

2 The origins: urban growth from 1800 to 1940

Modern urban and regional planning has arisen in response to specific social and economic problems, which in turn were triggered by the Industrial Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. It is important to notice that these problems did not all come at once, in the same form; they changed in character, and in their relative importance, so that the questions uppermost in the minds of city-dwellers in the 1930s were by no means the same as those experienced by their great-grandfathers in the 1840s. As problems were identified, solutions were proposed for them; but because of the inertia of people's minds, and still more the inertia of social and political processes, these solutions – especially the more radical ones – might not be put into action until decades afterwards, when the problem itself had changed in character and perhaps also in importance. That is a most important common theme which runs through this and the next two chapters.

Planning before the Industrial Revolution

There were important cities before the Industrial Revolution: Ancient Rome had an estimated population of one million by the year AD 100; Elizabethan London numbered about 200,000 people. Correspondingly, these cities had problems of economic and social organization: Rome had to be supplied with water brought over considerable distances by aqueduct (the word itself is Roman in origin), and the city developed immense problems of traffic congestion – which, unfortunately, have been inherited by the modern city 2,000 years later. London by the fourteenth century had to draw on coalfields by the River Tyne, 270 miles away, for fuel, and on distant countries for more specialized provisions, such as dyestuffs or spices; by the seventeenth century it, too, was drawing water from 35 miles away by aqueduct. (The New River, which runs through North London, is part of it.) These problems in turn brought forth a host of regulations for the better ordering of the city, sometimes dealing with strangely modern problems: Rome banned chariots at night to deal with the first recorded case of urban noise pollution; in London in the fourteenth century a man was hanged for burning 'sea coal' – a somewhat draconian penalty for medieval air pollution.

Furthermore, many cities both in the ancient and the medieval world were planned, at least in the sense that their existence and their location were laid down consciously by some ruler or some group of merchants; and among this group, a large proportion even had formal ground plans with a strong element of geometric regularity. In Britain the group of medieval planned towns is larger than many people think: a small town like Baldock, on the Great North Road (A1) before it was bypassed, was actually a creation of the Knights Templar, and the name itself is a corruption of Baghdad; Winchelsea on the Sussex coast, and small towns in North Wales like Flint, Conway

and Caernarvon, were all fortified towns created by Edward I in the late thirteenth century, and were deliberately modelled on the Bastide towns established by the French kings as part of their conquest of Provence a few years earlier.

The greatest flowering of formal town planning before the Industrial Revolution, though, came in what is known in Continental Europe as the Baroque era: the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There, it produced such masterpieces of large-scale architectural design as the reconstruction of Rome during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; or the great compositions of the Tuileries gardens and the Champs-Élysées, in Paris; or the palace of Versailles and its bordering planned town; or the completely planned town of Karlsruhe, in Germany; or the seventeenth-century quarters of Nancy, in the province of Lorraine in eastern France; as well as many other smaller, but fine, examples. These were nearly all expressions of absolute regal or papal power, and some commentators have claimed to see in them the expression of a new style of warfare – instead of the medieval walled town, cities must now be planned along broad formal avenues where mobile armies could deploy themselves. Britain, after Cromwellian times, had no such absolute monarchy; here the aristocracy and the new merchant class dominated the growth of cities, and determined their form. The result was a different but equally distinctive form of town planning: the development of formal residential quarters consisting of dignified houses built in terraces or rows, generally on a strongly geometrical street plan which was modified by charming squares with gardens. The original development of many of the quarters of London's West End, now sadly decimated by later reconstruction – areas like St. James's, Mayfair, Marylebone and Bloomsbury – still provides the best examples in Britain of this type of planning attached to an existing major city; Edinburgh's New Town, facing the medieval city across the deep cut now occupied by the railway, is another. But perhaps the best example of eighteenth-century British town planning is the development of Bath, up to then a small medieval town, as the result of a new enthusiasm for spa cures among the aristocracy at that time.

All these examples, and many other imitations, have great interest for the student of architecture or the origins of planning. And similarly, the creation of the rural landscape of Europe – a process which involved much more conscious planning than most people, looking at the result casually, would imagine – is important for the planner, understanding how previous generations adjusted to the opportunities and the limitations the region presented. But the subject deserves much fuller treatment than it can receive here; and it is excellently written up in the book *The Making of the English Landscape* by W.G. Hoskins. Our main concern now is a subject that has little relation with the past: the unprecedented impact of modern industrialism on urban development and upon consequent urban planning problems.

The impact of industrialism

Oddly, at first the Industrial Revolution had no striking effect on urban growth. The earliest of the new inventions in textiles or in iron-making, developed in England between 1700 and 1780, seemed rather to be dispersing industry out of the towns and into the open countryside. By the end of this period – and even later still, into the early nineteenth century – typical industrial landscapes, such as the cotton-making areas of south Lancashire or south Derbyshire, the woollen areas of the Colne and Calder Valleys in the West Riding of Yorkshire, or the iron-making and working areas of Coalbrookdale (Shropshire) or the Black Country, essentially consisted of a straggle of small industrial hamlets across an area that was fundamentally still rural. In some industries this tradition

survived even longer: D.H. Lawrence's early novels describe it in the Nottinghamshire coalfields as late as 1900.

