It is generally considered that ideas in Britain about historic cities, and their appropriate management, changed radically between the period of the Second World War and its aftermath and the end of the 1960s, in reaction to comprehensive redevelopment and with the rise of the conservation movement. Plans produced in the early part of this period, ‘reconstruction plans’, have been characterised as representing ‘clean-sweep’ planning, though recent research has shown a rather more complex relationship between these plans and the historic environment, with these plans representing a significant body of documents that sort to reconcile the historic qualities of place with functional modernity (Larkham, 2003; Pendlebury, 2004a). By the end of the 1960s, it is held, very different ideas prevailed. One of the key articulations of this cited is the four studies for the historic cities of Bath, Chester, Chichester and York, jointly commissioned by the national government and the relevant local authority to consider conservation issues both in those cities, and in terms of the wider lessons that could be learnt. This paper analyses the approaches used in conceptualising and planning for two of these four historic cities, Bath and York, with reference to both the 1960s studies and their 1940s precursors. After briefly describing each of the plans it considers how approaches had evolved and changed, or not, as the case maybe. It concludes that on the whole the 1960s plans for Bath represents a continuation of approach from the 1940s rather than a radical sea-change, with the emphasis still firmly on conceptualising the historic city highly selectively and in proposing high degrees of intervention. Changes are more evident in the plan for York which heralds a more inclusive and embracing conservation of place.
Introduction

Issues of how to balance planned modernity with the conservation of the character of historic city came to the fore in the 1960s. This was the decade that saw the first explicit legislative recognition of the importance of historic areas through the creation of ‘conservation areas’ in the 1967 Civic Amenities Act, following a flurry of activity by government and others on appropriate ways to plan the historic town. A huge range of work dealt with these issues in this period including international exhortations (Council of Europe, 1963), major conferences (Ward, 1968), official statements (Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 1967) and coverage in other key documents of the period (Buchanan et al., 1963). Applied at the local level these concerns famously led to the four studies undertaken in 1966 for Bath (Buchanan and Partners, 1968), Chester (Donald Insall and Associates, 1968), Chichester (Burrows, 1968) and York (Esher, 1968), each jointly commissioned by the government and the relevant local authority. As well as providing lessons for the individual cities their purpose was to inform more widely. These studies remain as often cited benchmarks in the development of thought about appropriate responses to the planning of historic towns.

Prior to this period planners often saw conservation and preservation activity as very much at the fringes of mainstream planning. For example, the text book that Taylor (1998) regarded as key in the post-war period, *Principles and Practice of Town and Country Planning* by Lewis Keeble saw preservation as a ‘subject on the edge of land Planning proper’ as late as the 1964 edition of his book (Keeble, 1964, p315). Yet there are an earlier group of plans that collectively form a major body of work on the nature of planning for historic towns and cities. During the course of World War 2 and in its immediate aftermath a whole series of plans (now collectively referred to as ‘reconstruction plans’) were produced for a wide spectrum of settlements in the UK. Stemming from the demand for comprehensive planning developing but frustrated during the 1930s, the case for planning was given great impetus by the devastation wrought on a number of towns and cities by German bombing and by an apparent willingness from the government to legislate for and to resource comprehensive planning (see e.g. Cullingworth, 1975). Urban areas across the country including major commercial centres, small mill towns and cathedral cities undertook plans. Not surprisingly badly war-damaged cities usually commissioned plans, but many were produced for settlements untouched by bombing.

Collectively the plans are known for their uncompromising vision and self-belief in creating better, more functional places, despite the difficulties that might be encountered in achieving these goals. Existing British cities were held not to be working efficiently. Generally the key priorities were seen to be the need to improve access and circulation (for both people and traffic), to separate incompatible land-uses and to provide better quality housing for the urban poor (Abercrombie, 1943; Tiratsoo, 2000). Plans for historic towns and cities often included a detailed and sophisticated analysis of the development of a place, but older fabric was frequently characterised as redundant and with the exception of key architectural monuments often intended to be removed wholesale (Larkham, 1997). Radical restructuring of urban form was often proposed and in bomb-damaged cities there was little of the tendency to recreate historic street patterns and building forms found in many continental cities (Diefendorf, 1990).

