on the West side of Church Street, opposite the Four Courts (64, 65). In Abercrombie's scheme for a remodelled city centre, it provided the terminal architectural feature at the North end of Capel Street (66). Mears, on the other hand, believed that the new Cathedral should be located on the ridge immediately North West of the Castle, facing the existing Anglican Christchurch Cathedral. The eminence of the ground at this point would raise it high above the surrounding buildings, making it visible from almost every point in the city. Mears further argued that "the building of a cathedral at the high point beside the Castle, dominating the central spot which was the citadel of foreign power down the ages, would be a fitting symbol of the final nationalizing of the Pale" (67). In July 1922, he wrote to Geddes that:

> "I have suggested also a site for the Cathedral and am getting out a scheme. 'Site proposed is on the ridge just N.W. of Castle and perhaps impinging on some of its out-buildings. This is really the highest ground in Dublin. The clearing out of the British Government from the Castle and the probability that the Anglicans may have to give up Christchurch Cathedral even on financial grounds make this site, in my view,

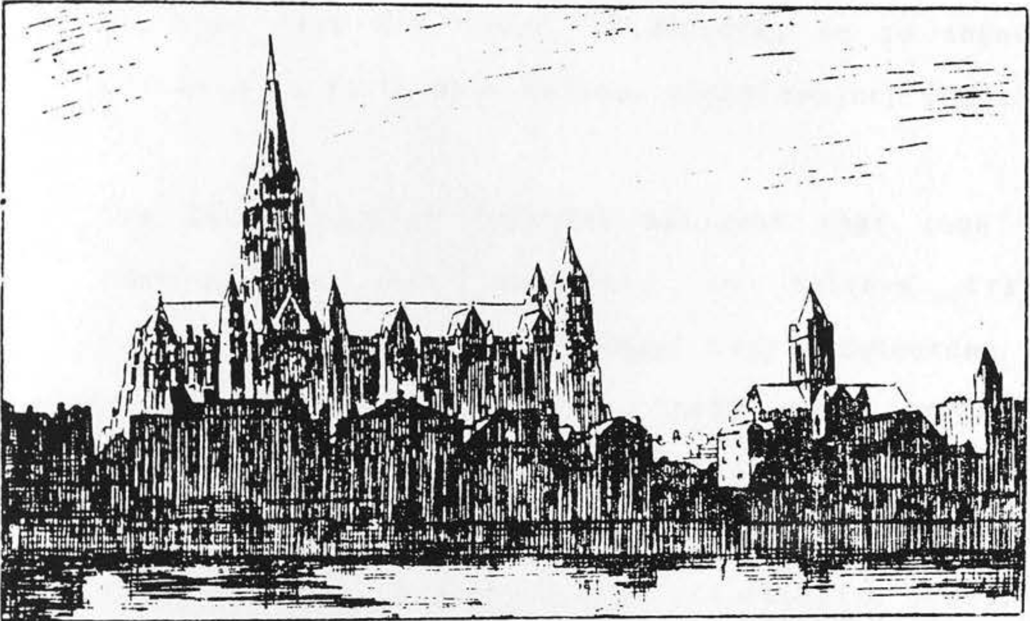


Fig. 2.8. Perspective drawing of Mears' design for the new National Cathedral as viewed from the North bank of the Liffey, with the Anglican Christchurch Cathedral to the West. Source: de BLACAM, H. (1923), "Greater Dublin", The Illustrated Review, p.152.

possible. I am going for a scheme of severe early Medieval type meantime. The present Archbishop is not committed in any way to Byzantine, so I hear, and I can't feel that the site suggests a heavy dome type.

The suggestion to be put will be that here is a site largely vacant or else in public hands, and they have the money, £2,000,000, so go ahead at once so as to help relieve unemployment" (68).

The Reconstruction Movement believed that some road improvements were necessary to relieve traffic congestion, although the changes they recommended were much less extensive than those put forward by Abercrombie. Better communications to the West of the city were to be provided by the construction of new boulevards through decayed and derelict areas. A new north-western highway was to be created by the widening of Upper Abbey Street and Mary's Lane, thus opening up a vista from the Four Courts to the Custom House Docks. This thoroughfare would be extended westwards from the Four Courts to Benburb Street, relieving traffic on the congested northern quays and providing a suitably distinguished approach to Phoenix Park. Correspondingly, on the South side, it was proposed that a new street should be cut through

derelict property from the junction of South Great George Street with Stephen Street to the North end of Cork Street, thus providing a direct connection from Dame Street to Dolphin's Barn and Crumlin in the South-West of the city. In the South, it was proposed to convert the railway line from Harcourt Street Station to Bray into an extension of the electric tramway system as a means of improving communications with sites for new suburbs along the route from Dundrum to Shankill (69).

Dublin was served by a number of railway termini situated at widely scattered points on the outskirts of the city. Under Abercrombie's scheme, the new centre of the road system was also to provide the centre of a completed railway system. A new Central Station, linked by tunnel to the existing rail network, was to be built to the North-East of the Four Courts (70). Instead, Mears, O'Neill and O'Connor proposed the creation of a National Railway Depot by extending the Amiens Street terminus southwards to the quays on the East side of the Custom House. This station already had rail links with the other termini for the use of mail trains, and, with a little modification, these could be made suitable for other traffic. New docks to the East of the Depot would allow cross-channel ferries to bring passengers right

Fig. 2.9. The gutted Custom House, proposed location of the new G.P.O. Greater Dublin Reconstruction Movement, 1922. Photograph courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Edinburgh.

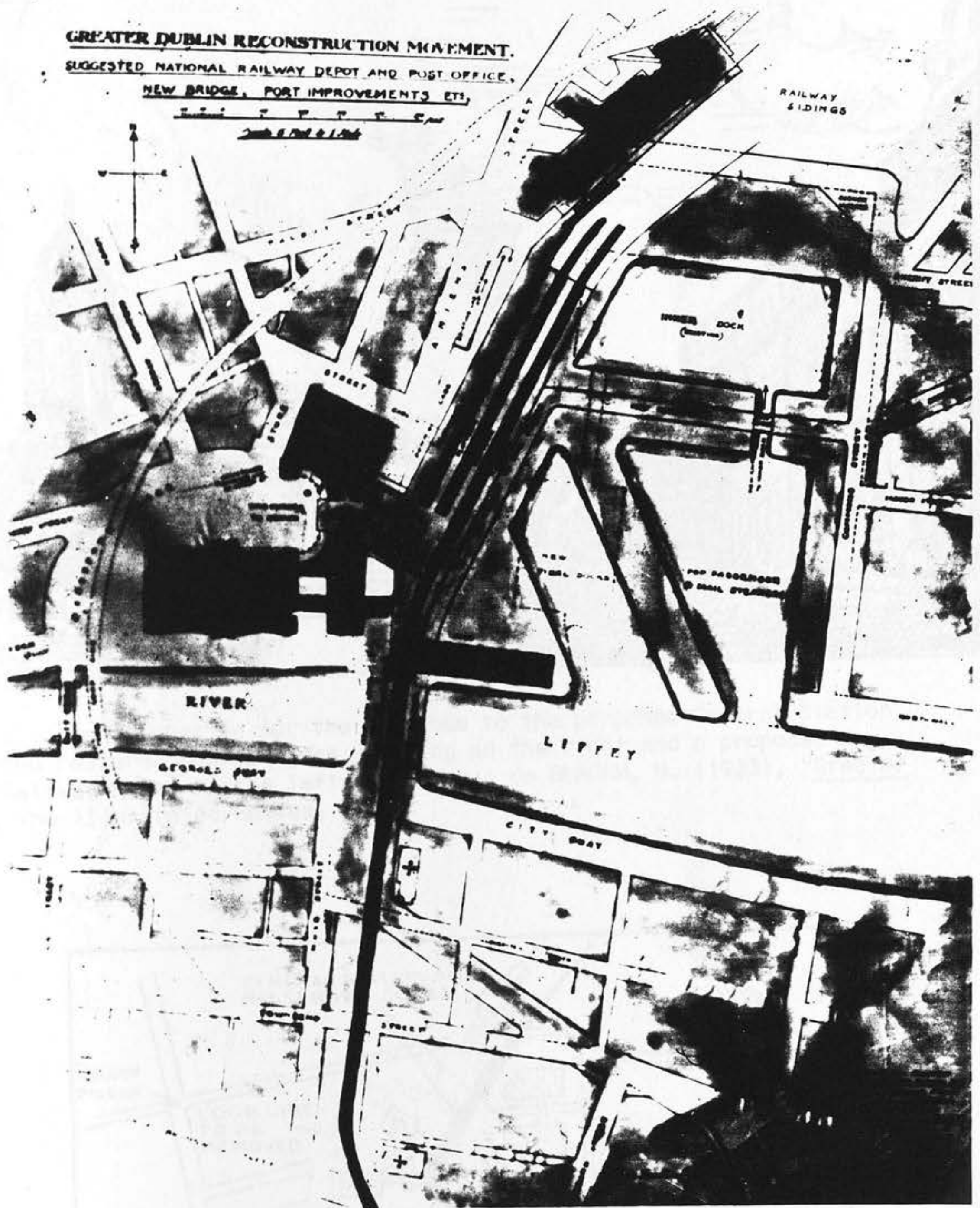



Fig. 2.10. Plan showing the proposed relationship between the new Central Station, passenger and mail steamer docks and the new G.P.O., together with the proposed relocation of the rail crossing over the Liffey, Greater Dublin Reconstruction Movement, 1922. Photograph courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Edinburgh.

Fig. 2.11. Mears' design for the entrance to the proposed Central Station, showing the restored Custom House building on the right and a proposed new Central Railway Hotel on the left. Source: de BLACAM, H. (1923), "Greater Dublin", The Illustrated Review, p.149.

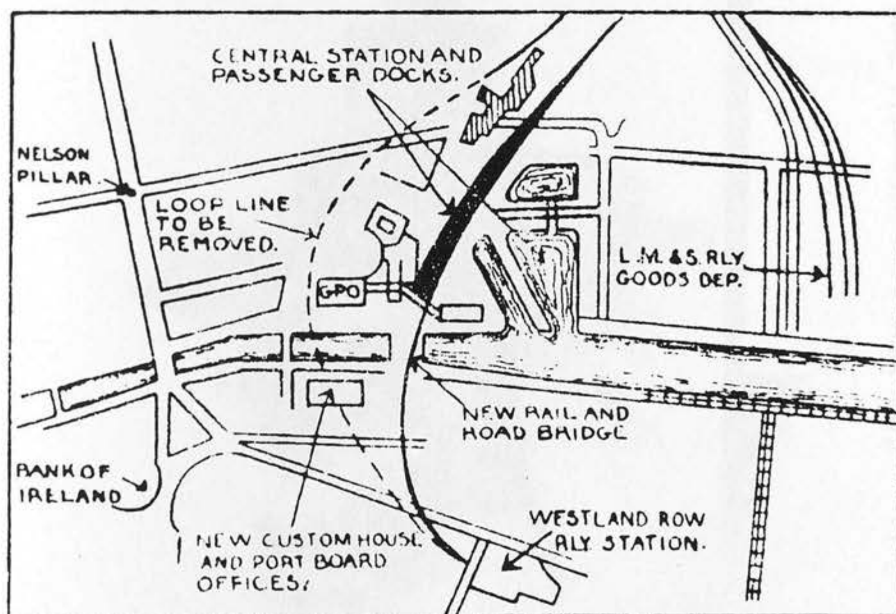



Fig. 2.12. Plan showing proposed relationship of new Central Station to Passenger and Mail Steamer Docks and new G.P.O. Source: de BLACAM, H. (1923), "Greater Dublin", The Illustrated Review, p.150.

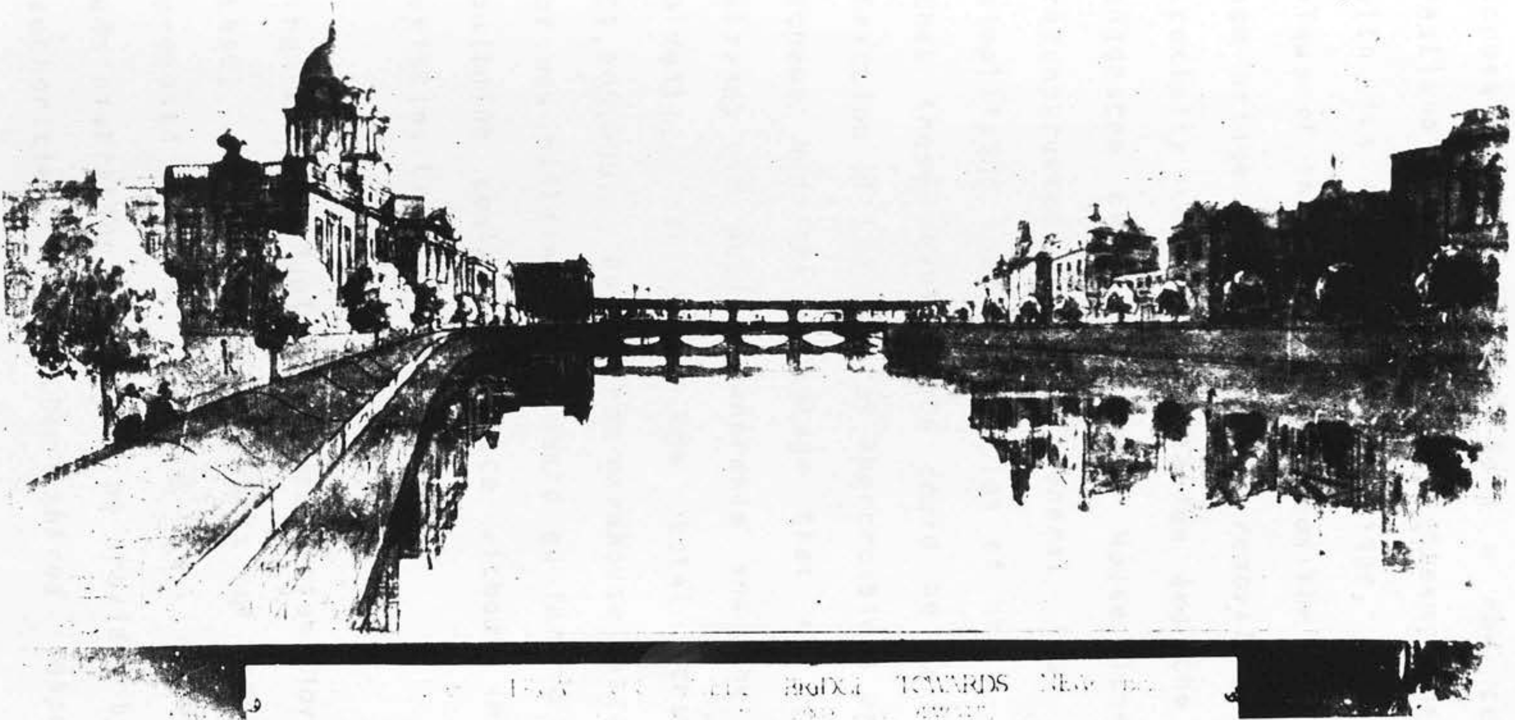
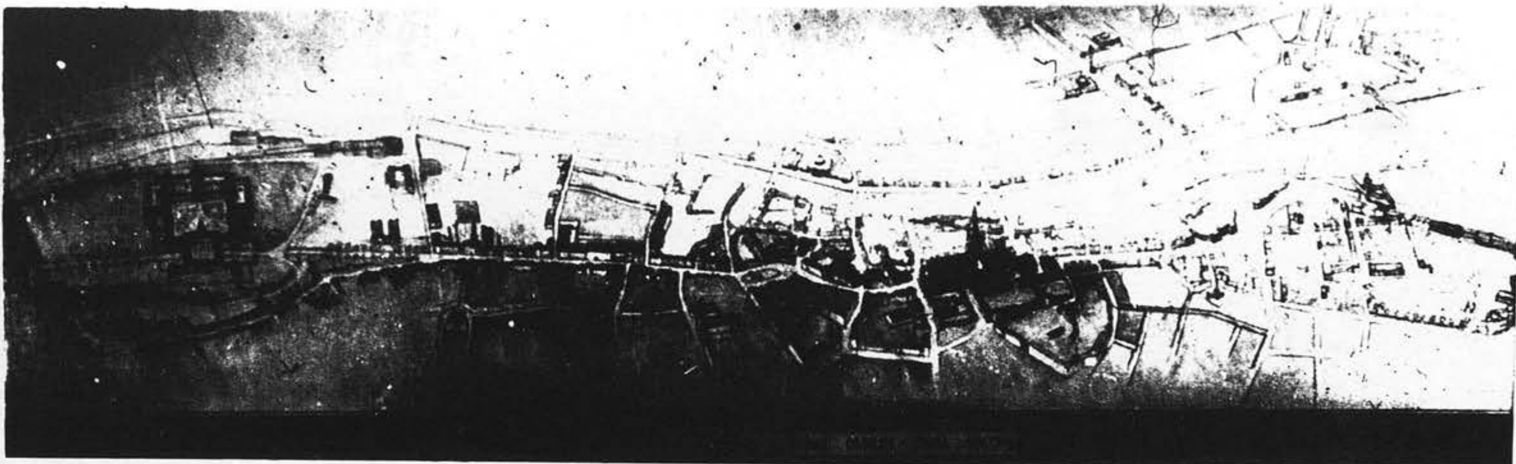
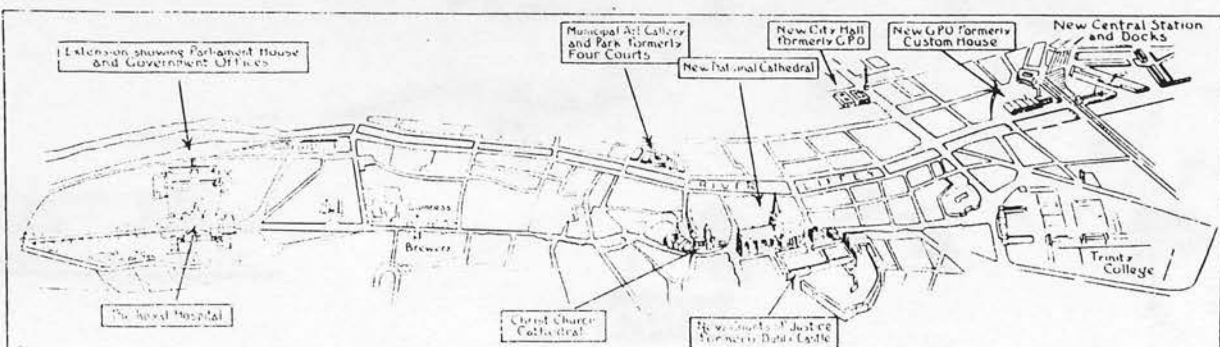


Fig. 2.13. View East from O'Connell Bridge towards the restored Custom House building and the proposed new road and railway bridge over the Liffey. F.C. Mears, Greater Dublin Reconstruction Movement, 1922. Photograph courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Edinburgh.

up to the platforms from which they could entrain to all parts of Ireland. In addition, it was proposed to throw a new road and railway bridge southwards across the Liffey to form a new connection with Westland Row Station. Upstream, the "Loop Line", with its unsightly iron bridge, had long obscured views of the Custom House from the river banks. The new bridge would allow its removal. Because of its proximity to the new station and the port, it was suggested that the Custom House itself should be reconstructed as the General Post Office, thus simplifying the distribution of mail. Mears argued that these developments could be carried out for a fraction of the cost of Abercrombie's proposals. The scheme had the advantage that all the ground was already in public ownership and the engineer, Mr. O'Neill, estimated the total cost at around £1,000,000. Rents from warehouse space and the value of new building plots would go far to repay this and building could take place without interfering with existing traffic (71, 72, 73).

The Greater Dublin Reconstruction Movement believed that, taken together, works of the magnitude it proposed would require a more co-ordinated administration than could be provided by the ten local authorities which then shared responsibility for






Panoramic View of Centra Features of Reconstruction Scheme: View from South.

Fig. 2.14. Bird's Eye View of Central Dublin from the South, showing the distribution of public buildings and institutions along a central grand highway from the new Central Station to the new seat of Government in Kilmainham. Photograph courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Edinburgh. Source: de BLACAM, H. (1923), "Greater Dublin", Illustrated Review, p.150.

