



## **Heritage in Reconstruction / Heritage of Reconstruction: The British Experience after World War II**

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During the immediate years after the Second World War, towns and cities changed rapidly and profoundly. There was an urgent need for reconstruction after wartime damage, and a transformative approach to replanning dominated, based on the rhetoric of “reconstruction as opportunity”. New fashions in planning areas and in designing buildings - new styles, materials, trends in retailing, transportation, working and leisure - changed the country. How did the reconstruction deal with heritage? How did plans accommodate buildings of special significance, as well as the ordinary fabric in older areas? What happened to vestiges as a result of the reconstruction process? How did the commemoration of catastrophe relate to the preservation of heritage? And how did the inertia that is built into all development processes interact with the politics and practicalities that dictate the adoption of new urban and architectural forms? But that was up to six decades ago. What has been happening since? Pressures for urban change have continued. “Reconstruction-era” areas and buildings are reaching the end of their useful lives, and some have already been redeveloped. We need to deal with the heritage of this difficult era - difficult because of the scale and rapidity of change; because of its effect on our everyday lives; and because some of its products are not visually appealing. How can we keep some record of this crucial period? How are plans and records kept and used? How best to cope with the heritage of a period that produced places that is generally unpopular with the public? How can we evaluate their qualities and decide what to retain from them? A daylong workshop was held in June 2008 to promote discussion on these questions. The workshop was made up of three main sessions. The first two sessions focused on how British wartime and post-war reconstruction planning and its consequent redevelopment handled the issues of conservation and heritage. These were only slowly emerging in the UK in the prewar period; bomb damage spurred new considerations of these issues in the wartime and post-war eras. The first session focused on the place of conservation within the plans for reconstruction, while the second session considered the actual rebuilding that resulted from the plans. The final session explored the heritage of the reconstruction era. These replanned areas and their new buildings are now more than half a century old: they are increasingly coming under pressure of redevelopment in their turn, although a small number are starting to be identified as worthy of conservation designation.

This paper seeks to report back on the findings of this workshop by considering the dual aspects at its heart. Using the experience of the post-World War II British reconstruction, it will consider how heritage finds its place in a reconstruction process, and conversely how the results of a reconstruction process can acquire the traits of urban heritage.

**KEY WORDS:** UK, reconstruction, heritage, World War II.