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Peter Hall

Life story interview with Paul Thompson

2011

Principle investigator's thematic highlights

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Table of Contents

1: Family stories and family secrets.....	3
2: Blackpool Grammar School: a fascination with history	5
3: Cambridge and Gus Caesar, mentor	6
4: PhD and new mentor, John Vaizey.....	7
5: The Board of Trade.....	8
6: <i>The Industries of London</i> : statistical and historical records	8
7: Towards planning	9
8: Labour politics	11
9: London 2000	12
10: The World Cities.....	13
11: Cities of Tomorrow and Great Planning Disasters	13
12: The Containment of Urban England.....	14
13: Practical visionaries: Ebenezer Howard and Frederick J. Osborn.....	17
14: American research organisation.....	18
15: Michael Young and the Institute of Community Studies	19
16: London Voices, London Lives.....	19
16: Meeting Magda.....	21

Professor Sir Peter Hall
Interviewed by Blanche Girouard
13 July 2011, West London

1: Family stories and family secrets

My father was a quite junior civil servant in the clerical grade – Clerical Officer – in what was then the Ministry of Health...

My father was illegitimate, as they used to say in those days. He was born with his mother's name; there was no father on the Birth Certificate, a Victorian disgrace, and it took a very long time, indeed, to try to establish who his father was, and I finally got details from an eccentric aunt who knew everything, who said his father was a Henry Vollmer – exactly, Georg Heinrich Peter Vollmer, born Hanover, about 1845, who had moved to Manchester ... So he followed a well-known path of German textile people in the footsteps of Friedrich Engels and many others who went to Manchester because it was the place to do textiles – and buttons too....

He was actually adopted, I think about the age of three, by a worthy family of Baptists, a schoolteacher, in the village of Disley, about 12 miles south of Manchester, and there went to school and, I think, left at 14 or 15, with the usual sort of clerical education of those days. ... He had a strange collection of theatrical advertisements, including cards, saying, "Arthur Dare, vocalist and light comedian. *A Country Girl*", which is the name of the musical comedy, on tour. We always believed that he used these to hand out to barmaids in various parts. Because he was extremely polite. He was actually an Edwardian gent. He was always beautifully dressed, and he had a very posh accent which he'd acquired from somewhere. And he was in the habit, in pubs, of always saying to the barmaid, "Have one yourself, my dear!"

We somehow established that Herr Vollmer had continued to look after him and provide for him in some ways. What we were told was ... that Herr Vollmer, when he died on Hale golf links, outside Manchester, in 1913, of a stroke, aged 67 – he'd actually provided

for Arthur some money, on strict condition he didn't go on the stage! (LAUGHS) And in fact, that money, I think, paid for the establishment of the Efficiency Service Bureau – this is what we believe. By the way, I went through Herr Vollmer's very very extensive Will, at Somerset House. He left £750,000 – a tidy sum in 1913 ... Anyway, that's the story with my dad.

There was an aunt, a very ancient aunt, aged in her eighties, who lived in ... Trafford as it now is – whom we used to visit in the 1940s, in the War, and she was my grandmother! (LAUGHS) But she was never ever represented as my grandmother! They knew, clearly, that she was, but they were hiding it all. Very mysterious. It was always - my father, always referred to his mother as Mrs. Hall, which was rather strange, but that was, perhaps, Edwardian. It was very clear that it's because she wasn't his mother. Anyway, that's that story.... I very seldom saw her – about once a year – and I found it rather creepy. It was a rather creepy sort of Victorian house that scared me.

My mother had been a secretary, and had founded a very early secretarial agency called "The Efficiency Service Bureau", which ran out of an office in Grand Buildings, Trafalgar Square; the Buildings, not the Bureau, are still there – and gave it up - they obviously sold it when I was on the way because, of course, in those far off days, women gave up work when they had children....

My mother was born in 1901, in a very large family ... They lived in North-East Manchester, in Miles Platting. And this was another strange strange story. I actually discovered this ancestry story. This is almost one from a Victorian underclass. My maternal grandfather was called Keefe – clearly Irish, and his ancestry was impossible to establish ... Thomas Keefe, and his father was Patrick Keefe... He worked in the Mackintosh factory, making raincoats, which is a pretty dreadful activity – about as bad as you could find, because it involved this terrible, you know, soaking these textiles in rubber – so it was about the worst job you could get. And he obviously did belong to the Irish underclass that Engels described in 1844, in *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*... The version here, which again comes from my exotic aunt, is that he was the illegitimate - wait for it! The illegitimate son of the Earl of Lonsdale. (LAUGHS) Great

grandfather! (LAUGHS) You couldn't make this up, could you! With a woman who was a maidservant, called Jane Park...