But it was coal that changed the situation. As soon as it became a principal raw material of industry – replacing water power in textiles after 1780, for instance – it tended to concentrate industry where supplies could be made available: on the coalfields themselves, and then adjacent to bulk transport. Britain, because it industrialized earlier than any other country, experienced special constraints on its industrial location pattern: the early machinery consumed great quantities of coal because it was inefficient, and the coal was very expensive to transport because there were no railways, only canals. After about 1830 (the first steam-driven railway, the Stockton and Darlington, came in 1825) both these conditions changed, and industry was freer to locate. But by then its pattern was fixed (Figure 2.1).

This fact alone created a new phenomenon: the new industrial town, developed almost from nothing – or perhaps from a small and obscure village origin – within a few years, on the coalfields of Lancashire and Yorkshire and Durham and Staffordshire. Simultaneously, some towns – those which were neither port towns nor on coalfields – stagnated industrially. But many older-established medieval towns – because they were near enough to coalfields, or because they were on navigable water, or because they became railway junctions soon after the railways arrived – were also able to become major centres of the new factory industry: Leicester, Nottingham and Bristol are good examples. Port towns, indeed, were just as important as pure industrial towns in the whole process of industrialization, because they effected the critical exchange of raw materials and finished products on which the whole system depended: thus cities like Liverpool, Hull, Glasgow and, above all, London were among the fastest-growing places from 1780 onwards.

Some of the resulting growth patterns are extraordinary – even by the standards of the twentieth century, which has become used to mushrooming growth in the cities of the developing world. The most spectacular cases were, of course, some of the new industrial towns which developed almost from nothing. Rochdale in Lancashire, for instance, numbered about 15,000 in 1801, 44,000 in 1851 and 83,000 in 1901; West Hartlepool in County Durham grew from 4,000 in 1851 to 63,000 by 1901. But though their percentage rate of growth was necessarily more modest, many bigger and older-established centres managed to maintain an amazing rate of growth throughout most of the century. London doubled from approximately 1 million to about 2 million between 1801 and 1851; doubled again to 4 million by 1881; and then added another 2.5 million to reach 6.5 million in 1911.

The parallel with the cities of the developing world is, in several ways, only too exact. The people who flooded into the burgeoning nineteenth-century industrial and port cities of Britain were overwhelmingly coming from the countryside. They tended to be drawn from the poorer section of the rural population: those who had least to lose and most to gain by coming to the city. Many of them had found it increasingly difficult to get work after the enclosure movement, which, approved and planned by Parliament, transformed so much of midland and southern England during the eighteenth century. Some of them – like the Irish who flooded into Liverpool and Manchester and Glasgow after the failure of the potato harvest in 1845–6 – were truly destitute. They had little or no knowledge of the technical skills needed by the new industry, or of the social and technical necessities of urban life. And though the industry of the towns provided economic opportunities in plenty for an unskilled labour force, the social arrangements in the towns were quite incapable of meeting their needs for shelter, for elementary public services like water and waste disposal, or for health treatment.

This last point is critical: these towns had only the most elementary arrangements, or none, for providing water, or clearing refuse or sewage, or for treating mass epidemics.