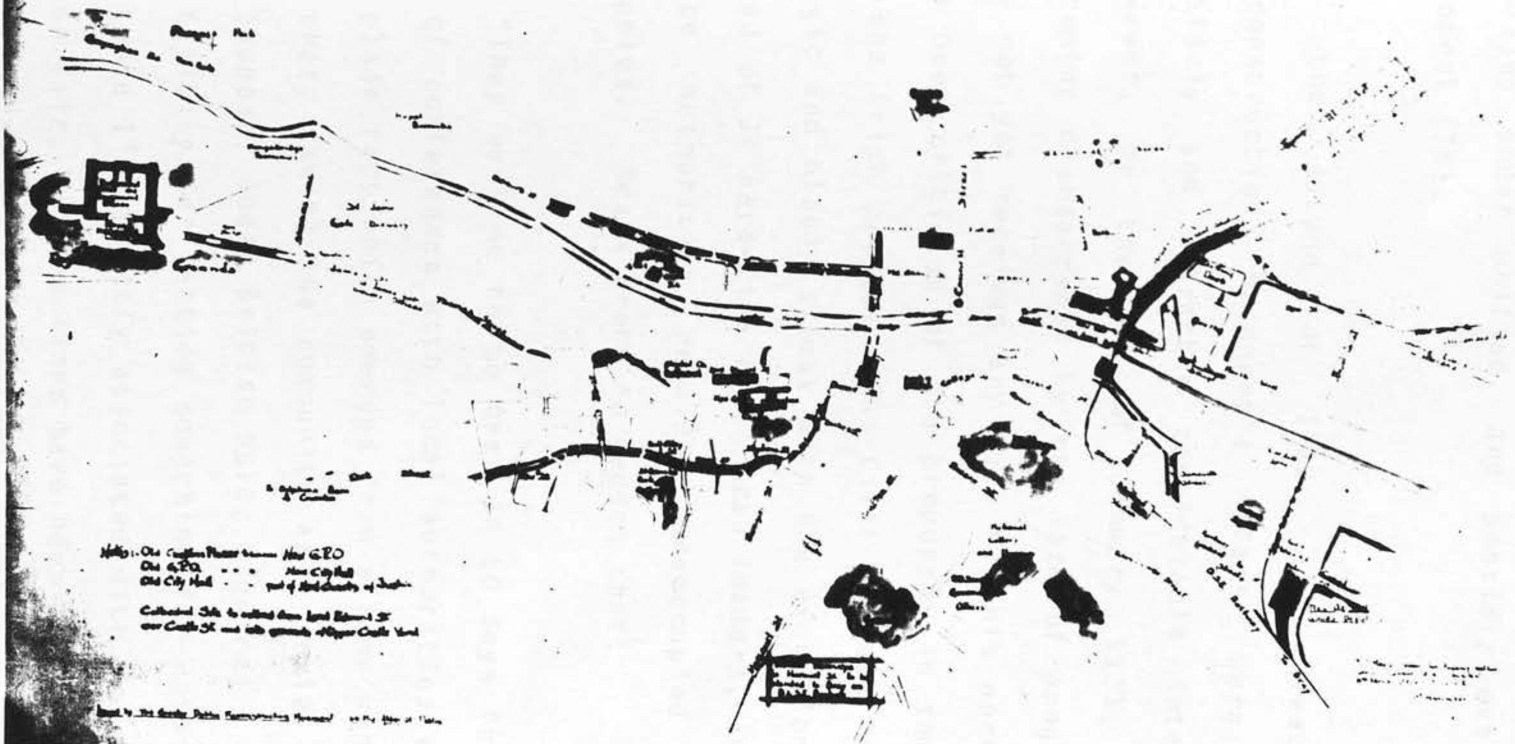



Fig. 2.15. Sketch plan showing the proposed National Highway from the new Central Station via Abbey Street, O'Connell Street, Dame Street and Thomas Street to Kilmainham, with suggested sites for National and Municipal Buildings. Greater Dublin Reconstruction Movement, 1922. Photograph courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Edinburgh.

services in the area of Greater Dublin. It therefore had under consideration proposals to bring common services such as transport, electricity, sewerage and housing under unified, and possibly even national, control (74).

In the Autumn of 1922, the Greater Dublin Reconstruction Movement's plans were exhibited publicly and attracted considerable interest (75). However, by the end of January 1923, Mears was becoming disheartened by the lack of progress. He had not yet received any fees for his work and there had been criticism of his proposals in some sections of the Irish press. The Civil War was reaching its tragic and bloody climax with the execution by firing squad of 34 hard-line republican leaders, and the Free State authorities remained preoccupied with the troubles. Mears wrote to Geddes that:

> "They want me to go over in 10 days for a series of conferences with local authorities etc. The plain fact which emerges from all my work there is that, taking the community as a whole, it has, I suppose, under British Rule, acquired a marvellous facility for getting something for nothing. All those I'm directly associated with are anxious to be fair, but the times have been difficult.

However, I'll give this present Dublin scheme a good trial, and if it fizzles out I think one will be entitled to assume that Ireland isn't ready yet. With all their independence and Irish speaking, one often can't distinguish their troops from British, the only difference is a greenish in place of a brownish khaki.

The trouble is that they really don't know what they want. Dublin Corporation is still giving its rebellious servants half-pay, including those in prison.

So one is half afraid they will go in for a patch of Abercrombie's plan and then be too hard up to carry on" (76).

By April he had more encouraging news. He reported to his father-in-law that:

"The Abercrombie group have admitted the force of our traffic scheme at Amiens Street and Custom House, but still, illogically, cling to the idea of a traffic etc. centre at Four Courts.

I propose shortly to make a move to meet them by showing that our scheme accepts a "centre"

thereabouts, but it will be a symbolic one to which the old roads may lead quite naturally" (77).

However, disagreement between the two factions continued. At one point Geddes appears to have offered to intervene in an attempt to effect a reconciliation, but Mears was hostile to the idea, writing that:

"As regards Abercrombie's scheme, I want it to be clear that at the very beginning we asked him to Dublin and gave him every possible chance to meet us, explaining all our proposals in detail - so that had he liked he might have modified his book - or at any rate written an addendum. But he did not see his way.

I am told on all hands that his central scheme is dead - still born - and never mentioned in Dublin, on account of its impossible expense and its hopeless cutting up of the city. The "discord" you mention is not accidental. We went into it all and realized what we were doing, and having given him his chance to come in, we have no intention of sacrificing what we believe to be a wholly better plan in order to save his face.

So I hope you ... will go slow with any actual <u>writing</u> to Dublin in this connection ... Aston has now a very strong committee of all sorts, including Senators and Deputies. I don't know what the Civics Institute actually represents, but it seems pretty sleepy" (78).

In May 1923, I.R.A. leaders issued an order to their remaining units to "dump arms", bringing the Civil War to an end. In June, Mears attended a formal luncheon in Dublin at which the Greater Dublin Reconstruction Movement's proposals were explained to the Free State's Governor-General, Mr. Timothy M. Healy and the Minister of Home Affairs, Mr. Ernest Blythe. Afterwards, Messrs. Healy and Blythe expressed their approval in principle without actually committing the Government to the detail of the suggestions put forward (79). Meanwhile, Mears' friend, MacCabe was preparing a report for the Reconstruction Committee on the executive and financial organization of their proposed emergency reconstruction programme (80).

Mears anticipated that, in the main, the Reconstruction Movement's proposals would be accepted and that work would soon begin. Earlier in the year, he had heard that the Government had privately decided to adopt his suggestion of Kilmainham as the site for

the Dail and new Government Offices (81). However, there was a strong lobby from commercial interests in favour of retaining the Government in the centre of Dublin by housing the Dail in the old Irish Parliament House. Despite its historical associations, Mears considered that this building was now unsuitable because of its noisy surroundings, lack of facilities for lobbying, and the proximity of too many pubs! O'Connor, the Reconstruction Movement's Irish architect, had suggested that it might instead be used as the new Mansion House, the centre of State hospitality (82). The matter was debated in the Dail itself and, in early 1924, Mears reported to Geddes that:

> "They have had quite a respectable political crisis over Kilmainham as the seat of the Dail, a second committee is sitting on the matter - a case of crying for the moon in the Old Parliament House, which they can't afford to buy and alter. One man said Kilmainham was so good he was afraid they'd stay there if they went. We may win yet, the difficulty is that reasoned arguments can't be put up in face of the sentimental political cry. Central Dublin vested interests are busy too ... The Executive are in favour of Kilmainham but afraid of loss of popularity" (83).

Later in the year, the Dail debated whether to convert the Custom House into a General Post Office or reconstruct the original building for the purpose. In the end, the significance which the O'Connell Street G.P.O. had acquired as a political monument ensured that it was restored to its original function. Mears was eventually obliged to concede defeat over Kilmainham as well but, in a last throw of the dice, he suggested an alternative, more central site for the Dail and Government Offices on the high ground at the East end of Thomas Street. This was at the centre of a large area of decayed tenement property in which, he argued, it would be difficult to stimulate improvement by other means. Although it was at the geographical centre of the city's built-up area, it was isolated from both the university and business quarters by the Castle and Cathedrals.

> "We cannot leave a central area of nearly one square mile to look after itself. New arterial streets will not cure the disease for the social activity does not exist which will clothe their borders and the area is too large for an official reconstruction scheme of housing, even if this were desirable.
>
> We cannot count on Business, Manufacturing or

Education for renewal here. There remains the need for a centre for the Dail and Government departments" (84).

## 2.5 The Dublin Civic Survey

The Greater Dublin Reconstruction Movement and the Civics Institute of Ireland had attempted to co-operate over the promotion of a Civic Survey of Dublin (85). However, in March 1924, Mears was incensed by two articles in the "Irish Times" written by Mr. Horace O'Rourke, Dublin City Architect and Chairman of the Civic Survey Committee of the Civics Institute (86). Without naming it, O'Rourke attacked the Reconstruction Movement for putting forward piece-meal proposals without the authority of any survey. He wrote that:

> "To judge by an event last year, the Dublin public have reason to fear that a partial town planning scheme not based upon any survey of present conditions nor upon adequate knowledge of planning elsewhere, is receiving a measure of support. In the particular case to which I refer the chronological order of survey first and plan afterwards is being reversed, and in that way

> Dublin is in danger of being committed to a plan which would have no justification in the light of fuller knowledge, yet which, when once adopted, it will be too late to replace or even difficult to modify" (87).

For O'Rourke, a Civic Survey was "the statistical and graphical representation of things as they are in a community". The Civics Institute's Survey of Dublin was gathering information under the seven headings of Archaeology, Education, Recreation, Hygiene, Housing, Industry and Commerce, and Traffic. The City Architect acknowledged that some earlier surveys in the U.K. had been influenced by provisional hypotheses, focusing on areas where particular problems had been perceived. For example, at Doncaster, Abercrombie had been primarily concerned with the problems of the coal industry, whereas his Sheffield City Survey had concentrated on traffic congestion. However, O'Rourke reported that the Civics Institute had concluded that:

> "As the problems to be solved in Dublin are general and normal, applying to small capital cities elsewhere requiring reconstruction, there was no need to lay down any provisional hypothesis" (88).

"General and normal" though the problems might be, the City Architect had no doubt that the solutions must be drastic. In a reckless flight of hyperbole, he described how he would set about the task of reforming Dublin:

> "I would put Dublin on the operation table and drastically apply the surgeon's knife to its cancerous growths. Nothing should be a deterrent in this task for the benefit of posterity. I would rather leave one third of the area of my native city growing with grass than leave it as I found it!
>
> Demolition and demolition and more demolition is the only remedy for a building or a city falling from decay. After that - reconstruction" (89).

Dublin needed a great new awakening and a freedom from politics and controversy, O'Rourke argued. Progress had been hampered by too much nit-picking. He illustrated his point allegorically:

> "Within recent memory the city has been in the position of the irritably inquisitive old lady who came up to Father Healy with a religious problem. "I want to know", she said, "what's the difference

> between a cherubim and a seraphim? "Oh!" said the witty priest, "don't worry: there was a difference but they made it up!"" (90).

The Greater Dublin Reconstruction Movement was certainly vulnerable to the charge that, like Abercrombie before it, it had paid insufficient attention to the need for survey. O'Rourke's articles struck a raw nerve. Mears countered the accusation by pointing out that he had been associated with Geddes since the Professor had first set out the principles of Civic Survey, and was therefore well aware of them. He had assisted in the formulation of the original programme on which the Dublin Survey was based and had worked on the Edinburgh Survey for 17 years. He considered that he had a far better appreciation of the nature of survey than O'Rourke, whose approach he regarded as naive. He rejected the notion that survey could proceed without a hypothesis. To assume that one had none was "only to confess oneself enmeshed in the convention of the modern industrialized city" (91). The planning of Dublin had to be thought of from some definite standpoint. He wrote that:

> "It is often assumed that a Civic Survey will automatically supply all the information needed

for a City Development Scheme but it cannot be too strongly emphasized that all such studies are necessarily bounded by the outlook of their promoters. The complete Survey of any City would fill many encyclopaedias and would be out of date before it was finished.

A less complete Survey will, consciously or unconsciously, illuminate only certain aspects of the problem. Danger lies ahead when the assumption is made that this Survey is complete and free from bias". (92).

Survey could not be approached with scientific detachment.

"We cannot be purely scientific in this matter. The City is as complex as life itself, she calls first for vision, for an Ideal of Renewal, not for mere statistics, however complete" (93).

Mears asserted that his studies of Dublin had "been admittedly coloured by the dream of the City to be". He had never allowed himself to be "enslaved by statistics of things as they are". Although such data had high value, it was necessary to use them with caution. They must not be employed to "fortify

standards of civic life already past or passing".

> "Statistics and diagrams unguided by any ideal beyond accuracy come readily to hand. At best they represent some particular point of view - not abstract truth as a whole - some aspect of the City as it stands, or seems to stand; at worst they may deceive us into losing the broad view for some particular aspect" (94).

Nor did Mears regard Survey as a discrete stage in the plan-making process which had to be completed before further progress could be made. Rather, it was a continuous activity, or, as he expressed it:

> "... it grows as our hopes for the City widen" (95).

Although O'Rourke had professed to be conducting a Civic Survey with no provisional hypothesis, he had confessed, before that survey was complete, to a belief in the need for "demolition and demolition and more demolition". Describing this as a "hideous and uncompromising doctrine", Mears fell to the attack with a characteristically caustic wit. He wrote of the Reconstruction Movement that:

"Our approach has always been that of the careful gardener and not of the navvy with his pick, shovel and levelling staff. We seek first, principles of health, not a programme of pruning and rooting out; and here I join issue with Mr. O'Rourke.

... We are now entitled to visualize the Dublin to which he leads us without any provisional doubts:- a Dublin consisting of the Barracks, Prisons, Hospitals, Asylums, Government Buildings and Lower O'Connell Street, for these alone will survive his efficient axe - occupying as they do along with open spaces two thirds of the city:- all the rest decently interred under grass dotted with a few model villages as "cradles of civic consciousness"" (96).

He suggested roguishly that the coat of arms of the Civics Institute should be emblazoned with three tumblers of Guinness and bear the motto "Down Dublin". O'Rourke's allegorical tale was neatly turned to reinforce Mears' own message in the following manner:

"There was an old lady came looking for Dublin and she met the City Architect trundling a lawnmower. "Can you tell me," she says, "what was the

difference between the Civics Institute and the Greater Dublin Movement?" "Oh" said the witty official, "there was a difference, but I've cleared it away"" (97).

By early 1924, Mears believed that the chances of practical progress towards the reconstruction of Dublin had greatly improved. The Free State Government was now more firmly in the saddle (98). It had embarked on the development of subsidized housing schemes and, in response to the Reconstruction Movement, announced its intention to set up a Greater Dublin Development Commission (99). In the end, however, neither Abercrombie and the Civics Institute nor Mears and the Reconstruction Movement saw many of their proposals implemented. O'Rourke's voluminous report on the Civic Survey of Dublin was published in 1925 and formed the basis for much of the subsequent planning of the City (100). After Mears' death, Abercrombie described the Civic Survey as a "magnificent" document and placed it firmly in the Geddesian tradition (101). It is unlikely that the Professor's son-in-law would have agreed.

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# Chapter Three

# Town Planning in Palestine.

## 3.1 The Zionist Commission for Palestine

On 2nd November 1917, the Balfour Declaration committed the British Government to the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine (1) and, on December 9th, the Egyptian Expeditionary Force under the command of General Allenby captured Jerusalem from the Turks. These two events heralded a new wave of immigration to the Holy Land by Eastern European Jews determined to start a new life free from the restrictions and periodic pogroms which they had suffered in the collapsing empires of Russia and Austria-Hungary.

Many of the young Zionist settlers had been strongly influenced by the revolutionary politics of Czarist Russia. Their very secular Zionism was a rigorous amalgam of socialism and nationalism which frequently demanded a radical new social organization in agricultural communes and co-operatives; the <u>kibbutzim</u> and <u>moshavim</u> which are still such a characteristic feature of rural settlement in modern Israel (2).

The idealism and dedication of the Zionist pioneers captured the imagination of many non-Jews, Geddes

among them. Philip Boardman cites evidence that his Presbyterian upbringing, with its Old Testament emphasis, rendered him particularly susceptible (3), but the Professor also saw that the Zionist passion to renew both spiritual and physical contact with the soil of Palestine accorded well with the emphasis which his own social theories placed on the restoration of close contact with the rural environment. In an interview reported in "The Scotsman" in May 1921, Geddes commented enthusiastically on the agricultural reclamation projects being carried out by Zionist pioneers with urban backgrounds (4).

In August 1919, at the instigation of his friend, the Jewish psychiatrist and social thinker, Dr. M.D. Eder, Geddes was engaged as Planning Consultant to the Zionist Commission for Palestine (5). He intended that Mears should assist him, but on 1st September the Zionist Leader, Dr. Chaim Weizmann, wrote from London:

> "I am in receipt of your letter dated 29th August from Dublin regarding Captain Mears. I note your opinion with regard to him, but fear that the Organization cannot undertake the responsibility of engaging him. If, however, you desire to

take him with you, I have no objection" (6).

In correspondence with Mears, Geddes appears to have been characteristically vague about the terms of employment he had agreed with the Zionists. On 4th September, Mears wrote anxiously to his father-in-law:

> "I'd like some indication of what we're going for. I only have the vaguest idea of the scale, ie. is it only Jerusalem district or the whole of Palestine, only for actual property held by the Commission or more generally for whole districts? ... Are the Commission paying for my passage?
>
> ... I am really very much in the dark about the whole business" (7).

In the coming years, Mears' concern over the apparent uncertainties surrounding Geddes' arrangements for the Palestine venture was to prove only too well-founded.

Initially, Geddes was to prepare preliminary plans for the proposed Hebrew University of Jerusalem and advise the Zionist Organization on a number of other projects which they were initiating in Palestine (8), but it is clear that his horizons were always considerably

wider. In his letter to the Professor of 1st September, Weizmann expressed concern over a report which had appeared in "The Jewish Chronicle" claiming that, as well as planning the Hebrew University, Geddes was also going to prepare a master-plan for Jerusalem as a whole. He pointed out that:

> "... the paragraph which appeared in the press regarding your mission to Palestine may give offence to the British Administration in Palestine and also perhaps alarm the Arabs. It may be construed as meaning that the Zionist Organization desires to encroach upon the town planning schemes which have been initiated by the authorities on the spot. Although these schemes are probably only tentative, we are anxious to avoid taking any steps which may cause friction between us and the official Administration" (9).

## 3.2 Jerusalem Actual and Possible

In fact, in July, Geddes had attended the exhibition at the Royal Academy in London of the Town Plan for Jerusalem which Mr. William H. McLean, the City Engineer of Alexandria, had prepared for the Military Administration in Palestine in 1918 (10). There he

had discussed the defects of the plan with the Military Governor of Jerusalem, Brigadier-General Sir Ronald Storrs. On reaching Jerusalem in September, he met with the Chief Administrator for Palestine, Major General H.D. Watson, and arranged to prepare a report suggesting improvements to the McLean Plan (11).

In the preparation of his report, Geddes adopted his customary method of survey:

> "... that of thorough and repeated perambulation day after day, in all directions, and practically without use of any plans at all until considerable familiarity with the whole city, old and new, has been obtained ... In this way one gradually comes to see the qualities, the defects and the possibilities of the areas under consideration" (12).