There was a final tragedy. In 1911, Thomas Keefe lost his job – he was a warehouseman I think – and he hanged himself, he killed himself... This was a personal tragedy because my mother, who was apparently very clever, she passed what was then called the Scholarship – the 11+ - and gone to a kind of technical school, and she'd had to leave school at 15, and she told – I always remember she telling me as a child – that the teachers had all wept when she left, because they'd hoped she could go on to university. But she had to get a job as a typist, a secretary. (pp. 1-6)

2: Blackpool Grammar School: a fascination with history

So my real education was at the Blackpool Grammar School from 1943 to 1950.

And did you do geography there?

I did geography as a specialism in the sixth form. It was a very traditional grammar school, and I think, in retrospect, a very good one.... Of course, they had no equipment or anything, it was very simple, but the quality of the teaching was beyond belief, for the simple reason that most of the teachers – it was a boys' grammar school with men teachers, some of whom were away at the War and came back - the teachers were overwhelmingly recruited during the 1920s and 1930s, including the great Depression, when school teaching was one of the best jobs around because it was safe and gave you a pension.

So you got taught by men who, undoubtedly, would have been university teachers 50 years on, and in particular the guy who taught me history, a man called Donald Murdoch, was a huge influence on me...

The history master, Mr. Murdoch, was absolutely inspiring... Apart from being manic depressive, he was a Communist who had broken with the Communist Party during the Stalinist show trials in the 1930s, and become a Trotskyist! (LAUGHS) And in this very

Right-wing town in the War, no one seemed to take any notice! And so his history lessons were interspersed with bizarre pieces of advice... So he taught history from an extremely Marxist perspective. The whole of 17th century history was taught in terms of “class warfare”, but it seemed to go down with the examiners quite well! ...

But I really wanted to go on to university to do history. Here was the story. He said he hadn't much influence at his own College ... So although it wasn't really my first love, I found myself in October, '50, arriving at Cat's, to read geography.

Do you think, if you had gone to read history, you'd now be a historian?

I could be. But in a funny way, I think I became an historian, as well as a bit of an economist. I actually went back to history more and more, so I managed to weave history and geography into a kind of narrative, and that's still what I believe I enjoy doing best... Everything I did subsequently, I think you'll find there's history woven into it, almost everything. And continues to be, although you might say, now, that I'm not a historian or a geographer, but a planner. But I firmly believe that you can't plan without understanding the deep structures that control what you're able to do in planning – that's perhaps a Marxist view I got from Mr. Murdoch. (pp. 7-9)

3: Cambridge and Gus Caesar, mentor

I was taught by an outstanding teacher in economic geography, a guy called Gus Caesar, whose full name was almost unbelievably Alfred Augustus Levi Caesar, and he was a legendary figure in British geography... He was not a researcher, he'd got a very poor research record, I don't think he'd have got tenure nowadays, but he was an absolutely inspiring teacher in close supervision, because the style was, you would write an essay every week, of course, and he would read it, and he would tear the essay to pieces! He'd say, “Look, old lad” – his favourite term – “Look, old lad, you're putting the conclusions before the evidence. Say what you think the hypothesis is, and then produce the evidence carefully, in logical order, and then the conclusions”. He absolutely [analysed] your essay. Everyone who was taught by Gus, has this extraordinary kind of intellectual discipline of being able to argue A to B to C to D, which none of us ever lost, I think.

And Gus's boys, his lads, nearly all went on - an extraordinary proportion went on to academic careers and to Chairs... (p. 10)

4: PhD and new mentor, John Vaizey

One of the most important influences in my life, intellectually, was a guy called John Vaizey. I met John Vaizey, as several of us did, in a fateful meeting – it must have been 1954, because I'd already been doing the Ph.D. for a year, and rather unexpectedly, this guy I'd never heard of, invited a number of us for coffee in his rooms. He was a new Fellow, the Kenwood Research Fellow, and his opening gambit, he said, "I've got all of you wondering why you've come, and why I've invited you". And he said, "I arrived in the College two weeks ago, from Queens" – where he'd been previously – and he said, "I've discovered this is the most deadbeat dump I've ever been in my life". He said, "Absolutely dead and alive. And I can't stand the other Fellows", so he said, "They've got a secret book about you, each of you, in which they sum up your characteristics, and so I chose the ones who they say they can't understand because they're absolutely weird"! (LAUGHS) And they were basically people who weren't playing games and things, who they couldn't understand.