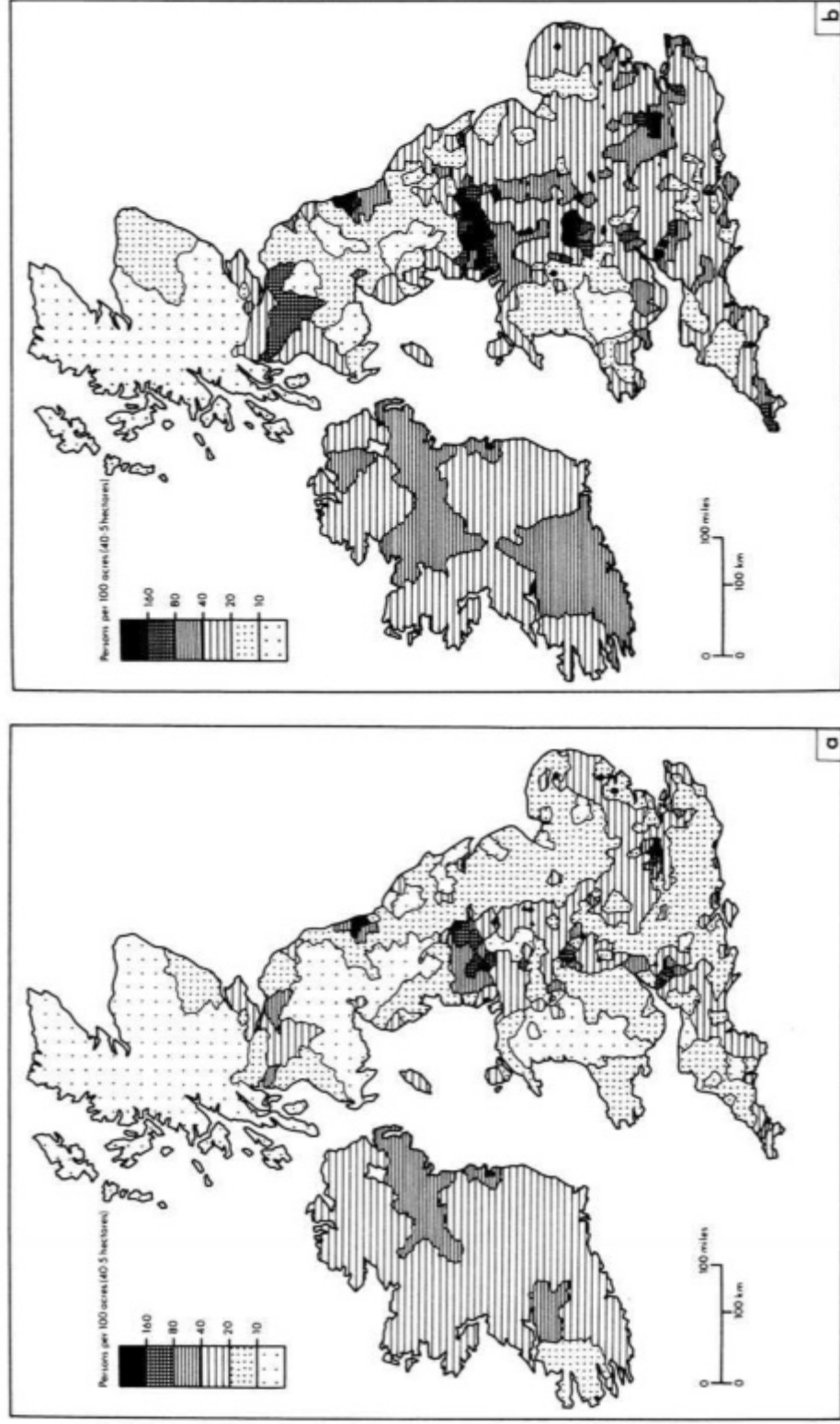


Figure 2.1 Population distribution in the British Isles: (a) 1801 (Ireland, 1821); (b) 1851 (Ireland, 1841). In the first half of the nineteenth century population concentrated in the towns – especially on the newly developed coalfields of the north. Here, towns grew without plan or control.

Many of the towns, having sprung up so rapidly from villages, had virtually no arrangements at all. Even in the larger towns they had been very elementary; and they tended to be quite overwhelmed by the influx. In a stagnant or slowly growing city, or in a relatively small town, the consequences might not have been so dire: wells might not have become polluted so easily by sewage; new dwellings could be constructed quite easily outside the existing town limits without overcrowding. But in the rapidly growing towns, these solutions were not open. Because there was no system of public transport to speak of, the new population like the old must be within walking distance of work in the factories or warehouses. Within the limits thus set, population densities actually tended to rise during the first half of the nineteenth century; the census records for London or Manchester show this quite clearly.

The results could have been predicted. Limited water supplies were increasingly contaminated by sewage; there were quite inadequate arrangements for disposal of waste, and filthy matter of all kinds remained close to dense concentrations of people; water supplies were lacking or fitful, and personal hygiene was very poor; overcrowding grew steadily worse, both in the form of more dwellings per acre and more people per room; cellar dwellings became all too common in some cities, such as Manchester or Liverpool; medical treatment, and above all public health controls, were almost completely lacking. And, to make things worse, the greater mobility induced by trade meant that epidemics could move more rapidly across the world than ever before. This, plus polluted water supplies, was the basic cause of the terrible cholera epidemics that swept Britain in 1832, 1848 and 1866.

The results for public health became clear only after the establishment of an efficient government organization for charting the state of public health: the General Register Office, set up in 1837. William Farr, the first Registrar General and one of the founding fathers of the modern science of statistics, showed as early as 1841 that the expectation of life at birth – 41 years in England and Wales overall and 45 in salubrious Surrey – was only 26 years in Liverpool: two years later in Manchester, it was only 24. Much of this difference arose because of the shockingly high infant-mortality rates in the northern industrial towns: 259 out of every 1,000 children born died within the first year of life in Liverpool in 1840–1, and for the early 1870s the average was still 219. (The corresponding figure for Liverpool in 1970 was 21; an eloquent testimony to the improved quality of life.)

It was a situation which society could not tolerate for long. Even in the most cynical view, the more privileged members of society – the industrialists and merchants – were likely to suffer from it: less so than their workers, to be sure, but still the statistics showed that the risk was considerable. Yet the struggle for reform was a difficult one; it had to surmount at least three major hurdles. The first was the will to act; and this took some time to spread to a large section of the controlling interests who dominated Parliament and the local authorities. Until 1832, it must be remembered, Parliament was totally unrepresentative of the experience and the views of those in the industrial towns. The second was knowledge of how to act; and on many critical questions, such as the germ-borne causation of disease and its treatment, and above all the origin of cholera, medical experts were sadly ignored until after the turn of the century. (Cholera was first identified as a water-borne disease in 1854 by a London doctor, John Snow, in an early piece of spatial analysis (Figure 2.2); he proved that the outbreaks in a slum district of London were systematically associated with the water supply from a single pump. But it was not until some time after this that the mechanism was understood.) The third need was for effective administrative machinery, including finance, for instituting the necessary controls and providing public services; and this, in an era of rampant *laissez-faire*, was in many ways the hardest of all, involving as it did the reform of existing and ineffectual local governments.