Mears regretted that he was unable to joint the Professor for the first two weeks of this most vital part of the plan-making process, but, on his arrival, the two men spent many hours walking over the ground (13, 14). By November, Geddes had returned to his Chair of Sociology and Civics at the University of Bombay and was able to report to Weizmann that:

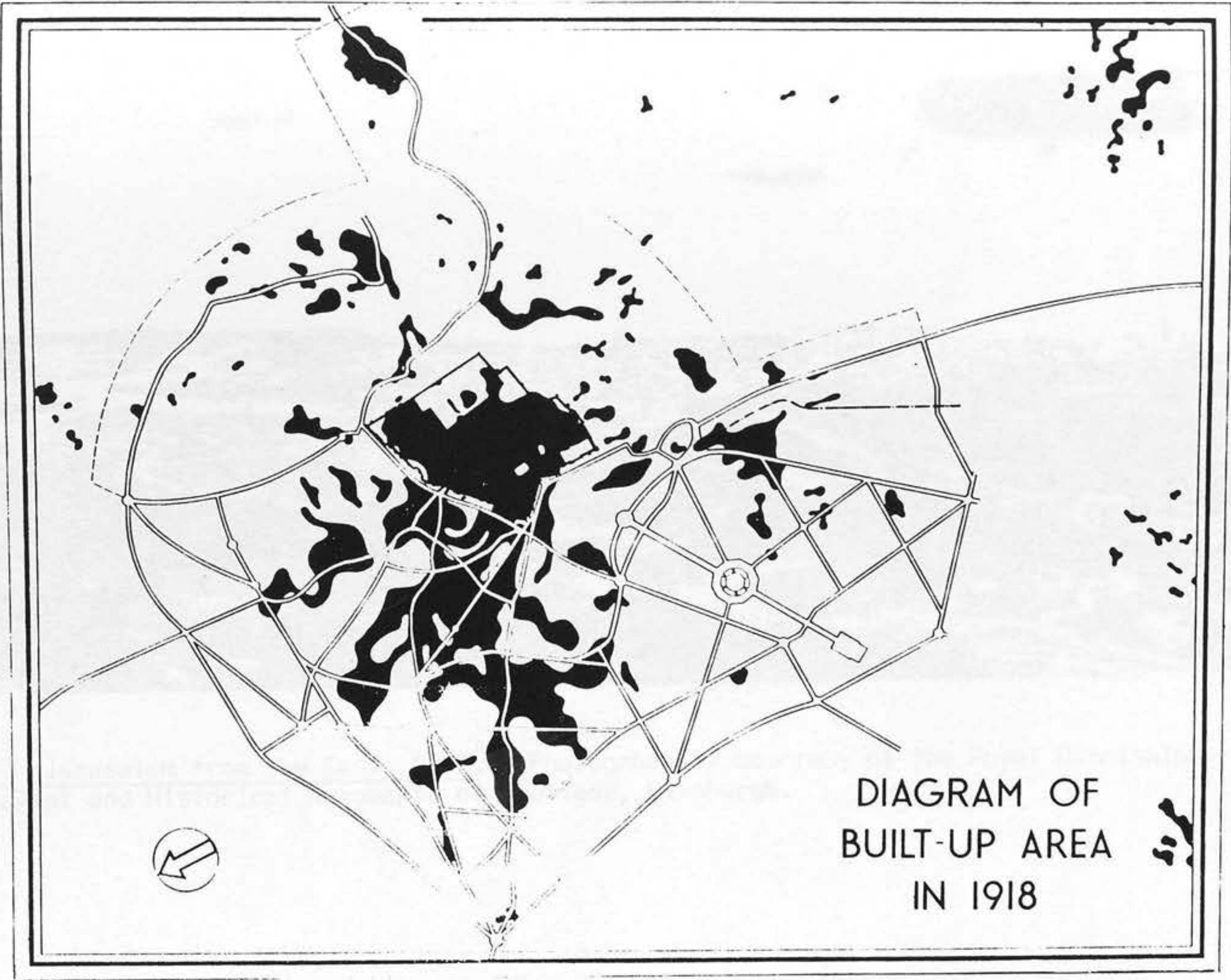



Fig. 3.1. Jerusalem in 1918. Diagram of the built-up area with William McLean's proposed road network superimposed. Source: KENDALL, H. (1948), "Jerusalem City Plan: Preservation of the Old City and Planning of the New", HMSO, London.

Fig. 3.2. Jerusalem from the East, 1919. Photograph by courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Edinburgh.

"My preliminary report on city improvement and town planning of Jerusalem, as desired by General Watson as Chief Administrator and General Storrs, Military Governor or Jerusalem, will shortly be in your hands. The corresponding, preliminary report to you on the University is also in progress" (15).

Mears stayed on in Jerusalem to continue work on the Hebrew University and prepare further plans and perspective drawings in support of the town planning report.

On 5th November, Geddes wrote to a friend:

"I have had a very interesting six weeks or so in Palestine, of which fully five in Jerusalem, where I have had the double task:

(1) of improving the very crude extension and improvement plan recently prepared for the Military Government of occupied territory, and
(2) of planning the university.

The City problem indeed is manifold:

(a) the old buried City of David (of which my archaeological programme has been successful in eliciting the enthusiasm of the archaeologists here, so far as I have met them);

(b) the picturesque old Jerusalem within the walls, with its strongly marked quarters, Moslem, Jewish and Christian;

(c) the existing modern town - a vast spreading suburban area, not well planned, but capable of improvement, and

(d) the future expansion of this on better lines, a matter of practical certainty so far as any can be" (16).

With the lofty assurance of the evangelist, he asserted that the aim of the university project should be no less than the unification of the "religious and moral spirit with the progressive researches of the scientific world". He reported that, in furtherance of this ambitious objective, and complementary to the University itself:

"... a great range of Museums is getting into plan - and these nearer the city, in fact continuing the perspective of the wall. School of Medicine, Music etc., in the city, and much else - perhaps

a High Street of academic houses and college halls of residence, recalling in some ways Oxford, in others Edinburgh, but of course Jerusalem in style. To distinguish and develop the Jewish style from the Arab or Sarasenic is of course a great problem - and I think we are succeeding. Frank Mears is surpassing himself, and his beautiful sketches have just been carried off to Cairo by Dr. Weizmann to show Marshall Allenby today ..." (17).

Geddes' preliminary report on the town planning of Jerusalem, entitled "Jerusalem Actual and Possible", was completed in Bombay in November and subsequently presented to the Military Administration in Palestine. McLean's Plan of 1918 had set out to preserve the Medieval aspect of the Old City of Jerusalem by restricting development in the surrounding valleys. Building was to be completely prohibited within an inner ring with an average width of about 300m. around the City Wall, and outside this was a zone where development was to be restricted and would only be permitted after detailed architectural scrutiny. On the East this extended in a rough semi-circle to a distance of between 2,000 and 3,000 m. from the Temple Mount. To the West, the "restricted zone" was narrower and, on the plateau beyond, the modern city

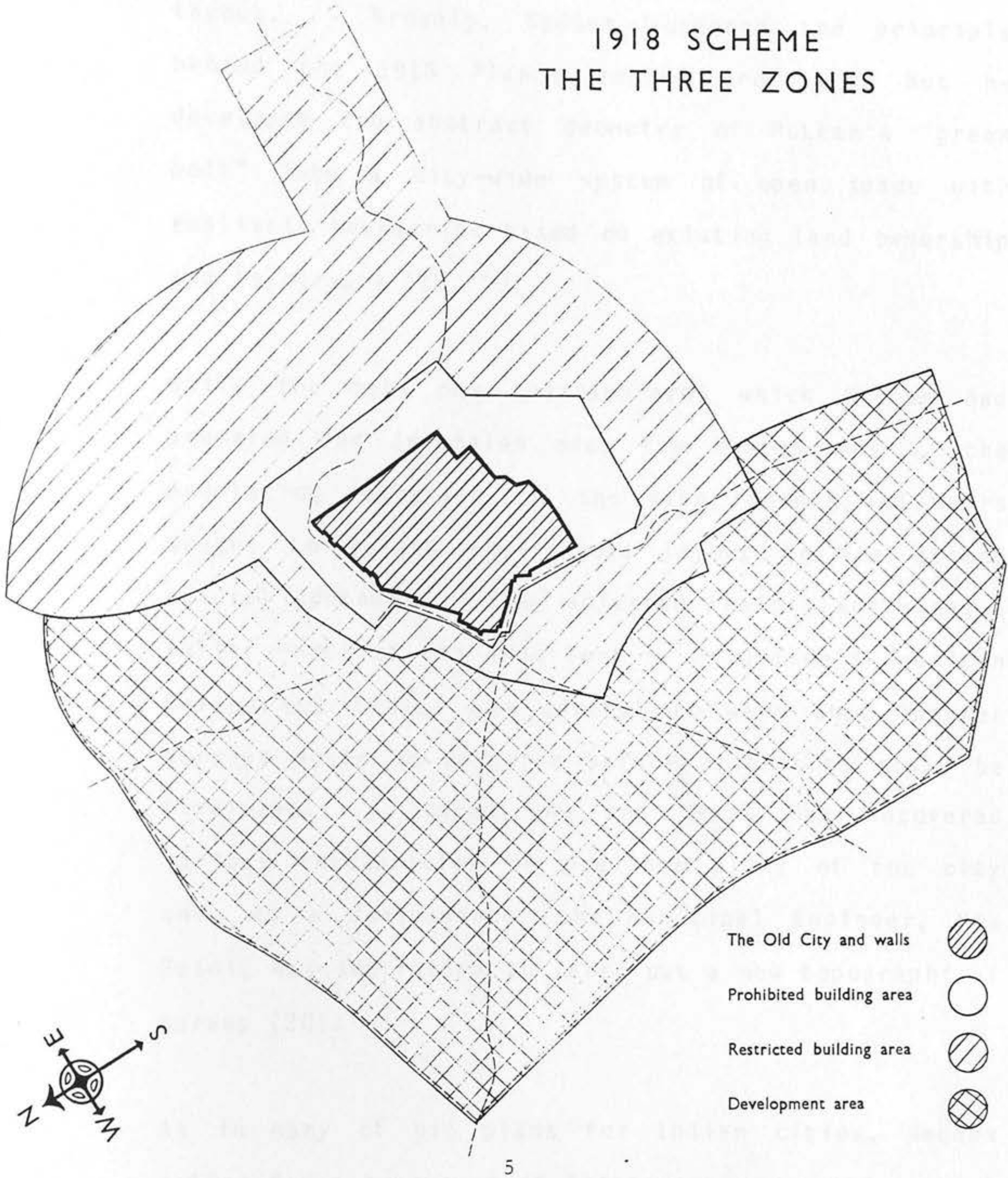



Fig. 3.3. Conserving the Setting of the Old City, William McLean's zoning proposals, 1918. Source: KENDALL, H. (1948), "Jerusalem City Plan: Preservation of the Old City and Planning of the New", HMSO, London.

was to be developed with a roughly radial-concentric layout. Broadly, Geddes accepted the principle behind the 1918 Plan's zoning proposals, but he developed the abstract geometry of McLean's "green belt" into a city-wide system of open space with realistic boundaries based on existing land ownership and topography (18, 19).

While the bold new thoroughfares which McLean had prepared for Jerusalem made few concessions to the undulating topography of the site, Geddes and Mears sought to relate their road layout to the strong natural contours. They adjusted their plans using a relief model of the area lent by Jerusalem's American Colony but Geddes was careful to warn that further surveys would be required before alignments could be finalized. Indeed, he and Mears had uncovered serious inaccuracies in previous plans of the city and, as a consequence, the Municipal Engineer, Mr. Guini, was instructed to carry out a new topographical survey (20).

As in many of his plans for Indian cities, Geddes called for a programme of "conservative surgery" which he believed could greatly improve conditions in Old Jerusalem without necessitating the demolition of any habitable property.

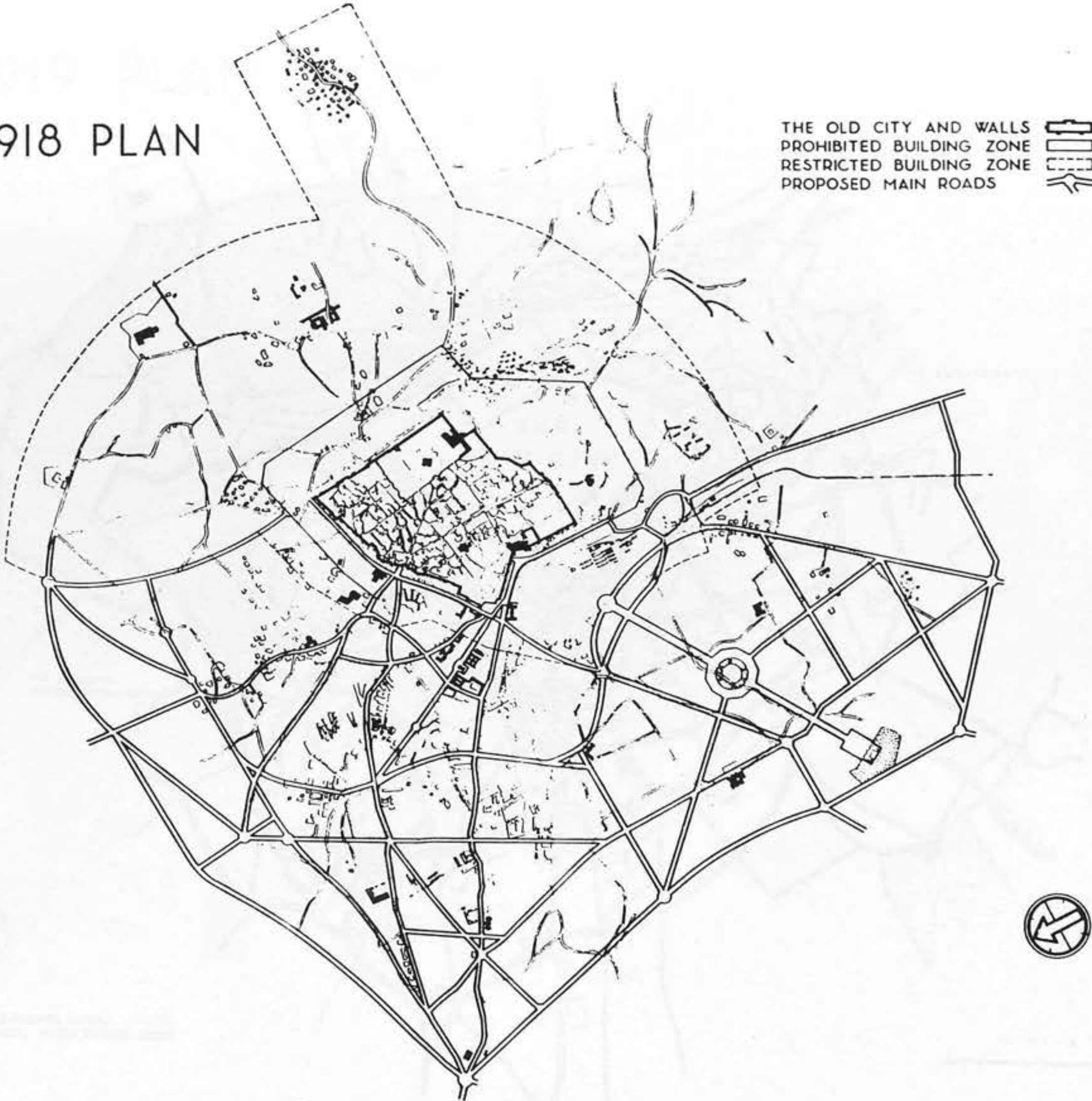



Fig. 3.4. McLean's Plan for Jerusalem, 1918. Source: KENDALL, H. (1948), "Jerusalem City Plan: Preservation of the Old City and Planning of the New", HMSO, London.

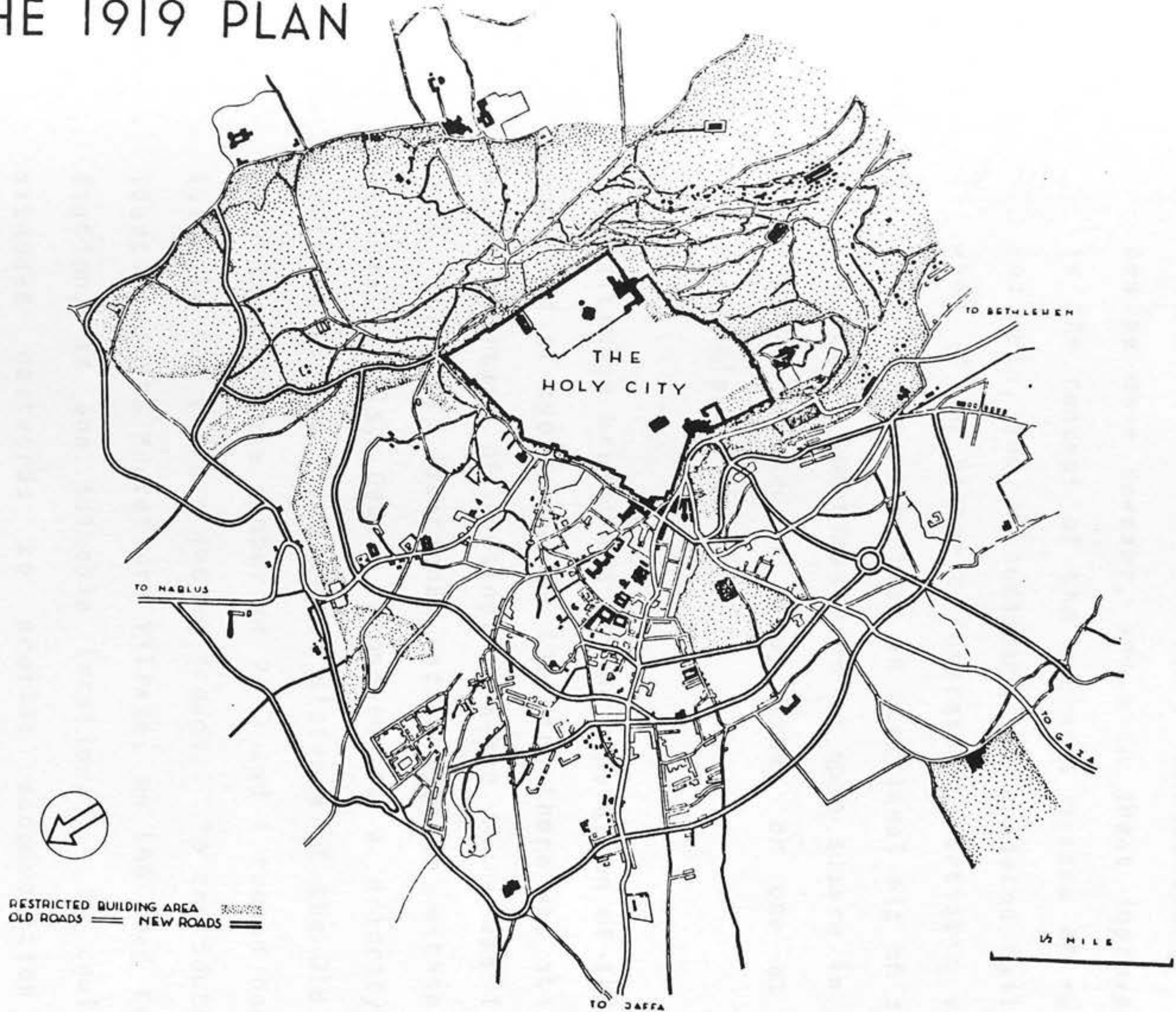
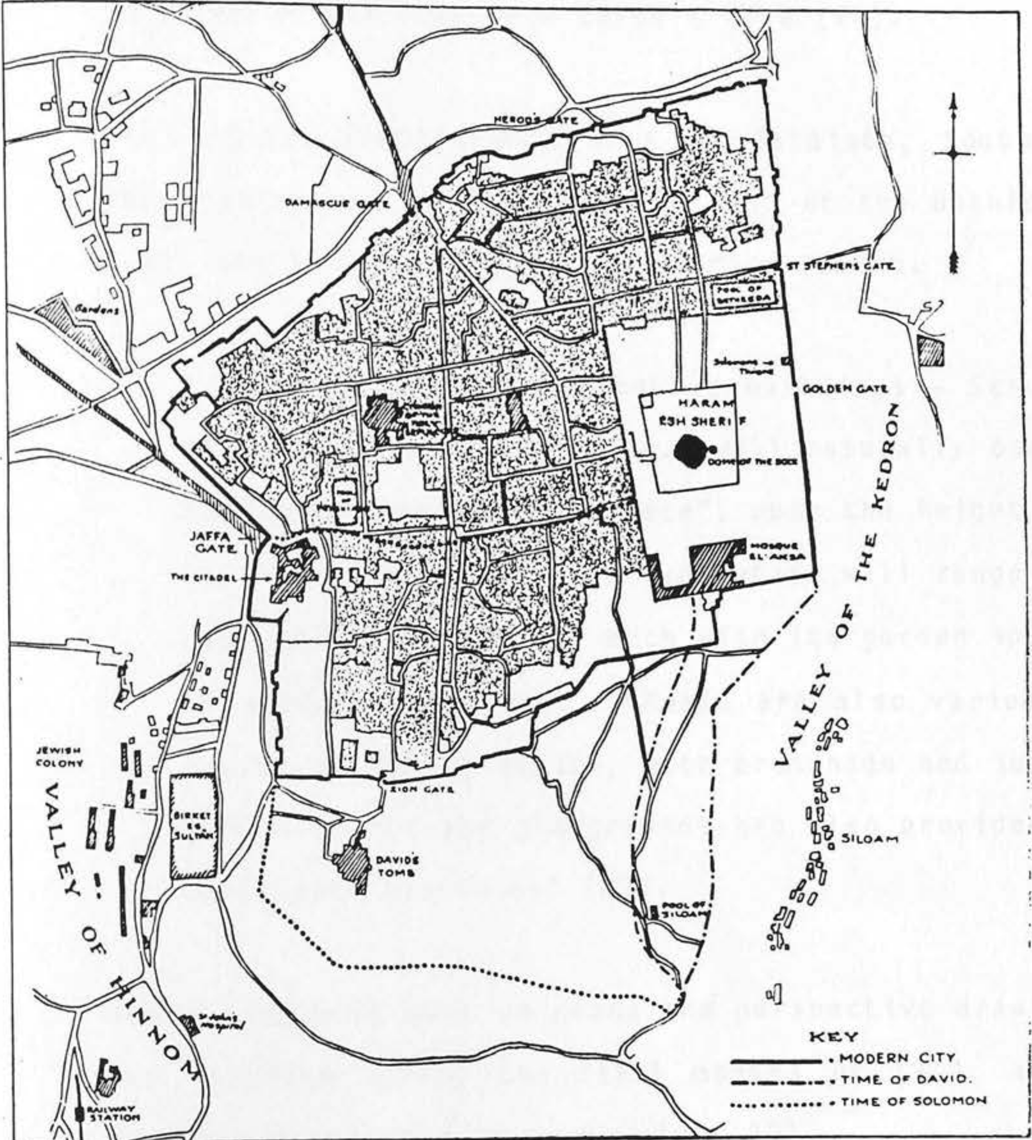



Fig. 3.5. Geddes' Plan for Jerusalem, 1919. Source: KENDALL, H. (1948), "Jerusalem City Plan: Preservation of the Old City and Planning of the New", HMSO, London.