This paper reviews both the reconstruction and 1960s plans for two historic cities, Bath and York. Each of the plans is briefly described. This is followed by a discussion of some of the key themes which emerge in the way that thinking about planning for the historic city had changed in this period. The focus of the paper is on the plans and how they conceived the historic city, rather than, for example, how much the plans were implemented. However, some brief context is given on how the 1968 plans were received and some of the key debates.
Plans for Bath

The 1945 plan for Bath was produced by Patrick Abercrombie in co-authorship with the City Engineer (Owens) and the Planning Officer for the Joint Area Planning Committee (Mealand) (Abercrombie, Owens, & Mealand, 1945).

Bath experienced significant war-damage, with at least some damage to 245 buildings of identifiable architectural or historic interest. Buildings of architectural or historic interest identified by the Bath Corporation Act, 1937, and Abercrombie’s plan both focus on Georgian Bath. The plan was at pains to establish its sensitivity to the Georgian heritage of Bath, though much of the rest of the city centre was seen as ‘ripe for redevelopment’ and requiring ‘rejuvenation with a firm hand’ (Abercrombie et al., 1945, p53). The Georgian stock was compared favourably with three other major repositories of Georgian domestic architecture, London, Edinburgh and Dublin – Abercrombie prepared plans for each of these cities during his career. The buildings in Bath were divided into four categories, essentially by historic period, early Georgian, the developments of the Woods, later Adam influenced development and ‘utility Georgian’. This last phase

may be said to include all the later building which continued under the Georgian influence, gradually losing its beauty and appropriateness of detail, but maintaining its walling and window openings... is of great importance to the general appearance of Bath (p64).

It is interesting that this last category, though less celebrated than the earlier grander buildings, was regarded in the Abercrombie plan as essentially of very good quality and generally worthy of retention. However, this came with the proviso ‘unless it must give way to essential major planning improvements’ (p64).

The plan of buildings worthy of preservation identified four categories. The first two, ‘must be retained at all costs’ and ‘desirable’ but ‘should not stand in the way’ largely corresponded to the buildings that received protection under the Bath Corporation Act. Two further categories of Georgian buildings, ‘not worthy’ of preservation and ‘not likely to be affected’ were mostly additional buildings identified. Specific proposals were made for a range of buildings including the Royal Crescent and the Pulteney Bridge. The Royal Crescent was suggested as a new Civic Centre, clearing away the accompanying mews and eventually introducing an additional new civic building. This partly stemmed from an attitude that the larger Georgian houses were excessively large for contemporary needs, and thus was seen as solving a problem of finding an appropriate use for one of the most important groups of Georgian buildings. This view was also found in a contemporary report produced by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (MacGregor, Sisson, Birdwood-Willcocks, & Lees-Milne, 1944), which included alternative schemes for dividing houses in to a larger number of residential units. In the case of the Pulteney Bridge the intention was to widen the roadway, remove the shops and relocate the path in an arcade in the space created. The extensiveness of historic buildings, often deemed to be in poor condition, was considered a significant financial burden on the local authority and it was recommended they be given specific powers to raise a conservation fund to meet these costs.

No major change of function was proposed for Bath, though emphasis was placed upon developing it as a destination for recreation and leisure. Attention was given to sorting out some undesirable arrangements and conjunctions of land use, for example, through relocating industrial uses. Issues of appropriate architectural style for new buildings are rather fudged with a variety of options being presented, though the significance of materials (and the local stone) and colour are emphasised. As with most reconstruction plans, road proposals were a dominant feature and the importance of achieving desired standards, for example of carriageway width, was reflected in the proposal for Pulteney Bridge. Thus, despite the forgoing rhetoric about the
significance of historic and Georgian Bath beyond the medieval core and principal Georgian expansions large-scale redevelopment and transformation was envisaged. The redevelopment areas identified have a marked co-incidence with those areas later identified by Fergusson (1973) where demolition had taken place.

