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| **Title** | Dublin Town Planning Competition: Ashbee and Chettle's The New Dublin - A Study in Civics |
| **Authors(s)** | Bannon, Michael J. |
| **Publication date** | 1998 |
| **Publication information** | Bannon, Michael J. "Dublin Town Planning Competition: Ashbee and Chettle's The New Dublin - A Study in Civics." University College Dublin. School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Policy, 1998. |
| **Series** | Planning and Environmental Policy Research Series, Occasional Paper No. 6 |
| **Publisher** | University College Dublin. School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Policy |
| **Item record/more information** | http://hdl.handle.net/10197/6165 |

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# Dublin Town Planning Competition: Ashbee & Chettle's The New Dublin – A Study in Civics

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*Occasional Paper No. 6*

**August 1998**

**Copies available from:**
Department of Regional & Urban Planning
University College Dublin
Richview, Clonskeagh
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**Price: 10.00**

**ISBN:** 1-898473-98-6

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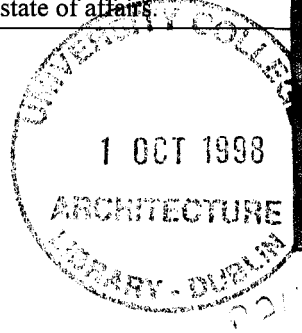

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## 1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT.

> *"The eighteenth century saw a rapid growth in the size and population of Dublin. The city prospered. The medieval walls were swept away and new broad streets and squares constructed in the open countryside on either side of the Liffey. The river itself was embanked and graceful bridges built. Dublin was a wonder among cities – admired for its buildings, wide streets and promenades"*, (Nowlan, 1988).

This was the image of a neo-classical, grand Dublin, "*the second city of the empire*" which is familiar to many. In part, this classical Dublin owes much to the foresight and guidance provided by Dublin's Commissioners for the Making of Wide and Convenient Streets and Ways (The Wide Streets Commissioners, McParland, 1972; Craig, 1969; Harvey, 1949).

But behind and alongside the grandeur and the splendour of Georgian Dublin there was another reality, a population of deprived, under educated, poor and unemployed living in slums in back alleys, mews courts and lanes and especially concentrated in the western half of the city (Warburton et al, 1818). But in the 19th century following the Act of Union of 1801, and especially in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, there was a sharp fall in agricultural prices and the consequent economic decline of much of the country was to affect both Dublin's gentry and its poor – a poor population swollen by an influx from "*the poverty stricken countryside as Dublin literally became another pool of Bethesda*", (Larkin, 1998). The elites aggravated the problem by fleeing their traditional inner city areas to the unincorporated suburbs or abroad, leaving much of Dublin's fine neo-classical heritage to fall into multi-family tenements. The causes of the Dublin slums and tenements appear to have been unique in the western world in the 19th century in that these conditions were not the result of industrialisation. As Larkin notes "*Dublin, in fact, suffered more from the problems of de-industrialisation than industrialisation between 1800 and 1850*", (Larkin 1998). The results of these processes included poverty, destitution, overcrowding, unemployment, disease and very high death rates, as well as the decline and decay of much of the physical fabric of eighteenth century Dublin. Such conditions drew from Sean O'Casey's pen the following terrible description of houses in a Dublin street:

*"a long lurching row of discontented incurables, smirched with the age-long marks of ague, fevers, cancer and consumption, the soured tears of little children, and the sighs of disappointed newly-married girls. The doors were scarred with time's spit and anger's hasty knocking; the pillars by their sides were shaky, their stuccoed bloom long since peeled away, and they looked like crutches keeping the trembling doors standing on their palsied feet. The gummy-eyed windows blinked dimly out, lacquered by a year's tired dust from the troubled street below. Dirt and disease were the big sacraments here – outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual disgrace".*

## 2. DUBLIN'S HOUSING CRISIS.

A great deal of material has been published on the housing crisis in Dublin at the beginning of the 20th century, a crisis that had deepened throughout the nineteenth century and to which the public and private responses had been woefully inadequate (Daly, 1985; O'Brien, 1982; Prunty, 1998). There are many rich sources of material underpinning this research including Census records, statistical surveys and the reports of public inquiries. Amongst the latter we may note the Fever Reports of the 1830's, the Poor Law Inquiry of 1833, Medical Officers' reports, Report of the Royal Commission on Housing 1885 and, most especially, the report of and evidence to the inquiry into the Housing Conditions of the Working Classes in the City of Dublin held in 1913, (Report, 1914). Table 1 attempts to sum up the situation from 1891 to 1911 as the situation deteriorated.

The housing crisis was the most visible manifestation of a city population ravaged by endemic disease, ill health, overcrowding and death rates which, in the period 1860 to 1910, were well in excess of those in other large cities within the United Kingdom and above those experienced in other Irish cities and towns, (Prunty 1998 – see Tables 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3). The Dublin slum problem was compounded by the gross under-bounding of the city area, the continued influx of rural to urban migrants and the ineffectiveness and ineptitude of the municipal and public authorities in addressing the problem of such magnitude, (Daly, 1984). Thus, by 1914 nearly 26,000 families or thirty-five percent of

the population lived in 5,000 tenements while more than 20,000 of those families existed in one room and another 5,000 families had only two rooms. The Dublin slums became the institution, the locus, where poverty existed and where a '*culture of poverty*' developed which was to exist long after many of the slums and tenements had disappeared.

