

## CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT AND BEAUTIFICATION? TOWN PLANNING IN LAUNCESTON 1930-1945

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### ABSTRACT

*In the 1930s the regional city of Launceston in northern Tasmania, Australia developed a town planning consciousness. These reasons included the appointment in 1930 of a new City Engineer who was a town planning enthusiast, the revival of the Northern Tasmanian Town Planning Association in 1933, the leading role taken by architects who trumpeted the virtues of town planning, and the support of the Fifty Thousand League, a booster organization intent on expanding Launceston's population and economy. These forces combined to preserve and extend Launceston's reputation as a beautiful city. The City Council was receptive to calls for further beautification of the city, but created tensions with the town planning movement because of its reluctance to spend large amounts on town planning when faced with implementing an expensive flood prevention scheme. Further tensions were created by the State Government's disregard of plans for city improvement. World War 2 initially slowed the momentum of the town planning movement. But from 1943, in the euphoria of a new society promised in the post-war world and the need for more housing once war ended, town planning assumed greater importance to meet heightened public expectations. Finally the State Government supported town planning and passed the Town and Country Planning Act 1944, long desired by town planners. At last the interests of the City Council, the State Government and citizens' groups converged. This paper examines what was achieved in the assertive and growing regional city of Launceston between 1930 and 1945.*

### INTRODUCTION

Historians of town planning in Australia in the interwar years have concentrated on developments in the six capital cities of the Australian States. Much attention has been focused on the reconstructionist phase of the 1920s, but in the shadow of the Great Depression the 1930s has been relatively neglected; as Hutchings argues, 'planning was, by and large cast aside except for experiments in the provision of public housing'.<sup>1</sup> Planners were preoccupied with dealing with the physical and social problems of capital cities and public interest in metropolitan and master plans evaporated until the final years of World War Two. Failure to coordinate the different levels of government, to pass effective town planning legislation and to prepare workable plans characterised the 1930s. What was achieved was the incremental improvement and beautification of capital cities, but no blueprints for the future in the form of carefully developed city-wide plans emerged.

But what of town planning in regional cities in Australia? This seems to have been even more neglected as a subject of research for the period before 1945.

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<sup>1</sup> Hutchings, 2000, 65.

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Cities like Geelong in Victoria, Newcastle in New South Wales, Toowoomba in Queensland, and Fremantle in Western Australia cry out for study.<sup>2</sup> Only Mackay in Queensland, which developed a city-wide plan, has been closely examined in the 1930s.<sup>3</sup> This paper therefore fills a gap in town planning history by highlighting the changing fortunes of town planning in the northern Tasmanian city of Launceston, more significant as a second city in power, influence and ambition in relation to its capital Hobart than any other Australian regional city. Although town planning enthusiasts in Launceston had some grandiose ambitions, they realised that all that was possible to achieve was civic improvement and beautification. Hence environmentalist values predominated not social values, and planners were motivated by the belief that 'a beautiful city was also a progressive and prosperous one'.<sup>4</sup>

This approach was reflected in March 1944 when Launceston town planning advocate Keith Darcey, representing the Fifty Thousand League (FTL), told the Parliamentary Joint Committee inquiring into the Town and Country Planning Bill that 'few people understand or are interested in Town, Country, or Regional Planning' and most people showed 'little, if any, curiosity with regard to the principles and benefits to themselves'.<sup>5</sup> They happily paid rates to maintain conditions 'as inconvenient as they are ugly and unhealthy'. They did not see the benefits that town planning could provide in 'such things as light and air, trees and flowers, beautiful architecture and healthy surroundings'. Darcey asserted that town planning should begin by 'expressing civic care for beauty and utility, and should end by assisting the housing problem'.

Darcey reflected the disillusionment commonly expressed by Australian planning enthusiasts before 1945, but he also highlighted issues that attracted fellow enthusiasts in Launceston between 1930 and 1945. Building on the foundation laid between 1915 and 1930, town-planning ideas in Launceston experienced a resurgence in the 1930s in the shape of a revived Northern Tasmanian Town Planning Association (NTTPA) led by leading architects, who strove to develop closer relations with the Launceston City Council. While they failed to persuade the City Council to develop a city-wide plan to guide future development, they did, along with pressure groups like the FTL, succeed in securing more parks and recreation areas and improving and beautifying Launceston by 1939 when war concerns became paramount. Town planning in Tasmania was revived again towards the end of World War Two when the State Government declared its commitment to post-war reconstruction, which included town-planning legislation. Such legislation had been a plank of the NTTPA's programme and the Launceston City Council welcomed the powers it acquired under the Town and Country Planning Act 1944, Tasmania's first major town planning statute. In 1945 the interests of the State Government, the City Council and citizens' groups converged in support of town planning. Opportunities for advancing town planning in Launceston had never been greater and facilitated by the new legislation the much-desired city-wide planning scheme seemed closer to becoming a reality.