"Here, I am told, some have recommended the widening of streets; even in some cases boulevards; but such proposals are totally incongruous, and fortunately impracticable. What can be done however, and with great improvement, is the removal of the enormous masses of rubbish and ruin, and of occasional dilapidated buildings when of no historic interest or artistic value. Thus we may accomplish an occasional bit of street widening. Sometimes even an open square in which may be planted a shady tree, or one at each available corner" (21).

Even although around 20% of the population of the city had died of typhus during the War, there was still an acute shortage of housing. Since there was little room for any additional accommodation within the Medieval walls, Geddes proposed as a priority the erection within a reasonable distance of the Old City of a considerable number of 2, 3 and 4 roomed houses, suitable for various income groups. To the South, he identified the Montefiore Village, on the road to the station, as one suitable location. It could be extended westwards to provide accommodation for residents from the congested Jewish Quarter of the Old City. In the northern, mainly Moslem, portion of Jerusalem, sufficient land for new housing could be




**Plan of Jerusalem and its Suburbs**

Fig. 3.6. Plan of the Historic City. Patrick Geddes and Frank C. Mears, 1919. Source: GEDDES, P. (1921), "The City of Jerusalem", Garden Cities and Town Planning Vol. XI, November 1921, p.253.

obtained on the road from Herod's Gate (22).

The Zionist Commission's site at Talpioth, South of the station and a little to the East of the Bethlehem Road, was to be developed as a Garden Suburb.

> "Of this the necessary public buildings - School, Hall, Place of Worship etc., will naturally occupy and adorn the "Central Place", upon the height and thus furnish a feature around which will range the many groups of houses, each with its garden space, of various magnitude. Roads are also varied by spaces of public garden, with promenade and seats. Tennis courts and playgrounds are also provided at convenient distances" (23).

Mears continued work on plans and perspective drawings for Talpioth during the final months of 1919, after Geddes had returned to Bombay (24, 25).

In the building of new housing areas, Geddes called for the use of indigenous design and construction methods rather than the often inappropriate foreign styles which were being introduced by the new settlers. Steeply-pitched snow-roofs, suitable for the climatic conditions of Europe and North America, were not only out of character with the surrounding

townscape but deprived the occupants of the useful additional living space available on traditional flat-roofed dwellings (26).

As elements in a general scheme of environmental improvement, Geddes proposed the redistribution of considerable quantities of soil to create new areas for cultivation and gardening, extensive tree planting on the slopes of the Mount of Olives to counteract soil erosion, and the restoration of the city's historic pools as reservoirs and landscape features. On a vantage point near the station, he advocated the creation of a "Hail and Farewell" Park from which visitors to Jerusalem could enjoy their first and final views of the Old City (27).

One proposal which is particularly noteworthy in view of subsequent events was that for the improvement of the area around the Wailing Wall. Geddes suggested how access might be improved and space increased for the Jewish faithful by the removal of a single row of houses. Later he was to argue, perhaps less than realistically, that the religious riots of 1929 might have been avoided if this scheme had been put into effect (28). With his usual optimism, Geddes firmly believed that "the co-operation of the various races and creeds towards bringing prosperity to the land is

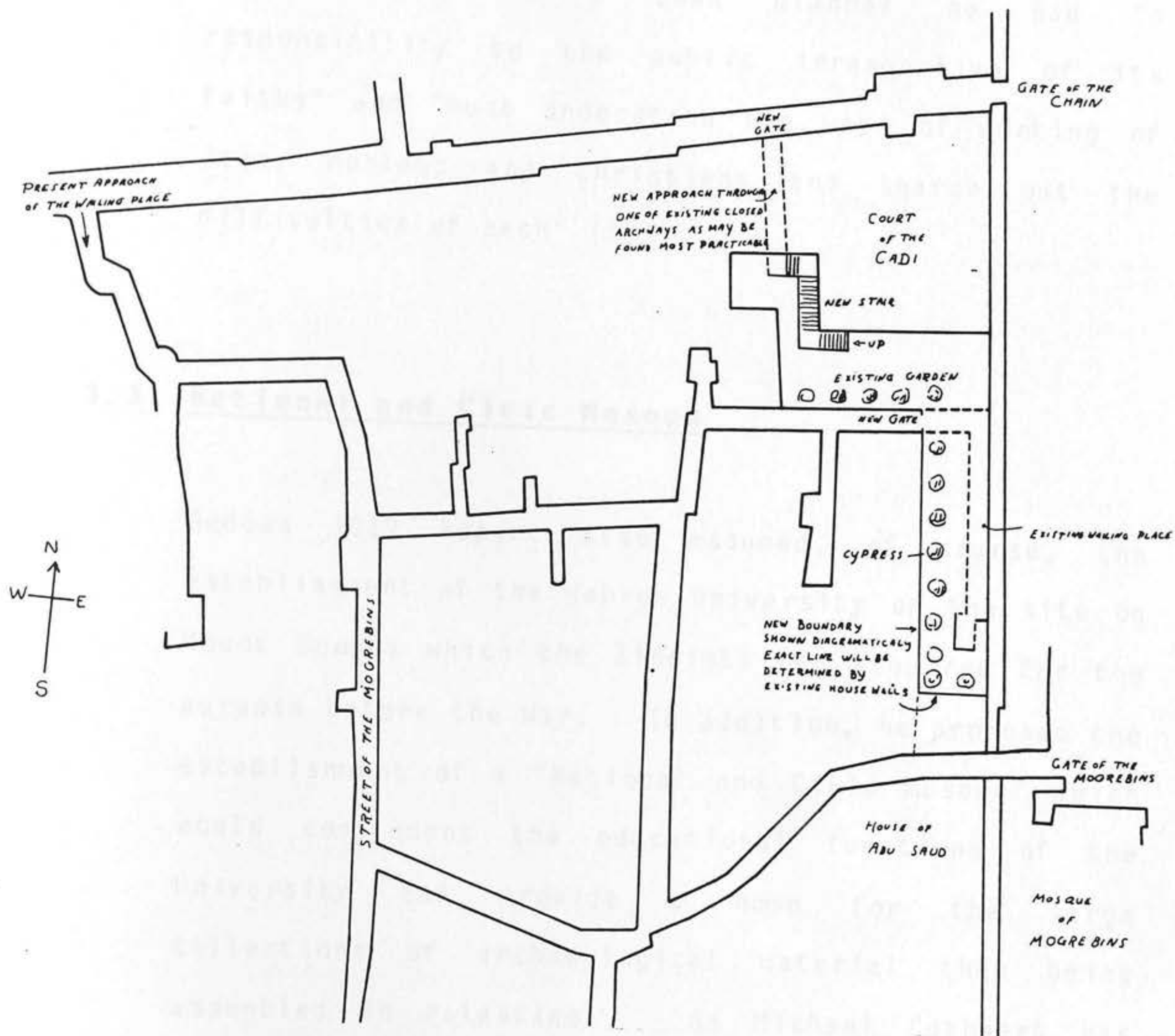



Fig. 3.7. Geddes' proposals for improvements at the Wailing Wall, 1919. Courtesy of the Zionist Archive, Jerusalem.

only a matter of time" (29) and emphasized that although he was "privileged to work for the Zionist Organization", as a town planner he had "a responsibility to the public irrespective of its faiths" and "must understand the ways of working of Jews, Moslems and Christians and search out the difficulties of each" (30).

## 3.3 National and Civic Museum

Geddes 1919 Report also assumed, of course, the establishment of the Hebrew University on the site on Mount Scopus which the Zionists had acquired for the purpose before the War. In addition, he proposed the establishment of a "National and Civic Museum" which would complement the educational functions of the University and provide a home for the large collections of archaeological material then being assembled in Palestine. As Michael Cuthbert has pointed out, such museums played a central role in Geddes' strategy for raising civic and social consciousness (31). Geddes stressed that the Jerusalem Museum should combine a "definite and scientific purpose" with a "popular presentment". As well as galleries and a lecture hall, he proposed that there should be an open air theatre for the production

of historical dramatizations (32).

As might well have been foreseen, there was some controversy on religious grounds over the appropriate layout of the Museum. The Quakers of the American Colony were generally unsympathetic to Zionism (33) and some of the American archaeologists in Jerusalem felt that Geddes' scheme gave too much prominence to the Jewish influence in Palestine. On 11th December 1919, Mears reported to Geddes that:

> "I have seen the Americans regarding the Museum. They don't like the separate "Jewish" gallery and are very strong on the Museum being set up and run by the State. One of them pointed out that we hadn't allowed for a Central National Library. They would have been better pleased if the Jewish Gallery had been merged with the main series, much as we had it at one stage. It seems impossible to know how prejudice here will show itself. I suppose one must assume that it will assert itself whatever you do" (34).

By 19th December, he was writing that:

> "I had another talk with the American Prof. Clay about the Museum. He is more agreeable than he

Fig. 3.8: A National and Civic Museum. Diagramatic representation of Geddes and Mears' proposals for a museum and college complex on a site to the North-East of the Old City, November 1919. Courtesy of the Zionist Archive, Jerusalem.

would admit, but still strong on nothing specially Jewish being admitted (as a separate series of Galleries). He has started advocating an English-speaking university here extra to the Jewish one, so he is now more willing to discuss things - having got a pet of his own" (35).

However, despite sectorian squabbling, a modified version of the Museum project was eventually proceeded with. In 1927, an Archaeological Museum was established as the result of an endowment by the American Jewish multi-millionaire, John D. Rockefeller, on the site which Geddes and Mears had originally selected outside the North-East corner of the Old City (36).

In "Jerusalem Actual and Possible", Geddes suggested that the historic Citadel in the Old City should be employed as the Centre of Government for Palestine while, at the same time, perhaps, incorporating a War Museum after the manner of Edinburgh Castle or the Tower of London (37). Mears, however, did not believe that this scheme was practical and wrote to the Professor that:

"I had a look at the interior of the citadel and can't see it being very successful as a Government

H.Q. any more than for a museum. Adequate window space could only be got at the cost of spoiling it, and they would build all sorts of additions. I can only think of starting the archaeologists digging there, and getting them to continue for some time, so that Government allocations will go elsewhere, and then a satisfactory use may turn up for the place. 'Probably just a relic, with some museum galleries in the more regular portions" (38).

## 3.4 Trouble With the Military Administration

Because of the lack of adequate survey information in 1919, Geddes regarded the proposals in his preliminary report as only tentative. He promised that:

"On our return in spring we shall adjust details together, invite the criticisms and suggestions of various authorities on the topography, archaeology and history of Jerusalem, and then submit plan amended and completed to the best of our ability, and with fuller report accordingly" (39).

However, because of difficulties which arose over his status in the eyes of the British Administration,

Geddes' final report was never completed. At first, the Military Governor, General Storrs, seems to have been well disposed towards Geddes, even arranging an aerial survey of Jerusalem for him in September 1919 (40). In a letter dated 11th December, the Professor was informed by his son-in-law that Storrs was pleased with the Preliminary Report and his formal approval was expected before Mears, Weizmann and Eder left Palestine at Christmas (41). A week later, Mears reported that:

> "I saw Storrs again, he is quite friendly, 'is going to send the letter asking you to come back" (42).

Geddes returned to Palestine in June 1920, shortly before the replacement of the Occupied Enemy Territory Administration (OETA) by a Civil Government under the pro-Zionist Sir Herbert Samuel, High Commissioner for Palestine. The Professor's fierce battles with the Military during the Autumn of 1920 may not have endeared him to the British authorities. At a meeting in Brigadier General Storrs' office in mid-November, he clashed with two generals over their plans to build a military camp on ground proposed for the Hebrew University or, alternatively, to appropriate the site of the Zionist housing project at Talpioth (43, 44).

Referring to this period in a letter to a friend in January 1921, he wrote of:

> "... a great fight in Jerusalem; first with one General, who wished to make a vast military camp on Scopus and next with a new General, who chose instead to evict Mears and my best garden village (Talpioth) on a hill by Bethlehem Road planned for 1,000 houses to cost (say) two millions! However, a cable has just come to say he has given in, and accepted my plan for him on the plain (far more practical too - with railway siding etc.). So this double saving of the New Jerusalem proper, of which I hope Mears will have time to make the fine perspective he can do so vividly and truly in time for next Academy perhaps. But to this I must return this coming season, unless (as I am trying to arrange) Mears can go on there, as I am wanted again at one or two States in India" (45).

After the Professor's stormy meeting at the Military Governor's Office, he wrote to Eder asking him to mobilize friends in London or inform the press, "so leading to questions in Parliament etc. which the War Office of course hates" (46). He won this battle, but it may have cost him dear in terms of future relations with the authorities in Palestine.

Geddes did not in fact return to Palestine in 1921, and by the Autumn of 1922 he was in dispute with the British Administration over payment for the work which he had carried out in 1919 and 1920. On 6th September 1922, the Chief Secretary of the Palestine Administration, Sir Wyndham Deedes wrote repudiating responsibility in the matter of accounts submitted by the Professor in connection with planning work in Jerusalem and elsewhere. In response, Geddes admitted that he had no written agreement but pointed out that this was frequently the case when he was called in to give expert advice on planning matters. He claimed that he had a clear verbal contract with the Military Administration dating from September 1919, when the Chief Administrator, General Watson, in the presence of Dr. Eder, had expressly instructed him to prepare a Report on Jerusalem and had even agreed on a fee of £250. Nine months later, in November 1923, the Chief Secretary finally rejected Geddes' claim, stating that General Watson had no recollection of giving him any such instructions and that General Storrs had stated that at no time was any contract with the Professor entered into, either verbally or in writing (47).

The full truth of this matter is now probably impossible to ascertain, but at some point Geddes

appears to have succeeded in seriously antagonizing the British authorities. An account written years later by Captain S. Stein, a Jewish officer who served in the Political Office of the Military Administration, tends to confirm this. He states that:

> "In 1919, Eder, who had long been an admirer of Patrick Geddes and was familiar with his work at Edinburgh and in India, induced him to visit Palestine in the hope of interesting him in the Hebrew University. It was also part of Eder's plan to bring Geddes into touch with the British authorities, who might (he thought) reasonably be expected to welcome the advice of so eminent an authority on the town planning problems arising in Jerusalem and at Haifa. The British Military Authorities (Palestine was still under military administration) were not impressed. They were bored and irritated by Geddes. Geddes, for his part, was exasperated by what he regarded as the unimaginativeness of the military mind. This part of Eder's programme was not a success" (48).

## 3.5 The Pro-Jerusalem Society

Whatever the cause of the problem, it was not that the

Military Administrators were unsympathetic to the need for sound planning in Jerusalem. In the years before the Great War, the British Empire had made considerable use of architects, archaeologists and antiquarians in its intelligence-gathering operations in Turkish Palestine. Visits to the numerous historic and religious sites in the Holy Land had provided the perfect cover for clandestine observation of the ruling power. Subsequently, many of these agents returned to Palestine as officers in the Egyptian Expeditionary Force and assumed positions in the Military Administration. They saw themselves as enlightened Christian liberators with a responsibility to protect the religious monuments and overall architectural character of the historic Old City of Jerusalem. The Military were also aware of the potential for civil unrest and saw civic and planning initiatives as a useful means of building bridges between the territory's disparate religious and ethnic communities. In a memorandum dated 20th August 1919, a Colonel French on the G.H.Q. staff of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force warned his superiors in Cairo that "the policy of Zionism can only be carried out with the assistance of British bayonets" and that if the Government was to accept the Mandate for Palestine it would "have to provide not only a large proportion of

the men and money necessary for the administration but also a considerable garrison in order to ensure as far as possible peaceful conditions while the country is developed" (49).

The Turks were still in possession of northern Palestine when General Allenby asked William McLean to suggest measures to protect the architectural character of the Old City (50), and shortly afterwards, on hearing of the presence in Egypt of Mr. Charles R. Ashbee, the pioneer planner of the Arts and Crafts school who had submitted an entry to Geddes' Dublin Planning Competition in 1914, Brigadier General Storrs wrote asking him to visit Jerusalem and prepare a report on its possibilities. Ashbee did so and was subsequently appointed Civic Advisor and Secretary to the Council of the Pro-Jerusalem Society (51).

The Pro-Jerusalem Society effectively started life in the Spring of 1918 as "the Military Governor civically and aesthetically in Council" with the heads of the religious and lay communities of the city. From the outset it enjoyed the active patronage and support of the Commander in Chief of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, General Allenby. The Society was formally constituted in September 1918 and incorporated in October 1920. Its Charter was modelled on the

English National Trust of which Ashbee had been an active member. The personal interest of Sir Herbert Samuel, who became High Commissioner for Palestine in July 1920, helped greatly to increase the Society's scope and status and, for a time, it was very successful in transcending sectarian divisions to promote civic improvements and establish new craft industries in the city (52, 53, 54, 55). Weizmann, Eder and Geddes were members of the Council of the Pro-Jerusalem Society (56) and the Professor was enthusiastic about its role in preserving the architectural character of the city and advancing the interests of its inhabitants regardless of their creed (57).

As a result of the public interest aroused by the activities of the Society, a Town Planning Commission was established by Ordinance in January 1921. One of its first tasks was to prepare a draft town planning scheme based on the accurate survey by the Municipal Engineer for which both Geddes and the Pro-Jerusalem Society had campaigned. What came to be known as the 1922 Town Planning Scheme was prepared under the guidance of Ashbee, as Civic Advisor, and incorporated or refined many of the proposals put forward by Geddes and Mears in 1919. In particular, it developed their suggested park system and adopted many of their

contour roads (58, 59).

Ashbee finally left Jerusalem in 1922, largely, it appears, because he was unsympathetic to the aspirations of the Zionists and unhappy about their increasing influence with the British Administration (60). Afterwards, Geddes was to claim that he himself had been the Administration's first choice to serve on the Jerusalem Town Planning Commission. In a letter to Eder in November 1924, he wrote:

> "I suppose I am still on (or at any rate can easily return to, and stir up) Sir H. Samuel's Town Planning Committee - (which I was asked to join instead of Ashbee, and he was only later invited, by my request - perhaps too amicable in intention!)" (61).

Geddes believed that he had "lost hold of city planning to Storrs and Ashbee" because his reports of 1919-20, "with their comprehensive scheme of city planning, including that of garden village, industries and all", did not get printed (62). Whatever rivalry there may have been between the two eminent planners in Palestine, Ashbee's version of events suggests that he held Geddes in considerable affection and was keen to secure the publication of the Professor's plans.

In his memoir of his period in Jerusalem, he wrote:

> "... when it comes to editing hundreds of pages of crabbed mercilessly written manuscript, and still worse typing, on Palestine cities, I tell the Administration, for the love I bear Pat I will do it but on one consideration only, that if they publish they will allow the coloured plans, on which all turns, to be published also. As this will cost several hundred pounds, the Administration antennae instantly retract into their financial shells" (63).

There is no doubt that Geddes' long absences in Bombay and elsewhere made it difficult for him to give his projects in Palestine the sustained attention required to bring them to a successful conclusion. Shortly after he had saved Talpioth from the Generals, the Zionists announced that they intended to put its planning in the hands of the Jewish architect, Richard Kaufmann. Mears wrote soothingly to his father-in-law:

> "I fancy Kaufmann is a Jew and they feel the need on grounds of policy, of giving him a chance, but you ought to be in a much better position after all these months work with Government as well as

Jews, and Government won't be very keen on having a German about" (64).

In fact, Kaufmann was to have a distinguished career as a pioneer of agricultural settlement planning for the Zionists. The plans which he prepared in 1921 for Nahalal and Ein Harod were to serve as models for moshavim and kibbutzim respectively for many years to come (65). Ashbee was impressed by Kaufmann's drawings for Talpioth but was startled when one version reserved a site on the crest of a hill for a Parliament Building. He wrote afterwards that:

> "The humour of the situation, that even before the ratification of the Mandate, the Houses of Parliament for Palestine should be projected by the Zionist Commission in a Jerusalem garden suburb, had never occurred to them" (66).

The Zionists were to have the last laugh.

## 3.6 Other Projects

In addition to Jerusalem, Geddes and Mears were involved in town planning projects in several other parts of Palestine. On 10th November 1919, after

the Professor had returned to Bombay, Mears travelled to the northern port of Haifa in search of Colonel Gray Donald of the Public Works Department of the Military Administration. On finding him gone, he spent the day in the company of Mr. Feivel Weizmann, brother of the Zionist Leader, preparing an outline road layout for a site on Mount Carmel which the Zionist Commission had acquired for housing (67, 68, 69). Although his sketches were very rough, and Mears feared that many of his proposed roads would be on ground too steep for house building, Geddes was able to use them as a basis for more detailed planning of "garden villages" on Carmel when he returned in the following year (70). Inspired by the success of the Pro-Jerusalem Society, the Professor also attempted to establish a "Pro-Carmel Society" to promote civic improvement in Haifa. The Zionists of Haifa appear to have been well pleased with his efforts, for they offered him the gift of one of the finest sites on Mount Carmel on which to build a house. He declined, however, and made the area over as a camp site for scouts and holidaymakers (71).

In 1920, Geddes also prepared a Town Planning Report on Haifa for the Military Governor of Phoenicia, Colonel Stanton. In it he put forward plans for the expansion of the seaport which were both simpler and

cheaper than those proposed by the Admiralty. He suggested a cable tramway on the steep slopes of Mount Carmel to link the lower town with the new suburbs above, but, although this possibility was investigated by the Municipality, it was not proceeded with. Geddes' Haifa Report was the only part of his town planning work in Palestine for which the British Administration admitted liability and for which he was eventually paid (72).