**Table 1: Housing in Dublin: Number of Families in each Class of Accommodation, 1891/1901/1911,** ***(Note 1)***

| Class of Accommodation | Number of Families | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **1898** | **1901** | **1911** |
| 1st class (occupancy of 1st class house by one family) | 4,694 | 4,635 | 4,599 |
| 2nd class *(note 2)* | 13,279 | 33,199 | 37,202 |
| 3rd class *(note 3)* | 14,536 | | |
| 4th class *(note 4)* | 19,342 | 21,429 | 20,564 |
| Total families | 51,851 | 59,263 | 62,365 |
| Total inhabited houses: | | | |
| Old city (15 wards) | 25,764 | 27,404 | 28,938 |
| Added areas | - | 4,657 | 6,539 |
| Totals | 25,764 | 32,061 | 35,477 |

*Note 1:* Data for 1891 is for 15 wards, i.e., the extent of the city of Dublin before reconstitution as a county borough and the addition of 5 wards for the added areas in 1900.
*Note 2:* Denotes occupancy of 2nd-class house (5-9 rooms) by one family or 1st-class house by two or three families.
*Note 3:* Denotes occupancy of 3rd-class house (1-4 rooms) by one family, 2nd-class house by two or three families; 1st-class house by four or five families.
*Note 4:* Denotes occupancy of 4th-classs house by one family; 3rd-class house by two or more families; 2nd-class house by four or more families; 1st-class house by six or more families. (Houses of the 4th-class were a negligible factor, numbering only 11 and 4 in 1901 and 1911, respectively).
**Source:** Census of Ireland: City of Dublin; 1891, 1901, 1911 (Table VIII)
*Taken from J. V. O'Brien, 1982*

An official report by P. C. Cowan calculated that there was need to provide improved housing for at least forty-one per cent of the city's population, i.e. 135,700 persons or 29,500 families, (Cowan, 1918). This translated into a need to construct 16,500 new

houses and to "*re-model*" 13,000 tenements, (Prunty, 1998). Patrick Abercrombie had prepared his 1914 plan on the basis of a need to re-house 64,000 persons, (Abercrombie, 1922). As matters stood, the Corporation was landlord to or had constructed a total of 1,880 houses in the thirty-five years since 1882 so the housing challenge was "*inconceivable*" and indeed this colossal task was "*immensely greater proportionately*" than the challenge of building 300,000 houses in England and Wales after the end of the war.

Traditionally, the view had been held that the root cause of the Dublin housing crisis was the poverty of residents which was based on insufficient and precarious employment. Geddes in his evidence to the 1913 Housing Inquiry challenged this neat sequence. For him housing was seen as "*fundamental to the problem of labour, since the house is a central and fundamental fact of real wages*", (Bannon, 1978; Bannon, 1985). This view was to gain some credibility in Dublin, because by 1918 Cowan, the Chief Engineering Inspector, Local Government Board, was of the view that there was little chance of improvement in the "*terribly depressed conditions of labour*" until "*a greater efficiency*" on the part of the Dublin worker was secured, and to this end "*no remedial policy is more promising than that of improved housing*", (Cowan, 1918). Of wider significance and perhaps of more lasting consequence was the ability of Geddes to convince Lady Aberdeen of the logic of his argument.

## 3. THE ABERDEENS AND THE POOR OF DUBLIN.

Lord Aberdeen and his wife, Lady Ishbel, were Scottish members of the Liberal Party who gave a life of distinguished public service at home and abroad. Lord Aberdeen first served as Viceroy in Dublin from 1886 and, after a period as Governor General in Canada from 1893, until 1898, the Aberdeens returned to Dublin's Viceregal Lodge in 1906 where they remained for nine years until February, 1915. The record of their stay in Ireland was one of commitment to social reform and to the Home Rule movement, ("*We Twa*", 1925). In particular, Lady Aberdeen devoted herself unceasingly to the causes of social reform, housing improvement and economic development. In 1907 she founded the '*Women's National Health Association of Ireland*' dedicated to the eradication of disease, reducing mortality rates, improving housing and creating local

enterprise. In time, the W.N.H.A.I. was to spawn several reform organisations still active in social and economic advance throughout Ireland. Lady Aberdeen's love and commitment to the improvement of Irish conditions was to outlast their official stay in Dublin and she continued to visit and to work with Dublin groups throughout the 1920's.

As a Scott, Lady Aberdeen would have been familiar with the work of Geddes, she visited his Outlook Tower in Edinburgh and she recognised the potential of his "Cities and Towns" travelling exhibition to help "*stir up public feeling*" on Irish housing conditions and deprivation throughout the cities and towns of Ireland. "*With this end in view [we] invited Professor Geddes to bring his Cities and Towns Exhibition to Dublin, guaranteeing him against loss. He came, not once, but twice, and he and the Exhibition made a deep impression upon a small circle of earnest students*", ("*We Twa*", 1925).

## 4. GEDDES: POVERTY, HOUSING AND THE TOWN PLANNING COMPETITION.

Geddes took his "Cities and Town Planning" exhibition to Dublin during the summer of 1911, where it was displayed as part of the international Congress of the Royal Institute of Public Health. During the Congress and over the next three years Geddes subjected Dublin to his renowned flurry of attack and reform on all fronts, (Bannon, 1985; Welter, 1998). He was instrumental in bringing to Dublin the leading figures of the emerging town planning profession in Britain and the United States. He encouraged, and cajoled all the leaders of Dublin to work towards the eradication of the housing crisis in a planned and orderly manner. Geddes recognised the urgency of the "*civic uplifting*" of Dublin's population. For him "*planning pays its way*" and he cautioned that "*putting buildings up in a permanent way without town planning is preparing slums for the future*", (Report of Housing Inquiry, 1914). Rather, using the analogy of war preparations, he advocated "*bringing up resources on every side*" while "*drawing up your plans*". Drawing up a plan should not be an excuse for procrastination – "*during the preparation of a town plan much useful work could proceed 'subject to criticisms'*".

While on visits to Dublin he was a frequent guest of the Viceroy, held discussions with the Local Government Board, the Lord Mayor, the Roman Catholic Archbishop, with

most leading officials and businessmen and he even dared to meet the then unacceptable trade union leader, Jim Larkin, to discuss ways of planning and solving the problem of providing a solution to the working class housing issue.

Apart from the exhibitions, Geddes influenced the establishment of the Housing and Town Planning Association of Ireland in 1911 which later merged into the Civics Institute of Ireland. Along with his daughter, Nora, he embarked on a '*campaign to convert*' derelict sites into recreation areas. He ran Summer Schools for Civics and, with Raymond Unwin, reviewed the Municipal and Local Government Board's proposals for housing development, including the site for a Garden Village at Marino. One of his most important achievements, the only one with lasting consequences and the one central to this conference, was his success in getting the Viceroy to agree in early 1914 to the establishment of a Dublin Town Planning Competition with a prize of £500 to go to the winning entry.

