The Contributions of R.T. Kennedy to New Zealand Planning

Robert Freestone
University of New South Wales
r.freestone@unsw.edu.au

Robert Terence Kennedy (1903-1997) was the foundation professor of town planning at the University of Auckland from 1957 until his retirement in 1969. During these years and into the 1980s he also practiced as a design consultant as well as advising governments on various planning matters. Kennedy had no tertiary qualifications but brought a wealth of experience from his time in the UK. He began his working life as an architectural assistant in Manchester and by the early 1940s was working with William Holford. This propelled him into a key role in the UK wartime planning bureaucracy alongside Holford and Gordon Stephenson. From 1943-55 he was Chief Planning Officer of UK Ministry of Housing and Local Government. He thus brought to New Zealand knowledge and expertise steeped in the British town and country planning tradition. Apart from establishing the first university planning qualification, his NZ career is also marked by high profile engagements in various design projects: waterfronts, civic centres, and motorways. This biographical paper stitches together the main lineaments of his professional life. It revisits his planning ideas, the firm moral compass guiding his work, his achievements and frustrations.

Keywords: RT Kennedy, planning education, planning practice, New Zealand

Introduction

RT Kennedy - Robert for formalities, Terry to friends and colleagues, ‘Prof’ to his students – spent the first half of his life in Britain, initially as an architect and then as a town planner where he made his name as a senior official in the wartime Ministry of Town and Country Planning and its postwar successors. The second half of his life was spent as a planning academic and consultant in New Zealand. He played a key role in establishing professional education for town planning in New Zealand upon his arrival in 1957 to take up the foundation chair at the University of Auckland through to his retirement in 1969. His responsibilities involved promoting the understanding of town
planning and elevating community and professional discourse. The position also enabled the right of private practice which he pursued to the mid-1970s.

Unlike his eminent British contemporaries from the 1940s, William Holford and Gordon Stephenson, Kennedy has not been the subject of substantive biographical study, although his name surfaces intermittently in accounts of post-war reconstruction in Britain. Stephenson long urged Kennedy to follow his lead in writing an autobiography but there was any number of excuses, most tellingly the self-deprecating feeling that Kennedy’s own story would not be of particular interest for a latter-day readership. His New Zealand years are thus even less well chronicled. For over a decade Kennedy carved out a high profile in educational and professional circles, but there has been little serious study of the man, his ideas and legacy. Miller’s (1998) authoritative review of NZ planning history literature turns up no references to him. However, her later history of the NZ Planning Institute (Miller 2007) establishes his contribution as a key educational figure active in professional matters. Sinclair (1983) weaves him into his official history of the University of Auckland. And we glean some understanding of his life and professional contributions from short obituaries and memoirs.

Kennedy arrived in New Zealand with a small, energetic but somewhat fragmented town planning movement already in place, new enabling legislation on the statute books, but an institutional environment for professional education sadly undeveloped. While the three established professional professions for architects, surveyors and engineers vied with each other to command the new field of town and country planning, qualified planners came from British immigrants, ex-servicemen who studied in London after World War Two, or dedicated individuals undertaking a long and laborious external study to meet the British Town Planning Institute’s (TPI) requirements. Complementing the fledgling professional discourse was a growing community appreciation of the need for expert land use management and design control, as well as a developing literature (e.g. Martin 1949). A notable initiative was the town planning school of Wellington’s Architectural Centre supporting students undertaking external TPI study and which involved leading planning lights such as John Cox, Al Gabites and Maurice Patience; it ran from 1949 up to the launch of the Auckland program in the late 1950s.

This paper focuses on a recapitulation of Kennedy’s own story through a biographical perspective. It represents a preliminary, largely descriptive synopsis from a more extensive investigation of his career and draws mainly on his personal papers and discussions with former colleagues and family. It concentrates solely on his time in New Zealand. There are four main sections. The first provides a brief overview of his life and career with a review of the circumstances of his appointment at Auckland and subsequent life in New Zealand. The next three sections explore the main strands of interest in his professional life: (1) contributing to public debate through talks, papers and commentaries leading to a brief consideration of his core planning ideas and philosophy; (2) his engagement with planning education as foundation chair at Auckland; and (3) his work as a planning consultant, notably for the Auckland Harbour Board and the Wellington City Council.