So anyway, he said, "I propose, now, to form a Club", and I think it was a weekly Discussion Club. He said, "I've done this with another new Fellow called John Broadbent, who's just arrived from King's, in English", and he said, "So we're going to form this Club together, and every [week] you'll prepare a paper on a topic, which won't be your academic topic, but some general discussion, and we'll have an elevated discussion". So this seemed all right, and we all went away quite excited. ...

He was absolutely brilliant beyond all belief. He was a Fellow in Economics, who then went on to a Fellowship at Worcester College, Oxford, and then became one of the first professors at Brunel University in the 1960s, when Brunel was set up, he became Professor of the Economics of Education. His specialism was the economics of education which was then a highly esoteric subject. John died, very tragically young, at age of about 50. ...

So you hadn't finished your Ph.D.?

No. I got badly diverted during this last year, being on the Film Society Committee, and doing the Programme notes, and lots more, and also becoming film critic of *Varsity* newspaper.... They showed fantastic movies, and it was very commercially successful. So I got very badly diverted out of geography into movies, and really, wasted a lot of time. So when I got to Birkbeck, I had to start seriously again. It was difficult, because your first year of teaching is always really hard grind, particularly if you didn't know the subject! But in 1958 I got really seriously back into it, and managed to submit and got the Ph.D. in 1959.... (pp. 12-17)

5: The Board of Trade

So I then went into the Civil Service, which I didn't really want to do, but it was a second best because there were no academic jobs around. I couldn't stand the Civil Service. I went into the Board of Trade – this was 1956 – I hadn't finished the Ph.D., by the way, because I'd got badly diverted into movies... I couldn't stand the Board of Trade, I couldn't stand the guy I was working with, a guy called Fred Broomfield - we obviously took a dislike to each other – and I wrote my resignation after two weeks and kept it in a drawer. And so finally, I was obviously not going to get anywhere, and then came the next academic year, and I went for an Assistant Lectureship at UCL... And then went on to an interview at Birkbeck. (pp. 14-15)

6: *The Industries of London*: statistical and historical records

I liked research, and I was interested in historical geography. So I then went on to do what became the first book on *The Industries in London: 1851-1939*, which then turned into a book, then got updated, and [was published in 1962].

I worked slavishly, on historical records of industry in London as a basis for the Ph.D.. And the Ph.D., with additional material – because it all had to be updated, in 1951 the Census came out actually after I'd finished the Ph.D. ...

What were the key difficulties of writing The Industries in London?

Well, it was overwhelmingly difficult to finish the Ph.D., because I'd really got an impossible topic. First of all, Clifford Smith, my supervisor, and others had warned me, they said, "You can't do this". They said, "London's too big. It's too big a topic, and you'll never ever do it". And I said, "I'll show you I'll do it". But the problem was that the actual records were of two kinds. First there were Census records – the Victorian Censuses showed occupations in some detail, except that they were by place of residence, not place of work. And they stopped being useful after 1861. And the trouble was that when I started, the 1951 Census, which would have been the thing I needed, wasn't ready, and it never got ready, it wasn't out. The critical industry tables, I think were only produced about '56, '57, so I was able to use them for the book, but not for the Ph.D.... I also had directories, the Post Office London Directories, which showed the location of every individual company, and these were really down to very small one-person companies, which was vital, because I mapped, in the research, the distribution of these classic workshop industries like clothing and furniture, and printing, and I also used a lot of very interesting historical evidence from the Victorian Royal Commissions, and, indeed, from Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People in London*, where the research was done in the 1880s, much of it, funnily, by the young Beatrice Webb – Beatrice Potter as she then was. So I drew very very heavily on the direct evidence to the great Victorian Royal Commissions of around 1890, such as the Select Committee on Alien Immigration. (pp. 11-18)