Quoting from a speech by Lord Aberdeen to the Burns Club, the Irish Architect and Craftsman records that:

> *It is in connection with this Exhibition [Geddes's Cities Exhibition] that a prize of £500 has been offered for the best survey and scheme of building improvement in this city, and a (sic) claim that the money may justly be regarded as being not less directed to the ultimate benefit of its inhabitants, and especially the poorest of the inhabitants than if it were expended on gifts of meat and clothing. Probably the latter form of benefit would be less desirable than the other, certainly in the long run.*

The competition was considered to be of international importance and was widely advertised. By March 31st 1914 the Housing and Town Planning Association of Ireland's Technical Committee had finalised the Competition's particulars and conditions of entry. The designs to be completed and submitted before 1 September 1914, were to consist of a written report, containing a summary of the main conclusions, recommendations and estimates, together with drawings mounted on linen and on stretchers at scales of 12"or 6" to a mile, 25" to a mile and street sections at 1 inch to 20 feet.

The planning proposals were to relate to a Greater Dublin area taking in Howth, Glasnevin, Ashtown, Dundrum and Dalkey. The submissions should have regard to the following main headings:

1. Communications: Road, rail and canal systems; existing and proposed industrial locations and main existing and proposed streets and thoroughfares.

2. Housing: Existing tenements, number, location and types of dwellings required, housing densities, phasing of developments, open space in every area using the American standard of 10 per cent O.S., and the relocation of institutions from centre city to suburbs.

3. Metropolitan improvements: Better use of city's situation including the rivers and bay, preservation or expansion needs of public buildings – e.g. Administration Buildings, New Art Gallery, Cathedral etc, provision of parkways and park system. (Bannon, 1985).

The submitted plans were to be assessed by Professor Patrick Geddes, Professor John Nolen, Boston and Mr. Charles McCarthy, the Dublin City Architect. The winning submission was to become the property of the Housing and Town Planning Association of Ireland, who were also prepared to preserve for reference any submissions receiving honourable mention. The guidelines emphasised that too much remained unknown about Dublin's needs as yet to allow any definite commitment to implement any of the schemes. Rather the objective was to "*elicit Plans and Reports of a preliminary and suggestive character, and thus obtain contributions and alternatives which may be of value towards the guidance of the future development of the City in its various directions*". A total of eight entries were received by the closing date of 1st September, 1914.[1]

[1] The eight competition entries were:
a) Competitive Designs submitted by Messrs. Donnelly and Moore, Dublin
b) Competitive Designs submitted by Frank A. Cushing Smith.
c) Competitive Designs submitted by Kaye-Parry and Ross, Dublin
d) Competitive Designs submitted by G. F. Beckett and J. A. Geoghegan, Dublin.
e) Competitive Designs submitted by Isaac Stephen Varian
f) Competitive Designs submitted by J. M. Bogle, A. W. Panton, H. O. Borroughs and O. Newbold.
g) Competitive Designs submitted by Patrick Abercrombie, Sydney A. Kelly and Arthur Kelly
h) Competitive Designs submitted by Messrs. C. R. Ashbee and G. H. Chettle.
A brief summary of each of the competition entries is contained in The Dublin Civic Survey, The University of Liverpool Press, 1925.

**The Competition Results.**

Perhaps the most important outcome of the Competition was the bringing together of the principal planning protagonists of the day and their contrasting philosophies and ideologies as to what constituted the newly emerging art and science of planning. There, alongside the positivist Geddes was Abercrombie with his Liverpool School, Beaux Arts ideas of order, symmetry and elegance and a belief that the hotchpotch of English (and Irish) cities needed "*pulling down, Hausmanning, and re-erection on intelligent lines*", (Adshead, 1910). A number of U.S. personnel, including Nolen, were steeped in the City Beautiful Movement while Ashbee largely looked back to a romantic pre-industrial vision of England and of a by-gone society. Coupled with these were a number of competitors for whom planning was either an extension of architecture or a matter of transportation engineering.

Due to war time conditions and the absence of Geddes in India, it proved impossible to adjudicate on the competition entries until September 1916. In reaching their decisions, the Assessors sought and received the assistance of Thomas Adams who prepared a nine page report on the entries, (Bannon, 1985).[2] The adjudicators were well pleased with the mass of designs and "*the many proposals of practical value and suggestive interest" brought forward by the various submissions and "each and all of the Competitors have their particular excellences*". Given the detailed terms of reference, the advance material made available to the contestants and the common back-cloth of the Civic Exhibition and Summer School, it is hardly surprising that many aspects of the various submissions concur both in respect of the analysis of the existing situation and the resolution of problems. Recurring features in many of the eight submissions include a central passenger station, replacement of the "metal bridge", the erection of a civic centre, the location of a new cathedral and the laying out of new and improved cross-city thoroughfares. So good were some of the entries that one of the adjudicators regretted that they were legally bound to give the prize of £500 to the outright winner, (Nolen, 1917). Indeed, Nolen had earlier expressed the hope that "*some public spirited gentleman would supplement the Lord Lieutenant's generous prize for plans by at least two more prizes of £200 and £100*".

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[2] A hand written note in the Nolen papers, dated 19th August, 1916 suggests that the Abercrombie et al received a prize of £400 with £100 going to J. M. Boggle et al. Three further entries were proposed for "honourable mention". The note is in the names of Thomas Adams and John Nolen.