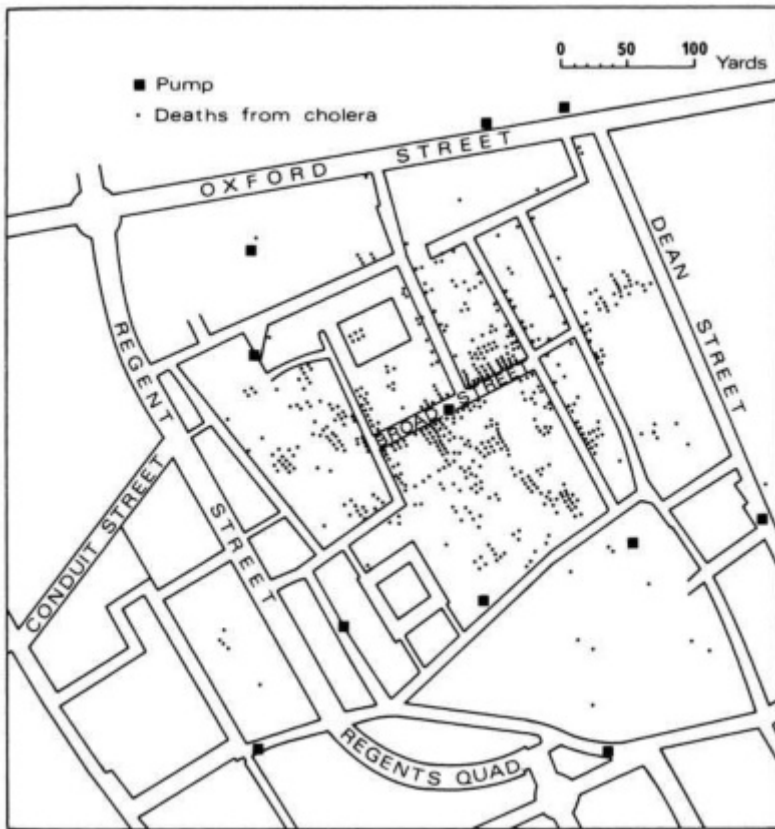


Figure 2.2 Deaths from cholera in the Soho district of London, September 1854. Dr John Snow's celebrated map, which established the connection between the cholera outbreak and a single polluted water pump in Broad Street. This emphasized the importance of supplying pure water to the inhabitants of the growing cities in Britain.

The position here was confused. An Act of 1835, the Municipal Corporations Act, had reformed borough government; but usually it did not make the boroughs exclusively responsible for public services or sanitary controls, and in any case, many towns had new building beyond their boundaries. Two major Blue Books, or official reports – the Select Committee on the Health of Towns (1840) and the Royal Commission on the State of Large Towns (1844–5) – recommended that there should be a single public health authority in each local area to regulate drainage, paving, cleansing and water supply; they also called for powers to govern the standards of construction of new buildings. From the mid-century a series of Acts – the Public Health Act of 1848, which set up a Central Board of Health and allowed it to establish Local Boards of Health, the Nuisance Removal Acts from 1855 and the Sanitary Act of 1866 – aided the control of the more obvious sanitary problems. And, from the 1860s, there was increasing interest in the control of building standards. The Torrens Acts from 1868 onwards allowed local authorities to compel owners of insanitary dwellings to demolish or repair them at their own expense; the Cross Acts, from 1875 onwards, allowed local authorities themselves to prepare improvement schemes for slum areas (Plate 2.1). The last of these Acts – the Public Health Act of 1875 – produced a long-overdue fundamental reform of local

government in England and Wales, outside the boroughs: the country was divided into urban and rural sanitary districts, which would be supervised by a central government department already set up in 1871, the Local Government Board. The word ‘sanitary’ in their title amply indicates the original scope of these authorities; but soon they were incorporated in a comprehensive local government reform. Three Acts – the Municipal Corporations Act of 1882 and the Local Government Acts of 1888 and 1894 – gave new local government structures to the boroughs, the counties (plus new county boroughs or large towns) and county districts. This system survived almost unchanged until the major reform of English local government, carried through by the Act of 1972.

These local authorities, but above all the boroughs, increasingly began to adopt model by-laws for the construction of new housing from the 1870s onwards. By-law housing, as it came to be known, can readily be recognized in any large British city. It tends to occur in a wide ring around the slums of the earlier period (1830–70), most of which were swept away in the great assault on the slums between 1955 and 1970. Drably functional, it consists of uniform terraces or rows of two-storey housing in the local building material (brick in most parts of the country, stone on the upland borders in Lancashire and the West Riding). The streets have a uniform minimum width to guarantee a modicum of air and light; each house originally had a separate external lavatory with access to a back alley, which runs parallel to the street. (This was necessary for the emptying of earth closets; for even in the 1870s it was impossible to provide for water-borne clearance of waste from many of these houses. It was also thought desirable for clearance of solid refuse.) So originally, these houses had neither inside lavatory nor inside bath – indeed, no fixed bath at all. They represented a housing problem in the 1960s and 1970s; but since they were built according to some minimal standards, most have been upgraded to reasonable modern standards without the need for demolition. And the areas in which they were concentrated were at the same time often environmentally improved, enhancing their basic qualities of good neighbourliness and thus making them into rather good living environments for a new generation of owner-occupiers. But a generation later, at



Plate 2.1 Early ‘industrial dwellings’ in Bethnal Green, London. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, these were a reaction by private philanthropic landlords to the slum problem of the Victorian city. They offered superior working-class accommodation and yet gave a return on capital.

the turn of the century, some of these areas – especially in northern cities – were being abandoned, as owners found newer and more desirable housing elsewhere.