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<sup>2</sup> Freestone, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Petrow, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Freestone, 2000, 31-32.

<sup>5</sup> Minutes of Evidence given to the Joint Committee of Both Houses of Parliament on the Town and Country Planning Bill 1943, 1943-44, evidence of Keith Darcey, 92-3.

The history of town planning in Launceston was characterized by a mixture of successes and setbacks. By 1900 Launceston had become the commercial capital of the island state of Tasmania in Australia and a rival of the political capital of Hobart for industry and population. Launceston, widely admired as one of the most progressive cities in Australia, was a leader in providing municipal services, parks and open spaces.<sup>6</sup> But it lagged behind in town planning. In 1915-16 lectures by visiting British town planner Charles Reade stimulated interest in town planning. When the father of town planning in Australia, John Sulman, visited Launceston in 1917 he declared that Launceston's population of around 30,000 was the optimum size for a 'self-contained city'.<sup>7</sup> While no city-wide plan was developed and no town planning legislation was passed, citizens' groups and city officials removed unsightly and unhealthy housing, built garden suburbs, and added new parks and gardens.

Achievements before 1930 largely extended what had been underway since the late nineteenth century. The absence of an active town planning association to shape public opinion in support of town planning and to press for legislation and more co-ordinated town planning was a major retarding factor. This prevented Launceston from growing in an orderly fashion before the Great Depression and a major flood in 1929 distracted attention from town planning. The 'very large, important and expensive nature' of the scheme for flood protection absorbed attention for more than two decades and, as they weighed the data collected on 'the best possible schemes', aldermen were reluctant to take major initiatives in areas like town planning.<sup>8</sup> From 1930 a new era began.

## THE RESURGENCE OF PLANNING AND THE ROLE OF THE NTPA

As the affects of the depression wore off after 1930, interest in town planning experienced a resurgence. There were signs of greater attention to town planning on the Launceston City Council. W.E. Potts, City Engineer and Building Surveyor since 1930. Potts had worked as a municipal engineer in Canterbury, New South Wales and Canberra, where he was deputy chairman of the development committee in charge of town planning and flood prevention schemes.<sup>9</sup> He was 'very keen' about town planning and sought information on 'the latest methods in cities where definite town planning was practised'.<sup>10</sup> Potts criticised the subdivision of estates by owners, who wanted to get 'as much out of the land as possible' and he thought that streets should be constructed 'with a view to traffic and other requirements of the future'. He realized that cost would be the stumbling block, especially providing compensation to landowners. Mayor Allen Hollingsworth agreed that town planning was needed in Launceston, but it was 'a big question' and the council already had 'a number of big undertakings, which kept it busy'. Council officials like Potts needed 'the full benefit of the knowledge and ideas' of local

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<sup>6</sup> Petrow, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> *Examiner*, 10 March 1917, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Minutes, Launceston City Council (hereafter LCC), 19 February 1940, pp. 84-5, AB 396/1/14, Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office (hereafter TAHO).

<sup>9</sup> *Examiner*, 7 October 1930, 8.

<sup>10</sup> *Examiner*, 21 July 1933, 9.

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architects to develop a town-planning scheme. In the 1930s Potts was too 'over-worked' to add town planning to his other responsibilities.

In July 1933 leading architect Frank Heyward advocated the revival of the Town Planning Association to 'provide a plan for future development'.<sup>11</sup> The founder of the NTPA and prominent architect, Harold Masters, welcomed the revived interest in town planning and hoped it would result in 'more efficient control than has so far been attained in this city or in this state'.<sup>12</sup> While the town planning movement and practice were strong in other parts of the world, in Launceston, lacking 'legislative or other official control', it had been left to the individual engineer, architect, public health officer and 'other enthusiastic people to carry on the work without the necessary co-operation to secure complete success'. Masters summed up the principles of town planning as 'Improved city and town planning, better housing and more hygienic and comfortable living conditions'. The town planning movement world-wide was characterized by 'the spirit of public service' and Masters urged local bodies such as the FTL to join the council in carrying out town planning functions.