7: Towards planning

But then what happened – and this is taking it forward a bit – I became interested, around 1959/1960, I can't date it, in planning questions. I think this was probably the indirect influence of Gus Caesar. Gus had been very heavily involved in regional policy. During the War – he never was in the forces, for whatever reason, probably health - he became a civil servant in the North of England, North-East England, and had been very heavily involved in developing regional policy. So I became more and more interested in this question, and started teaching a course at Birkbeck College, on Applied Geography – which was really planning – and especially in questions of regional industrial location. So

I began to trace the story of the attempt to shift industry out of London into, especially the North of England, Wales and Scotland, after World War Two, which arose from a Royal Commission called the Barlow Commission, of 1940, and I exhaustively looked at the Barlow Commission, the voluminous evidence to the Barlow Commission, and became more and more interested in this, and this actually provided the basis for the final chapter of *The Industries of London*, by which time I was seriously becoming more interested in very recent what you'd call "historical economic geography", than in the distant past.

Then John Vaizey, as ever the [influence] said, "You've got to write a book about this". I'd become, also, rather involved, already, in politics. I can't remember how this happened. I think it was, again, through John Vaizey. John bought a magazine called *Socialist Commentary*, long since demised, a sort of intellectual monthly mag... It was edited by a marvellous woman called Rita Hinden, now long dead, and so I started writing articles on London planning issues. I think the first of them was 1960. I'd always had rather a penchant for journalism, I have to say, having written reviews for *Varsity*, and also the Cambridge reviews on films, I turned to writing journalism, which I rather enjoyed doing. So that happened. And then John said, "You've got to write a book on planning London. It's obvious. Why don't you?" He said, "I can get you a contract ... So I signed up with Charles Monteith of Faber and Faber, and wrote *London 2000*. (pp. 18-19)

Now, a very important influence I really should have mentioned earlier is that in 1955, while still a graduate student in Cambridge, I went off with a fellow graduate student on a rail tour of Scandinavia.... I fell completely in love with Scandinavian cities, particularly Stockholm, and I went back a year later. And Stockholm was then rebuilding itself totally. The city centre was being rebuilt with new offices, they were opening this new underground railway, they were building the first satellite cities,, which I visited, and still a vast building site, and I was totally inspired, and I came back and said, "This is what we've got to do!" And I think that single visit to Stockholm in the summer of August of '55, is one of the most really important single influences of my life, because it really made me passionately committed to a vision of planned development. It was what started me on the road to being a planner. (p. 23)

8: Labour politics

I was getting more and more tied up with Labour Party politics – it was then ‘62/’63, the last years of the long Conservative Government of ’51 through ’64, gearing up to the inevitable General Election. I joined the Fabian Society through the agency of Shirley Williams ... and then joined the Fabian Executive, so got very tied up with all the leading people in the Labour Party at the time, including the disastrous George Brown. So we started helping George, and involved in his leadership bid, which failed.

But then, of course, Harold Wilson made him his Minister for the new Department of Economic Affairs.... It was felt that the Treasury were an obstacle and that this new Department would do what was necessary to do planned economic growth. So it was to be a national plan, French style – French style planning was very big – and with it, within it, regional plans for each region of the country.

So they decided to set up regional Economic Planning Councils with boards of civil servants, and in late ‘65/early ’66, they asked me to join the South-East Planning Council – that was through Bill Rodgers, who became a great friend... So I got very heavily involved, directly, in shaping government policy in those early years of the Wilson government, in particular these questions of the growth of London, and whether you could seek to, in any way, control the growth of service industries... I was directly in the middle of that.

There was idealism all right, but it was very much associated with a spirit of the time – zeitgeist – which is difficult to capture now. It’s almost captured in the history books by Harold Wilson’s famous statement about the “white heat of technology”. Labour presented itself, in the ’64 Election, as “the Party of modernisation”, as “The young Party”, “The serious Party of the new class of the technocrats”. Remember the Prime Minister was Alec Douglas-Home, who was an aristocrat, ... was going to be swept away by these young people who were really experts - technical people - and we were going to have this French style planning. We were all deeply committed to that, to a notion of modernisation, including physical modernisation.... The country was then and had been, very very physically flat out in a way that is difficult for anyone to imagine London

was filthy, shabby, basically Victorian, and there was a feeling that all this had to be swept away and created and replaced by a “New Britain”. The cities had to be rebuilt totally. And there was also a belief, now difficult to credit, in automobility, we had to build motorways everywhere, and I was very supportive of this. (pp. 21-23)