In 1919, Mears was involved in preparing preliminary drawings for a number of architectural projects, including a synagogue at Jaffa (73) and an electric power station in the style of a Greek Temple for a site on the Sea of Galilee, near Tiberias (74). However, nothing seems to have come of these. It had been hoped that Mears would be able to go to Tiberias during November or December 1919 to survey sites which the Zionist Commission had acquired for housing there, but his full involvement with the Hebrew University project prevented this.

Geddes was able to spend time in Tiberias during his busy season in Palestine in 1920. He made suggestions for the improvement of the historic sulphur baths which dated from the time of Herod, and believed that the town could become a successful spa,

with associated medical establishments on the lines of those "at Battle Creek (Michigan) at Banff and St. Andrews in Scotland, etc." (75). Of his garden suburb plans for the Zionists, he boasted that:

> "... in the road scheme for the new Tiberias Colony, one cut down, in a single day's work, eight kilometres of streets to four, with an economy of about £8,000 on road-making alone, not to speak of future upkeep, while even the economy of land thus affected, say 6.4 hectares (about 18 acres) is not to be despised" (76).

During 1920, while back in Edinburgh, Mears came to hear of the scheme to establish a Scots Presbyterian Church and Hostel in Jerusalem (77). In June he discussed the project with one of its promoters, a Mr. Hill, and afterwards wrote to Geddes asking if he could assist in the identification of a suitable site. He assured the Professor that the institution was not intended to be narrow in character and:

> "... would be in no sense a Jewish mission, but a place for divinity students and others who would attend courses at Dominicans' and other places, for Biblical knowledge, also even the University for Hebrew studies. It would also be a centre

for Scots visiting Palestine" (78).

The Scots churchmen were looking initially for a villa with ground for possible expansion and Mears suggested that a suitable location might be found near the English and American Museum district in the North of the city, or, alternatively, on Greek land near the station in the South. The St. Andrews Church and Hospice were finally established in 1927 on a commanding site near the station, very close to Geddes' proposed "Hail and Farewell" park.

Geddes also mounted a reduced version of the "Cities Exhibition" in Jerusalem in the Autumn of 1920, and Mears sent out some drawings of the Hebrew University scheme to augment the material which had been shipped to Palestine in 1919. An aside, in one of his covering letters from Edinburgh, reveals Mears' involvement with Freemasonry. He asked the Professor:

> "Could you either directly, or through Becker (79) or Ashbee, get a bit of Jerusalem wood, preferably from Temple area, or other site which might have masonic associations - size 7 inches x 4 x 4 about. A friend, connected with good clients, wants to make a mallet. If you happened on a

larger piece it might come, as one could present pieces to others who would value it too. You never told me if you had joined F.M.s in Bombay" (80).

Geddes made altogether three visits to Palestine; the first during September and October 1919, the second from June to November 1920, and the third from late March to July 1925. On this last, apart from his continuing involvement with the University scheme, he was mainly concerned with the preparation of a Town Planning Report on Jaffa and Tel Aviv (81). This made proposals for the improvement of port facilities and the extension of Tel Aviv northwards to the Yarkon River. However, most of these were overtaken by the subsequent expansion of the city on a scale he could not have anticipated at the time (82).

## 3.7 Geddes' Objectives in Palestine

The new agricultural settlements being pioneered by the Zionist Movement held considerable theoretical appeal for Geddes as living examples of the scientifically-advanced, co-operative rural communities which he saw as characteristic of the coming neotechnic age, and there can be no doubt

that they were one of the features of Zionist colonization which initially drew him to Palestine. Yet, on his arrival there, by far the greater part of his time was spent on urban planning projects. The Military Administration's initiatives in seeking to preserve the historic character of the Old City of Jerusalem provided him with a splendid opportunity to apply his considerable experience in the field of "conservative surgery" and the laying out of new suburbs for the Zionists at Jerusalem, Haifa and Tiberias allowed him to demonstrate the utility and economy of English Garden City principles wedded to indigenous building styles more suited to the local climate. However, the main motivation for Geddes' Middle East venture was that he saw Palestine, like Ireland, as a proving ground for his anti-imperial regional theories. As the culture-capital of a region uniquely rich in religious and historical associations, Jerusalem proved an irresistable attraction and, although he was retained by the Zionist Commission, much of Geddes' work there was directed towards developing the civic, scientific and cultural institutions which he believed were necessary to facilitate the full and vigorous development of an ethnically-plural Palestinian entity. Unfortunately, the cultural inheritance of the region was more complex, problematic and fraught with conflict than

Geddes was prepared to allow. Undaunted by the constant bickering of Moslem, Jewish and Christian factions, the vacilating policy of the Mandatory Power, and the irreconcilable objectives of Zionism and Arab nationalism, Geddes clung to the belief that his prescription of co-operative civic and regional development would ultimately overcome the intractable ethnic and sectarian divisions of the region. The incompatibility of his vision of the future with the aspirations of Jewish cultural nationalism was to be the cause of much friction during Geddes and Mears' ten year involvement with the scheme to establish a Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The history of that venture is the subject of the next chapter.

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5. BOARDMAN, P. (1978), op.cit., p.312.

6. WEIZMANN, C. "The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann", Vol. IX, October 1918 - July 1920, I.U.P. Transaction, f.205.

7. MEARS, F.C., 4th September 1919, Letter to Patrick Geddes, MS. 10573, f.48, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

8. In a letter to the Palestine Office of the Zionist Organization on 5th September 1919, the Zionist leader, Dr. A. Ruffin, stated that, in addition to the Hebrew University, Professor Geddes' views were to be sought on the following projects:

   "1. The question pending in regard to that part of the town which lies near the technical institute in Haifa.

   2. The best use to be made of the ground which we have bought on Mount Karmel (sic).

   3. The planning of Talpioth in Jerusalem.

   4. The founding of a Jewish quarter on the Ilea grounds near Tiberias.

   5. The planning of a residential suburb on the Kerak near Kinereth.

   6. Regarding a Garden City on the grounds of the Orangery Kappis.

   7. A Smallholdings Colony on the irrigable soil of Daganiah".

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35. MEARS, F.C., 19th December 1919, Letter to Patrick Geddes, MS. 10573, f.55, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

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## Chapter Four

## The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

## 4.1 City of Learning

The work which had originally led to his engagement by the Zionist Commission was the preparation of a plan for the proposed Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and this indeed took up most of his attention during his first visit in 1919 and in his subsequent winter term in Bombay. As time went on, after he had arrived at the overall conception, the task of adjustment and realization, through the preparation of detailed architectural drawings, devolved increasingly on his son-in-law, Frank Mears. Meanwhile, ever restless and eager for new challenges, Geddes moved on to numerous other projects in Palestine, India and elsewhere. Nevertheless, until the end of his life, he retained a particularly strong emotional attachment to his university scheme.

For Geddes, the self-styled "critic of universities", it was a major opportunity to put his ideas for educational reform into practice, and he fell to the task with gusto. He was immediately inspired by the commanding site on Mount Scopus, which a Mr. I.J. Goldberg had acquired for the purpose in 1913, and wrote in a letter reported in "The Scotsman" that:

> "The crest of Mount Scopus, the site chosen for the new University, is one of the most magnificent in the world, on one side looking West over the most historic of cities, on the other, over than unique and tremendous cosmic spectacle - the perspective view of the desert hills, plunging down to the great rift of the Dead Sea and rising again into the Moab Mountains behind" (1).

The site comprised a house and grounds formerly owned by Sir John Gray Hill. By 7th November 1919, Dr. Weizmann was able to report to the Zionist Bureau in London on plans for the early utilization of Gray Hill House and its outbuildings:

> "... there is a possibility of establishing a small but very rational and practical science faculty, or better science research Institute, in Lady Gray Hill's house on the Scopus. We have been over this building with Prof. Geddes and some of our specialists in Palestine. There is ample room to establish at present on the Scopus: (1) a good physical Research Institute; (2) a modern Chemical Laboratory; (3) a fairly spaceous amphitheatre for lectures; (4) the beginnings of a library; (5) the necessary administrative offices. The plans are being prepared at present ...

Fig. 4.1. Composite photograph showing the view from the Old City eastwards to Mount Scopus and the Mount of Olives. Photograph courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Edinburgh.

> In the opinion of Prof. Geddes and the others, it should not require more than 6-8 months to carry out the necessary building ...
>
> Prof. Geddes will present you soon with his preliminary report. His scheme of the Jewish University is a magnificent one and the carrying out of such an undertaking would require many years and could only be done gradually. Nothing could further the great University scheme better than a sound practical beginning in the near future. We shall have the plans for this prepared very soon and we shall request you to sanction them so that we may begin this work soon" (2).

The basic elements of Geddes' "magnificent" scheme had been worked out and discussed with Mears and Eder before the Professor left Jerusalem for Bombay. He was critical of previous European architects whose designs for institutional buildings on the hills around Jerusalem had incorporated high towers which he accused of being out of scale and inappropriate, dwarfing the landscape and lacerating the skyline. For the University, he proposed a series of buildings of simple and economical construction which together would present a long and low architectural profile

on the summit of Mount Scopus. Nevertheless, Geddes regarded it as essential that there should be a strong central feature and he proposed that this should take the form of a hexagonal Great Hall, or "Aula Academica", surmounted by a large dome. This was not merely to provide a unifying element in the design but also to serve a higher symbolic purpose. The hexagonal ground plan Geddes derived from the six-pointed Star of David and, characteristically, he found additional biological justification for it in the hexagonal construction of a honey-comb! The "Dome of Synthesis" above was to symbolize:

> "... the great Unity which it is the glory of Israel to have first realised and taught, and which Christian and Moslem alike, despite all their hostility, have the candour to confess they have thus inherited" (3).

On either side of the Great Hall were to be ranged the various departments of the University, each carefully linked to its neighbours according to a Geddesian scheme for the organization of related fields of human knowledge (4). Round five sides of the central courtyard of the Great Hall would be a block of buildings housing the General Reading Room, Dining Hall and Departments of Philosophy, Mathematics and

Music which he accorded central positions in his scheme of academic organization. From this core were to radiate buildings housing related disciplines, Arts, Engineering and Forestry to the North and Sciences to the South. The sixth side of the central court was to be left open to provide a commanding view westwards over the city (5). As the Professor later explained his conception to a "Scotsman" reporter:

> "Around the Central Hall there will run the main buildings of the University, first of all in a hexagon, or rather pentagon block, since one side of the dome must be left open towards Jerusalem, centering on the old temple site. The great library and reading room will occupy one side, the great dining hall the other. For studies three sides remain, and Music, Mathematics and Philosophy will fill these places of honour. From these again the buildings radiate in three main ranges for the great studies and professions and "faculties" over the ridges of the hilltop and so far down them, with minor domes and masses, while linking ranges of minor buildings and institutes run between, at two or three different levels, on successive descending contours" (6).

When fully realized, the University was to become a

THE UNIVERSITY
OF
JERUSALEM
GENERAL PLAN SHOWING
MAIN DEPARTMENTS

Fig. 4.2. The University of Jerusalem. General Plan showing Main Departments, Patrick Geddes and Frank C. Mears, 1919. Photograph courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Edinburgh.

great new "City of Learning ... upon its noble hill", eventually accommodating some 3,000 students (7, 8). However, Geddes always envisaged that it would develop gradually, as funds permitted, from modest beginnings in the laboratories of Gray Hill House. In addition, he was adamant that his scheme should not be seen as static or inflexible. It was a characteristic of universities that their needs were always changing and there must therefore be ample scope for modification and expansion. To this end he proposed that the departmental buildings should be constructed according to principles more usually applied to industrial premises.

> "Shocking though may be this proposal at first sight, let the method of modern Factory planning, with its provision for alteration and extension be here considered. For while the first main building of assured use, may be erected with finished frontage, say of two storeys, space is reserved behind, for gradual and progressive extension as required by means of one-storey buildings of similar character" (9).

## 4.2 Uncertainty and Delay

Geddes left for his winter term in India intending to

complete his university report in time for it to be presented to the International Congress of the Zionist Organization which was scheduled to take place in either London or Geneva early in the New Year. His son-in-law remained behind in Jerusalem in order to work on further plans and perspectives before returning to the United Kingdom along with Weizmann and Eder at Christmas. However, Mears was not directly involved with the coversion work at Gray Hill House which appears to have been jealously guarded by the Zionist Commission's own technical staff (10). Writing to Raymond Unwin from abroad the S.S. "Etna" in mid-November, Geddes reported that:

> "The Jerusalem adventure has turned out satisfactorily so far: both the plans for the government of Palestine and the Governor of Jerusalem, and for the Zionists' University ... And all alike are pleased.
>
> In this of course I'm greatly indebted to Frank Mears - who has eg. materialised my long-dreamed Dome of Synthesis (for Aula Academica) in a way which will I'm sure interest you, and whose convincingly pretty perspectives have delighted our clients, who don't make much of mere plans!

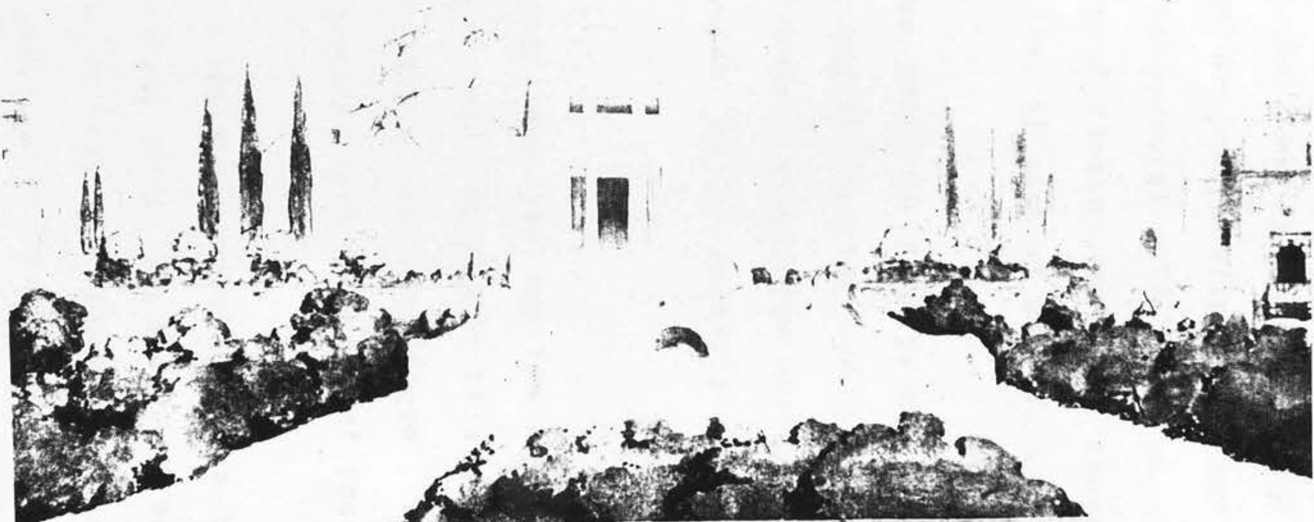

Fig. 4.3. The Great Hall - central feature of the proposed University, F.C. Mears, 1920. Source: The Architect, June 11th 1920.

> They have kept him to go on, both with such pictures and with the needful elaboration of plans in detail until Xmas, when he has to go with the leaders of this Commission (Drs. Weizmann, Eder etc.) to the general assembly of Zionists at London or Geneva after New Year - when they are hopeful approval will be given. They do not seem afraid of finding the funds thereafter. In that case they'll want us back in spring" (11).

Mears also seems to have gained the impression that ample financial backing would be forthcoming from wealthy Zionists around the world. Commenting to his father-in-law on a recently-completed drawing, he wrote:

> "I fancy when you see the big perspective you'll find it good enough for this stage. I just fear its a little too "magnifique", however, I suppose millionaires want a little of that" (12).

Weizmann certainly appears to have been confident of raising enough money at least to begin work on the conversion of Gray Hill House. In January 1920, the Zionist Leader wrote to a friend in Boston:

> "One word about the University. You remember my plan of founding research institutes. We have gone into it very carefully with Professor Geddes in Jerusalem and we came to the conclusion that this could be started at once. The building (Lady Gray Hill House) which is on the university site is eminently suitable to be adapted to the purpose we have in view. It would cost £50,000 to rearrange the house and to fit out Physics, Chemistry, Bacteriology institutes, to have the beginnings of a library and reading room, lecture theatres etc. I need not waste words on the importance of such a beginning which, when brought into being, would grow very rapidly. The A.C. has voted £15,000 for the purpose. I have promises from Egyptian Jews which may bring in something. Jimmy [de Rothschild] (with whom we are great friends now!) has contributed a little, and so I intend to start the rebuilding of the house at once" (13).

Geddes had hoped that his son-in-law could organize a display of the "Cities Exhibition" in Jerusalem during the final months of 1919, but Mears felt that the pressure of the University work left him insufficient time. The drawings were taking longer than expected owing to his lack of practice during the war years.

In making his excuses, he revealed something of the difficulty of collaborating with the Professor. He wrote to Geddes at the end of November:

> "One must simply live for these big drawings, they require a quiescent state of being, with as few interruptions as possible. Its just as well that you are away now for this is a stage when everything has to be static, and no questions as to whether something else will be better. Its very sad, but a necessary stage in such work. At earlier stages I usually realise fairly soon the value of your suggestions and criticisms, though when they come they are naturally disturbing ..." (14).

Mears had also started a Jewish sculptor called Menlikoff working on the construction of a scale model of the proposed University complex, and the supervision of this work took up a great deal of his time. It was being carved in white stone and, by late December, he was able to report that it was nearing completion and turning out most satisfactorily (15).

Towards the end of December, Mears was due to leave Palestine, travelling with Weizmann as far as Trieste,

Fig. 4.4. Menlikoff's model of the proposed Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1920. Photograph courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Edinburgh.

but their departure was delayed by flood damage to the railway line. Mears used the few extra days in Jerusalem to make finishing touches to the model. On 26th December, shortly before leaving Alexandria, he wrote to inform Geddes that, in view of diplomatic negotiations over the future of Palestine due to be held in January, the Zionist Congress had been postponed until February and would probably take place in London (16).

On his return to Edinburgh, Mears reported that Weizmann had been very friendly on the journey home and had said that he was anxious to have him back in Palestine. The Doctor hoped to arrange a conference on the University project early in February in order to make a start as soon as possible (17).

In the event, the San Remo Peace Conference did not formally entrust the Mandate for Palestine to Britain until 25th April 1920. For the time being, the Zionist Organization, absorbed with wider political developments, had little time for further consideration of the Hebrew University. Back in Edinburgh in early 1920, Mears fretted over postponed decisions and lack of information, uncertain whether to prepare for a return to Palestine or to concentrate on building up his architectural practice in Scotland (18, 19, 20).

There was also difficulty over Mears' remuneration. Weizmann had initially informed Geddes that the Zionist Organization could not afford to engage his son-in-law (21) and so Geddes had arranged to pay him £200 out of his own fees (22). The Professor seems to have been under the impression that Weizmann had subsequently agreed to relieve him of this responsibility and pay Mears out of Zionist funds. However, the Zionist Leader had a different recollection of the agreement when Mears discussed the matter with him during their journey from Palestine. On reaching Edinburgh, Mears wrote to his father-in-law:

> "His [Weizmann's] memory of verbal agreement with you about my pay was that the Zionists pay travelling expenses and you pay time, but he said he wanted to do what was right, so I'd like to have your view of that talk as soon as possible. Meantime I'm asking for a proportion leaving a sufficient balance for adjustment" (23).

At first, Mears found little work in Edinburgh. While waiting for news from the Zionist Organization, he busied himself with the preparation of more plans and perspective drawings of the University and corresponded with Geddes over adjustments to the

design. When the Professor's University Report finally arrived, Mears "made a number of corrections and one or two small additions" before it was formally submitted to the Zionist Organization (24). In early March, he received a letter from the Zionist Office in London, informing him that Dr. Weizmann was about to leave for Palestine and that he had cabled Geddes inviting him to return to the Holy Land for twelve months:

> "the terms being that the Zionist Organization pays Prof. Geddes expenses, and the question of fees is left over until it is known whether the scheme is found acceptable" (25).

Mears was asked whether he was prepared to return to Palestine on a similar basis. He replied that in fairness to his family he could not do so. By the end of the year, such terms would leave him out of pocket by about £800, which he estimated to be the annual cost of maintaining his household and office in Edinburgh, and, in addition, he would have had to sacrifice many business opportunities there. he reminded the Zionists that neither he nor Geddes had yet received any payment beyond travelling expenses for their work in the previous season. However, he stressed that he found the work in Palestine "most

fascinating" and felt that the University scheme offered "an experience unparalleled in modern times". He was therefore prepared to consult Geddes and Dr. Eder over the possibility of securing additional private work in Palestine in order to make his return economically viable (26).

Mears also wrote immediately to Geddes enclosing detailed accounts which indicated that he was still owed £474/3s./5d. in connection with work for the Zionists since 17th September 1919. He asked the Professor to settle with Weizmann the matter of responsibility for the £200 of this due as payment for his first two months in Jerusalem. In addition, he suggested that some private work might be found to enable him to return to Palestine or, alternatively, that the Zionists might be prepared to pay him for further development of planning schemes at Talpioth and elsewhere. In the meantime, he was going to concentrate on building up his practice in Edinburgh (27).