Buchanan’s 1968 report (Colin Buchanan & Partners, 1968), was a culmination of his work in the City and needs to be understood in relation to his other work there. In particular he was the author of A Planning and Transport Study commissioned by the Council in 1965 (Colin Buchanan & Partners, 1965), following an earlier report on traffic in Bath in 1964. Traffic is the central preoccupation of the 1965 report. There is seen to be a terrible dilemma between relieving the city and its heritage of traffic and finding routes to achieve this that do not impact upon the heritage. This is again based upon what would now consider to be a highly selective view of what constitutes the key elements of the historic environment. Broadly the focus is again upon the medieval city core and the show-piece elements of the Georgian town, including the Circus and Royal Crescent. Again, extensive comprehensive redevelopment was proposed, or at least accepted, for most of the city centre to the south and west of the historic core and for more limited areas elsewhere. Vertical segregation of traffic and pedestrians was regarded as desirable for the larger redevelopment areas.

Different options were proposed to solve the traffic problem. All contain a tunnel to carry traffic from the west to east in the city, extended as a cutting through the residential area of Bathwick. There is also a central cross route in a twenty foot cutting, close to some of the Georgian set-piece developments. The more drastic traffic possibilities, not favoured by Buchanan, include a four lane riverside route, skirting the historic core. Car parking issues, including for the core Georgian area, are proposed to be resolved through the construction of multi-storey car-parks.

The subsequent 1968 conservation study (Colin Buchanan & Partners, 1968) is limited in that it only dealt with the part of the city that had been occupied by the medieval town. Thus, it did not include the Georgian expansion for which Bath is principally famous. The 1968 plans were demonstration studies of the practicality of reconciling preservation objectives with modern functionality and in the case of Bath the complexity of the central area was considered more representative of such problems than the Georgian set-pieces. The plan emphasises Bath’s importance, ‘in an English context Bath is one of the half dozen most precious small towns, for its architectural quality, for its historic associations and its contribution to the art of urban design’ (p 10). Greatest stress is place upon the City’s visual qualities, for ‘in Bath as a whole the facades are very much more important than the interiors’ (p. 13). The existing listing of buildings was considered to under-represent group value and the role of buildings as part of visual compositions. Conversely de-listings are suggested, including some altered works by John Wood Senior, one of the key architects of Georgian expansion.

The study area was divided in to four and ranked as highest importance, secondary importance, little importance and in need of large-scale renewal. With the first category preservation is imperative. With the secondary areas the aim should be to keep the best buildings and to conserve the general character, though ‘large-scale renewal cannot be rule out’ (p. 47). In the other areas the policy ‘must be the acceptance of change’ (p. 48). Areas one and two covered approximately 60% of the area. Thus Buchanan was advocating major change to at least 40% of the historic core, and possibly more. The inner road, previously in a cutting, was now covered in a tunnel. As proposed it involved demolition of historically significant buildings in Bond Street and Queen Street. Rebuilding to create general character rather than precise architectural form is recommended for Queens Street but in Bond Street the overall composition should be re-established. There was a wider strong recommendation that new build should not be neo-Georgian, except where completing a unified composition.
Overall two issues were held to dominate, finding new uses for historic buildings and addressing the problems of cars and traffic. The first was thought to be difficult but achievable depending upon major resources, imagination and determination, with the benefit of Bath being a University city with a consequent demand for flats that students might occupy. In dealing with traffic there is discussion and study of traffic management, but notwithstanding this major road construction is deemed to be necessary.

The successive proposals for conserving Bath by Buchanan are strongly modernist in character. Though the significance of place is clearly articulated and preservation a key objective, in both cases it is a highly selective approach principally based around architectural quality and picturesque effect. Preservation is intended to sit alongside massive transformation and this is seen as compatible with sustaining the historic character of the city.

