

ted factory built in 1956 was an immediate success and now accommodates some 180 individual operators in units from 200 sq. ft. to 2,000 sq. ft. in a six-storey H-shaped building comprising a total of 75,000 sq. ft. of floor space. A number of other Government flatted factories have been built since then, and private enterprise has been quick to see the need for, and profit to be obtained from, such development. As a result, some fifty privately built flatted factories, varying in size from a five-storey building on 6,000 sq. ft. to eleven storeys on 50,000 sq. ft., are now completed and very largely occupied.

Factory legislation gives effect to requirements under

International Labour Conventions and provides *inter alia* the maximum hours of work, particularly for women and young persons. Provision has also been made by Ordinance for workmen's compensation in respect of accidents arising in course of employment, and for holidays with pay for workers earning not more than \$700 a month. Although hours are long by western standards — twelve hours a day for persons over eighteen years — they are difficult to reduce in the circumstances of subsistence living which is the lot of the great majority in Hong Kong. Trade unionism exists but individual unions are small, unorganised and generally of little effect.

(To be continued)

Architecture, Planning and Politics

By

JULIA BASTIAN

"Plan the town and plan the country. Control expansion with green belts. Restrict building in this area, subsidise it in that. Lay down densities and step up compulsory purchase. Create a network of by-laws and building conditions that fox the tax collector and frustrate the architect . . . There is talk now by planners of "planned migration," but with all this planning there is a danger of forgetting the lessons of the past."



TO LOVERS of Georgian architecture and to historians, *Georgian London* by Sir John Summerson (recently published in Pelican edition, 7s. 6d.) has plenty to say. It also has some interesting "asides" for the Georgeist.

We are introduced graciously to the Georgian period, taken systematically and at some speed through it, and, because Summerson is so genuinely caught up with his subject, propelled out on the other side and well into the Victorian era. The author gives his readers good measure.

It is valuable to be shown the early growth of the Cities of London and Westminster, still quite separate entities, and linking them, a sweet Thames running softly between marsh and meadow. To the east lay the merchant metropolis, to the west the Court. Along the Strand stood palaces with halls, courts and gardens much like Oxford colleges today, and beyond — a loosely woven tapestry of village life.

As the pages of this fascinating book turn, we see clearly how development in London has come in distinct waves of activity and at fairly regular intervals across the years.

The first great wave came after the Fire when the well-to-do, and the luxury trades depending on them, moved westwards towards the Courts. Prevailing winds were blowing city smells down river, but to the west land was more desirable — and more expensive.

The next wave broke after the Treaty of Utrecht, 1713, a year before George I ascended the throne. This great building boom swung into existence as more and more country lords set up town houses in addition to their country seats, bringing with them a genteel population of professional classes, all of whom required not only good

class accommodation but new facilities for leisure and pleasure.

A third wave began during the Seven Years War, 1756-63, which, with Pitt in the saddle, turned out to be a period of unusual confidence and prosperity. Victory at Waterloo, 1815, set in motion another tremendous spate of building which had echoes in the ever-widening circles of "metropolitan improvements," until the nineteenth century was given over to producing closely-packed, ill-considered, girthless suburbs — the miles of "gloomy neighbourhoods without neighbours" we know today.

While the *effects* of these waves provide chapters of enjoyable reading to interest anyone who has ever given a thought to this great capital city, it is disappointing to discover that *causes* have been dismissed more or less in a few crisp sentences.

In the author's opinion these waves of activity and development coincided with trade cycles, boosted and dampened down by periods of peace and war, and accelerated by tremendous increases in population. There could be a yet more fundamental cause than this.

"Slowly the concept dawns on us," writes Summerson, "that a city is a living creature which must be controlled, and which, to be controlled, must be understood." But is such control, applied like a strait jacket from without, either necessary or desirable? Is there no inner control which, given half a chance, will operate exquisitely of its own accord?

To understand a city it is necessary to look more closely than there has been time for in this work to the causes that brought the city into being. It is vital to consider the

city in relation to the larger unit — the country — inside which it develops. It cannot escape our notice that the Enclosure Acts of the eighteenth century had a more profound effect on our way of life, and ultimately on the whole national economy, than any other factor in British social history.