A life in architecture and planning

Kennedy was born in West Didsbury, Manchester in September 1903. After school and a desultory period in a local bank he was articled to his architect father William Kennedy and attended courses at Manchester College of Technology and School of Arts. From 1925-1939 he worked as an architect
in local government. After completing his articles he first joined the staff of the Manchester City Architect. During this period he married Mary Yelland, a mathematics graduate from Bedford College, and they would have two sons: Nicholas (born 1943) and Phillip (born 1947). From Manchester he moved to Essex County for two years (1935-36) and then to the office of the Liverpool City Architect and Director of Housing, becoming responsible for the design of several central area redevelopment projects (1936-39). In 1940-43 he joined William Holford in the supervision of large wartime building contracts for the Ministry of Supply, first for a Royal Ordnance Filling Factory outside Liverpool and then several hostels to house munitions workers. In early 1943 he joined the new Ministry of Town and Country Planning. This was his entrée into town planning proper, working in the ‘Planning Technique’ section alongside Holford and Stephenson with the focus on new planning standards and techniques. After the war he was appointed Chief Planning Officer in the Directorate of Technical Services in the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. In this role he was involved in a more expansive range of town and country planning matters: the replanning of blitzed cities; the selection, designation and planning of 12 new towns; national parks; and examination of advisory city, regional and county borough plans. In 1955 he entered private practice with Holford in London. The working relationship with Holford was less open than their earlier partnerships (Cherry and Penny 1986), so despite taking a long time deliberating on leaving the Ministry he was soon looking again for a more rewarding position, even lodging an unsuccessful application for Architect of the City of London.

In 1956 the Auckland chair fortuitously came to his attention. This position was the culmination of a long lobbying campaign dating to the era of John Mawson, the second NZ Director of Town Planning from 1928 who conscripted to the cause Professor Cyril Knight of the School of Architecture, Auckland University College (Miller 2011). At various times rival professional bodies representing town planning interests took up the cudgels: the Town Planning Institute (formed 1930), the Town & Country Planning Association and the Institute of Professional Town & Country Planners (both in the late 1940s). The preferred model by 1948 was a chair as head of a separate school within a faculty of architecture at Auckland University College. Knight continued to play a key role and there was already a Senior Lecturer in town and country planning in architecture (Gerhard Rosenberg). The matter was considered exhaustively by Council, Senate and various committees into the mid-1950s. A member of Council, Norman Spencer, gave an endowment of £7200 to support the chair for the first four years. Spencer was a businessman, lawyer and philanthropist involved in the transport industry and chairman of the Auckland Transport Board from 1955-1964 (Glenie 1972).

Kennedy, then aged 53 years was one of the two shortlisted candidates, alongside Neil Abercrombie, son of the legendary Sir Patrick. Neil had just taken up the position of Town and Country Planning Commissioner of Tasmania after five years as Senior Lecturer in Town and Regional Planning at the University of Melbourne (1951-55). Holford was a referee for both men, but Kennedy also enlisted influential support from Dame Evelyn Sharp, the Secretary of the UK Ministry of Housing and Local Government; Robert Matthew, Professor of Architecture at Edinburgh University; and Gordon Stephenson, by then head of City and Regional Planning at the University of Toronto. Applications were deliberated by various university entities including the professorial board and there was a report of a special ‘London Committee’. The post was offered to Kennedy in October 1956. Although not a planner by training, his decade in the Ministry had seen him a key participant in a momentous period in British planning. He sailed with his family from Southampton on the “Southern Cross” and
arrived in May 1957 to take up his appointment: first head of the Department of Town Planning in the School of Architecture at Auckland University College.

Kennedy says he arrived in Auckland virtually “pennyless” which seems a gross exaggeration but nevertheless enlisted the assistance of a distant relative in building a family home to his own design in Remuera. This provided a comfortable environment until 1965 when its amenity was compromised by construction of a residential flat building adjacent; he lost a subsequent court case which became a cause celebre in damming the legal and technical loopholes of local planning schemes (Northey 1966). Both his sons studied at Auckland University and became architects. At age 65, Kennedy was formally obliged to retire but was reappointed in January 1969 to the end of August 1969 as a transitional arrangement pending the arrival of his successor, Ivan Boileau from the University of Sydney. Already a seasoned consultant, he continued in private practice for several years, interrupted only by a disastrous retirement journey to Britain in late 1970 that lasted only a few weeks. He returned to seamlessly resume his primary part-time engagement as town planning adviser to Wellington City Council until 1974 when he moved to Christchurch to live alongside his son Nicholas in a new dual occupancy development. This marked his formal retirement. His final years were not always happy, with the premature death of Nicholas in 1977, and then Mary three years later after a protracted twilight suffering from dementia. Kennedy passed away in September 1997 just 10 days short of his 94th birthday.