This vision was soon to be subject to a very public critique. Perhaps in Bath more than any other British city was there a fierce backlash in the early 1970s over how the historic city was being planned and managed. For example, Bath featured prominently in pro-conservation polemic of the period (Aldous, 1975; Amery & Cruikshank, 1975) as well as generating at least two texts specifically on the perceived destruction of historic Bath (Coard & Coard, 1973; Fergusson, 1973). These were not necessarily aimed specifically at Buchanan’s influence in Bath. (Fergusson, 1973) directs most of his ire at the local authority and some of their other architectural advisors. He notes the constraints Buchanan was placed under by the briefs he received from the City and the pre-existing Development Plan and the way that some of his recommendations had been ignored. However, he does also note a letter by Buchanan to The Times in 1972 which seems puzzled by the contestation over the redevelopment of ‘minor’ Georgian architecture and to implicitly support the local authority’s approach.

The details of the approach taken to planning Bath by Abercrombie and Buchanan differ; both in terms of some of the planning concepts used (e.g. Buchanan uses the environmental area concept he had developed) and in terms of detailed proposals. However, there was also a great deal of continuity. For example, both have a real sensitivity and understanding of the significance of Bath, but both ultimately see the potential for major redevelopment and change, especially in the south and east of the centre, including the loss of significant amounts of Georgian building. Both acknowledge the environmental problems of traffic but see major road building as inevitable. Both, despite their sensitivity to place are ultimately technocratic and seeking to modernise.

**Plans for York**

The reconstruction plan for York was commissioned from another leading consultant, S. D. Adshead in 1943, though he was dead by the time the report was completed and subsequently published (Adshead, Minter, & Needham, 1948). It as a much slimmer document than most of the major reconstruction plans, being essentially the brochure of an exhibition. The report celebrated the historic legacy of the city and stated that it was vital that this inheritance be preserved, ‘maintaining its character as one of the world’s most beautiful cities’ while meeting ‘the requirements of progress’ (Foreword). This appreciation distinctly stopped with the Victorian period; there was discussion of rebuilding the railway station, one of the greatest of the nineteenth century.

Much of the discussion was centred on accommodating traffic. At the time there was no inner or outer bypass as such so, for example, much of the traffic between the Yorkshire industrial heartlands and the Yorkshire coast passed through the city. As well as recommending an outer ring road an inner ring-road, on average of 250 yards beyond the line of the medieval
wall, was proposed. This allowed for the retention of the historic approaches to the Bars (gates) into the city (Lichfield & Proudlove, 1976), although in practice only Bootham was recognised as historic and important to retain. The inner ring road would

‘form the boundary to the “Central Area” separating it from the outer areas of the City, yet, at the same time, it will have the effect of knitting all parts of York even more closely together’ (unpaginated).

The proposals would have clearly done the former, although whether they would have achieved the latter is rather more debateable (Lichfield & Proudlove, 1976). Generally the space in-between the road and the Walls was to be cleared and then act as an inner

“Green Belt” which will greatly enhance the dramatic effect of the Walls and provide new sites for public buildings set in gardens and new open spaces. The existing buildings should be cleared from the moats so as to show the full length of the Wall in all its impressive beauty...’ (unpaginated).

Thus the historic city was to be separated from the surrounding urban areas and the Walls given a monumental presence. This was a hugely interventionist proposal, would have entailed the removal of much property, a lot of which is now considered historic, and was fundamentally unrealistic in its ambition and scope (York 2000, 1972).

Within the Walls a range of approaches were taken to traffic, in part responding to the sensitivity of context. It was seen as desirable to remove traffic from the precinct of the Minster and there were proposals for the partial pedestrianisation of Stonegate and Shambles, with no vehicles admitted after 10am. Stress was placed upon the importance of narrow streets in defining the character of the city and a number of streets specifically identified for retention in their current form. Even where streets were held to be of no great architectural importance the general policy was to resist road widening, though in some cases it was suggested that a colonnade under the existing shops be introduced, allowing for some widening of carriageways. However, despite the ambitious and massive inner ring road proposals, perplexingly it was proposed that a through-route east to west and north to south be retained, and this would have entailed some widening plus a new road puncturing the Walls.

Traffic was the issue that continued to dominate planning debates in York for the next 30 or so years. However, as Hargreaves (1964) and Nuttgens (1976) describe, and as Esher (1968) was to audit, there were also many more localised conflicts over individual buildings and streets, some resolved with a favourable outcome from a conservation perspective, some not.