Commonly, even with the more generous standards of street width which were required, by-law housing was built at net densities of about 50 houses to the acre (124/hectare). (The term ‘net density’, often used in this book, means density of housing or people on the actual housing area, including local streets; it does not include associated open space, public buildings or industry.) Given the large families of three or four children prevailing, this could mean densities of 250 people to the acre (620/hectare) or more. In London densities of over 400 to the acre (1,000/hectare) persisted in places as late as the Second World War. Today, with smaller households, these densities are a memory.

The phenomenon of urban spread

But by and large the period after 1870 marks a significant change in the development of British cities – and, as far as can be seen from international studies by the economist Colin Clark, in other countries’ cities too. In fact, the trend is quite marked for London after the 1861 census. Up to that time, as we noted earlier, densities were actually rising within a radius of about 3 miles (4.8 kilometres) from the centre of British cities – the radius within which people could walk to their work within about an hour, there being no effective public or private transport of any kind for most of the population. If we look at a town like Preston (Plate 2.2), which had changed little in the 100 years or so between the time when most of the buildings were erected and the time of the photograph (about 1935), we should realize that most of the people living in these gardenless houses, without public parks, nevertheless could walk to open fields within about 20 minutes. (This was true in 1935 as in 1835.) And since the cotton mills – then the chief and almost the sole source of work for many – were scattered fairly evenly across the town, journeys to work on foot were quite extraordinarily short: an average mill hand could walk to and from work four times a day, coming home for a midday meal in rather less time than the average modern commuter spends on his or her outward morning journey. Even the biggest European city, London, grew relatively little in area as it doubled in population from 1 to 2 million people between 1801 and 1851.

But then, between about 1870 and 1914, virtually all British cities rapidly acquired a cheap and efficient public-transport system – first (in the 1870s and 1880s) in the form of horse trams and buses, then (about the turn of the century) of electric trams, and lastly (just before the First World War) in the form of motor buses. In very large cities like London there were also commuter trains. The early railways had neglected the possibilities of suburban traffic, even in London, but most of them awoke to the possibilities after 1860; and one, the Great Eastern serving north-east London, was compelled by Parliament to run cheap trains for workmen, allowing them to live in suburbs as distant as Edmonton and Leytonstone. London even had a steam-operated underground railway, the world’s first, by 1863; its first electric tube railway opened in 1890 and its first electrified suburban lines in 1905–9.

The impact on urban growth was profound, as can clearly be seen in the series of maps for London at different dates (Figure 2.3). London in 1801, with 1 million people, was still a remarkably compact city, mainly contained within a radius of about 2 miles (3.2 kilometres) from the centre; and by 1851, with double the number, the radius had not increased to much more than 3 miles (4.8 kilometres), with higher densities in the inner areas. Then the city began to spread in all directions, but particularly to the south and north east – as seen in the map for 1880 and, even more clearly, for 1914. This last represents the apogee of what can fairly be called the early public-transport



Plate 2.2 Aerial photograph of Preston in the 1930s. This demonstrates the high density and closely built-up nature of the early industrial town. Though open space is lacking, the town is small, and open countryside is not far away (though not visible here); and, with factories scattered among houses, the journey to work is short. Today, many of the mills have been demolished, although those remaining are the subject of conversion and redevelopment into residential, commercial or community uses. Much of the housing in this picture has been replaced. Many of the inhabitants of the town doubtless travel farther to work, for many of the jobs are either on the town's periphery or farther afield in and around the Lancashire conurbation, accessed via motorway and rail services.

city. The steam trains gave fairly easy and rapid access to middle-class commuters (and, in east London, the working class too) at distances up to 15 miles (24 kilometres) from the centre. But they accelerated and decelerated poorly; stops tended to be widely spaced; and feeder services, in the form of horse buses or trams, were poorly developed, or slow. The result is a typically tentacular form of growth, with development taking the form of blobs (or beads on a string, to change the metaphor) around each station.

Between the two world wars the whole process of suburban growth and decentralization began to speed up; in doing so it changed its form. The forces behind the suburban movement during those years were partly economic, partly social, partly technological. Economic forces in the world outside – world depression between 1929 and about 1934, a general depression in the prices of primary products – meant that both labour for construction and building materials were cheap. Social changes, too, were produced by economic development: more and more workers were becoming white-collar employees in offices or shops or other non-factory occupations, enjoying regular salaries which allowed them to borrow money on credit, and regarding themselves as members of an enlarging middle class. In large numbers, these people began to aspire to buy a house of their own with the aid of a mortgage. Lastly and perhaps most fundamentally, further developments in transport technology extended the effective commuting range: electric