Masters, revered as a man of 'ideals and vision', elaborated on the value of town planning at a FTL meeting.<sup>13</sup> Influenced by the ideas of Englishman John Burns, Masters noted that town planning inspired support from different citizens for different reasons. Medical Officers of Health stressed improved health ('sanitation and healthy houses'), engineers improved transport ('trams, bridges and good roads'), and the policeman better traffic regulation, while others sought more open spaces, parklands and garden plots and the architect supported all these aspects 'in relation to the designing of the homes of the people'. He appealed for 'a concerted effort to bring about a definite improvement in town planning in the widest sense'. Only nineteen of 250 invited civic leaders attended Masters' lecture.<sup>14</sup> Not one alderman attended and representatives of improvement associations were conspicuously absent. But Masters praised the access to old plans and files given by Hollingsworth, Potts and Town Clerk F.C. Crawford and believed that the council would consider all requests to improve the city.<sup>15</sup> A discordant note was struck by 'Commonsense', who told *Examiner* readers that it was 'unreasonable' for the City Council to buy properties for 'the purpose of beautifying our city' when many citizens were unemployed and could not pay rent.<sup>16</sup> 'Commonsense' opposed any town-planning schemes that added to the rate burden of property owners still recovering from the depression.

Not everyone agreed that town planning should be shelved. The first organization to seize the initiative was the recently-formed Apex Club, which saw its 'first big job' as forming a Town Planning Association for Launceston.<sup>17</sup> Apex was a service organization formed for young men in Geelong in 1931. Apex Launceston admired the model of the Geelong Town Planning Association

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<sup>11</sup> *Examiner*, 21 July 1933, 9.

<sup>12</sup> *Examiner*, 29 July 1933, 7, 15 June 1929, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Minutes of Evidence, evidence by Keith Darcey, 94; *Examiner*, 1 August 1933, 8.

<sup>14</sup> *Examiner*, 16 September 1933, 5, letter by "The Ghost", 19 September 1933, 10, letter by "1933".

<sup>15</sup> *Examiner*, 19 September 1933, 10, letter by A.H. Masters.

<sup>16</sup> *Examiner*, 19 September 1933, 10, letter by 'Commonsense'.

<sup>17</sup> *Examiner*, 22 September 1933, 9.

formed in 1924 and asked Mayor Hollingsworth to convene a public meeting of interested parties.<sup>18</sup> At the meeting Masters revealed that the NTPPA, inactive since 1916, still existed and the original members, supported by the FTL, were about to revive it.<sup>19</sup> On 17 October the NTPPA was officially revived and broadened to include public bodies interested in town planning.<sup>20</sup>

At the first annual general meeting of the reorganized NTPPA Mayor Hollingsworth presided.<sup>21</sup> The meeting adopted the rules and constitution of the Town Planning Association of Victoria. These included promoting town planning, 'civic development and improvement', and everything that conduced to 'the healthy and pleasurable surroundings of people during work or leisure'; promoting garden cities and suburbs; improving housing and sanitation; conserving existing, and securing new, public parks, playgrounds and reserves; collecting and disseminating information on town planning; educating public opinion on the association's objectives; influencing and promoting legislation; and improving municipal by-laws. Masters was President and the Council included other leading architects like Colin Philp and Roy Smith, senior municipal officials including Potts, and representatives of the FTL, the Australian Natives Association and suburban progress associations.<sup>22</sup>

The *Examiner* supported the revived association. While Launceston could not afford 'expensive resumptions', the *Examiner* thought that the city could keep 'a very keen eye on development' and each householder could make his own home 'a pleasant link in a scheme for city or town beautification'.<sup>23</sup> Architect Frank Heyward told the Rotary Club that all citizens who wanted to make Launceston 'a better city to live in' should support the NTPPA.<sup>24</sup> Another architect and NTPPA councillor Roy Smith pronounced that the town planning movement had not been revived by 'experts' or 'amateurs', but by citizens who wanted Launceston to 'develop along reasonable lines for the citizens' benefit'.<sup>25</sup> One resident 'Simplicicus' urged the association to act quickly so that 'planning for the future should not be left until the future becomes the past'. The association should try to 'visualize future conditions' and 'influence reforms so that our city may progress along at least rational lines'. It should do more than 'sporadically raising Cain because the lawns are not mown or the trees neatly lopped, and then dashing again into a Rip Van Winkle siesta'.<sup>26</sup>