The ‘Conditions of Appointment’ for the Chair of Town Planning dated May 1956 specified several responsibilities: the fostering of public interest and participation in town planning matters as well as directing and undertaking planning research; establishing and teaching into a new Diploma in Town Planning plus ancillary teaching into the Architecture programme; and the right of private practice as a planning consultant. I now look at each of these in turn, starting with Kennedy’s broader role in community outreach and understanding.

Promoting planning

On Kennedy’s retirement, Nancy Northcroft pointed to him as:

... a cooperative and willing participant in many activities outside the University. He has presented papers at many conferences and taken part in many public discussions. All these have benefitted enormously from his objective and critical appraisal of the matters concerned, and from the fearless and sincere way in which he says what he believes to be so (Northcroft 1969, p11).

Between 1957 and 1969 Kennedy’s surviving papers record some 70 talks, addresses, exhibition openings and conference presentations, alongside radio broadcasts on NZBC (including a three part presentation on subdivision, suburbia and housing in mid-1962) and television interviews. Most engagements were in Auckland but he was in demand throughout the country. The subject matter ranged widely beyond general accounts of planning systems and planning futures into presentations on diverse topics such as transport, residential development, urban renewal and civic design. He often defended the contribution of the planning profession too often made scapegoats for criticism. He diligently prepared typescript notes for every talk and quite a few of these eventually made their way to print. This body of work constituted his main research output; there was no funded research
leading to peer review outputs which are the staple of modern higher education research. His was an applied, reflective approach. Kennedy’s publications were concentrated in local professional journals such as The Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects, New Zealand Surveyor, Town Planning Quarterly, and New Zealand Local Government, trade journals like Home and Building, community publications like The City Beautiful, conference proceedings, and feature articles in newspapers, mostly the New Zealand Herald. Not surprisingly, the greatest concentration came in the (Town) Planning Quarterly the journal of the NZPI which he co-founded and co-edited with Jim Dart from the early 1960s.

Although the _oeuvre_ is modest, he nonetheless wrote consistently and his correspondence in retirement with colleagues such as Dart and Stephenson was prodigious. Much of this writing turned time and again to his experience as a professional planner particularly in London in the 1940s and 1950s. He commented on drafts and contributed detailed recollections for others’ versions of planning history such as Myles Wright’s _Lord Leverhulme’s Unknown Venture_ (1982), Gordon Cherry and Leith Penny’s _Holford_ (1986), Stephenson’s _On a Human Scale: A life in city design_ (1992), and for a new Danish edition of Steen Eiler Rasmussen’s _London: The Unique City_ in the 1970s. He felt his writing was inferior to his peers, putting it down to an early working life at the drawing board. Many of his personal letters were abandoned before completion as he apparently struggled with the right prose, apologising constantly for not being erudite enough. This undoubtedly held him back in sustaining a commitment to writing his own story at length. Nonetheless, in re-reading his writings today, one is struck by their directness and lucidity.

Kennedy was frequently involved in public debate in the media over planning matters. He saw this as not just a right but an obligation of academics because of their ability to comment critically “without fear of the consequences”, a privilege that “should be zealously guarded by the universities” (Kennedy 1969, p16). Within weeks of arriving in Auckland he was writing letters to newspaper editors on various matters and building a reputation as a critic not afraid to speak his mind. The targets were numerous: the shortcomings of the NZ _Town and Country Planning Act_ 1953, central government’s approach to urban renewal (1964), transport planning in Auckland (1965, 1973). Even as an 80 year old he was speaking out against what he saw as unscrupulous property development in Christchurch. He conceded that he won few friends in government or amongst the ranks of politicians and even some of his fellow professionals. “But who, entering the ranks of planning’, he reflected, ‘ever expected to be popular?’” (Kennedy1969, p16).