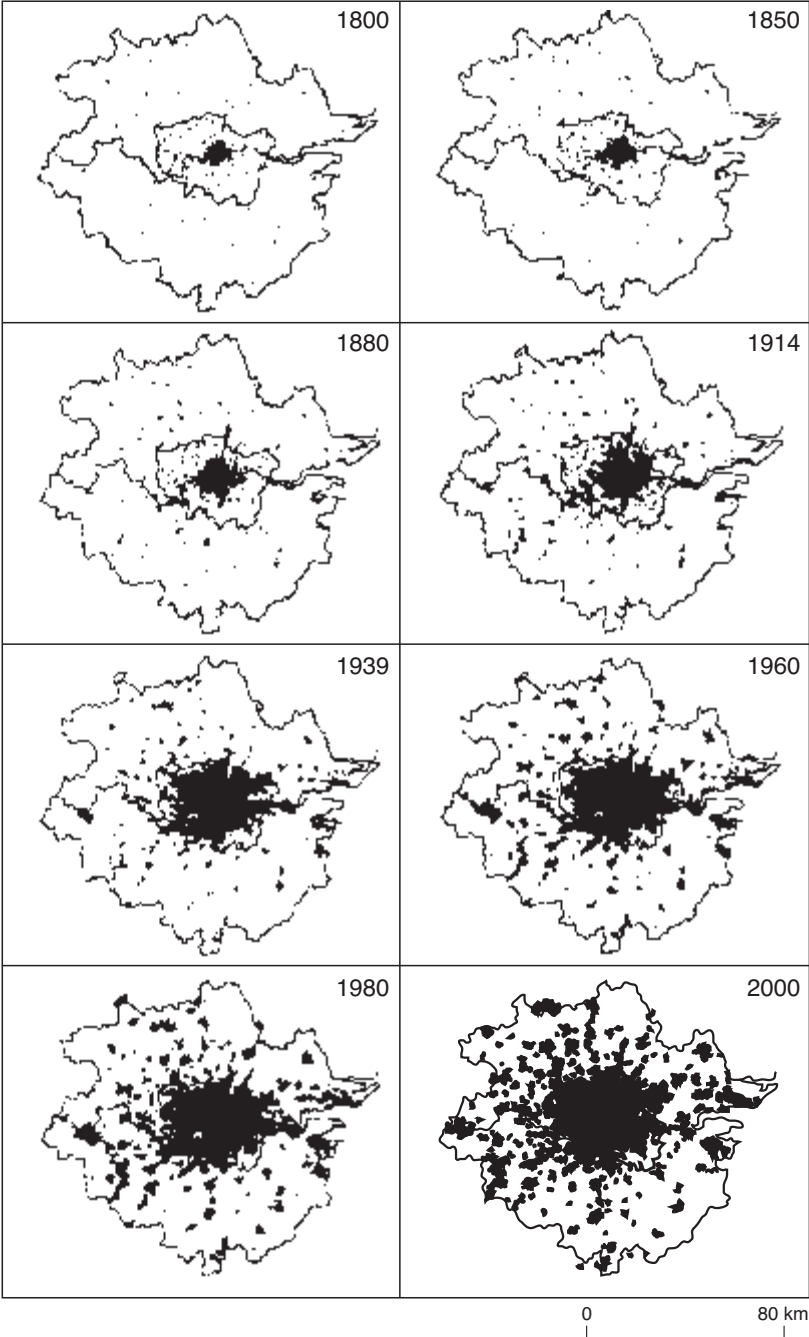


Figure 2.3 The growth of London, 1800–2000. Until 1850 London’s extent was constrained by walking distances. Steam trains from 1850 to 1914, and electric trains, tubes and buses from 1914 to 1939, allowed suburban sprawl – but then the green belt stopped it.

trains in London, motor buses elsewhere, allowed the effective area of the city to extend up to four or five times the previous limits.

This was particularly well marked in London. In 1914 London had a population of about 6.5 million; by 1939, 8.5 million. Yet in that period, the capital's built-up area extended about three times. The underground railways before 1914 had barely extended beyond the existing developed area; but after 1918 they began to colonize new territory, extending quickly above ground onto previously undeveloped areas. The result was as predicted: a vast flood of speculative building, cheaply built for sale. Plate 2.3 shows the result around just one station: Edgware in Middlesex, some 12 miles (19 kilometres) from central London, in 1926 – two years after the line was opened – and 1948 – a quarter of a century later.

The precise impact of this sort of development upon the urban structure can be well seen by comparing the maps of London, in 1914 and 1939, respectively, in Figure 2.3. London in 1914, as we already noted, had the characteristically tentacular shape associated with the early public-transport city – the city of the steam train and the horse bus. By 1939 London had assumed a completely different shape: growth was much more even in any direction, producing a roughly circular city with a radius about 12 to 15 miles (19 to 24 kilometres) from the centre. The basic reason for this was a change in the technology of transportation. First, electric trains were more efficient carriers than the steam trains had been: accelerating and decelerating rapidly, they could serve more frequently spaced stations. Second, and even more importantly, the motor bus allowed a fairly rapid urban-transport service to penetrate in any direction from these stations, along existing roads, without the need for elaborate capital investment on the part of the operator; it therefore served as a highly efficient feeder service. These changes altered the pattern of accessibility within the urban area. The isochrones (lines of equal accessibility to the centre, in terms of time) were in 1914 very irregular; they fingered out a long way along the rail lines. By 1939 they had become more even and circular (or concentric) in form; and the development of the urban area followed accordingly. This form we can call typical of the later public-transport city; it was not at all a creation of the private car, since in London by 1939 only about one family in ten owned one.

The same process was repeated around the provincial cities too; it was merely on a smaller scale, and dependent on the tram or bus rather than the train. In some of the bigger cities – Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds – the local authorities themselves contributed to the process. They rehoused many thousands of slum dwellers and other people in need of public housing by developing new estates of single-family homes – generally at distances from 4 to 7 miles (7–11 kilometres) from the city centre, in the case of the biggest cities, and connected to it by rapid, frequent and cheap public transport. Like the private housing, this was cheaply built (and, unlike most of the private housing, it was aided by central-government subsidy as the result of a 1919 Housing Act). It was also of a standard never before reached in public housing: equipped with basic facilities like bathrooms, and with generous private garden space around. These authorities built fairly faithfully according to the recommendations of an influential official report, the Tudor Walters Report, which had been published at the end of the First World War in 1918; it had recommended development of single-family homes at about 12 per net residential acre (30/hectare), or about one quarter the density of the old by-law housing.