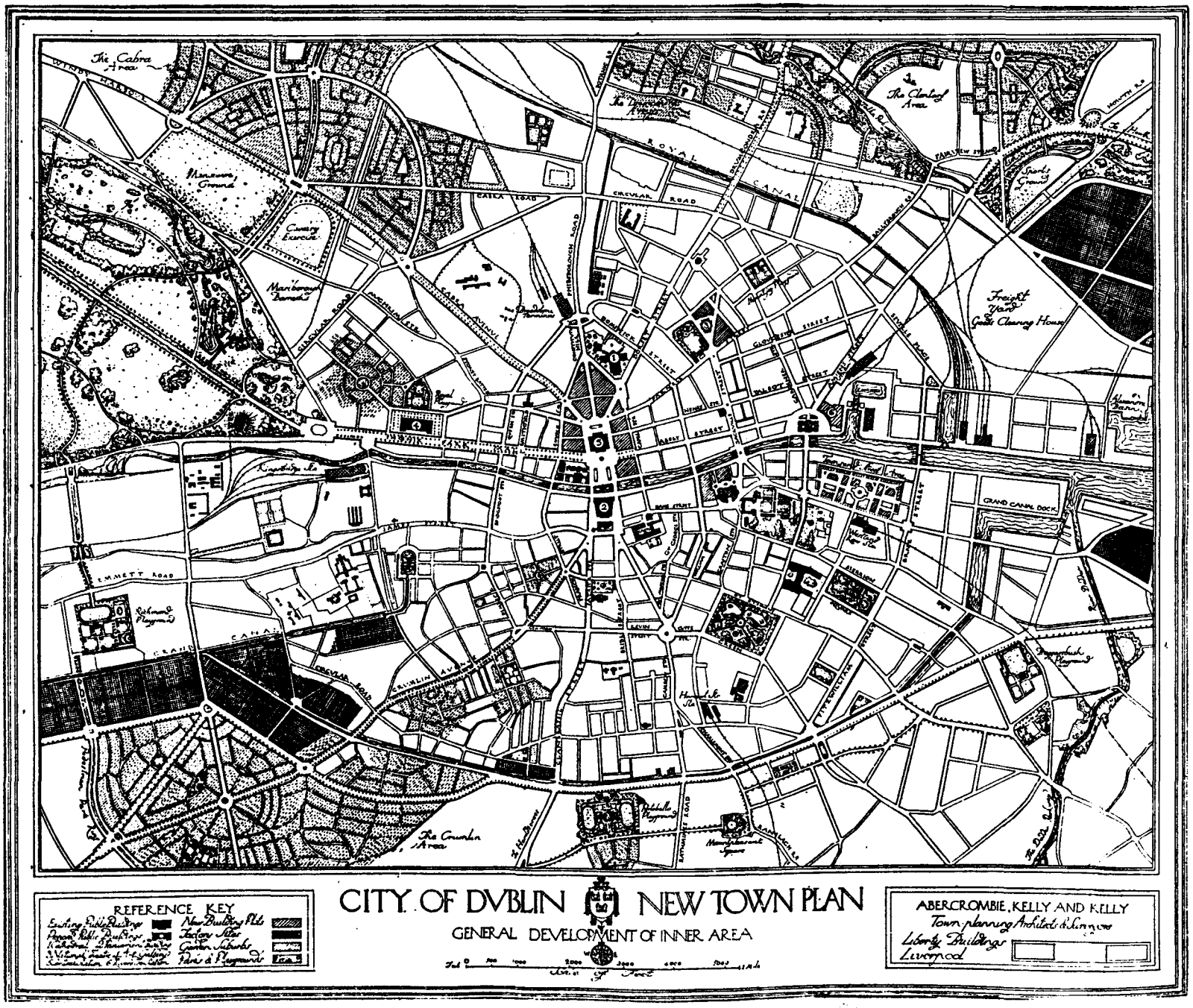
Having considered all the plans, the prize of £500 was awarded to the Lever Professor of Civic Design at the University of Liverpool, Patrick Abercrombie, who in association with Sydney and Arthur Kelly, Liverpool surveyors, had compiled the winning entry. The prize was awarded to Abercrombie and his colleagues having regard to the *"magnitude and comprehensiveness of the exhibit, evidencing corresponding thought and labour"* as well as *"skill and beauty of execution"*.

The proposals by Abercrombie, Kelly and Kelly, published in 1922 as Dublin of the Future: the New Town Plan, (Abercrombie et al, 1922) consisted of two rather contrasting parts. With regard to the city centre, the idea was to model Dublin, the emerging national capital, on the plans of Hausmann and Henard for Paris (Evanson, 1979) complete with boulevard construction, extensive street widening, a new traffic concourse (a Dublin Place de La Concorde) and sites for new public building, including a bourse! Outside the centre, the authors prepared sketch suburban housing layout plans to accommodate the 60,000 to be "thinned out" from the centre, (Fig. 1). These layouts reflected the design experimentation then evident in suburban housing layouts under the 1909 Housing and Town Planning Act of England and Wales. The plan provided for a hierarchy of open spaces, metropolitan bus and underground transport systems, the suburbanisation of industry and extensive in-filling of Dublin Bay to accommodate housing, open space and industry.

In awarding the first prize to Abercrombie et al, the adjudicators stressed that *"we are not thereby endorsing all, or any, of the particular proposals"*, nor were they recommending *"their being put into execution to the exclusion of all other alternatives"*. Indeed, some years later Geddes expressed his reservations in respect of Abercrombie's survey, (Bannon, 1985). On the other hand, Abercrombie became convinced as time elapsed that *"in the main, the general outline of the plan of 1914 could yet be followed, subject to certain modifications"*, (Irish Independent, 19/02/1938). As the only competition entry to have been published and in a lengthy vacuum in respect of planning, Dublin of the Future tended to take on the perspective of a *"great Dublin plan"*.

Apart from the winning entry, the adjudicators singled out for special mention the competition entry by C.R. Ashbee and G. H. Chettle since *"no other report expresses a fuller and more comprehensive grasp of civic problems."* The adjudicators favoured

**Figure 1: Abercrombie et al, City of Dublin: New Town Plan, 1914, published 1922**



publication of this report and expressed the view that had circumstances not prevented its completion, "*the author of the premeditated design might have found in this [entry] a more serious competitor*".

It had long been presumed that all competition entries apart from that by Abercrombie had been lost. However, a copy of Ashbee and Chettle's submission survives in the John Nolen collection in the Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Cornell University Libraries. In addition in 1994, Ashbee's personal copy of "*A Study in Civics*" came on the market and was acquired by the Richview Library at University College Dublin. This volume, consisting of 101 sections over seventy-two pages, is a flimsy carbon copy of the original text with a number of delicate and fragile drawings. The work appears to be solely or largely the work of Ashbee. George Chettle, who became Ashbee's pupil in 1904, described as "*a long thin rather charming brown-eyed creature with lots of stuff in him*" became Ashbee's partner in practice in 1912 but seems to have had little input to the Dublin study.