One of his most controversial engagements commenced almost immediately upon taking up his post at Auckland. Debate was raging as to whether the University should consolidate and upgrade around its historic location in Princes/Symonds Streets or decentralise to a new greenfield campus in suburban Tamaki. Influential members of the professoriate favoured relocation with the prospect of state-of-art buildings and infrastructure. This precipitated a tense, fraught and unpleasant work environment (Sinclair 1983). Kennedy was a pivotal figure in making the case to stay. His review of the general principles involved was his first published paper in New Zealand (Kennedy 1957). Incredibly, Auckland City Council was also keen to see the University move and lodged an appeal with the Town and Country Planning Appeal Board against confirming the central city as the university site. The Council’s appeal was disallowed in August 1960 but came at a cost for Kennedy. Unhappy at the lack of support for his stance, he resigned from Council, the Professorial Board and
the New Buildings Committee. Uncomfortably, both the Chancellor, William Hollis Cocker, and the VC, Kenneth John Maidment, supported a move. The relationship with Cocker was fraught throughout his tenure but he continued to get along with Maidment who often took him for Friday night drinks at the patrician Northern Club. His relations with other senior academics seem to have been generally cordial but distant; Kennedy’s lack of formal academic qualifications made him something of an outsider in academic circles. He looked back many years later to declare that ‘life in the University was far from easy, after ten years of it I was glad to retire emeritus at 65”.

Through his advocacy for causes, his public lectures, his teaching and his consultancy an appreciation of his planning philosophy can begin to be assembled. He was, as he confessed, a relative newcomer to planning having little formal involvement until joining the British civil service in the early 1940s. His formative views were thus shaped largely by practice and through his working associations with people like Holford, Stephenson, Thomas Sharp and Colin Buchanan. Intellectually, his influences were not Patrick Geddes or Raymond Unwin, whom he both regarded as eccentric, but Lewis Mumford, whose Culture of Cities (1938) he found inspiring, Patrick Abercrombie, Clough Williams-Ellis, and, perhaps surprisingly, William Lethaby, whose essay “Towns fit to live in” (1918) had first aroused his interest in planning. “As soon as greater interest in town life can be aroused improvements must be undertaken in every direction”, wrote Lethaby (1922, p27).

Kennedy was first and foremost a physical planner. Time and again he returned to three crucial yardsticks in making and evaluating plans: the economic, the social and the aesthetic. He was a firm believer in the importance of what we would now term urban design - though rarely using that term - for its power in communicating the visions and elaborating the details that matter for successful planning on the ground. He left no great personal statement but his inaugural lecture entitled ‘Design in Environment’ comes closest. This was delivered at University Hall on 27 March 1958, an occasion also marking the transition of the Auckland University College of the University of New Zealand into a University in its own right (Kennedy 1958, 1958b). His major theme was the need to value the whole environment as conducive to better living: “the control of physical development on the land yields negative results if there is no design”. He took the opportunity to reflect upon themes which would drift through his writings for the next decade such as the complexity and tedium of statutory planning, the challenge of the motor vehicle, the best new towns as model developments, and the subtopian tendencies of NZ suburban development.

Other dimensions which he valued come through his lectures and articles: the importance of interdisciplinary endeavour (albeit with the planner as team leader); the relevance of strategic and master planning as comprehensive forward-looking visions; and public participation. He was an unapologetically pragmatic planner which could be partly attributed to his years in Whitehall: “a theoretical future is so often at odds with immediate and practical solutions” (Kennedy 1969, p14). Alongside that was the need for simpler, realistic planning schemes. He channelled many of his ideas into constant critiques of New Zealand’s main planning legislation, the Town and Country Planning Act 1953. He saw it as overly prescriptive and legalistic, particularly in its voluminous regulations, and offering few opportunities for positive planning or community involvement. His early criticisms of the complexity and the administrative demands of the legislation were not well received by the Town and Country Planning Directorate within the Ministry of Works in Wellington with whom he was offside on many issues. Nevertheless one of his most original ideas called for greater
centralisation: this was the recommendation that planning survey research and data gathering be taken away from local authorities and resourced at the national level (Kennedy 1968), an idea that would have come from his experience in central government in Britain (Kennedy 1949).