## 4.3 <u>The Work of Officialdom</u>

On 8th March, Mears had written to the Zionist Organization asking for permission to exhibit his

drawings for the Hebrew University at the Royal Academy in London. The reply he received from the Organization's Education Department was disturbing. The letter from Mr. Shlomo Ginsberg, Secretary to the Organization's Education Department, stated that while the Zionists had no objection to the drawings being exhibited:

> "The scheme of Prof. Geddes and the plans prepared by yourself must be considered as your proposals submitted to the Zionist Organisation: they cannot be considered or exhibited as the scheme adopted by the Organisation and having <u>any official character whatever</u> [my emphasis].
>
> ... in view of the above considerations, the name of the Organisation will not appear in connection with the exhibits" (28).

Ginsberg went on to say that the Zionists would not for some time contemplate practical steps towards the erection of such a "magnificent building" as that proposed by Geddes and Mears. Dr. Weizmann's University Conference had been indefinitely postponed and the Organization would, for the time being, concentrate on the "small scheme" for the development of Research Institutes at Gray Hill House. It was

not anticipated that Professor Geddes would have much work to do in connection with the University during the coming season; the bulk of his work would probably be on housing and town planning schemes (29). Throughout his career, Mears found communication with officials difficult and frustrating. Informing Geddes of Ginsberg's letter, he commented:

> "I think this longer letter is probably the work of officialdom, though it indicates a basis of possible opposition somewhere. It also suggests a lack of understanding of your Report, which suggests gradual growth, and not a complete "magnificent building"" (39).

On this occasion, Mears' suspicion of excessive bureaucratic caution may have been justified. In his record of the early years of the Hebrew University, Joseph Klausner has described Shlomo Ginsberg as "a man of clear mind, cautious and exact in his methods, who prevented the undertaking of premature ventures" (31).

Mears was unhappy about the proposed financial arrangements for Geddes' return to Palestine, arguing that:

"If they wanted you only for Town Planning etc. for immediate action, they should pay on a basis of ordinary fees, and you take your chance on the speculative element of the University, doing no doubt' a lot of work because it interests you.

I feel always that the Zionist Organisation is somewhat loosely organised. These departments go on on their own account or perhaps compete, but probably this may always, as in the past, be characteristic of Jewish Effort, and perhaps has many advantages. But it makes one see the need for care in business dealings. ... Altogether, I think things are just as might be expected - in view of the political delays and uncertainties. I assume that, as you made them an offer, and they have wired you to come, you will do so as soon as Colombo is finished" (32).

Geddes had not been able to accept Weizmann's invitation to go to Palestine for a full year because of his commitment, each winter, to spend four months in occupancy of his chair in India. However, he had promised to return in the summer, claiming expenses only. Originally he had intended to set off for Jerusalem on 13th March, after the end of term at Bombay. However, in view of the uncertain progress

of the Hebrew University scheme, he had decided first of all to take up an invitation to visit Ceylon in order to prepare a town planning report on Colombo.

In mid-March 1920, Mears at last received an interim payment of £200 from the Zionist Organization. By the 24th, he was able to pass on news which made him more optimistic about the eventual approval of the University scheme. His friend, the Theosophist, D. Graham Pole, who had now settled in London and was in contact with some of the Zionists there, had reported that the Geddes/Mears scheme had considerable support among "the people who really count". Encouraged by this, Mears took steps to inform himself of the latest ideas on laboratory design which might be applied in the science blocks at Jerusalem. He arranged for Professor Francis Baily, an associate of Geddes with Theosophist connections, to show him round new developments at the Department of Electrical Engineering of Heriot-Watt College in Edinburgh (33).

In early April, growing Arab unrest over the implications of the Peace Settlement for Palestine erupted in a series of anti-Jewish riots in Jerusalem in which six people were killed and over 200 were injured. The confidence of the Zionists was severely undermined by these events and many of their new

projects were temporarily suspended. Some activists, led by Zeev Jabotinsky, took matters into their own hands and organized a Jewish self-defence force. Menlikoff, the sculptor who had worked on the model of the University, was suspected of being involved in this underground movement. The British Authorities raided his studio and some of his work was destroyed in a search for concealed arms (34). Luckily the model of the Hebrew University was left unscathed. Subsequently it was shipped to London where it was later damaged as a result of a fire at the Zionist Offices in Great Russell Street (35).

Meanwhile, the University scheme was receiving publicity in the United Kingdom. Mears' perspective drawings were exhibited in the Royal Scottish Academy in Edinburgh and the Royal Academy in London, and reproduced in "The Architect" and "Building News".

## 4.4 The Zionist International Congress

The Zionist Organization arranged to hold its International Congress in London in July to discuss its plans in the light of the San Remo Peace Settlement and the transition to civil government under the new British High Commissioner, Sir Herbert

Samuel. Mears and Eder urged Geddes to attend in order to present his proposals for the University. His influential friend, Mrs. Joseph Fels, was to be there along with other sympathetic American Zionists, and it was hoped that their support could be enlisted to ensure that the full scheme was approved and work commenced. Other councils were advising that the Organization should, for the moment, confine itself to the development of Research Institutes at Gray Hill House (36, 37). Geddes, however, had meanwhile arrived in Palestine and, on hearing that the University project might not even be discussed at the Congress, he decided not to travel on to London. In a long letter to Mrs. Fels, in which he described in detail his hopes for the University, he wrote:

> "I am sorry not to get home as my first instructions promised, as Eder wished me to be at the Congress to explain the plans of the University. But they cabled that they are not likely to be discussed at all (I presume because all time is required for the urgent matters of adjusting relations with new (Samuel's) regime and the immediate colonization expected). Per contra, I am also glad to be staying, as I am getting on with the planning of the city, and also with Haifa (whence I am actually writing in these

days) and likewise with Tiberias, etc., and soon I hope with Jaffa too, and probably various colonies" (38).

Not having received an invitation, Mears was unsure whether he himself should attend the Congress. In the end he decided against it, after being advised by Graham Pole that the Zionists would be too preoccupied with political matters to give much consideration to the University scheme (39, 40). In August, he discovered that a report on the Hebrew University had in fact been presented to the Congress. Its wording caused him some concern. There was no mention of the Geddes/Mears scheme, beyond a footnote which suggested that it was quite unofficial, and a clear indication in the text that further plans were to be sought by open competition. In addition, the Secretary of the Zionist Organization's Education Department, Mr. Shlomo Ginsberg, had written to say that plans for the "building of a University Palace" had been held over and there was now no prospect of Mears being invited to return to Palestine in the current year (41). Mears wrote to Geddes that:

"It seems quite clear from the Report to the Congress that the University question _has_ been discussed in considerable detail both in February

and July, or that other meetings have been held and decisions taken and reported to the Congress. There is clearly a sharp division made between the preliminary scheme and ours. They are supposed to have no connection. It is of course possible that this view is being held mainly by the officials concerned, and does not represent the idea of the leaders, but you will need to reckon with it. I have heard indirectly that you have strong backing, which is no doubt true.

> I think you should devote some time to making it clear, in an appendix report, that your scheme was not limited by stone and lime, that the latter is the shell for a system of studies, and that both are thought of, from the beginning, as growing from small beginnings in the most elastic way" (42).

Mears was distressed that the Zionists had not appreciated the value of his perspective drawings. He wrote:

> "... In any case they are missing a great opportunity of general propoganda by turning down, even temporarily, the only thing they have which can appeal to the imagination through the eye" (43).

He resolved to get in touch with the Edinburgh Rabbi, Rev. Dr. Salis Daiches, in order to enlist his support.

## 4.5 Continuous and Economical Growth

By the end of August, Mears had received an encouraging letter from Mrs. Fels informing him that a meeting to discuss the Hebrew University was to be held in the near future at which she would press for the adoption of the Geddes/Mears scheme. Eder was also expected shortly to return to London from Palestine and would be able to put his weight behind the proposal (44). In his reply to Mrs. Fels, Mears outlined some of the thinking behind his work with Geddes:

> "In working out the report and drawings we were confronted with the difficulty that if we concentrated on small practical beginnings the great scheme into which these must grow would be lost in petty details. We therefore planned in the first instance for the future, but underlying the naturally imposing final scheme was the strong idea that the whole must be arranged to grow in a consistent way from the present Gray Hill House

and outbuildings. If a wrong start were made, there would always be incoherence in the plan, and loss of the real dignity of surroundings which I feel has a very great part in fostering the real spirit of University life.

Our plan, therefore, though to some it may appear too great in these first days of struggle, is definitely thought of as admitting of continuous and economical growth. With the exception of the Great Memorial Hall, and perhaps of the building on the extreme left, devoted to Hebrew studies, the structure is intended to be of the very simplest character. The design avoids regular and symmetrical masses of buildings so that room is left for modification in detail as the experience gained in each stage of development shows the way to improvement.

I think that some misconception as to what was proposed may have arisen because of the small scale of detail adopted for the frontage towards Jerusalem. Had we adopted the larger Western scale in architecture as seen in the great French and German buildings in Jerusalem, the University as a subject for drawing would have looked much more modest in size, but if executed in this way

would completely dwarf the mount and destroy the scale of the Ancient City" (45).

In spite of the efforts of Mrs. Fels and her friends, however, no firm offer of employment was forthcoming from the Zionists. Mears became resigned to the lack of progress and, towards the end of 1920, increasingly distracted by pressure of work on housing projects in Ireland. He was aware that there were difficulties in raising money for the Hebrew University, but on one occasion suggested delicately to Geddes that part of the problem might be his failure to communicate his ideas clearly enough to the Zionists:

> "It seems to me sometimes that the lesson of much of your complaint re. non-visual Jews is that you need to put in writing the principle of the scheme more dramatically than in your Report. The pictures need to be interpreted to them" (46).

There is no doubt that Mears had a point. At times Geddes' inpenetrable prose style could be a real barrier to the understanding of his work and his Hebrew University Report was, perhaps, particularly tortuous and badly presented.

Much of Geddes' effort during the summer and autumn

of 1920 went into the preparation of town planning schemes in various parts of Palestine. However, he also found time, on his own initiative and on an entirely voluntary basis, to work out further proposals for the University. He identified sites for the establishment of Institutes of Geography and Astronomy away from the main University buildings. He suggested locations for a garden village for staff, student halls of residence and a workshop village with a pharmacy and facilities for printing and scientific instrument making (47). For, as he later informed "The Scotsman":

> "... just as the growth of Edinburgh's great printing industry is intimately connected with the presence of its university, and the discovery of chloroform and its scientific industries with its medical schools, the planning of the University of Jerusalem has been carried out on principles likely to encourage the commercial ancillaries of education and science" (48).

A University Park and Botanic Gardens were proposed for reclaimed land to the North of the University site. Some considerable time later, in October 1923, the Professor outlined these additional plans at a meeting chaired by Dr. Eder at Palestine House in London (49).

## 4.6 The University Committee

The Hebrew University project made little progress for four years after Geddes left Palestine in November 1920. In the summer of 1921, Mears was still owed £200 for his work in Jerusalem nearly two years before. Substantial sums were also outstanding for his work in Ireland and, concerned that he was "sailing near the wind" financially, he wrote repeatedly to Geddes asking him to settle the matter of his remuneration with Dr. Weizmann (50, 51, 52). It is not clear whether this was ever sorted out satisfactorily, but in a letter in November 1922, the Professor asked Mears whether he had done any more work on the University scheme. He wrote jocularly:

> "I admit the matter is not urgent: but it is needful to keep our finger in the pie, else our foot in the door may be pushed out!"

But he went on more seriously:

> "I take Eder to be our most understanding friend. Weizmann etc. have no vision of University as a whole, that I could discover at least" (53).

Geddes' assessment was probably correct. Joseph Klausner records that amongst those Zionists most closely associated with the University project there were two points of view:

"One held that the Hebrew University should be like all universities, engaging in both teaching and research in a wide range of subjects. The second point of view was represented by Ahad Ha'am and Dr. Weizmann. In the opinion of Ahad Ha'am, the establishment of a university on the model of other universities would not enhance the prestige of the Jewish people. We were not, he argued, then in a position to acquire for the Hebrew University men of great enough calibre in the sciences and general humanities to make their mark in the world of scholarship and so shed lustre on the Jewish people as a whole. As a result, we would have a small and poor university, and this would not be worth while. He therefore urged that a beginning be made with Jewish Studies and with subjects in the general humanities that had some relation to Jewish Studies, since it was only in the field of Jewish learning that there was hope of the University's scholars doing work of sufficiently great importance to reflect credit on an ancient and highly cultured nation. Only

after some years, when the time was ripe for it, would a proper university be developed. Dr. Weizmann, too, opposed the idea of a university on the usual pattern, which would produce an "intellectual proletariat". He therefore advocated the establishment of research institutes rather than of faculties devoted mainly to teaching. And since he was a chemist himself, he was particularly interested in an Institute of Chemistry" (54).

The Hebrew University project began to get underway again in 1924. The Zionist Organization had set up a University Committee in Jerusalem which, early in the year, requested the Jerusalem Town Planning Commission not to issue any permits for buildings on lands adjacent to the University site, pending negotiations for their purchase, as it was possible that such buildings would be erected by unscrupulous owners in order to increase the purchase price. Not unreasonably, the Commission took the view that, unless a proper scheme for the development of the site was prepared and approved by both the Jerusalem and Central Town Planning Commissions, no guarantee could be given that unsuitable buildings would not be erected in the vicinity (55). Some of the Zionists responded by producing a new University scheme which

fully justified Geddes' earlier forebodings. When Mears received details of this, he wrote a detailed criticism in a memorandum:

"The plan signed by Mr. Romberg, which represents the latest views of some of the University promoters, shows that the University site is becoming unduly specialised. For there are here provided too few departments:- Medical, taking most of the space, and a group of smaller buildings for the Mathematical, Chemical and Biological studies.

In effect the Scopus site is here mainly devoted to Hospital uses, with attached Research Institutes; the remaining space is allotted to small departments, agricultural and veterinary.

In summary, this whole is too exclusively a development of the Public Health Department; and as its departments expand, they will keep out, or crowd, all weaker neighbours. This is a very serious condition, since the scheme of a great centre of humanistic studies and outlooks, which are surely of the very essence of the University, as originally conceived, has here been lost sight of.

Moreover, these hospitals and associated buildings are placed at the top of a very steep hill, remote from the city. Hospital and Dispensary work and ordinary medical practice, must still be centred below; and thus the Scopus buildings would become more and more specialised and isolated.

It must also be noted that this plan is made on the assumption that the road to the Mount of Olives is to be kept on its existing line, thus bisecting the University, and bringing the dust and noise of motors etc, right into the heart of the institution, to the inexpressible disturbance and damage of its peaceful and dust-free working. Again the need of relating the general aspect of the University to be viewed from the city, has been worse than forgotten. For these buildings now too much turn their backs on the city - and the only formal court-yard is that looking East towards the desert! The effect from Jerusalem will therefore be no more than that of a hill-top village straggling along the skyline. The clinics in particular are unsatisfactory. They blind each other's windows like a range of military huts; and might just as well be placed on a level plain for all the advantage they take of this marvellous site.

> Most serious of all however is the loss of the conception of the 'University! - as a hilltop meeting-place where Sciences, Arts and Humanities may increasingly work together in mutual respect and stimulus, towards a unity of Culture in its fullest sense; and with this monumentally expressed, in the comprehensiveness and harmony of architectural design" (56).

However, Mr. Romberg's proposals were a short-lived threat. Eder reported later that they had only briefly been considered by the Zionist leaders.

## 4.7 The David Wolffson Library

A more substantial problem arose over proposals for a University Library. In September 1924, Mears and Geddes received news that a David Wolffson Memorial Trust had been set up, with funds for the building of a Library for the Hebrew University. The Trustees proposed to hold a competition for the design of the Library building. Mears was concerned by this approach. He believed that if development was allowed to proceed piece-meal, by means of competitions for individual elements organized by different sponsors, the unified conception of the

University would be lost. He wrote in a memorandum to Geddes:

> "... if control of planning be not exercised on behalf of the University as such, the site will show a jumble of partly completed (and in a <u>permanent</u> sense competitive) schemes, as successive groups of donors raise their respective monuments...
>
> Hence the guiding principle (whether in our planning or that of others) needs to be that of erecting adaptable buildings, on a considered, orderly and harmonious scheme. This does not prevent association with individual donors, or groups of initiators; yet all need to recognise that as departments arise and grow, and new needs arise, there be at once a general scheme and a spirit of "give and take" in the interests of the greater unity" (57).

In his Report to the Zionists in 1919, Geddes had advocated a decentralized system of library organization for the University, with each department served by its own moderately-sized library, the Central Reading Room housing mainly works of general reference, current periodicals and a comprehensive

catalogue (58). The conditions proposed for the Library competition made it clear that the Wolffson Trustees envisaged a single centralized institution located on a plot which they had acquired on the extreme southern edge of the university site. Mears argued that this would lead to the erection of a highly specialized and expensive building, remote from the departments which it was supposed to serve. On the other hand, the scheme which he had worked out with Geddes was based on cheap and adaptable building units; each block being conceived as a shell, with partitions and fittings designed to be removable, in order to meet the growing needs of departments and the university as a whole.

Mears suggested that, if the University Committee was not satisfied with their draft plan of 1919 as a basis for progress, it should either invite them to adjust and develop it, or promote a new competition for the University as a whole. Any other course of action would amount to an abdication of the Committee's responsibility for the overall planning of the scheme (59).

Geddes took the matter up in a letter to Eder who was by this time in London. The Professor endorsed Mears' criticisms of the Wolffson Library scheme and

warned that its weaknesses were symptomatic of a piece-meal approach to land acquisition. If portions of the site were to be acquired gradually by individual benefactors, there was a danger that these would tend to be appropriated for specific purposes, irrespective of any general plan. Modern planning required all the necessary land to be pooled towards a unified scheme.

> "It of course still remains as open as ever to those desiring (say) a Library, or a given laboratory, or a whole department, to apply their funds to its construction; but not necessarily upon the particular portion of site, which they are contributing, unless, by happy circumstance, it turns out to be the best one, for the scheme as a whole" (60).

He suggested that the use in Palestine of powers of compulsory purchase, which were being introduced in modern town planning legislation elsewhere, might facilitate the rapid acquisition of the entire University site.

Another criticism which Geddes and Mears had of the scheme outlined by the Wolffson Trustees was its retention of the existing alignment of the road

running along the ridge of Mount Scopus, through the middle of the University site. The 1919 Report, as well as proposing new, more direct routes from the city to the University, had advocated the diversion of this road to the East in order to eliminate the noise and dust of through traffic from the University precinct (61). In 1920, this had been approved by the Director of the Palestine Public Works Department, Colonel Gray Donald. However, it appears that Eder was unhappy about Geddes' proposals for land acquisition and road realignment and the Professor put this down to his lack of familiarity with modern town planning methods. He suggested that Eder should get Mears to explain what was involved, at the same time reminding him of his son-in-law's taciturn nature. He wrote:

> "It would be well also if you had a talk with Mears. Get him to come to London, to have things out with Dr. Weizmann and yourself clearly (He is apt to speak, as you may remember, with some difficulty, even to provoking brevity, and slowness: but to the point, and with clear understanding - though he would rather draw than talk!)" (62).

Geddes himself offered to return to Palestine for two months, for travelling expenses only, in order to help get the University project underway on the right lines. He was convinced that the sum of £25,000 allocated by the Wolffson Trustees woul not adequately meet the large requirements set out in their competition scheme. He suggested that the money instead be employed either to make a "good start" on his proposed General Library and Reading Room, or to provide a series of departmental libraries. He asked Mears to prepare plans for library accommodation, in conformity with the requirements laid down by the Wolffson Trustees, in the buildings on the South West of their general plan, previously allocated to the Dining Hall and Chemistry Department. The Dining Hall was to be relocated on the other side of the central courtyard, on the site originally proposed for the Reading Room (63).

## 4.8 Formal Inauguration

In late March 1925, Geddes finally returned to Jerusalem in order to attend the formal inauguration ceremony of the Hebrew University on 1st April. He found Departments of Chemistry, Microbiology and Jewish Studies already established in Gray Hill House

and its outbuildings (64) but was distressed to discover that these developments bore little relation to his original conception. Two days after the inauguration he wrote to his friend Victor Branford of his grievous disappointment:

> "to find £40,000 had been spent in extending small laboratories I planned (for a fraction of this) in 1920, and in spoiling Gray Hill House ..., so it seemed all up with our designs, and for which all the needed land was not yet purchased, despite 5 years of our advice!" (65).

However, the Professor was able to rescue the situation. He pointed out that the Zionist Organization had been using his plans for world-wide advertisement of the University project. Indeed, in reporting the inauguration ceremony, a correspondent for "Nature" had written:

> "The plans for the complete University proposed by Prof. Patrick Geddes, give promise of magnificent structures in harmonious keeping with the natural contours of the landscape and with the historical contours associated with Jerusalem" (66).

Dr. Weizmann, whom Geddes had not met since 1919, was himself horrified by the nature of the developments at Gray Hill House. He told the Professor that he shortly hoped to announce the definite expansion of the University according to Geddes and Mears' plans, and to send the new Principal, Dr. Judah L. Magnes, to the U.S.A. to raise funds (67).