The aims of the NTPPA were shared by the 700-member strong FTL, which held that Launceston's 'progress and advancement' depended on adopting 'a comprehensive scheme of town planning for the continued improvement and beautification of the city'.<sup>27</sup> FTL members included most of the city's businessmen. Never before had support for town planning been as strong in

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<sup>18</sup> *Examiner*, 22 September 1933, 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Examiner*, 27 September 1933, 6.

<sup>20</sup> *Examiner*, 17 October 1933, 6, 18 October 1933, 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Examiner*, 15 November 1933, 12.

<sup>22</sup> *Weekly Courier*, 23 November 1933, 22; Town Planning File, Launceston LINC.

<sup>23</sup> *Examiner*, 25 November 1933, 6.

<sup>24</sup> *Examiner*, 7 December 1933, 6.

<sup>25</sup> *Examiner*, 3 March 1934, 12.

<sup>26</sup> *Examiner*, 12 April 1934, 3, letter by 'Simplicicus'.

<sup>27</sup> *Examiner*, 29 May 1936, 10.

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Launceston as in the 1930s. The NTPA remained active until 1939. Most effort went into improving Lower Paterson Street, discussed below.<sup>28</sup> The revived NTPA demanded new town planning legislation 'to control the proper development of towns and suburbs' around the State. In 1936 the City Council responded that Potts was drafting legislation for submission to Parliament.<sup>29</sup> Nothing had materialized by 1939.

Another key objective was to develop a regional plan for Launceston, broadened to include areas that would form part of the municipality 'when the time was ripe': Franklin Village in the south, St. Leonards in the south-east, Rocherlea and Alanvale in the north and outlying parts of Trevallyn in the west.<sup>30</sup> The new area would encompass a circle with a radius of about four miles from the Town Hall, thus ensuring the city would 'develop on properly planned lines, give essential services to persons who were really suburban dwellers', enforce 'uniform building regulations' in outer areas and link adjoining areas in the four municipalities surrounding Launceston with 'suitable roads'. The NTPA argued its case for amalgamation before the Royal Commission on Local Government in 1939, but no amalgamations ensued.<sup>31</sup>

While the NTPA had the support of the Launceston City Council, it found the State Government a stumbling block. One example of the State Government failing 'to respond to local desires' involved the widening of Paterson Street.<sup>32</sup> The FTL failed to persuade the government to build the new technical school thirty-five feet from the street line.<sup>33</sup> By placing the building near the street, the government subverted the widening and beautifying of Paterson Street 'as a boulevard leading to the Cataract Gorge'.<sup>34</sup> According to Masters, town planning could never succeed in Launceston without 'more co-operation' between Federal and State authorities, local municipal or other authorities and local engineers, architects or surveyors in private practice.<sup>35</sup> This would only occur if the State Government enacted rigorous town planning legislation.<sup>36</sup>

NTPA councillors were agitated by numerous dead-end streets in new subdivisions. Smith decried the 'haphazard and disorderly' laying out of streets caused by 'the absence of any scheme for the development of suburbs on proper lines'.<sup>37</sup> Egregious examples occurred in the growing suburb of Newstead. In Douglas Street a brick house stopped the street extending to Punch Bowl Road, while the sale of a building allotment in Abbott Street blocked 'one of the main arteries from the city'. This caused great inconvenience and depreciated property values. In 1936 a NTPA-led

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<sup>28</sup> *Examiner*, 4 March 1936, 6.

<sup>29</sup> Sellers to Town Clerk, 22 July 1936, Town Clerk to Sellers, 28 July 1936, LCC 3, 26/1/3.5, Queen Victoria Museum (hereafter QVM).

<sup>30</sup> *Examiner*, 31 March 1939, 8; evidence given by Roy Smith, representing the NTPA, to the Royal Commission on Local Government, RC/19/4/1/5, TAHO.

<sup>31</sup> *Examiner*, 23 October 1943, 4.

<sup>32</sup> *Examiner*, 17 April 1934, 12, letter by A.H. Masters.

<sup>33</sup> *Examiner*, 12 June 1934, 8.