The type of centralisation which drew his ire was over-building of central business districts. He was anti high-density, seen as compromising spatial standards of living. New Zealand’s main urban problems came not from “blitz and blight” but traffic.\textsuperscript{11} While acknowledging the general quality of material life, he was also critical of the regimented and sprawling suburban landscape; ‘in physical terms, a mess’ (Kennedy 1968, p3). The middle way was sensible, practical planning, looking towards the closer integration of land use and transport planning; encouraging mixed use through more flexible land use zoning rather than monolithic spatial segregation; mixing public and private development, and enhancing urban design standards. His overriding yardstick was securing a common-sense balance of individualistic demands and collective welfare in the “public interest”, a theme he returned to frequently in his writings (Kennedy 1965). What was notably missing to later-day eyes was a true appreciation of environmental management which helps underpin planning today, plus virtually no mention of Maori or lifestyles beyond the nuclear family. Kennedy was a product of his time and training as an architect-planner; but the early sensibility to urban design stands out.

Upon retirement from the Auckland chair, Kennedy was well aware that his campaign to promote community understanding of planning and reform the planning system still had a long way to go. In 1968 less than half of all local authorities had approved and operative planning schemes. The number of annual appeals against planning decisions had increased exponentially. And “planning in the eyes of many, including many councillors, has become identified with a seemingly unjustifiable bureaucratic interference with the rights of the New Zealander to enjoy life fully” (Kennedy 1968b, p3). At least the number of qualified professional planners was slowly growing as graduates from the Auckland programme took up positions around the country.

**Teaching planning**

Kennedy’s brief from the University was for instruction to commence in the first session of 1958. He commenced preparation before leaving Britain by acquainting himself with curricula from various English universities. On arrival he consulted members of the architects, surveyors and engineers professional institutes and government officials to arrive at an educational model acceptable to all. The structure eventually arrived at called for a one-year full-time postgraduate diploma course with late afternoon/evening classes. Kennedy did not see this as a narrowly-focused academic qualification but more a post-professional experience aimed at men with “mud on their boots” (Kennedy 1958c, p213). Six main subjects were devised: two foundational papers in “Town Planning Theory and Techniques” complemented by instruction in Geography, Civil and Traffic Engineering, Surveying, Architecture, and Law, all as related to Town Planning. An additional thesis was “a test of how you apply what you know to a particular problem” and students were also exposed to drawing office and field survey work. This structure remained substantially intact until 1968 when an honours stream was introduced. Papers were taught by both core planning staff and other university lecturers. By 1968 the core staff had grown to five members - Kennedy, Gerhard Rosenberg from Architecture, two former star students (Jim Dart and Mike Pritchard), and Harold Turbott, who taught landscape architecture part-time. They were assisted by senior instructors from other
departments such as Professors NA Mowbray (Engineering), FJ Northey (Law) and Cyril Knight from Architecture. Honorary Visiting Lecturers delivering guest lectures included well known and respected professionals like JW Cox (Ministry of Works), FWO Jones (Auckland Regional Planning Authority), and Nancy Northcroft (Christchurch Regional Planning Authority).

Kennedy’s main teaching responsibilities were two co-taught papers: one, the foundational paper on theory and techniques providing an overview of planning history, governance, design, survey, and methods; secondly, the architecture for planners paper, an introduction to architectural composition and materials, site planning, landscape, and urban design. Kennedy, who had departmental secretary Betty Cutter type out all his lectures, later recalled:

    Just think of the bloody awful lectures that I had to give. I had never before given a lecture – on anything. I was no scholar, had had an insufficient education, had no degree had even failed matriculation ... When I saw what I thought I had said when typed out by Betty I was appalled and ashamed.12

Some former students have mixed recollections. Robert Riddell, in the first crop of students and later professor at Auckland himself, confirms that Kennedy was not a great lecturer to begin with and somewhat stuck in London in the 1940s but picked up enormously to become “much more of a Kiwi and a popular figure in NZ planning”.13 Michael Wearne remembers a practitioner rather than a theorist “not surprisingly”.14 Henry van Roon and Dick Smythe both remember an intense and alert lecturer with a wide general knowledge who cared about his students.15 Jim Dart, student and colleague, remembered him as:

    ... always stimulating in his enthusiasms and his passions, always constructive in his criticisms of poor design and indignant at the crassness, lack of vision and ad hocery of so much civic decision-making. Like the Ancient Mariner, once within range of his voice, he would capture his audience with talk at great length on a wide range of topical issues and always with a total recall of past events (Dart 1998).