On 2nd April 1925, a foundation stone was laid on the University site for a building to house the proposed Einstein Institute of Physics and Balfour Institute of Mathematics. By mid-April, Mears had received a telegram from Geddes saying that they had been "appointed consulting superintendent architects for the Balfour-Einstein and Library Buildings" (68). Mears wrote to Eder:

> "... I feel very pleased at this outcome after such long delay, both because of the work in itself and because I think Jerusalem the most beautiful of cities and want to get back to it" (69).

He immediately prepared a revised layout for the southern portion of the University site, showing Gray Hill House and the proposed new buildings grouped around a courtyard with a gateway facing Geddes' new

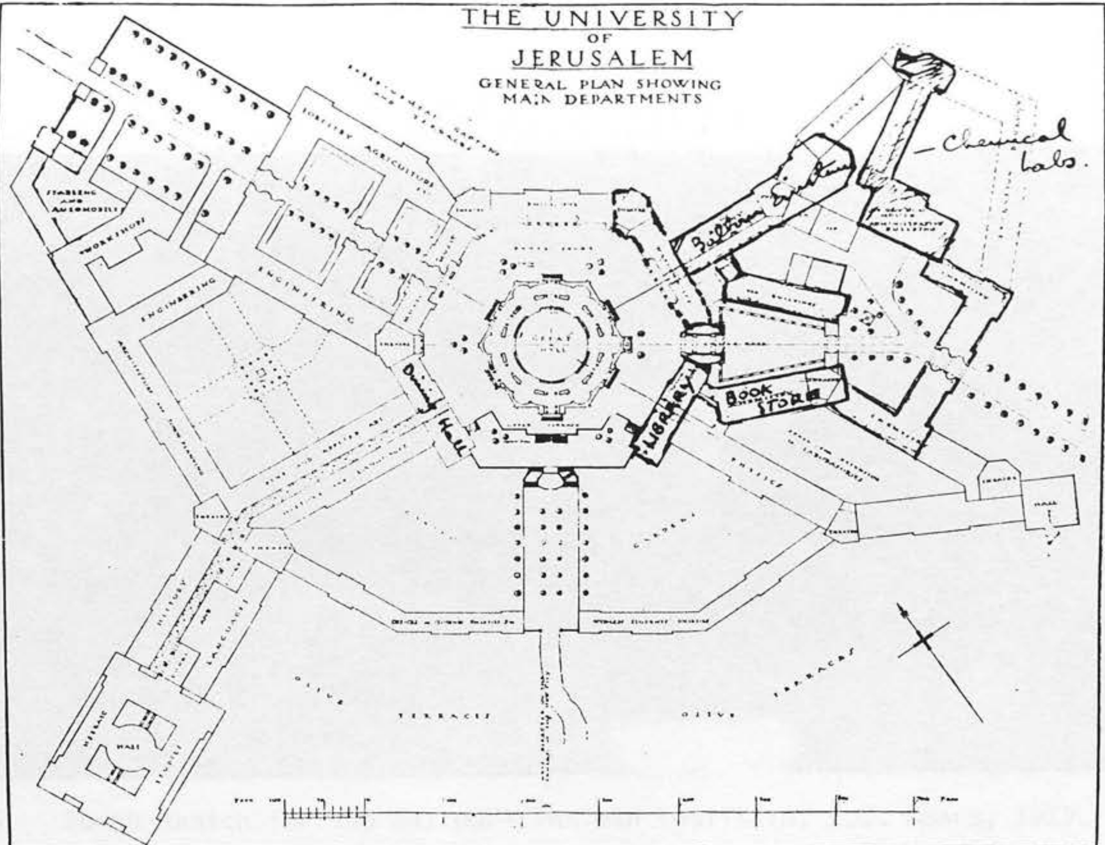


Fig. 4.5. Mears' modifications to the original design to accommodate the Balfour-Einstein Institute and Library. Courtesy of the Zionist Archive, Jerusalem.

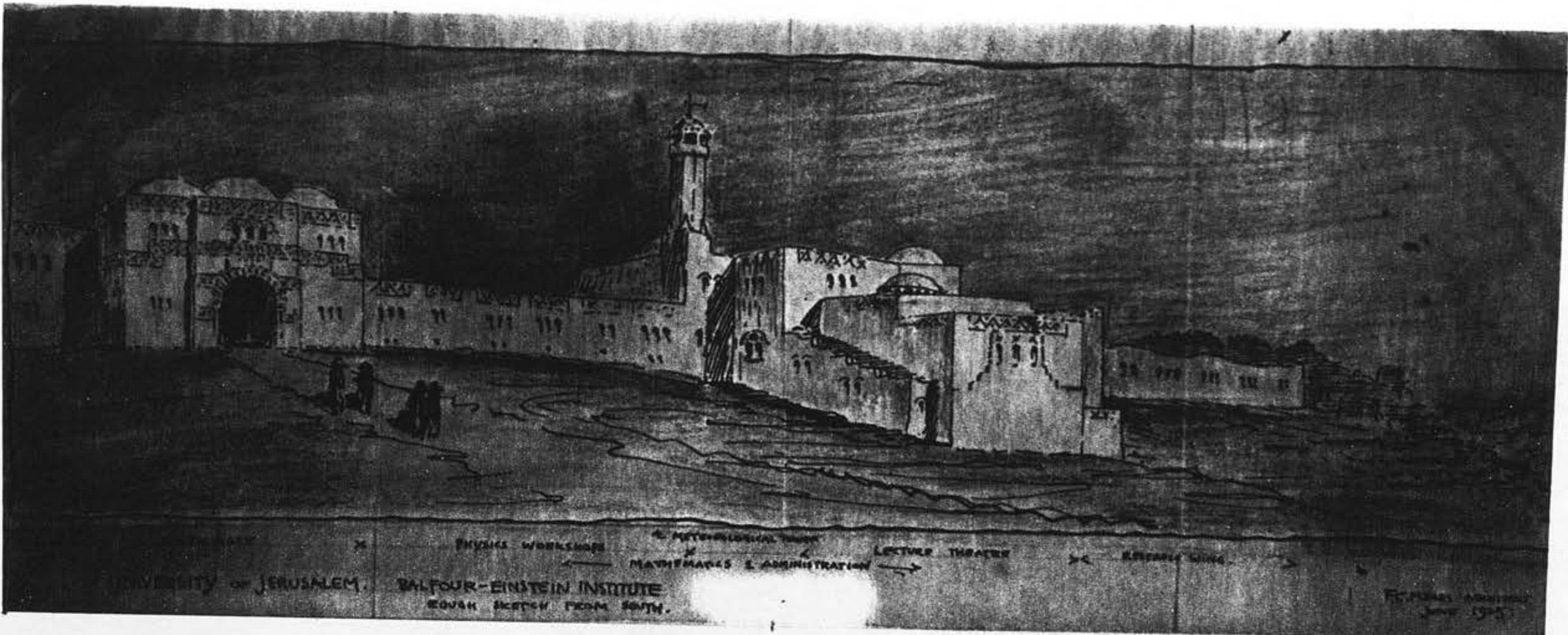


Fig. 4.6. Rough Sketch for the Balfour-Einstein Institute, F.C. Mears, 1925.

road to Jerusalem. The principle of grouping departments around enclosed courtyards had been adopted in order to provide sheltered open spaces on the exposed hill-top site. Another, less publicised reason was the need to provide security, in times of disturbance, on a site remote from established Jewish settlements (70).

Mears had also heard that it was Weizmann's intention soon to make a start on the Great Hall. He informed Eder that he and Geddes were working on a revised scheme for this which would provide a simpler, stronger construction, more accommodation, better acoustics and more economical use of materials. His new design, which would retain the floating dome characteristics of the original, involved "a new application of an old principle which had been forgotten since the Renaissance Dome ensnared western architects" (71). In addition, it would reduce the external dome to the same diameter as those of the Dome of the Rock and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the Old City. As he explained:

> "I was a little anxious all along lest we should be accused of megalomania in this connection and I think the new scheme of construction, while sacrificing nothing, guards fully against this" (72).

## 4.9 School of Palestinian Architecture

In the meantime, however, elements in the Zionist Organization had become concerned about the lack of involvement of Jewish architects in the University project. Mears had raised this matter as long ago as 1919 when Weizmann had contemplated inviting his friend, the Glaswegian architect, W.E. Dickie, to join the project. Mears wrote afterwards:

> "I pointed out that our idea had been that all assistance should be Jewish but he [Weizmann] said his view was that there should be a nucleus of English [sic]" (73).

In the Report to the Zionists in 1919, Geddes had advocated that the detailed planning of the University should be undertaken by the staff and senior students of its own Department of Town Planning and Architecture (74). The point was made again in a memorandum by Mears in 1924 where he stated that "the architectural continuance and execution of the whole scheme, with modification and development as necessary, should be as far as possible associated with the University's Departments of Architecture and City Design, as these arise; so that the buildings

would largely furnish their training ground" (75). Geddes and Mears proposed that work on the University and other major projects throughout the territory should provide the foundation for a "School of Palestinian Architecture" (76). It is not surprising, therefore, that Mears responded positively when, in the summer of 1925, the Zionists suggested that he should collaborate with local Jewish architects. He wrote to Geddes that:

> "... by full co-operative effort, including consultation with specialists, we get all that competition can give with addition of the effect of cumulative experience in solving problems on this difficult site and under the special Palestinian conditions. I should aim in the end at building up a local school who would be able to carry on automatically in all matters of hostels, workshops and general building, the builders too would do the proper thing and decorators would experiment freely and naturally along the lines of their respective crafts.
>
> Under the co-operative system, design becomes much more individual and personal; designs suitable for winning a competition tend to be over-accented in order to catch the assessors eye, whereas the

ideal is to subdue all the surrounding buildings in order to emphasise the Great Hall" (77).

After an exchange of correspondence, Geddes and Mears agreed to collaborate with Mr. Benjamin Chaikin, a Jerusalem architect who seemed both friendly and sympathetic to their scheme. However, approaches to a German Jewish architect, Mr. Baerwald, met with a less congenial response. He replied that experience in designing a Library in Berlin had convinced him that the sort of co-operation proposed by the two Scotsmen was impracticable and would involve an unacceptable compromise of his artistic integrity. Instead, he proposed that he should be free to prepare his own design for the Hebrew University Library, leaving detailed work to be adjusted by Chaikin in Jerusalem. Mears was angered by Baerwald's attitude and wrote a strongly-worded letter to his father-in-law, saying:

> "He [Baerwald] has the daring to reply to an invitation to co-operation with an attempt to scoop the job without the risks of competition. It is a priceless effort and I fear for any dealing with him. One feels the Prussian as well as the Jew.

... he is really looking for trouble, it oozes out all through his letter and his weakness is that its not on behalf of his brother Jewish architects but for himself alone" (78).

Mears argued that a design for the Library could not be prepared in isolation. If, as Baerwald proposed, individual buildings around the central courtyard were to be designed independently by different architects, again the overall unity of the scheme would be lost. He believed that he was as much a practical and artistic entity as the German, but recognized the greater possibilities which were opened up by co-operation. Such a great project could only succeed if those concerned were willing to subdue their personal ambitions to the common good to some extent. He maintained that he and Geddes, as superintendent architects, must be responsible for co-ordinating development in the interests of the university as a whole. Mears suggested that he should go out to Jerusalem and hold discussions with everyone involved. On the basis of these he would prepare rough sketches showing the overall accommodation so arranged as to maintain architectural harmony. Within this general plan, there would still be scope for a considerable variety of treatment of the various departmental buildings by local architects. He wrote that:

"... control should be identified with an atelier building up and carrying forward a tradition of Palestinian architecture and craftsmanship as free as possible from the rivalries of private practice yet safeguarding individual expression.

... Our idea is that those responsible for design and supervision should have their Jerusalem offices in one building, collaborating freely in all matters where constructional economy may arise.

Here would be a bureau where information and samples of material would be classified, tests carried out etc.

This office or group of offices would give great opportunity for experience to the junior architectural staff and it would not be difficult to devise lines of research for particular students. Out of some such system of co-operation arose the great system of building of the Middle Ages in Western Europe and to the lack of it today is due in no small degree to confusion and waste of our modern cities".

Returning to a theme which Geddes and Mears repeatedly emphasized in their advocacy of planning, he pointed out that there were also economic advantages to be gained from the system of working he proposed.

> "If departmental buildings of the University are carried out as separate commissions by architects working and arranging contracts independently, there will be inevitable waste as well as competition for materials and labour.
>
> Our suggestion that the work be carried out as from the Department of Architecture of the University was put forward not only on Educational grounds but also in order to unify control in this respect. Much may be done in the direction of economy if designs are so worked out that floors, roofs, and fittings of many kinds are standardised, and this will apply especially to imported materials. In this connection alone we submit that the expense of our visits will be amply repaid" (80).

Mears and Geddes were, of course, united in their desire to see the development in the Holy Land of a contemporary architectural style suited to Mediterranean and Middle Eastern conditions and

drawing on local traditions. However, perhaps for pragmatic political reasons, the Professor was to go further than his son-in-law in stressing its "Jewish" rather than "Palestinian" character. Geddes' town planning report on Jaffa and the entirely Jewish new settlement of Tel Aviv, prepared in the summer of 1925, was accompanied by perspective sketches for public buildings prepared by a Western-trained Jewish architect, Mr. Moed, who had also acquainted himself with Eastern architectural traditions. Geddes claimed that Moed's work showed:

> "... the possibility of a distinctly Oriental treatment, without any more copying from Arabian or other sources. I venture indeed to submit that such drawings, along with those of my colleague, Mr. F.C. Mears, for Jerusalem University, express beginnings towards the formation of a distinctly Jewish style. So too does Mr. Baerwald's design for the Town hall and also his private houses, as also do those of Mr. Chaikin, Mr. Minor and others. The development towards Oriental feeling, and with its appropriate Hebrew expression, is thus in progress" (81).

Although Geddes was diplomatic enough to include Baerwald amongst the new generation of Palestinian

Jewish architects, he could not resist criticism of his design for the Tel Aviv Town Hall. The Professor suggested that the scheme made insufficient provision for the future expansion of municipal offices. He was to be proved quite correct, though not even he could have predicted the scale on which Tel Aviv was to expand in the coming decades. The city authorities have long since departed for much larger modern office accommodation, leaving Baerwald's Town Hall building to house the Tel Aviv History Museum, where the records of Geddes' town planning proposals are now held.

## 4.10 Return to Jerusalem

During the summer of 1925, Mears prepared sketch plans for the Balfour-Einstein Institute based on accommodation requirements drawn up by Professor Omstein of the University's Department of Physics (82). In October, he and Geddes received instructions from the Wolffson Trustees to proceed with plans for the Library Building in association with Benjamin Chaikin. The work was to be carried out so as to promote the development of their desired School of Palestinian Architecture. Well pleased with this outcome, Mears wrote to Eder that:

"Geddes likes Mr. Chaikin, who, on the other hand, has written to him expressing himself in full concord with our ideas both of style of architecture and principles of development.

I feel this work gives a wonderful opportunity - but the sense of responsibility rather outweighs everything else at present. I shall probably be arranging for a visit at an early date" (83).

By late December, Mears was back in Jerusalem after an absence of six years. Right away he began to work on a modified general plan which he hoped would satisfy the more critical Zionists. There had been calls to have the Great Hall omitted altogether, and the central position taken by the University Library. Mears accepted that the initial scheme had to be modified to meet practical needs, but insisted that unity must be symbolized by some dominant central building (84).

In March 1926, he prepared a series of drawings from which a large new model of the proposed University was constructed for the Jewish Pavilion of the International Hygiene Exhibition in Dusseldorf. In appreciation of Mears' work, the Council of the Jewish Pavilion subsequently put his name forward for the award of an Exhibition Diploma (85, 86).

Mears enjoyed his second term in Jerusalem and stayed on longer than he had intended, finally setting off for Edinburgh on 6th May. He had got on well with his new partner, Chaikin, and felt that they had made useful progress. The threat that the Great Hall would be displaced from its central location by the Wolffson Library had been averted. Plans were well advanced for the Library on a site which would allow its eventual incorporation in the group of buildings proposed to surround the hexagonal central court (87).

The Scottish architect had returned home believing that agreement had almost been reached on the planning of the Physics and Mathematics building. However, by mid-summer, financial difficulties had arisen. Chaikin wrote to inform him that the Einstein Institute was likely to exceed its £15,500 budget unless the scale of accommodation was reduced. Mears wrote wearily to Eder that:

> "I have been very severe with myself on the side of architectural treatment and decoration, to the extent of arousing Prof. Omstein's protests at one stage.

Fig. 4.7. The Library Building - the only part of the University scheme which was completed according to Mears' designs.

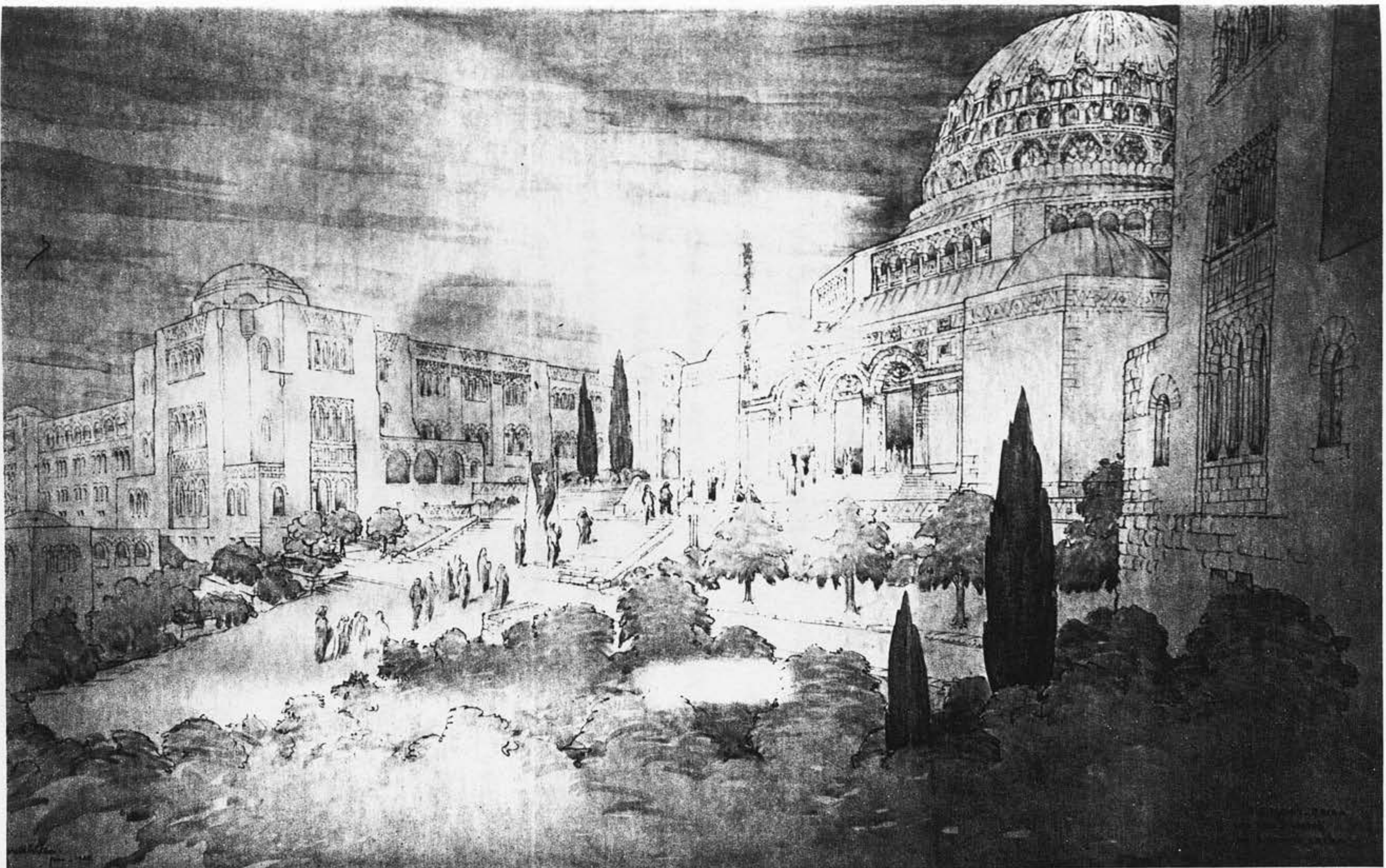

Fig. 4.8. The Great Hall and Central Buildings. F.C. Mears and B. Chaikin, 1926. Courtesy of Sir Frank Mears & Partners, Edinburgh.

It is very difficult for us when each Department calls for the best and largest. On both the Library and Physics buildings we worked out plan after plan in an effort to cut out inessentials. Both are larger than we bargained for, but both are very cheap for the scale of accommodation given" (88).

## 4.11 Relations Deteriorate

From the middle of 1926 onwards, relations with the University's promoters became progressively more difficult. Responsibility for various aspects of the scheme was divided amongst a number of committees and boards of trustees and there were strong disagreements over policy between different factions in the Zionist Organization. In October, Chaikin reported to Mears that the local Architectural Society, of which Baerwald was a leading member, had issued a statement to the Jewish press opposing the appointment of a non-Jew to design the Hebrew University. He commented that:

"From what I know of this Society this may be a movement by individuals for personal advantage" (89).