This also was the density of much of the private housing developed around London and other big cities; many private estates were built at even lower densities: 10 or 8 or even 6 houses to the acre (15–24/hectare). For the general feeling was that more spacious housing standards were a healthy reaction to the cramped terraces of the nineteenth-century industrial town; the bus and the electric train had liberated the manual workers in their rented council houses and the white-collar workers in their

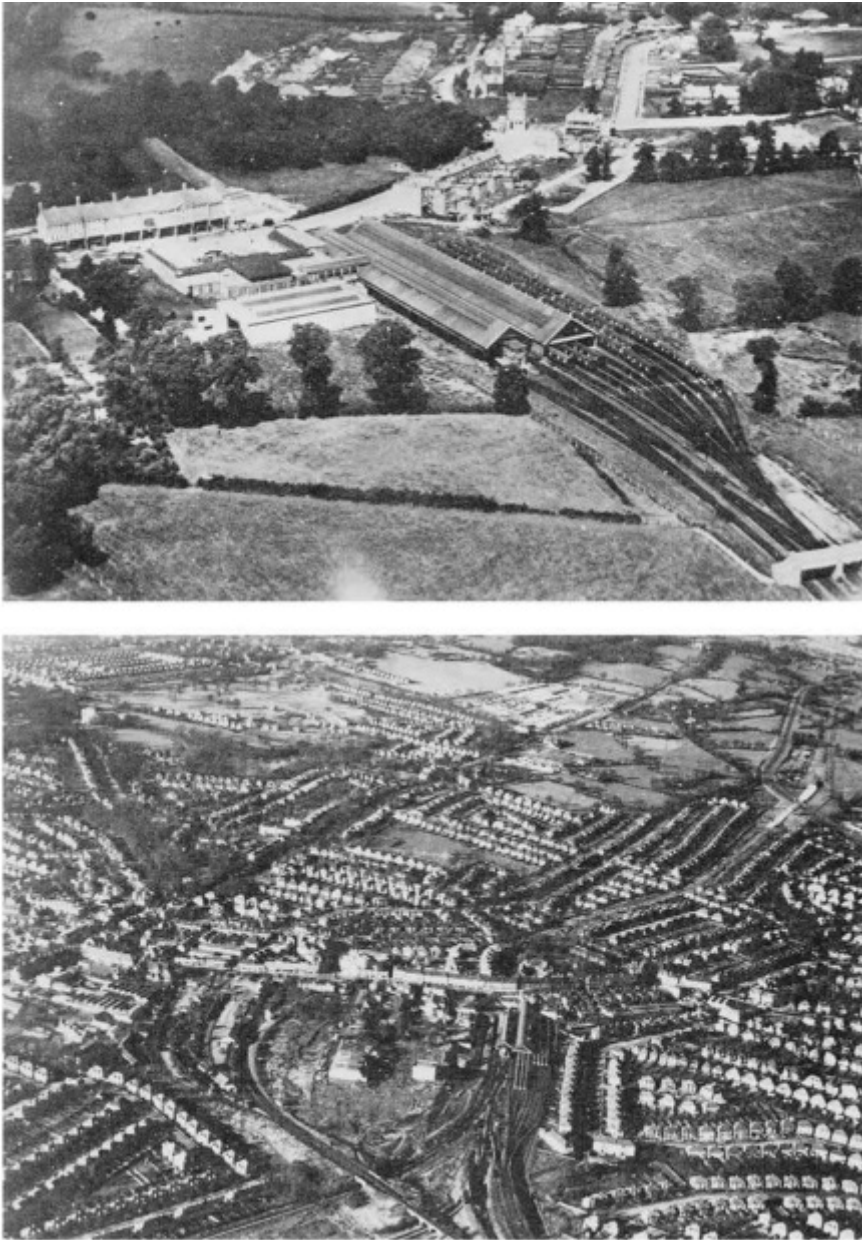


Plate 2.3 Edgware, north-west London: (a) 1926; (b) 1948, showing the impact of the extension of the underground railway (station in centre of pictures) on suburban development. Typical are the uniform rows of semi-detached housing, built at 12 dwellings to the acre (30/hectare), with generous gardens. Better transportation allowed the city to spread.

mortgaged semi-detached house alike. And because the improved transportation made so much land potentially developable, the price of land was low. Indeed, it is clear from later research that land prices and the house prices, which are always so closely related, reached a low point in relation to income in the 1930s that has never been equalled before or since (Figure 2.4). It was actually easier for the average clerical or skilled manual worker to buy a house in the 1930s than it is in the more affluent Britain of 80 years later.

The reaction against sprawl

A minority of thinking people, however, were alarmed at the result. They included both town planners, who by then existed as a profession – the Town Planning Institute had been incorporated in 1914 – and rural conservationists. They were concerned at the fact that the development was uncontrolled by any sort of effective planning. Though Acts of Parliament had provided for local authorities to make town-planning schemes for their areas – in 1909, in 1925 and then, most decisively, in 1932 – basically these Acts gave them no power to stop development altogether where such development was not in the public interest; developers could build almost wherever they liked, provided they followed the general lines of the local town-planning scheme. And this, the planners and conservationists argued, had two bad effects.