<sup>34</sup> *Mercury*, 30 May 1935, 7.

<sup>35</sup> *Examiner*, 17 April 1934, 12, letter by A.H. Masters.

<sup>36</sup> *Mercury*, 9 July 1937, 11.

<sup>37</sup> *Examiner*, 12 June 1936, 10; Smith to Mayor, 11 June 1936, LCC 3, 42/2.7, QVM.

deputation comprised of the FTL, local progress associations and other concerned bodies asked the City Council to apply 'town planning principles to the suburban areas now in process of extension round the city'.<sup>38</sup> Smith complained that many streets did not 'finish properly' and 'beautiful hillsides' had been divided into 'meagre allotments'. Smith blamed this on the absence of town planning legislation to ensure 'proper control' over subdivisions and hoped that the council would co-operate with the NTPPA to get such control. Masters urged the council to appoint a Town Planning Committee. Mayor Eric von Bibra admitted that the council was 'seriously worried' about many subdivisions and the neglect of recreation areas, but lacked power to direct subdividers where to build a road. He was not enthusiastic about the council taking over the cost of building roads from subdividers.

The NTPPA suggested various ways to beautify Launceston, including planting trees and providing more parks. In December 1932 at a FTL meeting Masters castigated the dilapidated appearance of lower Paterson Street, the main approach to the Cataract Gorge, Launceston's premier tourist attraction.<sup>39</sup> Masters thought that Paterson Street should be 'our best avenue' but was 'almost the worst' and the lower end between Margaret Street and the quarry was 'an absolute disgrace to the city'. Flood-damaged properties should be purchased and demolished and no further buildings should be erected in the area. Masters asked his audience to 'visualise' a widened Paterson Street as 'a tree-planted avenue from end to end, bounded on each side by park lands, gardens or buildings of a public nature only'. The *Examiner* supported Masters' vision for the future and perceived 'something very practical about this aesthetic plan'.<sup>40</sup> Masters spoke again about his 'beautification scheme' for Paterson Street to the FTL in September 1933.<sup>41</sup> If the council would not act, then the government should appoint a town-planning commissioner and assume 'legislative control' over such matters as city layouts and subdivisions. The NTPPA's intervention had mixed success. It approved of the City Council's purchase of property on the corner of Paterson Street and Bridge Road, which would 'permanently improve the approach' to the Cataract Gorge, but opposed the building of a shop in an area that should have been included in Royal Park.<sup>42</sup> In 1937 new open spaces created at the western end of Paterson Street were named King's Park in honour of the new King George VI of Britain.<sup>43</sup>

The NTPPA sought to revive Arbour Day and encourage tree planting.<sup>44</sup> Architect and NTPPA councillor Colin E. Philp advocated planting trees on major roadsides.<sup>45</sup> The road between Launceston and Hobart could be transformed from 'one of the most uninteresting motor trips' in Tasmania to 'a famous tourist drive' by planting native trees and shrubs. The Main Roads Board was the

<sup>38</sup> *Examiner*, 13 June 1936, 12; *Mercury*, 13 June 1936, 11.

<sup>39</sup> *Examiner* 13 December 1932, 7.

<sup>40</sup> *Examiner*, 14 December 1932, 6.

<sup>41</sup> *Examiner*, 15 September 1933, 7.

<sup>42</sup> *Examiner*, 14 June 1934, 6, 28 August 1934, 6, 20 February 1936, 6; Philp to Town Clerk, 14 June 1934, LCC 3, 42/20.3, QVM.

<sup>43</sup> *Examiner*, 25 March 1937, 6; City of Launceston, Mayor's Valedictory Address and Annual Departmental Reports 1939-40, 6.

<sup>44</sup> *Examiner*, 28 August 1934, 6.

<sup>45</sup> *Examiner*, 3 November 1934, 6.

