

CIVIC SURVEYS

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I WAS once asked "What is the most useful tool of the town planner?" and my questioner was somewhat surprised when I replied that I considered, for the kind of site we were dealing with, a bicycle was the most useful asset he could command. What I had in my mind in making this half jocular answer to my friend's serious question was that, the chief point to be gained in a preliminary view of the site, was a thorough sense of locality and the correct relationship of its several parts, and some rapid means of getting from one part to the other greatly aids in this by allowing us to see each portion in its relationship to the other portions from every point of view while the subject is fresh in our minds. This truth struck me very forcibly when working on a site in the North of England. I knew before visiting it that it was comparatively flat and devoid of trees so decided to do it on foot. When I had been there some days and had got the topography fairly well fixed in my mind, I had occasion to drive along a road passing through the estate for nearly its whole length and I was surprised what a difference the slight extra elevation made to my outlook and how easier it was to grasp the relationship of the parts of the estate, and especially its tortuous lanes, as we moved rapidly along with a good horse. I would therefore say, use whatever means of rapid conveyance is available or the nature of the ground makes possible, the automobile on a smooth road, the bicycle across agricultural land, or a strong wiry pony over rougher ground still.

Of course, in this work, one would make first for the highest points from which to obtain a panoramic view of the surrounding country and there, unfolding the plan, note the positions on it of all the features to be seen and particularly roads, rivers, rights of way, villages or the best points at which to cross railways, rivers, canals, or other obstacles and also swamps or rocky ground and anything else which occurs to us is likely to influence our design. We shall do well to make on our plan the exact position of any tall chimney, church spire or very prominent tree which will form a landmark to help our sense of locality as we move from point to point of the estate.

Before we have been at this work very long, ideas for the direction and route of the principal traffic arteries and sites of the various classes of

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buildings will suggest themselves to the mind and we can do nothing better than to walk over the various routes and sites which occur to us to be obvious, not because there can possibly be any finality in these first rough guesses at a scheme for laying out the ground, but because it will give our itinerary a purpose and we shall notice more thoroughly and with less conscious effort every feature which suggests an easy means of development or the reverse. We shall, of course, also traverse every existing road and follow all water courses and, in a partly developed district, we shall try the effect of continuing the lines of existing streets and studying to connect the new with the old. In my work in England, I have always made as much use as I could of the street car services. For instance in preparing my scheme for the improvement of Bolton, I found that by riding out of the town in all directions into the country on the top of a street car, I obtained from this excellent vantage point, much valuable information.

This preliminary work over and, as soon as we feel that we have a thorough knowledge of the site and all its surroundings, the next step is to open a temporary office in the town nearest the site and there interview every one who is interested in the proposed scheme or who, through having work on the site, or watched the development of surrounding places, is able to give information which may assist us in realizing all that is valuable in the local point of view. There can be rarely anyone so dull or so devoid of imagination that it is total waste of time to listen to all he has to say of what he knows of the place and, when confronted with what is obviously a glaring impossible point of view, we should try to trace the mental processes by which it has been arrived at when we may be rewarded by obtaining material which, by more logical methods of deduction, will produce a result of the greatest value.

William Pitt, a hundred and fifty years ago used to argue politics with a man of no special capabilities, whose opinion on such subjects was of no more value than that of any "man-in-the-street." When asked the reason he replied that he used the man as a "Foolometer," a term he coined to express the idea that he used the man to find out the point of view of the unintelligent individual on matters of state. We must do the same. We must act in the spirit of the old fashioned saying which tells us to—"Listen to all the advice we can obtain and act on as much of it as coincides with our own inclination." By this means we shall gather together, not only a vast accumulation of material about the locality, none of which can be entirely without its bearing upon what we propose to do, but also we shall be enabled to grasp that individual spirit which obtains in every district and which it is so important our scheme should foster and express.

This is most important for, as its location or the prevailing trade or manufacture may influence the town's character or individuality, so ought thees to be expressed in the design. Educational and ecclesiastical towns such

as Oxford or Canterbury will necessarily be planned on altogether different lines from shipping towns such as Liverpool or Cardiff. Each should wear an altogether different external appearance in order to be expressive of its own civic character or individuality. This is the first quality looked for by the civic architect who adequately and reverently approaches the problem of city planning. As Mr. Charles Mulford Robinson says, it is that tangible something which the city says, which is the secret of its own particular charm among cities. A man may be most learned in engineering, in landscape gardening, in architecture, but unless he is so sympathetic to the spirit of cities that he can catch the individual expression of each, he must fail in the making of city plans. It needs a nature extremely fine in its susceptibilities to catch the differing civic spirit of, say, London or Edinburgh, Montreal or Toronto, that something which it is perhaps impossible adequately to convey by words yet can be expressed and augmented by art.