Any history book will give us the facts. England in 1700 was chiefly a land of villages. The country folk, producing home-spun woollens in their cottages, provided the basis for England's wealth. By all accounts the people living in "merrie England" were contented, happy and busy. There were no beggars and no one was idle. It comes near to the ideal picture of a *balanced* community.

Between 1702 and 1750 some 112 enclosure acts were passed, and between 1750 and 1810 the number rose to 2,920. By 1801 the General Enclosure Act had made the whole procedure of enclosure much easier. During this time about 2½ million acres of common-fields and 1½ million acres of waste land were enclosed by Acts of Parliament, with the object — which appeared to be a progressive one — of redistributing the land as modern farms.

These farms, more economical and far more efficient, brought in their train the most appalling hardships. When the land came to be re-divided many poor people were unable to show a legal right to their piece, which often enough was determined simply by village custom. Even if they could lay claim to their land many were unable to pay for the cost of hedging and so had to sell their share. They also lost their rights to graze animals on waste land and to collect fuel.

One result was that thousands of country folk drifted to the towns. There were swollen demands for houses and a consequent rise in the cost of sites. The labourer, once happily his own master on his own piece of land, was now in the position of depending upon others for employment. He had lost his independence. Those who drifted to the cities were generally glad to take work of any sort, and soon they were glad to take any wage. As rents went up, wages went down, town houses became smaller, meaner, further out from the centre. A device known as the mortgage was introduced because the ordinary man could not buy a house by any other means. Today, even the mortgage is not enough.

The nineteenth century pointed the way to the gradual assumption of responsibility for housing the poor, first by philanthropic individuals or groups who built cheaply by stacking families in flats on top of each other, and then gradually by the State, which felt obliged to put the pressures on every form of taxation in order to provide the poor man with his wherewithal.

But the labourer never recovered the freedom he had once enjoyed as his own master in village life before 1700. And the community never fully recovered its balance.

Surprisingly, none of this is mentioned in *Georgian London*. It is not too clear whether Summerson has avoided these facts because he believes they have no connection with the growth of London, or because he is unaware of their significance. But there can be little doubt that enclos-

ure of the common-fields (coupled with the coming of power-driven machinery and the factory system), put an end to cottage industry and drove the people to work in cities. These would appear to be the fundamental causes behind every city's growth.

There is also no doubt that the author is worried about London's ceaseless expansion and, like many planners, is concerned about how it will all turn out.

One comment he makes is particularly interesting. He writes: "A town, like a plant or an ant-hill, is a product of a collective, unconscious will . . ." which although Summerson is looking for ways to *control* growth, suggests that he too admits that natural control may be built-in, and should the *right conditions* be operative, may yet bring about a city that is not only balanced but also beautiful.

Certainly a city is *living*, and is often termed an "organic structure" or "organised body." Can we in fact impose the organisation on such a body from without? Can we *make* a city work? Before we can control the growth, we have to come to understand the organism.

Today, many will say that planning is the answer. Planning is the fashion. Plan the town and plan the country. Control expansion with green belts. Restrict building in this area, subsidise it in that. Lay down densities and step up compulsory purchase. Create a network of by-laws and building conditions that fox the tax collector and frustrate the architect — and leave millions of people living cheek-by-jowl a few miles around Charing Cross. There is talk now by planners of "planned migration," but with all this planning there is a danger of forgetting the lessons of the past. History, especially social history, is useful if only to show us what not to do.

If we take a look with Summerson at seventeenth century London it becomes clear how some of these false conditions came about. Take for instance the royal prejudice on building. For centuries royalty has been curiously fond of rebuilding in grander style on the same pattern, yet reluctant to expand London for the benefit of the populace. Kings and queens, notoriously spendthrift on their own palaces, have consistently refused licences, and by so doing have held up or sabotaged many an excellent building scheme. Charles I, who wanted complete autocratic control over London's architecture, is a good example.