Bill Robertson, later a President of the NZPI, captures further the character of the classroom:

    His courses were all about the process and the various options and not expecting right answers. He would stand there looking at you over his rimless glasses and always able to suggest another point of view when one thought one had finally settled on a ‘right’ point of view. He was very good at providing wider references when various planning issues arose. He could always find alternative ideas or references to keep the planning possibilities open ... He used the diversity of student backgrounds to encourage us all to see the value of other skills, points of view and techniques.16

The diploma struggled early for students. Kennedy recalls the “birth pangs” as “agonising”.17 In 1958 there were 14 students (only four full-time); by 1969 this had risen to 59 students (12 full-time) (Northcroft 1969). By then there had been 66 graduates representing perhaps two thirds of all professionally qualified planners in New Zealand (Kennedy 1969) and 32 of his past students had been admitted as full members of the NZPI (Northcroft 1969). In 1969 the Town Planning Quarterly stated that “There is barely a government department involved in aspects of land use planning or a
territorial local authority of any consequence that does not have at least one ex-student on its staff” (Anon 1969). The Auckland diploma remained the principal means of providing professional training for town planners in New Zealand until 1974.

**Practising planning**

Kennedy’s engagement with actual planning projects commenced in the early 1960s, all characterised by the intersection of his design-based physical planning, commitment to the public interest, and pragmatic balancing of competing interests. Three major consultancies are evident: two for the South Pacific Commission, a major engagement for the Auckland Harbour Board, and a wide ranging advisory brief for Wellington City Council over a number of years. Each is described summarily in turn.

First, and initiated under the auspices of the South Pacific Commission (now the Secretariat of the Pacific Community), were two reports. In 1964 with Jim Dart he provided an overview of “the factors to be considered and the problems to be solved in planning for the future development” of Port Vila in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu). In 1969 with Dart and Mike Pritchard he reported on future planning possibilities for Nuk’alofa, the capital of Tonga, including a development scheme for a new government centre complex. These experiences began to open up Kennedy’s thinking to different environments and cultural expectations and alternate ways of doing planning. His reports resisted the temptation to fit the situation “into a Procrustean bed of town planning as commonly practised in the UK, the US or NZ”.

Second came Auckland where his chief client was the Harbour Board. In 1961 he had recommended “a tentative comprehensive plan” for the redevelopment of the waterfront and in 1963-64 was given the opportunity to do precisely that, working with an investigation group comprising the Board’s financial consultant, deputy chief engineer and property officer. His son Nicholas drafted the drawings and Mary typed the text. The major objective of his outline plan released in February 1964 for the 13 hectare site was “to increase for the ultimate benefit of the Board the degree of desirability of the area to those interested in building development”. The proposals aimed to encourage a re-subdivision to accommodate larger, more efficient building footprints; radical improvement in the vehicular and pedestrian circulation pattern; and overall enhancement of the environment. The outcome was “a set of possibilities” for comprehensive redevelopment to give Auckland “a new front door”. The outline plan envisaged about 20 new multi-storeyed buildings arranged around pedestrian courtyards. The centrepiece Queens Square was the size of a football ground with an underground car park. Over 70% of the new commercial floorspace was to be offices, the major landmark being a 22-storey building on the western side of the Square. Footbridges connected an elevated shopping mall to the city and harbourfront. A new conference facility, hotel and three12-storey flat blocks at the northern end of the elevated terrace were also part of the scheme.

With its featured podium, attention to a network of public plazas, modernist towers, segregation of car and pedestrians, and tokenistic traces of history (notably retention of the Edwardian-era Ferry Building), the project was a product of its time. It was a master plan pointing to possibilities beyond the uncoordinated redevelopment of scattered individual sites. It recalls comparable modernist-inspired schemes to renew Sydney’s Rocks and Circular Quay area produced around the same time.
(Blackmore 1988). Deletion of an earlier proposal for an above-ground motorway and projection of downtown residential land uses were progressive for the day. Moreover, only half the redevelopment potential of the existing planning scheme was to be capitalised to commend the community-orientation of the plan. The Kennedy plan was well received by the Harbour Board, the City Council and the wider community. Editorials in the major newspapers, the *NZ Herald* and *Auckland Star* were both laudatory. Auckland Mayor DM Robinson complimented “an exhilarating proposal which will have a profound influence on the redevelopment and the future of the area.”