'biggest obstacle'; it laid roadsides bare and was 'absolutely devoid of any aesthetic sense at all'. The maxim of every Tasmanian should be 'Save our trees' so that the island would remain attractive for tourists. The exemplar of what Philp proposed was the Pioneer Avenue of trees planted along the main road connecting Launceston and Hobart, begun with the support of the FTL in 1935 and completed in 1939. Walker argues that landscape beautification was a greater motivation than memorialization in the planting of the trees.<sup>46</sup>

The *Examiner* praised Launceston's 'fine parks and reserves', but wanted more open spaces in newly-settled areas.<sup>47</sup> Aldermen needed to plan 'well ahead' for future requirements, but they gave no priority to open spaces. In May 1936 NTTPA spokesman Alderman Hollingsworth pressed for a committee to investigate the possibility of buying open spaces for children's playgrounds and recreational areas in the city and suburbs.<sup>48</sup> The council should plan for such spaces 'along more definite lines', convert 'unsightly' areas (eg Mowbray Swamp) into 'places of beauty' and start 'a more comprehensive scheme of tree planting'. Hollingsworth believed that parks, gardens and recreation grounds were 'the most priceless gifts' aldermen could bequeath to future citizens and improved 'the health of the community'. Hollingsworth's failure to get a seconder for his motion confirmed the *Examiner's* view that aldermen lacked the 'vision' in providing open spaces as shown by cities like Chicago.<sup>49</sup> While aldermen did not plan for the provision of more open spaces, they did start to acquire land in some parts of the city. For example, in 1937 the City Council bought land in Mulgrave Street, which aldermen named Coronation Park, and five acres of land for a recreation ground in Newstead.<sup>50</sup> In total the Council maintained about twenty parks and reserves, amounting to 820 acres or about one-twentieth of the city. This was a substantial area, but the NTTPA agitated for more parks.<sup>51</sup> The *Examiner* thought beautification was 'a great asset to any city' and many Launcestonians approved of what had been done in the 1930s.<sup>52</sup>

Beautification embraced removing unsightly houses and building more aesthetically pleasing ones. Leading architect Hubert Springford East, who had worked in London for thirty years and was in partnership with Roy Smith, wanted 'adequate and healthy' housing for citizens unable to buy their own houses to be on the town planning agenda.<sup>53</sup> East thought that a certain number of houses should be 'renewed or demolished annually', but private enterprise found this unprofitable and abstained from acting. The Launceston City Council should follow the example of progressive councils in other parts of the world—London, Bradford, and Vienna were mentioned—and institute 'a comprehensive building scheme', which would 'gradually replace the damp, inconvenient and dilapidated houses ... with modern, bright and cheerful cottages and a proportion of flats, with open spaces and children's playgrounds'. East thought that Launceston's layout and 'wide distances from street to street' offered

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<sup>46</sup> Walker, 2000, 81.

<sup>47</sup> *Examiner*, 13 May 1936, 6.

<sup>48</sup> *Mercury*, 26 May 1936, 4.

<sup>49</sup> *Examiner*, 27 May 1936, 6.

<sup>50</sup> *Examiner*, 18 May 1937, 6, 9 October 1937, 6.

<sup>51</sup> *Examiner*, 1 June 1939, 8.

<sup>52</sup> *Examiner*, 10 April 1940, 6.

<sup>53</sup> *Examiner*, 2 September 1933, 10, 12 October 1938, 6, 13 April 1938, 6.

possibilities for 'grouping houses round a central open square' and in some outlying areas between ten and thirty acres could be bought and 'gradually developed as garden suburbs'. East argued that town-planning legislation was 'urgently needed to prevent the disfigurement of our streets and open the spaces and provide for adequate traffic and other facilities necessary for its proper development'. The 'mass grouping' of houses around 'a small recessed close or square' gave designers 'an opportunity for dignified and picturesque treatment' and created 'oases in the desert of dreariness'.<sup>54</sup> Launceston had not experienced such 'co-partnership or community planning', but he hoped a 'public-spirited citizen or syndicate' would see the virtues of 'expert design'. The City Council had ordered the demolition of some houses damaged by the 1929 flood and periodically condemned insanitary houses in other parts of Launceston.<sup>55</sup> More systematic demolition was impossible because of the lack of opportunities to rehouse the displaced tenants. In 1937 the FTL approved of the council's demolition of 'slum conditions in this otherwise beautiful city'.<sup>56</sup> War and house shortages in the city limited such activity.<sup>57</sup>