9: London 2000

The central thesis, was to argue that London was going to continue to grow, and, therefore, its growth had to be planned for. And that had been unfashionable because, to backtrack, the Barlow Commission recommended, in 1940, and afterwards government accepted immediately after the War, in 1947, that London’s growth should be strictly limited, that there would be a once for all New Towns programme – only eight New Towns around London. London’s growth would be stopped by Green Belt. New Towns would be built outside, but that would be it. It would be a once for all movement, get people out of the slums and into the New Towns, and then bingo! By the late 1950s, when I got interested in this at all, it was already becoming clear that something was going wrong with this, there was continued rapid growth in the London region... And the government, very reluctantly, switched policy towards planning for London’s further growth. But it was very much opposed by the Labour Party, and so I became a voice of the Labour Party, saying “Look, you can’t stop this”.

That made me very unpopular, actually. And then, and subsequently, because the Labour Party was dominated by what I would call “Old Labour Barons from the North”, who thought that everything should be up in the North of England.

Anyway, so the main thesis of *London 2000*, ... was that London was going to grow, but we accepted that it couldn’t grow within London, so it had got to continue to export its growth to another generation of New Towns, and I argued for 28 New Towns around London, extending much farther out. In fact, that never happened....

It was documentary research. It wasn’t fieldwork. I just looked at the numbers. I was, and am, a number cruncher, essentially. Not a very sophisticated number cruncher, I don’t mean models come from me, any models, but I do look at the numbers, and I look at the trends. And that’s always important. I passionately believe - it’s always been my

belief through all my academic life – that what academics should do is look at the trends, the deep trends, and then see what they can do to move this way and this way. And you're never going to do a King Canute job and stop trends, but you can make them happen a bit this way or that way, and that's always been my basic belief about London. (pp. 23-25)

10: The World Cities

The term “world cities” had been invented by a rather crazy Scots visionary planner called Patrick Geddes, in 1915. ... However, the term had fallen into disuse, and what I wanted to establish was that there were certain very important cities like London, New York, Paris, Tokyo, which were in a special category because they did different things from other cities. In this sense, the idea was not entirely original, but was original in being exhumed, and its been hugely used since – interchangeably now, with “global cities”. And, in fact, the term is much more central, now, to the discourse than it was 50 years ago. It was again reinvented with a bit of a Marxist twist in the 1980s, which I didn't share. But I think I could honestly claim that it was original. I tackled it by simply looking at these cities in detail, and describing and analysing them, and basically looking at how they were handling planning issues. So it was essentially a study in how cities planned their own growth at this very high level in the global hierarchy. You could call it, in this sense, journalistic, and certainly I'd call it one of the more journalist books I've written. But it's a favourite of mine, and I think it does represent the fact I would like to emphasise, that I'm perhaps as much an academic journalist as an academic in the true sense. (pp. 27-28)

11: Cities of Tomorrow and Great Planning Disasters

In the late 1970s, a huge sea change had come over planning, and I later wrote about it at length in *Cities of Tomorrow* [1988]. The biggest single change in my whole lifetime, professional lifetime, was this one that occurred in the early 1970s where the whole intellectual world, the whole intellectual underpinnings of planning, got completely blown apart and turned on their head – the world turned upside down. Everything that had been right was suddenly wrong, and everything that was ignored was suddenly right.

Basically, what went wrong, what was seen as wrong, was this big top-down controlling attitude to planning, and it was a movement that essentially started in the United States, and was strangely associated with the opposition to the Vietnam war under Lyndon Baines Johnson, but it then became associated with an attack on what could be called the “scientific military establishment”... It then became associated with a revulsion against large-scale physical redevelopment in cities everywhere – not just British cities like London – but Swedish cities, American cities, everywhere, particularly associated with an anti-motorway movement.

So you got an extraordinary situation that, in 1965, when the Greater London Council was created, the day it was created it announced, already, a huge motorways programme for London, and that was under a Labour administration. Eight years later, that programme was abandoned, trashed by a Labour administration in London. That was the degree of the turnover... As you can imagine, these two stories – the London motorways and Stansted Airport – really caused me to start thinking about how planning decisions got taken, and unpicked and then re-picked and re-invented, and that was the basis of the *Great Planning Disasters* book. ... (pp. 32-34)

Cities of Tomorrow - that's a favourite of mine. A real favourite of mine. I was persuaded to write it by my agent. I had a literary agent for many years, Michael Sissons... My happiest book ever, the one I enjoyed writing most, the most personal book. (p. 49)

12: The Containment of Urban England

In 1966, I was planning a major new enterprise at PEP – Political and Economic Planning, the think tank – which then culminated in the book, *The Containment of Urban England*, in 1973, which was certainly the biggest, by far, research project I've ever managed. Huge by standards today. Very expensive then, and it would have been mega-expensive today. A huge two-volume book. And I'm still very proud of that book. It was a co-operative venture which had great difficulties in practice, and tensions within the team.