## 5. CHARLES ROBERT ASHBEE, 1863-1942.

C. R. Ashbee was born in London of middle-class parents, his mother was the daughter of a Hamburg merchant and his father, at least in later life, a collector and bibliographer of erotica! Contrary to his father's wishes and on the advice of Charles Keegan Paul, he left the family home in Bloomsbury in 1883 to take up a place at King's College, Cambridge. He read philosophy. He was greatly taken with the ideas of Ruskin who argued "*that he could read the history and health of a whole society in its buildings and works of art*", (Crawford, 1985). Like Ruskin, he started from the assumption that the roots of art lie in the soil of society, and that the first question to be asked in any sane order of things was, what ought to be done. Ruskin's occasional onslaughts on the modern industrial system greatly influenced Ashbee and led him to question the thrust of nineteenth century industrialisation.

He was also influenced by William Morris who idealised the medieval craftsmen, the great traditions of Englishness and the challenge to restore the decorative arts to their place of honour from their degraded status "*as merely useful and inexpensive*". While there were many influences on Ashbee, Ruskin and Morris were the true children of

history, holding up the present to judgement of a romantic past. There was still a great divide in English society. The education system focussed upon the Church, the Army, the Professional and Public Service but not on industry. Geography strengthened the split with industry in the "*north*", power and influence in the south. It was a divide which enabled the Arts and Crafts movement to flourish alongside an accelerating industrialisation. In his final year at Cambridge he appears driven by the '*socialistic enthusiasm*' of many young men of means to better understand the working classes and to get at the "*common humanity*" below the class differences.

Having completed his studies at Cambridge he joined the London architectural firm of Bodley and Garner in 1886 to study architecture. In the evenings Ashbee turned towards the chronically deprived East-End of London, to Whitechappel and to Toynbee Hall, the University settlement in the East-End, where as a resident he was required to carry out social or educational work, much of it revolving around Ruskin's ideas, the Romantic movement and the importance of the decorative arts in society. Much of Ashbee's energies were devoted to crafts education and to the development and management of the Guild of Handcraft. The experience at Toynbee Hall also instilled in Ashbee a commitment to university extension education and for much of the 1980's, alongside his work for the Guild, he was engaged as an extension lecturer by Oxford University.

Ashbee was an ardent conservationist. In 1894 he initiated the "*Watch Committee*" for London to compile "*a register in which all work of artistic and historic interest shall be catalogued*", (Crawford, 1985). The Watch Committee was a forerunner of the National Trust, set up in 1895 and upon whose council Ashbee served from 1896 onwards. Despite this strong commitment to conservation, he had a lasting friendship with Frank Loyd Wright whom he first visited at Hull House, Chicago, in 1896 and whom he described as "*by far and away the ablest man in our line of work that I have come across in Chicago, perhaps in America*". Nevertheless, Ashbee was not totally in awe of Wright's work nor did he loose his own Romantic leanings – on one occasion he expressed the view that, in respect of some of Wright's creations, he would like "*to clothe them with a more living and tender detail*". Ashbee "*responsive as ever to progressive legislation*" welcomed the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909, joined the A.R.'s Committee on Town Panning and Housing and prepared his own Town

Planning Scheme for the Ruslip Manor estate on the North Western edge of London, (Fig. 2). His plan appears to have drawn upon utopian ideals from the Italian Renaissance, upon the ideas of Morris as to "*what a city might be*" and his bird's eye view of a perfect world only serves to show that for Ashbee "*town planning was more concerned with the achievement of social ideals than with the management of physical change and growth*", (Crawford, 1985).

Ashbee had much in common with Geddes and, like Geddes, his view of planning drew strongly upon Civics. He described Geddes as "*the finest educational revolutionary ... now living and teaching in England*". Ashbee knew Geddes from the 1890's, both knew of working class poverty, both realised the importance of university extension programmes, both had a similar intellectual temperament and both wished not to be constrained by professional or administrative boundaries. Geddes also shared with Ashbee the same sense "*of evolution of industrial society*" and alone amongst the early planners both worked at gratifying the "*humanistic on to the industrial*". Both valued "*the power of voluntary effort*" and each was characterised by "*a mild progressiveness*". Each could be described as "*something of a socialist*", though Ashbee was clearly also a cultural imperialist.

Like Geddes, Ashbee was also a prolific writer. Alongside his teaching, his work for the Guild and a considerable architectural practice, he wrote over ninety publications including books on Craftsmanship in Competitive Industry; A Few Chapters in Workshop Re-construction and Citizenship; The Trinity Hospital in Mile End: An Object Lesson in National History, The Survey of London, Vol. I; Socialism and Politics: A Study in the Readjustment of the Values of Life, Where the Great City Stands: A Study in New Civics.

It was little wonder, therefore, that Ashbee responded to the Dublin Town Planning competition, driven as it was by his friend and ideal mentor, Patrick Geddes.

## 6. NEW DUBLIN: A STUDY IN CIVICS.

Ashbee (and Chettle's) New Dublin: A Study in Civics appears to have been the work of Ashbee alone. It was also a work truncated by the outbreak of World War I and