This process, first getting to know all that there is to know about the topography of the site and its surroundings, and then interviewing everyone who has any interest in the proposed scheme should provide the landscape architect with a thorough knowledge, not only of his subject, but, what is still more important, of its history, and so of the requirements to be met and the possibilities for future development.

It will now be time for him to call to his aid the specialists, the antiquarian, the sociologist, the hygienist, the sanitary engineer, the educationalist, the commercial expert and any others whom the particular circumstances would suggest as essential to a result which will recognize all the requirements of all concerned. Accompanying them would be a carefully drawn up circular of instructions giving tersely and succinctly a review of the nature of the scheme proposed, the instructions received by the landscape architect from the promoters which may have a bearing on their reports and the results so far arrived at by the preliminary itinerary of the ground.

When these reports are received the real work of city planning will commence. First will come the important task of so collating and presenting the information gathered together by the various experts as to make it instantly accessible. This will generally be done by taking one or more copies of the large scale plan and showing on it, by a differently colored ink or pigment, the requirements of each class. For instance, if, in the case of an old town, we find on the plan so treated that the antiquarian has marked an architectural feature as of sufficient national interest as to make its retention an absolute necessity, and around it, a different color or a key plan, shows that the hygienist has condemned a considerable area as too low lying for healthy dwellings, we have at once a determinant factor suggesting as imperative that this area shall be cleared of existing slums and dedicated as an open space to the use of the public, the ancient buildings

providing the dominant interest in their lay-out to which all other features will be subordinated. Or suppose that the sanitary engineer has shown that a portion of the site is too high to be reached by the available water supply without resource to expensive pumping operations while the artist has scheduled it as a place of special beauty from which unique views are obtainable, this cumulative evidence in favor of its preservation will immediately become apparent when we indicate the recommendations of each by separate colors on one sheet as suggested. These are of course simple cases which would hardly call for elaborate methods but they indicate the principle which, if adopted, will enable us to deal far more thoroughly with these recommendations, and especially to detect conflicting interests and solve the problems they represent, than would otherwise be possible.

Infinite tact will be needed in this work. It is the bane of the specialist everywhere that he grows in time to a grossly exaggerated sense of the importance of his own particular branch to the exclusion of interest in any other. Charles Darwin, the great popularizer of the revolutionary theory of creation and progress, fully realized this even in his own case, for, in his intensely interesting book, *The Voyage of the Beagle*, he bemoans that, the more he studied the scientific anatomy of nature, the less he saw of nature's beauty until, towards the end of his life, it became almost a closed book to him.

The greater difficulty, however, will be with the amateur with the fixed idea and filled with a boundless enthusiasm for it and possessed of sufficient personal magnetism to obtain support for it. Such persons, from their very enthusiasm are generally promoted to a place on the board of promoters of a town-planning scheme, and the more plausible their hobby, the greater the danger of their wrecking, or, at least, crippling the scheme. As an instance of this, I may mention a scheme for a garden suburb in England where one of the most prominent members of the committee insisted that every other consideration of whatever kind should be sacrificed in order that each house should be placed at the northeast corner of its plot so that it might have a southwest aspect. In vain was it pointed out that every house has four aspects, that such a plan would prevent all privacy in half the gardens, that the public service pipes would be lengthened by 25 per cent, that all massing and grouping of the architectural details would be rendered impossible and the scheme as a whole be ruined. Such instances could be multiplied almost indefinitely but there is one case which crops up perennially on every piece of work with unfailing regularity. This is the person who would sacrifice everything and permanently injure the scheme, to avoid the removal of even the most decrepit trees. I grant, most heartily, that every healthy tree is an inestimable asset to the scheme, and should be preserved and made a feature of the layout if this is possible, but to alter injuriously the

whole line of a main road which, once planned, is more or less fixed for all time, in order to save a tree which can be replaced in fifty years, is a grave mistake. I could point to an English town-planning scheme which has been entirely spoiled by this very thing.

The preparation of the plan, collating and comparing the requirements of the various experts called in to advise on points outside the province of the landscape architect having been completed, the initiatory work incidental to the preparation of the scheme itself may be said to be over and the main business ready for consideration. The principles that will guide the landscape architect in his street planning, the proportioning and adorning of his boulevards, the design of his parks and gardens, and the merging of town and country will be dealt with in subsequent lectures, as they form themes of far too great a magnitude to be dismissed or even dealt with at all adequately in the remaining time at our disposal. Instead I would try and aid the tyro in this work by showing him some of the main principles which must receive recognition in the work of laying down the broad lines of his scheme.