But anyway, plotting this out, I went to talk to key people in the US, particularly regarding these new approaches to planning, analysing planning . I remember, I went to Philadelphia, to Chicago, to LA, and to Berkeley, and particularly, there, to talk to Mel [Webber]... I went to stay with him. It was wonderful. And we became huge personal friends...

Mel was very insistent I should come and teach there, because he felt I'd bring a new approach to the Berkeley Planning Department, so he got me in for a "quarter", as they then called it – they worked on the quarter system. In 1974 I taught there, and established a place, and then finally, in 1979, he said, "Well, there's a permanent place. Come and take it"....

But what happened is, I didn't give up the Reading chair, and then it got awkward... I adored Berkeley, Magda didn't. I thought it was by far – and still do – it was by far the best university - the best quality university, the best faculty, the best students, I've ever been in, and you just couldn't beat it. And I learned just how good a top American research university could be in its incredible - well, just the quality of the students, so brilliant, so questioning, so intelligent and able, and energetic, that you were energised the whole time.

It influenced me in all kinds of ways, most directly, perhaps, in this switch towards high tech research, which you mentioned earlier, starting by the collaboration with Ann Markusen... Then we got money together, grant money to do a study which culminated in *High Tech America* in 1987... And then we did a second big research which culminated in a book called, *The Rise of the Gunbelt*. ... (pp. 38-40)

Berkeley taught me the value and also the know-how of very high level close empirical research, on which I think the top American research universities are absolutely unbeatable. I learned a lot in those years, doing those books with Ann.

Well, two kinds of empirical research, which are combined in those books. One is number crunching – again, just finding out where stuff was happening. And number two, critically, tracing the historical sequence – again, this deep belief that the way you go is

by what I call “the economic history approach”. So if you take both of those books, they’re essentially telling economic history stories about how things happened in places, sequences, and involving people taking actions. And I remained firmly convinced that that’s the way to understand deep - what I think is a bit pretentious - deep economic processes you can only understand by unpicking it in terms of economic history....

From what I understand, even before Berkeley, that was your method.

Yes. It always has been. It always has been.

So in what way did Berkeley ...

It taught me how to guide it much more closely I think, and in particular more carefully, more long-winded, if you like, taking more time over it. American academic style is more deliberate, deeper, I think, and more careful...

We’d interviewed for the previous book, in *High Tech America*, and we’d interviewed, although not always me directly, quite a lot for *The Containment of Urban England*, which we haven’t discussed, which I still regard as perhaps my biggest academic achievement ever, where we’d interviewed....

Let’s talk about Containment of Urban England. Tell me about the research.

Well, it came in two stages. First of all, the central idea really came out of the idea behind *London 2000*, that you could not do a King Canute job, you could not stop deep processes that were changing the geography of the country, and in particular, shifting growth back towards Southern and especially South-Eastern England. I wanted to understand the process whereby planners believed they could do it – hence the title, *The Containment of Urban England*. And the truth was that containment had occurred at one level. Yes, London’s growth had stopped. Travel out of London in any direction, and suddenly London stops.... But, of course, the growth went on happening in more subtle ways, but very subtle ways, and the way urban England has grown since World War Two is, I think,

quite extraordinary. It's growth has been shaped absolutely. The growth hasn't been stopped, that's a fantasy, but it has been shaped....

So we traced it first through a series of historic chapters, which I wrote - all the chapters are ascribed – in particular looking at five major urban regions and what exactly happened, tracing the history right from the inter-War period through to the end of the 1960s/beginning of the 1970s. Then we become more analytical, and we trace, more analytically, how the planning system worked – Harry Gracey's work was particularly good there. Harry was an American who came here to work on the book, and then went back to America, but the fact he was American allowed him to see the British planning system almost anthropologically, which was useful. And then Ray Thomas.... Ray really wanted to show that in important respects, the planning system had worked, and it had produced good results, defined results. And his particular interest was in the New Towns, and Ray did a powerful analysis, which he later updated, demonstrating that the New Towns had achieved their stated objectives, which were self-contained and socially balanced communities....