The Esher study of York (Esher, 1968) p41 set out five objectives for the City:

‘That the commercial heart of York should remain alive and able to compete on level terms with its neighbour cities, new or old.
That the environment should be so improved by the elimination of decay, congestion and noise that the centre will become highly attractive as to a place to live in for families, for students and single persons, and for the retired.
That land uses which conflict with these purposes should be progressively removed from the walled city.
That the historic character of York should be so enhanced and the best of its buildings of all ages so secured that they become economically self-conserving.
That within the walled city the erection of new buildings of anything but the highest architectural standard should cease.’

Esher detailed the, for the time, considerable efforts made by the Corporation at conserving buildings in the City. However, the rate of attrition of listed buildings between the completion of the first list in 1954 and the study period was demonstrated. In thirteen years 31 buildings
had been added to the list but 63 demolished, with the total thus dropping from 652 to 620. Despite the positive efforts at conservation more fundamental problems of use and redundancy and environmental quality needed to be tackled.

A key element of this was to make the walled city liveable. At the time of the study the residential population was 3,500, a figure that represented a long decline as commercial and industrial development had displaced people from the centre from the nineteenth century. The target was to increase this to 6,000. Measures proposed to achieve this included first, removal of some (but by no means all) industry from the walled city and some comprehensive redevelopment, but very modest and surgical when set aside Bath. Second, the potential for the re-use of vacant upper floors was emphasised, there was a study of the Petergate area specifically on this issue. Another key theme for making the City more liveable was the management of traffic, including extensive pedestrianisation. Other management proposals for the walled city (very little by the way of new road construction was proposed) included the prevention of cross-town traffic, and the narrowing of one of the major nineteenth century streets, Parliament Street. Esher’s terms of reference precluded him from considering traffic proposals for the City as a whole. However, he was very sceptical about the inner ring road that was being proposed immediately outside his study area, that is just beyond the Walls. His objections were made both on amenity and functional grounds. It was considered that such a road and its associated works, such as roundabouts and junctions, would dwarf the City Walls and ‘above all the Bars, whose impressiveness is dependant on the contrasting scale of the small buildings in their vicinity’ (p. 53).

In addition to making the walled city more liveable Esher considered that York had nowhere near reached its potential as a tourist city and that there was some potential for commercial development. Other elements of the study included a re-evaluation of the listing in the City, with the purpose of adding many buildings of townscape value. Though it was acknowledged that some of these would in turn be lost as part of the natural evolution of the City it was indicative of a more inclusive approach to what was considered worthy of protection and retention. Furthermore, though it was made clear that this was a planning study it was also acknowledged that the contribution of historic buildings was not essentially visual, that fabric was significant too. Overall, though the report was not without its solecisms, such as a brutal multi-storey car-park proposed for Piccadilly, there was a feel of a fine grained sensitivity to the City. It feels like a study worked out from street-level (and indeed has lots of photographs of people animating space), rather than technocratically using plans and models.

Esher’s study generated much publicity (Esher, 1969) and was generally very well received in York (Lichfield & Proudlove, 1976; Nuttgens, 1976). The City accepted most of the proposals (with reservations about costs) except for his ideas about traffic. They pushed ahead with proposals for an inner ring road, which were bitterly contested and were ultimately defeated at public inquiry (Lichfield & Proudlove, 1976; York 2000, 1972).

The two plans for York do show some continuity. For example, the significance of narrow streets in the historic centre to the character of the City and the need to make these a tolerable environment for the pedestrian, for example through pedestrianisation. However, what is more striking is how in other ways there is a fundamental shift. In particular, the degree of intervention seen to be necessary and desirable for redevelopment and for accommodating traffic has been vastly scaled down. The view in the Esher report is that massive road proposals in or adjacent to the walled city will inevitably be to the detriment of the character of the city and therefore other means of managing traffic must be used.
Discussion

The 1940s plans produced for Bath and York were part of a wave of enthusiasm for planning that soon dissipated. Associated with large-scale redevelopment few can be said to have been implemented in any meaningful way. However, despite this one can also see in the plans of the period important enduring legacies for historic cities. There was for the first time a body of planning documents that specifically recognised the significance of the historic city as a whole, albeit working to a narrow definition of what the historic city was comprised of. The emphasis on character that was used has proved to be extremely enduring and indeed forms an important element of the later plans and the cornerstone of the national designation of protection of historic areas, conservation areas, introduced by the Civic Amenities Act, 1967. In the works of Thomas Sharp, not discussed here, we also had important antecedents for ideas about townscape that became very influential (Pendlebury, 2004b), and are evident in the Esher plan for York.