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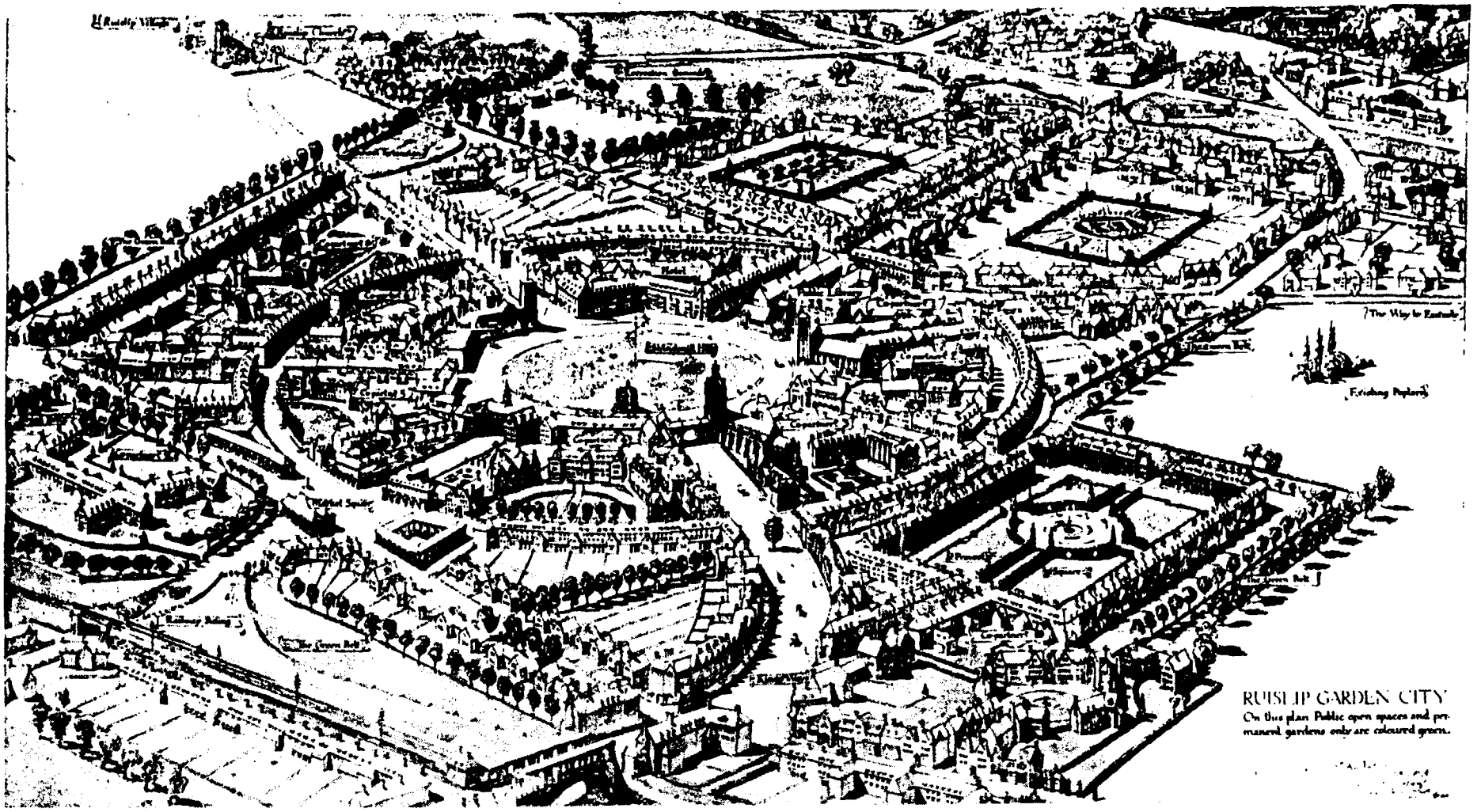
**Figure 2: Ashbee's Plan for Ruislip Garden City**



Ashbee's involvement in some form of clandestine activities *"which we cannot go into without revealing his identity"*, it was not possible to complete the work. The surviving document of 72 pages is more in the nature of a treatise in favour of good planning than a plan per se prepared *"to stimulate Dublin opinion and fix the attention of thoughtful people upon the city of the future"* (notes for cover). Also regretfully, rather few of his illustrations and none of the stretcher drawings survive.

The surviving report echoes many of the cherished values so firmly held by Ashbee. The influences of Ruskin and Morris are there, with perhaps more of Ruskin's influence befitting Ashbee's vision of the new capital. He quotes from John Nolen's *"Re-planning of Small Cities"* in favour of order, beauty and convenience as the hallmarks of good planning. He is strong on tradition arguing that *"no planning of an old city can have any value if it breaks with tradition"*. He stresses the need for survey before plan and hence in many instances his refusal to make definite recommendations. He accepts the importance of democracy, *"the need for a synthetic plan, the plan of the understanding of a people's needs"*. For him the key to the planning of most great modern cities, including Dublin, was the housing of the poor *"who have claimed their citizenship"*.

Ashbee sets out nine principles that should guide the making of a Town Plan as follows:

1. First and before all to reverence History.

2. To cherish traditional planning, including respect for the location and siting of historical monument, quaysides, street layouts, etc.

3. To cherish, both in the City Centre, and so on outwards, all amenities.

4. To emphasise the City Centre. *"It is through the skilful handling of the City Centre that we express the unity of design that shows a city's belief in itself"*.

5. To emphasise or to open out and co-ordinate the City's main entrances and communications.

6. To distribute green lungs throughout the city as far as possible pro rata to density of population.

7. To group though not necessarily to concentrate Mechanical Industrialism.

8. To rectify as far as is possible the individualistic disturbance of the City Plan during the industrial upheaval of the 19th Century.

9. To treat the Tenement and Housing question – in Dublin the dominant problem – a question sui generis, and so as not to damage the Town Plan.