## PLANNING DEVELOPMENTS DURING WORLD WAR TWO

During the early war years, discussion of town planning disappeared as citizens focused attention on the exigencies of war.<sup>58</sup> Many professional members of the NTPA served in the war and caused it to suspend its activities.<sup>59</sup> In 1943 Launcestonians began thinking about what kind of society they hoped to shape after the war and in that context town planning assumed greater importance. NTPA stalwarts were prominent among those highlighting the need for town planning. In September 1943 Roy Smith spoke at a Rotary luncheon about the need for 'a detailed plan for the post-war development of Launceston'.<sup>60</sup> Smith praised Hobart for engaging F.C. Cook, City Engineer of Port Melbourne, to prepare such a plan. Smith predicted that 'a large amount of building development' would occur to meet post-war demand for suburban housing. In the past 'many patches of ... second-rate development' occurred and he feared that 'we may acquire a ring of it'. Such development must be stopped 'even in the most democratic community'. In the post-war 'new order' he hoped everyone would live in 'well planned and constructed' homes. Smith scotched the notion that town planning was 'something which takes and spends', arguing that the 'unplanned city was a waste of both life and money'.<sup>61</sup> For example, Sydney between 1905 and 1933 had spent over £7,000,000 in resumptions for street widening and improvement and millions more improving 'the main arteries leading to the city'. Smith thought that Launceston's development could be guided by declaring 'some brick areas in districts that were not yet built up' to improve the 'standard of suburban buildings'. While this would restrict the liberty of people building only for 'profit', it protected 'the asset of the home builder'. He urged Rotarians to support town planning because

<sup>54</sup> *Examiner*, 2 December 1933, 10.

<sup>55</sup> *Examiner*, 25 March 1937, 6; Petrow, 2012.

<sup>56</sup> Sellers to Town Clerk, 30 April 1937, LCC 5/4.9, QVM.

<sup>57</sup> *Examiner*, 19 February 1943, 4.

<sup>58</sup> Reynolds, 1969, 174-77.

<sup>59</sup> Minutes of Evidence, evidence of Roy Smith, 105.

<sup>60</sup> *Examiner*, 30 September 1943, 4.

<sup>61</sup> *Examiner*, 30 September 1943, 4.

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‘nothing would help more to keep human nature straight than good housing and working environment and provision for the interesting employment of leisure’.

The intervention of the State Government changed the course of town planning in Tasmania. In 1943 the Cosgrove Labor Government drafted a Town and Country Planning Bill, which was submitted to a Joint Committee of both Houses of Parliament to seek knowledgeable and interested comment on its provisions.<sup>62</sup> This Act reflected a change of attitude by State Government to town planning. Premier Robert Cosgrove predicted that Tasmania would experience its most rapid industrial development after the war and that, as companies would need land, they must plan for future requirements before the war ended.<sup>63</sup> But who should take responsibility for town planning?

Leading figures in the town planning movement in Launceston gave evidence to the Joint Committee and criticism of the Launceston City Council surfaced. In March 1944 Keith Darcey, an estate agent representing the FTL, noted that individual land, property and home owners lost much money through ‘the erection of factories in obviously residential areas and the lack of co-operation between the Council and subdividers of land’.<sup>64</sup> This was demonstrated by the many ‘blind, ugly narrow streets and party rightaways’ allowed in the city. Insufficient attention had been paid to ‘the correct development of the city and provision of open spaces in the most suitable or convenient positions’. Darcey thought it ‘most desirable to obtain the maximum of public interest, co-operation and social responsibility’ by appointing a Board of seven members ‘from interested and competent members of the public’ and ‘a competent and experienced expert’ as Chairman. He opposed local authority representation on the Board because aldermen were incapable of controlling ‘the development of the City’. He advocated ‘dictators, ... men capable of developing the city’.

Roy Smith similarly supported town-planning legislation ‘to control and direct the development of our cities and larger towns’ and ensure ‘orderly’ growth after the war.<sup>65</sup> Launceston needed a survey taking into account ‘density of population, zoning, recreational areas and facilities, housing needs and the conditions which will affect future growth’. Another survey was needed of ‘the area immediately surrounding the city and the more extended areas in which growth is likely to occur’. Drawing on this information and town planning principles, a city development plan should be drawn up. Smith did not favour a Board dominated by public servants subject to ‘political control’. He preferred people with ‘an intimate knowledge of planning problems’ or a small executive Board assisted by ‘an advisory panel made up of technical members’. The Board should ‘instruct local authorities to prepare planning schemes or where this arrangement is unworkable itself ... prepare schemes’. Cities and towns should be required ‘to prepare plans for their future growth and improvement to which future development should conform’. The Launceston City Council, represented by Alderman Hollingsworth, admitted that housing conditions could not become

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<sup>62</sup> Petrow, 1995, 205.