My own method, after completing the street planning, would be to prepare a number of tracings or drawings on transparent paper which may be laid over the main plan and in which only one subject is dealt with. By this means, every part of the complex business of planning a town will be represented without crowding so much detail onto one sheet as to cause confusion. Thus on one tracing would be shown the different character of the various neighborhoods, whether residential, manufacturing, business, and so on, while another would show the varying densities of population, that is, the number of houses to the acre, to be allowed in various districts. These two would be closely related as would those showing the most economical drainage scheme possible on the site, the water service, the gas, electric, and sometimes the hydraulic power services. Other sheets would deal individually with various traffic problems; one would show, for instance, the routes which the fire engine would take to reach any part of the radius it serves, and so show whether the fire station were central in more than name; another would indicate all the playgrounds and show the traffic routes which small children would necessarily have to cross to reach each one from the districts it serves or whether they could be got at without danger to the little ones; another would show the traffic scheme in its relation to the principal railway stations and markets; another the same problem in its relation to the main routes out into the country; another the street car service, an extra thick line showing where two independent services use the same lines for a portion of their route, as this has a direct bearing on traffic problems; another would show the distribution of the town's open spaces and, by a systematic color scheme, the purposes to which they are to be put and this, again, would need careful collation with

the sheet we have already mentioned showing the varying classes of the different districts, and also that showing the allowable maximum of population. Besides these, which would cover the whole of the town, there would be others devoted to the problems incidental to a part of the scheme. Thus one would show the railway and canal facilities to be provided in the manufacturing district, while another, dealing with the same area, would show its relation to the part allotted to the homes of the workers and how they would reach their work.

When these, and all the other problems of city-planning, have been dealt with in this way, and so disposed of by means which are, at the same time, both concise and thorough, certain parts will need more detailed treatment than can be given them on the main plan drawn, as we have suggested, to about the scale of twenty-four inches to the mile. Plans of these will have to be made to a larger scale and the additional details filled in. Thus, each of the public parks and ornamental squares will need such treatment as will also boulevards and other open spaces and, in particular, the town squares in order to show clearly the sites for the principal buildings and their relation to the vistas down the streets approaching it. Then, of course, each railway station and its approaches will require detailed consideration and monopolize a separate sheet, as will every market or other place which will have its own traffic or other problems.

Far better would it be to aim at making the main town-plan intelligible to the average man in the street who has had no architectural training and who consequently cannot understand or read a plan. In England or Canada, our most important task in arranging the presentment of our scheme is to gain the interest and approbation of the public. If it seems to them visionary or a needless waste of public money we shall never get the average citizen to allow it to proceed. We have, to begin with, the unit, the plain citizen, John Smith. It may be the fault of our democratic constitution that John Smith rules the roost in town-planning. In Germany they arrange things on imperial lines and the town-planning officials are above the reach of the voters. Both systems have their advantages and their disadvantages. The late Sir W. S. Gilbert, when writing his plays always had before his mind's eye a stolid individual to whom the music and the jest must be understandable, and we, in presenting our town planning schemes must do the same. I have seen more than one scheme in Europe prepared by good and capable men and which if not showing signs of genius in the promoters, were yet good and worthy of the occasion, fall flat from just this very cause. The very dearth of town-planning schemes in Britain may be traced to this lack of imagination. This multitude of undistinguished men like our friend John Smith are, as units, obscure, and draw little notice in their narrow spheres of action, yet, in their corporate capacity, they are a grand force which may wreck governments. Most

likely as somebody has pointed out, John Smith must have a stake in the city, before you can interest him very deeply in the more complicated problems concerning it, but, that he is a power to be reckoned with, when it comes to the question as to whether a town-plan shall be adopted, no one who has had any experience in these matters will deny for a moment.

Instead, therefore, of giving him unnecessary detail to quarrel about, and which he will think he understands when he does not, the mind of John Smith must be illuminated by a clear and vivid representation of some of the main and indispensable features of the scheme, so placed before him as to awaken his enthusiasm for that which is good in it, and will not only arouse civic aspirations in him, but will appeal strongly to his democratic perceptions and practical philanthropy. In short, John Smith is a good chap, and, if he can be made to see the good in a scheme and be impressed with its practical and financial advantages, he will back it up for all it is worth. It is only and solely from first to last, because Mr. Ebenezer Howard, the author of *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, possessed at the same time the imaginative qualities of the artist, and the sound practical knowledge of the world, which enabled him to make his theories understandable to the lay mind, that the great experiment at Letchworth in England ever came about.