The letter was pursued in a letter critical of Geddes and Mears' appointment which appeared over the name of "Mr. Berliner" in the German Jewish periodical, "Juedische Rundschau", on 7th January 1927. In support of his friends, Eder wrote two private letters to the Editor, Dr. Robert Weltsch, in which he summarized their long involvement with the University scheme and justified their engagement as superintendent architects:

> "In 1919 we invited Professor Geddes and Mr. Mears to go out to Palestine for the purpose of making plans for the University. Advantage was taken of Geddes' visit to Palestine to make use of his services for town planning purposes not only for Jerusalem, but for many of our other towns and settlements, and it was through his work and influence that much of the recent development in town planning in Jerusalem was carried out. His general plans for the University were accepted in England, were published practically all over the world and were received, I think, with universal favour by Jews and non-Jews alike, both in Europe and the United States. Anybody who has seen how Geddes gets to work on an idea of this kind would realise that we are dealing with an artist.

There are, of course, two possible ways of having your buildings planned. I quite agree there is one way, by which you can have a competition and a decision made by some committee. This is the general plan, and it has resulted in some of the ugliest buildings in the world. There is another way, by which you take an artist whose work you appreciate and ask him to carry out the work for you. That is the way in which both Geddes' and Mears' work was carried out, and that is the only way, I think, in which really fine work in architecture can be done today. It goes without saying that you must admire the work of your architect and have confidence in his artistic skill and judgement. This is the view that was taken in regard to Geddes' plan, and I do not mind saying that I probably am to a large measure responsible for influencing my colleagues towards this way of thinking.

When you are dealing with questions of art, I think you must withhold all considerations of whether your architect is a Jew or a non-Jew, whether you are building in Jerusalem, or Rome, or London, or Berlin. The Zionist Organisation accepted the plans of Geddes and Mears, and afterwards the Executive of the Hebrew University

did likewise. It was the only unity in existence, and until the last few months no public criticism had been made.

It is an overstatement to say that no Jewish architects are being employed. The Jewish architect in Jerusalem - Mr. Chaikin - is associated with Geddes and Mears in the plans, and Mr. Chaikin has working with him three or four Jewish juniors. As the work progresses, Geddes, Mears and Chaikin have also proposed to use the services of other Jewish architects. For your private information I may tell you that Geddes and Mears both asked Mr. Baerwald to join them. I saw his reply to the suggestion, and it was couched in very discourteous terms. All it amounted to was actually a proposal that he should make new plans and that Geddes and Mears might make suggestions after the plans were made" (90).

Eder assured Dr. Weltsch that he hoped that the future would see "Jewish architecture thriving in Palestine", but it would never do if "the petty considerations" advanced by opponents of Geddes and Mears were allowed to rule. His somewhat sarcastic conclusion is revealing of some of the tensions which existed within the Zionist movement:

"I notice that all the criticisms ignore the fact that in addition to Geddes and Mears, Mr. Chaikin is employed as an architect. I presume Chaikin's name is not regarded as that of a Jew, because he is an architect who has been trained in England, although he has been living in Palestine for five years. Apparently Jewish architects must either be Russian or German" (91).

The Wolffson Library and the Balfour Institute of Mathematics were eventually built according to Geddes and Mears' proposals, but not so the Einstein Institute of Physics, although Mears and Chaikin repeatedly redrew the plans to meet changing requirements and a reduced budget. In 1928, Mr. Grein, an engineer whom the Jerusalem University Committee had put in charge of building work, took matters into his own hands. He abandoned Professor Omstein's specifications and prepared a scheme for a much smaller building on a new site on the opposite side of Mount Scopus. Mears was not consulted over the replanning but merely asked to adjust the elevations of the new building. The foundation stone, which had been laid by Sir Arthur Schuster in 1925, was transferred to the new site and the building was erected in plain concrete, with Mears' decorative detail omitted, at a cost of £11,000 (92, 93, 94, 95, 96).

Geddes only heard of this development in the summer of 1929 and he afterwards reproached both Mears and Chaikin for failing to inform him at the time. He believed that his intervention could have prevented what he regarded as a calamitous separation of the Institutes of Mathematics and Physics. Horrified by this fundamental assault on his scheme of academic organization, he wrote passionately to Eder:

> "Beyond this altering of the architectural scheme - as we think not for the better - is it not far more serious thus to separate - and almost as remotely as the site allows - the two most obviously interrelated of all subjects of education and investigation alike - Mathematics and Physics! For does not their modern progress advance with the dance and embrace between the two? And this under the great name of Einstein - of all minds since Newton's the foremost unifier of them! What can even specialised mathematicians, physicists and chemists think of it - say Brodetsky and Schuster, for single instances?" (97).

## 4.12 **Dome of Synthesis: Temple of Unity**

While Mears was in Jerusalem in early 1926, he heard that a wealthy American Jewish widow, Mrs. Rosenbloom, had announced her intention to provide funds for the erection of buildings for the Hebrew University in memory of her late husband. In March, the Rosenbloom Trustees invited Geddes and Mears to prepare detailed plans for the Great Hall and an Institute of Hebrew Studies (98). Difficulties soon arose, however, over the design and location of the Great Hall. Many of the Zionists were unhappy with Geddes' proposed "Dome of Synthesis", taking the view that domes were a feature of Moslem rather than Jewish architecture. Mears was sympathetic to this criticism, and made efforts to modify the design in order to overcome it, without detracting from the Hall itself. He wrote to Eder that:

> "We have there got a distinctive interior which will be something new in the world, yet, I hope in the spirit of Old Jerusalem" (99).

His description of the modified design recalls his earlier proposals for the Bahai Temple at Allahabad:

> "The Moslem dome is a cover to shut out the sun. The summit of our building must be treated as a lantern letting in light, which is screened and filtered by the Palm Tree below ...
>
> I think the building will be dome-like, but it must express in some way the fact that it is supported at the centre and not round the rim.
>
> If I can find how to do this right then we shall have a dome which owes little to Moslem tradition and so we may satisfy our friends" (100).

By September 1926, a new problem had arisen. Mears received word from the University Principal, Dr. Magnes, that the Hebrew Studies Council had pressed on the Mrs. Rosenbloom the importance of their Institute being the principle building of the University and she had agreed (101, 102, 103). In fact, Magnes, who had been ordained as a Rabbi in the United States, had himself been instrumental in securing the establishment of the Institute of Hebrew Studies and was strongly committed to it (104). Leon Simon has written that:

> "As head of the University, Dr. Magnes took a personal interest in every detail of its activities as well as directing the main lines of its policy. In the shaping of its destinies his hand was so ubiquitously present that it is difficult to single out any particular sector of its manifold life as owing more to him than another. If a choice had to be made, it would fall on the Institute of Jewish Studies, which was part of the original nucleus of the University, and in which by temperament and training he was most vitally interested" (105).

Mears travelled to Paris for a hurriedly arranged meeting with Mrs. Rosenbloom and Dr. Weizmann on 23rd September 1926. Weizmann was concerned that the religious lobby was exerting too powerful an influence on the development of the University, so that it "ran the risk of becoming a theological seminary" (106). He and Mears argued that, important though the Institute of Hebrew Studies was, it should not be allowed to displace the Great Hall. A central location was unsuitable for a major department which would require room for further expansion. Weizmann also stressed that the Great Hall would serve a vital role as the living centre of the University. Recalling Geddes ' Report of 1919,

he pointed out that, in the context of the Zionist struggle, it would not be just another University hall such as one might find on any American campus, but a Hall for gatherings of Jews from all of Palestine and the world beyond (107).

By the end of the meeting, Mears was convinced that they had converted Mrs. Rosenbloom, although she would not give a decision before consulting her Trustees. He seemed to have been proved correct when, in November, he received a letter saying that the Trustees had agreed that he should proceed with his plans for the Great Hall and the Institute of Hebrew Studies and that Mrs. Rosenbloom was willing to provide a little more money if necessary (108). Early in the New Year, however, the Rosenbloom Trustees reversed their decision and Mears was sent a cable from the U.S.A. which stated:

> "Aula idea abandoned. Substituting central building for Jewish and Oriental Studies with adequate University Hall, await letter" (109).

Eder, who had been fending off attacks on Geddes and Mears in the German Jewish press, was disheartened by the news and wrote to Mears:

> "At the present moment I feel quite beaten. It is of course the Board of Governors who have to decide on the matter. The Board of Governors will, I am quite sure, accept the views of those who are only concerned with some financial or political considerations. All this, and the attack on Geddes and yourself which I have been defending, does not make me feel very lively on top of an attack of influenza" (110).

There was evidently some pressure at this stage to terminate Geddes and Mears' association with the University project completely, but Weizmann resisted this, writing to Dr. Magnes in June 1927 that:

> "I have given full consideration to your letter of the 1st June, relative to the Rosenbloom building, and have yesterday sent you the following telegram: "Replying your letter June 1: approve suggestion Chaikin chief architect, Mears, Geddes consultants for erection Jewish Institute. Abandoning my wish for Aula view advancing work".
>
> In explanation of this I would say that I think the plan which you favour that we keep the present architects, Mears and Chaikin, making Chaikin the chief architect and Mears the consultant, offers a

good solution of an otherwise very difficult position. I do not think that our relationship to Geddes and Mears can be described as an indefinite one. They have received letters giving them detailed instructions up to the point of starting working drawings and I do feel that they can hardly be dropped now with any appearance of decency. Nor do I think would it be wise. The considerations which you set forth in your letter in favour of letting Mears and Chaikin continue the work in accordance with the general plan seem to me to be decisive.

As regards the planning of the new building, I recognise that I must abandon the idea of the central Aula for the present. But you know my feelings in the matter and I hope that better days may come, and we shall be able to erect the Great Hall" (111).

As a result of the difficulties which had arisen, the Board of Governors appointed a new Committee under the chairmanship of Professor Selig Brodetsky to oversee the future development of the University (112).

It was the symbolism inherent in Geddes' conception of the Great Hall which aroused the suspicion of many of the Zionists. Geddes claimed that the domed central hall represented "the great Unity which it is the glory of Israel to have first realised and taught, and which Christian and Moslem alike, despite all their hostility have the candour to confess they have thus inherited" (113). However, its detractors argued that it could be interpreted as a commitment to the political unity of the various religious communities in Palestine, and this they were not prepared to countenance. Geddes afterwards contended that it was intended to have only spiritual and not political significance, yet in 1921, he had told "<u>The Scotsman</u>" that the Great Hall stood for:

> "Unity in nature and art, unity in humanity, and in life from humblest labour to highest music, from daily life to philosophy and religion" (114).

In explanation of the concept of the Dome of Synthesis he had stated that:

> "... while the classic forms of architecture - Greek and Roman - are unsuitable to our purposes, and while towers of wars are inappropriate and

irrelevant, and minarets and spires alike impossible for Jewish buildings, the dome is of universal use for religious expression - not only common alike to the Pantheon of old Rome, to the church and mosque of Santa Sophia of Constantinople, to St. Peter's and St. Paul's of Catholic and Protestant, to all the sacred buildings of Islam, but also to the great religions of the further Orient, Brahminical and Buddhistical alike. It is the most universal and most appropriate form of edifice under which men can gather - that expressing on the small human scale the great dome of the heavens" (115).

In these passages, it is rather difficult to separate the political considerations from the spiritual, but there is rather clearer evidence that Dr. Weizmann, at least, regarded the domed Hall as important from a purely political standpoint. In 1925, Mears wrote that the Zionist Leader intended it to give assurance that the older domes of the historical city, those of the Dome of the Rock and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, would remain safely in Moslem and Christian hands (116).

The University Principal, Dr. Magnes, was one of those who were hostile to the symbolism implicit in the concept of the Great Hall and afterwards Mears wrote that:

> "Dr. Magnes never disguised his dislike of Dr. Weizmann's ideas for the University. I had a most difficult task. My first loyalty was to Dr. Weizmann, and I felt it a duty to maintain what I could of his great conception. Whenever I hinted Dr. Weizmann's ideas, Dr. Magnes showed a bitterness, and indeed anger, which led me to avoid the subject most carefully. Thus we had no real guidance and no-one to whom we could turn for instructions as to policy" (117).

In a letter to Mears in July 1927, Dr. Eder commented sourly:

> "I knew that Dr. Magnes had neither understanding nor interest in the central idea of the University. He is only interested in some form of an Ethical Department, a kind of American uplift. I presume once Dr. Magnes has been put in the position of Controller of the University, there is nothing more to be done" (118).

However, Mears endeavoured to make the best of things and agreed to Dr. Magnes' proposal that Chaikin be given the position of architect while he and Geddes should act as consultants (119). In November 1927, Mears accepted an invitation from Dr. Magnes to

return to Jerusalem to work on plans for a centrally-located Institute of Hebrew Studies incorporating a scaled-down University hall. Subsequently, the two men had a friendly meeting in Margate where they discussed the details of the new programme.

Mears gave up his lectureship at Edinburgh College of Art in order to go back to Jerusalem. On his previous visit in 1926, he had asked his friend and colleague, the architect, C.D. Carus-Wilson, to look after his business interests in Edinburgh, and their association had continued on an informal basis ever since. However, on this occasion, as Carus-Wilson would himself have to relinquish a teaching salary of £450 in order to concentrate on the work of the office, Mears felt obliged to offer him a partnership (120, 121).

In January 1928, Mears returned to Jerusalem for the last time, and spent three months working on plans for the Institute of Hebrew Studies based on a schedule of accommodation supplied by Dr. Magnes' office. The building was to cost £100,000. A new model of the completed University scheme was also prepared. In conformity with the wishes of Dr. Magnes and the Rosenbloom Trustees, the central dome was abandoned in favour of a stepped roof design.

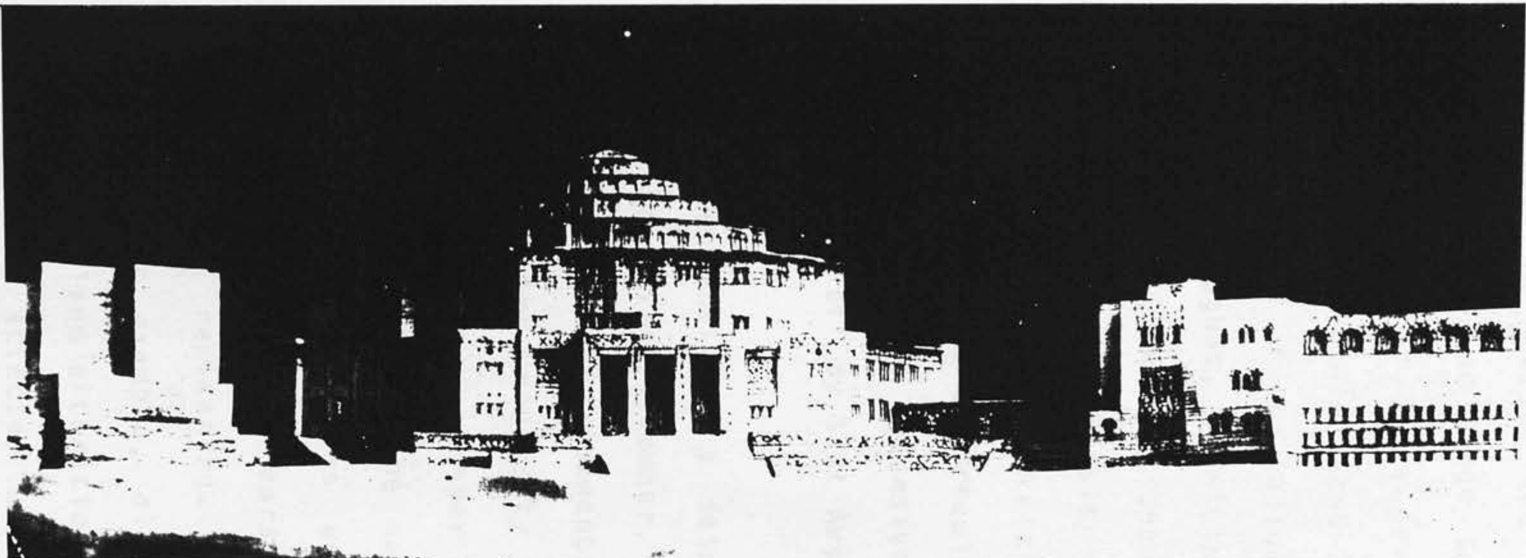

Fig. 4.9. Final model of the University scheme showing the centrally-located Institute of Hebrew Studies with its stepped roof design and the Library Building to the right. F.C. Mears and B. Chaikin, 1928. Photograph courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Edinburgh.

By the end of March, a report and a set of photographs of the model had been forwarded to Mrs. Rosenbloom in America and these were followed by a further report and large scale plans on 16th April. The Rosenbloom Trustees gave their full approval of the plans in a cable dated 21st April, but asked that the total cost of the building be reduced by £20,000. In early August, Chaikin forwarded a list of criticisms of the new scheme which had been made by members of the University staff. Mears replied, promising to send new sketches giving effect to these criticisms and to the requirement for a reduction in cost. He worked intensively on these and was able to send them off by 31st August.

There then followed a delay of nearly four months before, on 22nd December, Mears received a letter enclosing further comments by the staff and a proposal by the University Engineer, Mr. Grein, that the kitchen and some other facilities be placed on a terrace in front of the main building. Though no fundamental alterations were called for, the new suggestions involved Mears in a considerable amount of detailed replanning. Mr. Grein's proposed terrace, for example, although apparently a small matter, involved alteration of the main entrance, and this in turn affected the design of the vestibule,

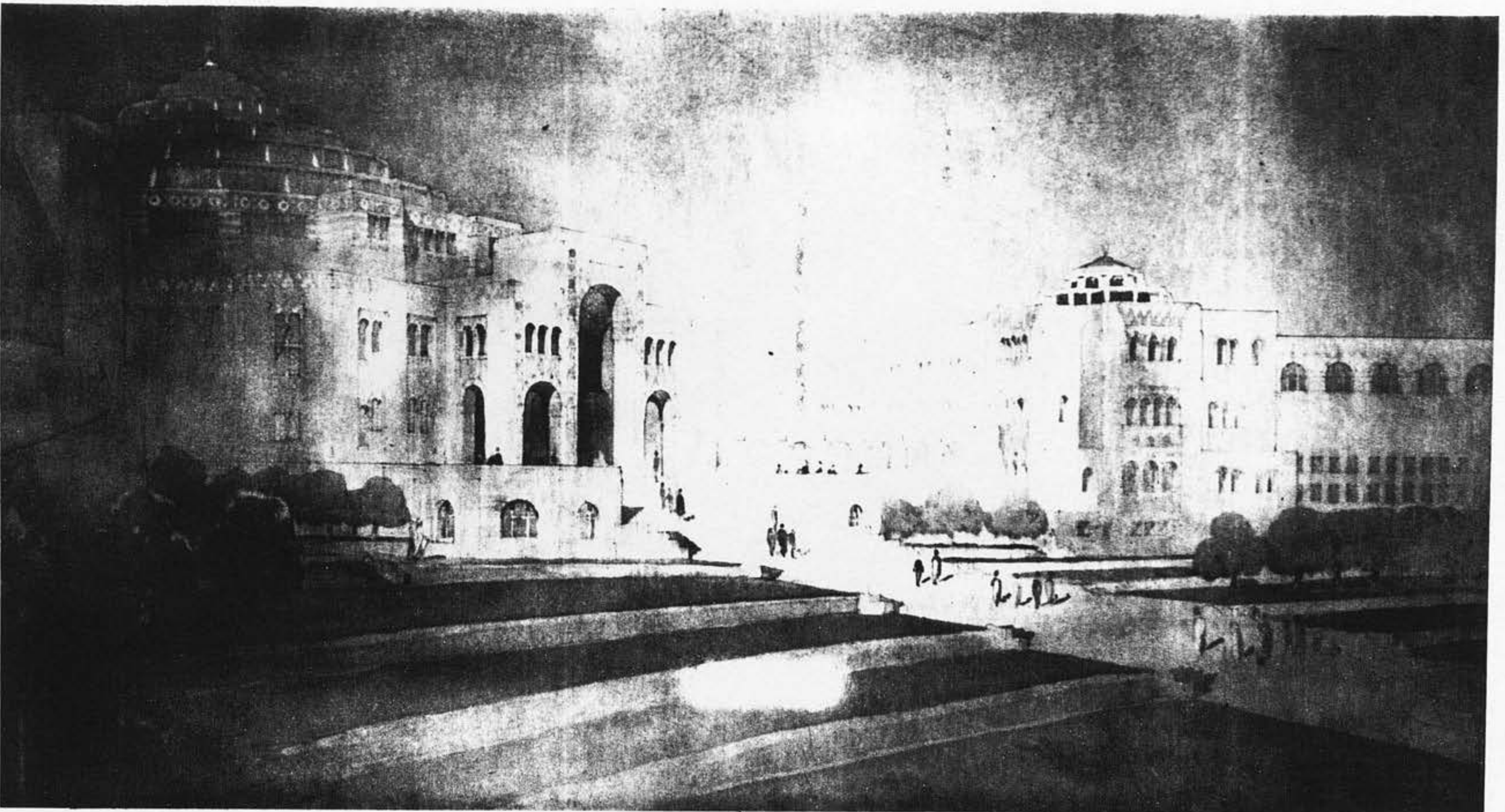

Fig. 4.10. The Institute of Hebrew Studies and Library Building. F.C. Mears and B. Chaikin, 1929. Courtesy of Sir Frank Mears & Partners, Edinburgh.