The 1960s plans considered here, and also produced for Chester and Chichester, were specifically commissioned to consider conservation issues with the aim of not only informing policy and action in those cities but in the country as a whole. Nevertheless, in addressing conservation issues these plans perhaps inevitably considered a much wider range of planning issues and, in the case of Bath at least, still proposed large-scale intervention and change in the urban fabric. Interventions suggested for York were also substantial though rather less and more surgical in nature.

Thus though the two sets of plans have rather different antecedents they share many things in common. All are essentially masterplans in basic approach, and all are grappling with problems of reconciling the historic city with modernity. The issues which arise in this respect have changed relatively little over the twenty or so years between them. Top of the list is the growth of traffic, the need to manage this and the desire to enjoy historic areas free of excessive traffic. The functional role of cities and the need to rationalise land-use to some degree is found in all the plans, but at the same time, though the emphasis varies between plans, there is recognition of the richness of mixing uses considered to be compatible. The need to find new uses for historic buildings whose original or existing use is obsolescent is a recurrent theme. Generally plans for both periods have a clear ideology that new buildings should be clearly contemporary in style (Pendlebury, 2004a), although the two 1940s plans discussed here are less clear on this point than usual.

However, despite the common features discussed some clear differences also emerge, especially with the Esher plan for York. How the historic city is defined has changed markedly. It is conceived more extensively and as a more intricate series of intimate visual relationships. Much more attention is given to historic fabric, though this is inherent in the brief for the later plans. Approaches to dealing with traffic have also evolved and changed. Buchanan was, of course, the most famous writer on traffic in the 1960s. In the Buchanan Report (Buchanan et al., 1963) and in earlier writings (Buchanan, 1958) he had displayed a deep ambivalence in the rise of the motor car and its impact on urban life. He saw the need to contain its use but also the need for extensive new urban roads and it was this balancing act he sought to achieve in his work in Bath. The City of York seemed to have been taking a similar approach, but Esher challenged this in terms of both the aesthetic impact a ring road would have had as well as its functional logic. Here was greater emphasis again on the management and containment of traffic. The 1960s plans are also more preoccupied with resources for conservation, part of their brief, than the 1940s plans produced at a time of optimism over what planning would be able to achieve.
Ultimately the differences that are evident between the four plans considered in this paper are as marked between locations as between different decades. The York study had common features with Bath. Key problems, especially traffic, are shared. There is the same rhetoric about the need for progressive planning and the same distaste for pastiche or historicist architecture. Modish 1960s solutions are evident in both plans. Buchanan advocated vertically segregation in Bath and even the Esher plan contained brutal multi-story car-parks. However, though it is difficult to directly compare reports due to the different circumstances of the two cities, there are distinct differences, not least in concluding in York that major road proposals are unacceptable, whereas in Bath they are very much in evidence. Furthermore, there is a selectivity in identifying the historic city in Bath reminiscent of the 1940s plans. In York there seems to be a more inclusive approach and a more holistic view of place.

The 1940s plans are an important first major wave of plans to consider how the demands of the twentieth century might be reconciled in historic cities. In many ways the 1968 plans represent an evolution of approach, rather than the radical sea-change that is usually now assumed. ‘The balanced approach’ of protecting the parts of the city identified as historic and intervening with roads and redevelopment to achieve modern functionality elsewhere is still evident. However, there is no doubt that they were commissioned on the cusp of period of great change in attitudes towards places, planning and conservation and the role of people (and traffic) in each of these. This is not very evident with the Bath report, which seems to represent the old technocratic era of high intervention. At York, though, Esher produced a report where the balance had firmly swung to a more inclusive and embracing conservation of place.
References


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