<sup>63</sup> *Examiner*, 27 May 1943, 4.

<sup>64</sup> Minutes of Evidence, evidence of Keith Darcey, 92-4, 96.

<sup>65</sup> Minutes of Evidence, evidence of Roy Smith, 99, 103.

'worse than they are today', blamed inadequate laws on land subdivision and house building and welcomed new powers enshrined in the proposed statute.<sup>66</sup>

The City Council had been notoriously slow in such matters and the scarcity of men and materials caused by the war further weakened its resolve. It received a setback when City Engineer Potts resigned in late 1944 to become City Engineer to the Hobart City Council.<sup>67</sup> In his last annual report of 1943-44, Potts confirmed the City Council's unpreparedness for town planning. In advocating 'the completion of a detailed survey of the city', he pointed out that 'no reliable city map exists, nor sufficient survey information, nor any complete contour plan of the City Area', all 'fundamental necessities for town planning and general works'.<sup>68</sup> Although fieldwork had been completed, he could not plot the area until a survey draughtsman was appointed. He urged preparation of a town plan for 'the City and environs' to guide 'future developments'.

This was timely because the State's first major planning legislation, the Town and Country Planning Act 1944, was gazetted to be operational in 1945. The Act strengthened local government responsibility for planning.<sup>69</sup> Councils were required to submit a town-planning scheme to the experienced newly-appointed Town and Country Planning Commissioner, R.A. McInnis. Once provisionally approved, the scheme remained open for public inspection. McInnis had developed plans for Brisbane and the northern Queensland regional city of Mackay, a smaller town than Launceston but one equally ambitious to expand.<sup>70</sup> In May 1945 McInnis's lecture under the auspices of the Launceston City Council highlighted problems such as 'sub-standard areas, access and communication, roads', and problems arising from 'uncontrolled siting of industries'.<sup>71</sup> Unless Launceston had a plan to co-ordinate 'the development of all complex activities of urban life', it would be unable 'to guide post-war expenditure' or obtain 'the best and most lasting results in planning'. McInnis discussed with Mayor Clark and the Works Committee the City Council's part in the town-planning scheme and aldermen supported his recommendation that a town planning committee be formed.<sup>72</sup> Armed with new legislation, the Town and Country Planning Commissioner was a catalyst for city-wide planning in Launceston.<sup>73</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The Launceston and Tasmanian experience reinforces the assessment that in Australia the period between 1930 and 1945 'represented a watershed for planning, thoroughly changing the political climate from skepticism and apathy to at least grudging acceptance that planning had or may have a crucial function to play for the modern state'.<sup>74</sup> While planning retained strong

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<sup>66</sup> Minutes of Evidence, evidence given by the LCC, 228.

<sup>67</sup> *Mercury*, 23 September 1944, 2, 2 November 1944, 7.

<sup>68</sup> *Examiner*, 8 March 1945, 4; City of Launceston, Mayor's Valedictory Address and Annual Departmental Reports 1943-44, 56.

<sup>69</sup> Petrow, 1995, 207.

<sup>70</sup> Petrow, 1997, 290-91.

<sup>71</sup> *Examiner*, 4 May 1945, 4.

<sup>72</sup> *Examiner*, 1 September 1945, 6, 12 September 1945, 4.

<sup>73</sup> Minutes, Launceston City Council, 9 April 1945, 395, 21 January 1946, 465, AB396/1/14, TAHO.

<sup>74</sup> Freestone, 2009, 21.

'community roots', the achievements of community bodies like the NTPA and the FTL were minor, despite support from prominent aldermen. Aldermen were committed in theory to improving and beautifying the city, but in practice financial impediments prevented them from changing the urban environment along town planning lines and they resorted to piecemeal changes. One reason was the absence of town planning legislation, but that changed after the enactment of the Town and Country Planning Act 1944. This empowered McInnis to help municipal councils develop town planning schemes, but not override councils and town planning remained a sacrosanct municipal function. The other significant missing factor is what Darcey bemoaned in 1944—the failure to secure wide public support for town planning causes. Town planning enthusiasts seemed unable to mobilise public opinion and public involvement in their causes despite lectures and articles in newspapers and they had to be satisfied with isolated improvements and beautification projects, leaving urban renewal, better standard housing and a city-wide plan to be tackled after 1945.

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