**Contents of the Plan**

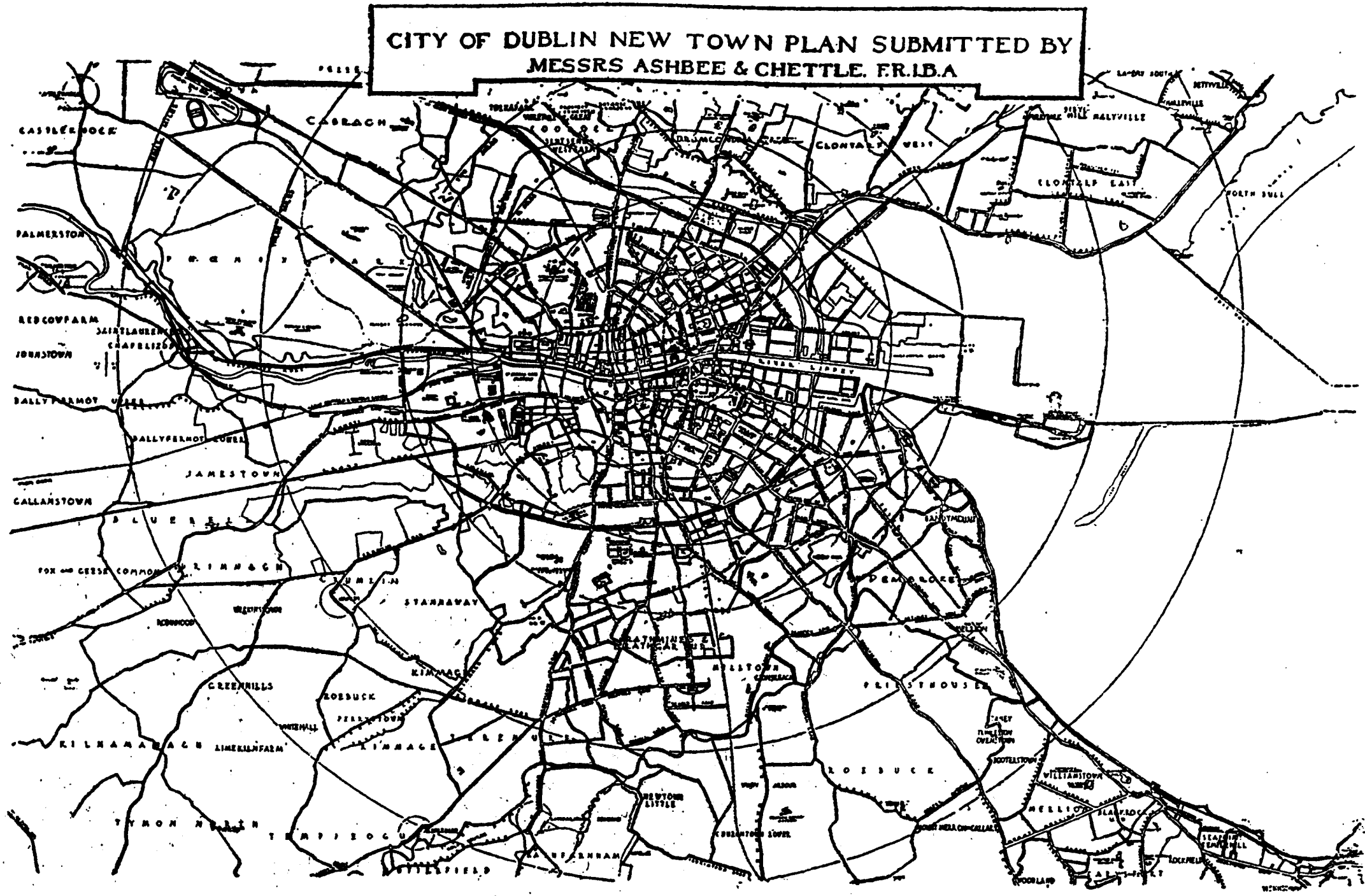
Ashbee emphasises a number of phases of planning. Dublin of 1914 is to be planned in his *"fourth period"* – the era of *"the new democratic town plan, the synthetic plan, the plan of the understanding of people's needs"*. He cites examples of the disintegration of the city due to past autocratic planning errors and argues that *"it is not till this democratic idea expresses itself that the tradition of planning dropped in the disintegration of aristocratic society can be picked up again."* He emphasises the need for proper survey before plan. *"The City Plan in the end to be adopted must not be a matter of guesswork but of hard facts. For that is what the City Survey means."* (For details see Fig. 3).

For Ashbbee, as for most others, the key to the re-planning of Dublin and most great modern cities was the issue of housing the poor. He proposes to *"deal boldly and immediately with the problem of the housing of the poor, the central problem of the Government enquiry which has led to initiating the Town Plan"*. Ashbee's suggested approach has four elements:

1. To set a term of 20 years in which to make the City Survey and carry out the town plan.

2. To start the decentralization immediately and on a large scale by providing temporary as distinct from permanent housing accommodations. He proposes the construction of up to 2,000 temporary houses capable of accommodating 10,000 persons. Much of this temporary housing would be located just west of the city near Kilmainham. One of the permanent benefits of this temporary housing would be increased investment in fixed infrastructures.

**Figure 3: Ashbee and Chettle's Plan for Dublin 1914,** (Source: Dublin Civic Survey, 1925)



3. To earmark and gradually to absorb the outside areas, treating them first with the temporary accommodation, or towards the close of the 20 years with something more permanent. He draws parallels with Hampstead Garden Suburb, Letchworth, Portsunlight, Romford, etc.

4. To open out and beautify the centre of the City on the lines of the town plan, gradually making the new streets and avenues as the clearances are made and the sites fall in. Aspects of his housing section reveal a strong determinism. *"We shall build up the lives of our citizens in accordance with the sort of house and surroundings we put them in"*, adding *"Soul is form and doth the body make"*.

Ashbee stresses that each suburb should be planned to *"admit of what is called 'neighbourizing'"* which he appears to draw from the Competition of the Chicago Club for *"neighbourhood Centres to be created in 1915"*.

Ashbee's proposals call for acquisition of properties and lands *"necessary for the protection of the city"* and he recommends the enactment of *"suitable regulations by means of the 'zone systems' for the protection of what we may call historic Dublin – the Dublin, more especially, of the civic centre."* This system of zoning regulation would be extended to ensure the control of all buildings, so as to differentiate neighbourhoods and protect private property and real estate values. These regulations should secure the 'scale' of all public buildings, and of the main streets in the interests of which the differentiation is made.

Ashbee also recommended the passing of regulations, in so far as the existing Local Government Board bye-laws have been proved inadequate, to protect the city from the recurrence of the evils of the tenement house system.