First, it was using up rural land – the great majority of it agricultural land – at an unprecedented rate. By the mid-1930s, as subsequent research showed, some 60,000 acres (24,000 hectares) each year (out of 37 million acres (15 million hectares) in all) were being taken from agriculture in England and Wales for all forms of urban development. Because the development was completely uncontrolled, it was no respecter of the quality of agricultural land: the suburban spread of London, for instance, took much of the finest market-gardening land in all England, on the gravel terrace lands west of the capital (and ironically, later on, Heathrow Airport took much of the rest; see Plate 2.4). The result, critics argued, was a major loss in domestic food production – a loss Britain could ill afford in times of war. And in the late 1930s, with war threatening, this seemed an important argument.

Second, the critics argued that the effect on the townspeople was equally bad. Homes were being decentralized at greater and greater distances from the city centre, but jobs were not being decentralized nearly as rapidly. In London and in some of the bigger provincial cities, between the two world wars some factory industry was moving outwards

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DETAILS:
4'2" x 10'0" (FRONT PORCH), 4'2" x 10'0" (REAR PORCH), 11'0" x 11'0" (DRAWING ROOM), 11'0" x 11'0" (DINING ROOM), 11'0" x 11'0" (KITCHENETTE), 11'0" x 11'0" (BED ROOM), 11'0" x 11'0" (BED ROOM), 11'0" x 11'0" (BATHROOM), 11'0" x 11'0" (HALL), 11'0" x 11'0" (CLOSET), 11'0" x 11'0" (W.C.).

Figure 2.4 A house-agent's advertisement of the early 1930s. At this time house prices, aided by cheap labour and materials, were probably cheaper in relation to white-collar salaries than ever before or since. Commuting on the new electric lines round London was easy. There was a striking contrast with the poverty in the depressed industrial areas of the North.



Plate 2.4 The Great West Road, London, in 1951; ribbon development of the 1920s and 1930s alongside an interwar arterial road. This consumed most of the best agricultural land in southern England, and aided the movement in the 1930s for more effective controls on urban growth. It also compromised the original purpose of the road as a through road, so that by the mid-1960s a replacement motorway was needed.

to the suburbs in search of space: new factory estates were developed like Park Royal and the Lea Valley in London, Slough just outside it, Witton Park in Birmingham or Trafford Park in Manchester. But much industry remained in inner urban locations, and the growing volume of so-called tertiary industry – service occupations like work in offices and shops – seemed to be firmly locked in city centres. As a result, traffic congestion in the cities appeared to be growing; and journeys to work, it was assumed, must be getting longer all the time. As cities grew larger and larger, as their suburbs sprawled farther and farther, it was argued that they imposed an increasingly insufferable burden on their inhabitants. And as new arterial roads were built to relieve traffic congestion on the old radial arteries out of the city, so these in turn were lined by ribbon

development of new housing, compromising their function and reducing their efficiency. Ribbon development was partially controlled by an Act of 1935, but the real answer to the problem – motorways for through traffic, with limited access, already being opened in Italy and Germany – was not introduced to Britain until the Special Roads Act of 1949.

Thus a small, but powerful and vocal, movement built up to limit urban growth through positive planning. Essentially, it represented a working coalition between people interested in town planning – some, but not all of them, professional planners – and rural preservationists, who had been instrumental in organizing the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) in 1925. One strong figure spanned both camps and united them: Patrick Abercrombie, Professor of Planning at the University of London and founder of the CPRE. Though they were persuasive, they might not have been so effective if they had not been joined by a third group: the representatives of the depressed industrial areas of northern England, south Wales and central Scotland. We shall see in Chapter 4 how this happened. But meanwhile, we need to retrace our steps in time, to look at some of the most important ideas circulating among urban planners, and others interested in the subject, at this time.

Further reading

A standard textbook of modern economic and social history will provide indispensable background. Good examples include E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Pelican Economic History of Britain*, Vol. 3: *Industry and Empire* (Penguin, 1970); and P. Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain 1700–1914* (Methuen, 1969; paperback edition available). Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (Hamish Hamilton, 1994) and Michael Hebbert, *London: More by Accident than Design* (Wiley, 1998) contain excellent expositions of London's interwar development.

These texts should be supplemented by W. Smith, *A Historical Introduction to the Economic Geography of Great Britain* (Bell, 1968), which emphasizes the geographical impact of economic change, and then by W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1988), which discusses the impact on the landscape.

On the earlier history of town planning, see W. Ashworth, *The Genesis of Modern British Town Planning* (Routledge, 1954), and Leonardo Benevolo, *The Origins of Modern Town Planning* (Routledge, 1967). These should be supplemented by Colin and Rose Bell, *City Fathers* (Penguin, 1972), which gives an indispensable picture of early town planning experiments; and by Gordon E. Cherry, *Cities and Plans: The Shaping of Urban Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Edward Arnold, 1988).

On the interwar development, useful sources are S.E. Rasmussen, *London the Unique City* (Cape, 1937), A.A. Jackson, *Semi-Detached London* (second edition, Wild Swan Publications, 1991), and M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes* (Heinemann, 1981). Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow* (Blackwell, 1988) is a comprehensive history of planning in this period. For London, see Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (Hamish Hamilton, 1994) and Rob Imrie, Loretta Lees and Mike Raco, *Regenerating London: Governance, Sustainability and Community in a Global City* (Routledge, 2009).