So there were lots of interviews involved in The Containment of Urban England?

Yes.

Did you?

No, no. No, Harry didn't want me to do the interviewing. I was really too busy. (pp. 42-45)

13: Practical visionaries: Ebenezer Howard and Frederick J. Osborn

Who is your favourite visionary?

In *Cities of Tomorrow*? Oh, it would have to be Howard. Ebenezer Howard, who's my patron saint. Because you know, my long association with the Town and Country

Planning Association – which we haven't talked about at all – but I've been associated with TCPA since the seventies. I was chair for a long period in the nineties, and now President... But he was the great visionary who was a practical visionary who dreamt dreams and made them happen. He said, "We'll build garden cities", and then made Letchworth happen. The story's all in the book. He came down to London in 1920, excited, and phoned some friends from King's Cross station, and said, "I'm just buying a huge site in Hertfordshire for Welwyn Garden City". And they said, "Where's the money?", and he said, "Well, I don't know. I need you to help me find the money"....

Another hero was his great lieutenant, Frederick J. Osborn – FJO – who was a wonderful figure, who I knew... He was the guy who made the New Towns happen, almost single-handedly. He campaigned, and campaigned, and manoeuvred, and he got 28 New Towns built. So he's a hero, certainly as a role model. ...

Yeah, I am a visionary, and I like to see things happen. I describe myself as a "practical visionary" which is a term - well, "practical Utopian", which is the term people used for FJO. I believe, passionately, that if you're going to do something, you've got to set an objective and and push it and push it. (pp. 52-53)

14: American research organisation

What I did want to do, and never really succeeded in doing, was to build up, in the Bartlett, what I'd had and seen operating well in California, which is what, in Californian parlance, is called an "ORU" – Organised Research Unit. One of the great strengths, I discovered, in California – and I think it's true of all great American research universities – is that research is professionally organised through Units, and some of them are almost coterminous with Departments. The IURD – the Institute of Urban and Regional Development – which I joined, and then took over from Mel, was almost coterminous with the teaching department, DCRP – Department of City and Regional Planning – but not quite. We were able to offer research from other people in other Departments, and I firmly believe this is the way to organise research. You had a highly professional management team. Had a superb manager there. I had a PA and then a Financial Officer. It was completely set up. "You have a research idea, we will develop it for you. We will

save you all the hassle, the tedium of preparing the research proposal. You will tick some boxes, and send it off”. And we’ve never had this in the Bartlett. We don’t have it in Britain, generally in British universities. I think it’s a great great mistake, because that’s the way to do research. (pp. 58-59)

15: Michael Young and the Institute of Community Studies

The Institute was set up by the legendary Michael Young ... famous for *Family in Kinship in East London*. And what was happening was that Michael was already reaching age 80 at this point, and everyone was saying, “Michael, it’s time to stand down”, but it was his brain child, he couldn’t give it up. It was very very difficult. They said, “Maybe if you take it over, you know him very well” - I’d known Michael for 30 years – “he trusts you and likes you”. And then there was a tremendous fight, they wanted to push him out entirely. And I said, “No, there’s no way. Get an office and he’s Senior Research Fellow”, and he stayed there in his office until the day he died.,,

Michael had been doing a study called, “The Re-survey”, which was supposed to look at Bethnal Green 30 years after *Family and Kinship*, and he was doing this through Geoff Dench, and Kate Gavron, ... and they’re the total problems, because the research produced a disastrous picture. Michael thought it was going to be about his lovely white working-class, living in sweetness and light, and he discovered they were all racist, and they hated the Bangladeshis! And they were all moving out to Essex. And he couldn’t take the research. So they kept writing the book, and he kept trying to re-write it! They were completely stuck. It was well over ten years since the research had been done, and they couldn’t publish it. Finally, he died... and then we finally published it. Geoff wrote most of it - well, Geoff wrote part of it, Kate wrote a lot of it, and I rewrote a lot of it, [but] I didn’t put my name on it at all. It’s still got Michael’s name on it, but Michael really would have hated it. Anyway, we got it out, it’s called *The New East End* (2006)... (pp. 60-61)