The plan deals with the issue of *"Industry and Craftsmanship"* revealing both the influences of the Arts and Crafts movement upon Ashbee's thinking. He has a good deal to say about workshops and he proposes to locate crafts activities in the Coombe area of the city. He links his crafts proposals to the future of Irish agriculture *"their revival is likely to follow an agricultural revival"*. But it is the treatment of industry which best reveals Ashbee's mindset. *"The general principle..... is that industrial works, factories and all that belongs with them, are not among the permanent things in a Town Plan, they should not be allowed to overweigh the things that make for a city's*

*nobler life".* Ashbee's Dublin was not to be blighted by industrial estates and the negative consequences of mechanisation and excessive industrialisation as reflected in his earlier experience of London's East End.

Transport considerations occupy a significant part of his "New Dublin". Ashbee's thinking on industry informs his consideration of transport issues. For him Dublin is likely to become a distributive and administrative centre, not an industrial city. Interestingly, he argues for the undergrounding of as much as possible of all goods traffic. He draws upon the views of Frank Lloyd Wright in Chicago and Augustin Rey in Paris to rationalise *"that human beings should be conveyed in the air above ground, and produce in the cool swift passages below."* Interestingly, as Dublin continues to procrastinate about transport investment, we have recently had proposals for the construction of a port tunnel for goods traffic and a largely overground light rail network for passenger transport. While Ashbee proposes the conservation of historic streets and streetscapes, there are recommendations for the widening and improvement of some existing thoroughfares and for the construction of eight new access routes, driven for the most part through existing slum districts. These new and improved routes were to have the objectives of:

(a) The linking up of the five main approaches to the city, Kingsland Road, Harcourt Road, Amiens Street, Broadstone, and Kingsbridge stations.

(b) The opening out and linking up of the great architectural features of old Dublin, the Customs House, The Four Inns, The Cathedrals, The Castle, etc.

(c) The easier transport of goods to the centre and the port.

Ashbee sees a greater potential use of Dublin's canal system to accommodate a greater volume of water traffic, the improvement of those road routes alongside the canals and the enhancement of the environment along the canals to provide amenities and to connect with the *"urban lungs"* of the park system as, for example, in the case of Hamburg.

Ashbee has much to say about the importance of *"approaches to the city"* and he makes proposals for the enhancement of the environs of the city's railway stations and some of the approach roads. For him, arriving in a city should be a meaningful, enriching

experience, a sense of occasion and place. He cites John Nolen's advice in The Replanning of Small Cities (1912) that *"every town or village should do all that is possible to ensure convenience, orderliness and a certain type of beauty in and about its railroad approaches."*

Ashbee's 'New Dublin' would be a city of beauty and with ample public amenities. He recommends the establishment of a 'park system', possibly with the support of private finances. This park system would link up existing parks, open spaces and squares. It would also include the creation of new amenities, *"creating more of the beautiful little points and gardens"*, developing the canals and rivers as the spines of linear amenities and the reclamation of the foreshore, as at Clontarf. He attempted to link up all old spaces and to create *"green peeps"* down to the Liffey, a river that would be cleaned, freed of refuse and which would in future provide *"improved facilities for open-air bathing places for men, women and children"*.

His amenity and civic design proposals include the securing for public use of the more important frontages, including the quaysides of the River Liffey and the remains of old abbeys ad ecclesiastical surroundings. He recommends the removal of all overhead wires, poles, etc., and the passing of *"what in America is called a 'shade tree ordinance' and providing for the systematic planting and maintenance of street trees."* It is suggested that private enterprise could be called in to co-operate with the city in this.

Reflecting his conservation ethos and his work with the London Watch Committee, he proposed the establishment, possibly in support of existing private Societies, (the Georgian Society was suggested as a good example) of bodies whose object would be the recording and preservation of historic Dublin. Such Societies might be recognised by the Corporation as the official custodians or recorders of the historic amenities of Dublin. A final element in relation to civic amenities is a recommendation for the completion *"of what may be called the civic outfit of the city in the matter of public buildings; those for instance that will be needed in the future, e.g. the Linen Hall as a 'People's Palace'; Ethnographic Museum; the Weavers' Hall, as a possible Georgian Museum; the establishment of an Irish Theatre; a Dublin Opera House; a Picture Gallery; possibly Labour Exchanges in some of the fine old houses in Gardiner Street, Henrietta Street, etc."*

Other recommendations relate to the Church and to hospitals. He favours decentralisation as society was moving from 'curative' to 'preventative' medicine and to a greater reliance upon open air treatment of disease. Reflecting both his own personal commitment to outreach education and the views of Geddes upon the role of universities, the New Dublin includes a section on 'The University and the Town Plan'. Apart from providing land for university expansion, he considers that universities *"should have the means of directly influencing the life of the City"*. He proposes that, with the decanting of the tenement population, it should be possible to use many of Dublin's most beautiful 18th century streets and *"make of them University settlements"*. His ideas on university education have strong links both to agriculture and back to his days at Toynbee Hall and the extension education roles of Oxford and Cambridge around the turn of the century. For him the university *"takes its constructive idealism into the City slum, and it leads the people by some imaginative exodus into a promised land ..... of green fields"*. In this way the university helped to transform slum dwellers and slums and, in addition, *"the idealism of the university has touched the spring of democratic life"*. In relation to the Dublin town plan, his view was that *"the vitalising force of the University must be kept clearly in view."*

Ashbee's 'New Dublin' concludes as follows: *"These proposals may not be all immediately practicable, but there is not one of them that may not be found carried out in some existing city in the civilised world. Meanwhile for the making of the Town Plan there is always a finer side of things to bear in mind, so in conclusion the citizens o f Dublin may recall what Plato said of the greatest city of all time:- 'We have filled the city with docks and arsenals and such trash, but what have we done for synphrosyne and righteousness?' Athens fell from causes with which we here are not concerned, her span of great life was shorter than that of Dublin from the coming of Strongbow to the passing of Home Rule, but here greatness is the abiding possession of all the most enlightened cities of the world – it is not her docks and arsenals that remain"*.

The re-discovery of Ashbee's manuscript on The New Dublin after some seventy years, adds a further dimension to the 1914 Dublin Town Planning Competition. The New Dublin adds to the rather scant literature on the planning of Dublin in the first half of the 20th century and it highlights some of the range of thinking and idealism which Geddes

brought to bear on Dublin's problems during his three years of active involvement with the city officials and its people.

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