We therefore see that, when his more immediate task is completed, the town-planner must also be in a position to take up this fresh task and, as Lord Houghton puts it, "To try and teach the souls you reach to feel and understand." This is a great task, but one which may be very much lightened by the hearty coöperation of an enthusiastic town-planning commission who, knowing the neighborhood and the trend of local opinion, may by their help and advice, and especially by the way in which they assist in placing the plans before the electorate, overcome mountains.

To do him credit, John Smith is quite ready to admit his ignorance of the artistic side of the work, but he feels that he has practical endowments which have enabled him to carve himself a niche in the universe and that he is capable of adjudicating on this side of the scheme. "I know I am an ass," said the gentleman in the play, "but I am not a *silly* ass," and this somewhat illustrated his attitude to town-planning schemes. We must therefore, in all we do, endeavor to show the man in the street the essential connection between the artistic and the practical, how they interlock at every point and how the attempt to divorce the ideal from the practical cannot but end in a machine-made lifeless standardization which, though it may succeed in rearing the grand external, can never satisfy human aspirations or elevate the public taste. We must, as I have put it elsewhere, "insist on the practicability of idealism."

There is one point in connection with the administration of such a scheme which I desire to mention not because it is a part of our present

subject, though it arises out of it, but because it is of too great importance to be neglected. The subject I mean is the answer to the question, "How far should the individual plot-holder on the area included in a town-planning scheme be controlled in the development of his own holding and especially how far should his architect be restricted in the preparation of his designs for proposed buildings on the plot?"

I think that we shall all agree that the fewer vexatious restrictions imposed the better, but, nevertheless, it is evident that, although the broad lines of the scheme are entirely in the hands of the town-planning commission and their expert adviser, what will mar or make the scheme will, ultimately, be the suitability of the details chosen and the way in which the small finishings are managed. To illustrate what I mean, I need only remind you to what an extent such little things affect the ultimate result in such matters as dress, or the furnishings of our homes.

It is evident, therefore, that, whatever drawbacks there may be to the process, some sort of restraint must be exercised to prevent a few tasteless or ignorant individuals from ruining the whole of the aesthetic effect or creating a nuisance.

Local conditions and characteristics will enter so deeply into the solution of this problem that no town-planner would act or set up a code of conditions without going into the questions involved most thoroughly with his advisory committee, but there are a few broad lines which are applicable to all cases.

The restrictions may take two forms. In the first place, as already mentioned, various sites may be dedicated to special purposes. Thus, on the leeward side of the town considered as such in relation to the prevailing winds, a large area may be set apart for factories while, in another part, private residences only may be allowed with special exemptions for lodges for servants, and so on. In the second place, we may place restrictive clauses in the agreement of sale of the plot on a privately promoted scheme or frame by-laws for submission to and for the sanction of the proper authorities in the case of a public scheme. If such restrictions are wisely drawn up they should be welcomed by the property owners, for not only will they prevent him from doing acts detrimental to the scheme but they will prevent his neighbor from injuring his own plot or causing its depreciation by spoiling the amenities of the neighborhood.

Obvious subjects for such by-laws or restrictive clauses are the prevention of the establishment of trades in a good district which give off a disagreeable smell, the prevention of very high buildings which shut out the daylight and dwarf and overshadow other buildings near them, the provision of a proper building line up to which the main frontage of the buildings must come, the obligation to plant or maintain trees along the boundary between the plot and the public road, regulations as to a levy on all the

houses round an open space laid out as a common garden to provide for its upkeep and such like arrangements which have been tried for many years in England with complete success so far as they have gone, only unfortunately most of us are persuaded that such things have not been done as much as they might have been.

On several English schemes lately there has been an attempt made to go much further than before in regard to the regulation of the designs of buildings to be erected. Most of the conditions relating to this matter enact that the designs for all buildings about to be erected shall be submitted to the town-planning commission in order that their town-planning expert may report to them as to its suitability for the site on which it is proposed to erect it. In case his decision is adverse to the design in any way, the expert is to state his reasons and how, in his opinion, it may be altered so as to harmonize with its surroundings and the prospective builder is bound to come to an agreement with him as to what shall be done before the commission will give their consent to its commencement. There are very obvious difficulties in such a course as this and, as it is on its trial in England it has not been tried long enough or often enough for us to be able to say how it will work or even which is the best and most satisfactory procedure. One can only say that in some cases it seems to be working very well, while in others it is producing what looks dangerously like a complete deadlock. This is no doubt due, to some extent, to the personality of the advisory expert and his committee and also as to how the matter has been put before prospective builders. Tact, in such a case, can work wonders as too can the lack of it in another sense.