16: London Voices, London Lives

In 1997 or '98, I can't remember how – don't ask me – we got a big ESRC grant, and I say “we” because it was a multi-university team. It comprised Ian Gordon, Professor of Geography at LSE, who I got to know because Ian had actually succeeded me at Reading. ... Ian had just about moved, at this point, to LSE. And Michael Harloe, a very distinguished sociologist from the Essex camp – and you know all about Essex – was in on this, and was just leaving, or just about to leave Essex, to become Vice-Chancellor of the University of Salford... And then there was Mark Kleinman at the LSE, except Mark then left and has actually become, effectively, a civil servant. Wait a minute, has that got all of us? Oh, sorry, Nick Buck, also from the Essex camp. So there was a close Essex connection in all this.

We really did form a co-operative, and it was one of the most really joyous, and really intellectually stimulating periods of all our lives, I think. We met for about three years on this. We met every month at the LSE, in a room at the LSE, and we spent a whole day talking about research. We had a research team, very dedicated, very good researchers, who were the interviewers – we didn't do any of this – and they're all credited in the book, and we had this wonderful intellectual discourse where we hammered out the shape of the book, and how it was all going to happen. A great - let me backtrack. The book, essentially, is a bit like other pieces of research I've discussed, and maybe this is the nature of social science research, or this kind of social science research. A lot of it was number crunching, in particular very careful work by Ian, who's a very very fine researcher on labour markets, really unpicking the nature of the London economy and London labour markets, and Nick, who's a number 1 number cruncher, working with him. And then there was the interview part, which was more Michael Harloe's area, and to some extent, and the politics of it, which was particularly Mark's, because he was, and is, a political scientist. Anyway, we brought all this together in quite a complex structure, and we conducted I think it was 130-something interviews – when I say “we”, I didn't do any of them, they're very carefully trained researchers – and we ended up with this vast volume of transcript.

When we came to finish the book, we suddenly realised that we'd hardly used any of the interview material! If you go back to *Working Capital*, I think you'll find about ten quotes! We said, “My God, we've spent all those thousands of hours, and we've got this

unique interview material, and we've done nothing with it! What are we going to do?" And I said, and I must have been a complete madman, I said, "I'll try and take it. I'll see what I can do with it"... It took another five years, and I somehow – with some help, I had some help to do it – got all the interview material totally transcribed, edited it, upstairs here, upstairs. It was all done on the computer, crunched out and extracted, and finally knocked into some kind of a shape. (pp. 62-63)

16: Meeting Magda

On an airport, at Stockholm, May Day, 1965, 8.00 a.m. in the morning. Strange circumstances.... I was at Birkbeck, we were running a field class to Scandinavia that summer, and my two colleagues had gone out in advance, and I was joining them to join in the reconnaissance party.... And they said, "You've got to come to a party, and we'll take you to this one. They have different Halls of Residence for the different nations". They told me that Magda was there, and they were very struck by this rather lively Polish lady, who was there, a kind of a refugee she was, and she was waiting for a lift to Stockholm in the morning, and they said, "Well, we'll give you a ride to Stockholm"...

Magda was originally a linguist, but then went back to College, she went to UCL, and then to Birkbeck... She was a consultant in the 1970s, working for communication studies and planning. That was very unhappy, because when she went to Berkeley we understood that she'd have what they call a "spousal deal", that they were going to hire her, and they never did. They did really cheat... She did a lot of work for me. She did, actually, most of the groundwork research – the reading and note-making – on *Cities in Civilisation*, over many years, both in Berkeley and then back here. But she... now regards herself as well and truly retired. (pp. 66-67)

17: Public discourse and journalism

I'm proud of some of my books, particularly *Cities of Tomorrow* and *Cities and Civilisation*... I'm pleased, more generally, to have been someone who influenced public thinking, public discourse, through my journalism. I've always been very proud of my

journalism, which is not something perhaps people think about, but it's something I've been doing for 50 years now – almost solidly I've been pounding out columns once a week (LAUGHS) for various magazines, and trying to influence public opinion in that way. Those, I would have said, are the chief ones. There are others, perhaps less significant. And also trying to build up university structures to do research more effectively, but as you've heard already, I've not been to brilliantly successful at that. (pp. 69-70)

I've always written to communicate. Absolutely. I've always written [for] an imaginary “intelligent member of the general public”. (p. 28)