After years of delay the fourth Earl of Bedford was more or less blackmailed into building grand architecture



for the king's pleasure, rather than houses for his own profit. Finally, in 1630, special dispensation came from Charles, granted on payment of £2,000 (a tidy sum in those days), and on the strange condition that the Earl built "on a scale and in such a manner as to provide a distinguished ornament and not merely an extension of the capital." In these circumstances Inigo Jones' great Covent Garden

scheme was born. The concept that London belonged to the king, a possession of the crown, dies hard.

By 1662 royalty was still showing favours by parcelling up land and handing it over "on loan." Lord St. Albans obtained a large piece near St. James's Palace on a sixty-year lease and set about laying out St. James's Square. This, we learn, was to consist of a few really splendid mansions built and occupied by the very best families — including his own. However, the scheme was in danger of failing since the "best families" wished to pass the family home on to the second and third generations, which a limited lease would have made impossible. Lord St. Albans put the matter to Charles II, asking him to turn the loan into a gift. The king, apparently anxious to have him for a neighbour, granted his petition, and St. Albans became freeholder of the soil.

Arrangements for land transaction continued to be haphazard, to say the least. In 1661 Lord Southampton introduced the building lease and with it the system of speculation which brought half London into being. His scheme, laid out in a dignified square on what had been one of his fields, was divided into individual plots, each let at a ground rent on the understanding that the lessee built at his own expense "a house or houses of substantial character." At the end of the lease these became the property of the ground landlord. This arrangement, in contrast to the great estates entailed in a family, or held in trust by a corporation which could not be sold except under Act of Parliament, represents a device by which land can be rendered profitable over and over again.

The device suited ground landlords well and became widely used, although leases were lengthened. The original forty-two-year lease was superseded by a sixty-four-year lease in the early eighteenth century, and later by the ninety-nine-year lease which by 1900 was practically universal. It is significant that today the very short lease, in some cases seven years for luxury flat accommodation in central city areas, is gaining in popularity — that is popularity with the landlord.

The destiny of a city, or a country — or a person for that matter — turns on a moment of decision. Had Lord Southampton and the powers-that-be handled the situation differently, it is conceivable that Britain would not be in an economic tangle today. If Lord Southampton had thought out the very simple system of selling holdings which entailed the payment to the community of rates based on the value of the land instead of introducing the building lease which guaranteed his own *personal gain*, it is not difficult

to see that economic forces would have shaped our present far differently. And the economic forces of the present are, this very minute, shaping tomorrow.

It is important to realise in this respect that land acts like a magnet. It is necessary for our survival. When land is enclosed and opportunity for survival in that place is lost, people look for new opportunities. The less land there is available, the less the opportunities are.

Placing the full tax load on land provides the incentive for improving all land in order to pay the tax and pocket the return. In doing so, it creates maximum opportunity for individual endeavour.

It is not difficult to see that taking land values would operate so that the magnetism of expensive city land would be put into reverse. Instead of great numbers striving to work (or being obliged to work) and live in cities, there would be a magnetic pull towards the lowest rated areas — the villages. It is possible that our two biggest problems, both inherited from the eighteenth century, the slum question, and the question of industrial relations between capital and labour, would never have arisen. The simple balance that was patently obvious in our villages of merrie England might well have been visible in the great cities of 1963.

And what are we to think of the following quote from Summerson's book, taken from a history of London written in 1773? "At Kentish Town, the air being exceedingly wholesome, many of the citizens of London have built houses; and such whose circumstances will not admit of that expense, take ready furnished lodgings for the summer, particularly those who are affected with consumptions, and other disorders."

At that time Kentish Town was a fresh, green, desirable locality, one of the New Town satellites of the eighteenth century. If we cannot come to understand why and how a town loses its balance and falls into a morass of "neighbourhoods without neighbours," all our efforts at brave new housing estates, slum clearance and overspill programmes are as pitiful as the misguided attempts of the bull Henry George speaks of, who cannot disentangle himself from the tether. Are we so blind that we cannot recognise the factors that have tied London in this knot? Is it not possible that by understanding the *causes* we can see our cities, towns and villages grow as they are needed, exercising that inner control that makes the ant-hill a work of art, the rose not only an object of beauty but as Summerson points out "a product of the collective, unconscious will."



INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR LAND-VALUE TAXATION AND FREE TRADE

International Conference — New York

AUGUST 30 — SEPTEMBER 5, 1964