Almost immediately the Harbour Board commissioned a more detailed feasibility analysis and from hereafter the story becomes a more complex narrative of the contested political economy of waterfront development progressively leaching the idealism of Kennedy’s initial design prospectus. An appraisal by Melbourne urban economist George J. Connor concentrated on the profitability to the Board of the area immediately west of Queen Street being devoted to a large department store and multi-storey car park. Featuring diminished public space (because of the absence of commercial return), it also dropped the apartments for a hotel and relocated the main office tower closer to the waterfront. In late 1964 the Board invited tenders for development welcoming yet more design alternatives. The only serious Expression of Interest came from an Australian-dominated consortium comprising Mainline Construction, Dillingham Construction, and Fletcher Trust and Investment Co., working with Sydney architects Peddle Thorp and Walker (PTW). Kennedy stayed connected long enough into 1965 to have his plans alongside Connor’s form part of the tender documents and subsequently to comment favourably on the planning competence of PTW (Smith 2013). Land title complications and depressed market conditions delayed progress but then the real controversy started. The relocated high rise office slab (opened as Air New Zealand House in 1973, now HSBC) overshadowed what remained of Kennedy’s Queen’s Square. Critics complained about wind tunnel impacts, non-compliance with planning ordinances, and secret deals between the developers and the Government (Richardson 1977). By this time Kennedy had completely disassociated himself. He decried the outcome as “a triumph for the forces of commercialism over public interest”. This proved to be just one episodic chapter in the incremental transformation of Auckland’s waterfront but it left Kennedy disillusioned:

> I realise now that I had been over-optimistic in thinking that the Board, the City Council and the Government Departments who together would be responsible for the redevelopment of 32 acres, would be prepared to contribute in land and otherwise for the enjoyment of the general public, that is for the citizens, on whose goodwill they depended, and on the good opinion of the visitors and tourists who contribute to Auckland’s prosperity.

Kennedy’s time at Wellington, his third sphere of engagement with practice, ended no more happily. His formal association as Town Planning Consultant to the City Council spanned the years 1965-1975. The Council’s institution of a town planning division was in part the outcome of a campaign mounted by the Architectural Centre from the late 1950s. The brief was to advise Chief Planning Officer Ken Clarke (an Auckland diplomat) and the Council on a range of referred town planning matters. These encompassed matters such as preparation of a general planning scheme, new subdivisions, proposed redevelopments, zoning issues, street extensions, car parking, civil defence issues, administrative organisation, rezonings, and progressed into more intensive design commissions. As in many cities, the planning environment in Wellington in the mid-1960s was tense
as modernist ideals collided with the rise of the environmentalist movement and citizen scrutiny. Controversial public intellectual William Sutch (1965) dubbed Wellington “the sick city” as it wrestled with housing, open space, and traffic congestion problems.

Kennedy’s most contentious role was to review the Ministry of Works’ proposal for a central area motorway which had attracted serious debate and criticism. His December 1965 report affirmed the Foothills Motorway as “the only reasonable and effective major contribution to a solution of the present and immediate future traffic problems of central Wellington” but took issue with details, such as the design and location of the interchanges proposed by the American traffic consultant De Leuw Cather. In 1970 he completed a report on the design of a new Passenger Transport Centre Bus Terminal at Lambton Quay but his major creative project was a civic centre scheme developed between 1971 and 1974 in the area bounded by Jervois Quay, and Wakefield, Victoria and Harris Streets. Again working with Nicholas, his “super block” plan envisaged a traffic-free precinct with a new town hall, council chamber and ancillary offices, public library, concert hall, conference building, planetarium and open air theatre. The scheme was not comprehensively realised but clearly had some influence in formulating an agreed template to move forward in the general disposition of main buildings, the basic concept of a central plaza enclosed by buildings as wind protection, and crossings to the waterfront. Warren and Mahoney Architects consulted with him in 1975 when designing the new town hall.

While his decade working in Wellington appears productive enough, it was not an altogether smooth association. The Capital City Planning Committee which he helped bring to fruition was too often factionalised into the interests of its local and central government representatives. His working relationship with Government Architect Arthur Hallam was always a struggle. In November 1975 he informed Mayor Michael Fowler that he did not wish to be reappointed when the “frustrations, disappointments and growing bitterness proved too much”.

Conclusion

RT Kennedy’s career spanned two continents over a half a century. In retirement in Christchurch, he made harsh self-judgments about an “up and down” serendipitous career. An admission to Gordon Stephenson in 1990 seems too bleak:

Unlike you I was never a dedicated Town Planner and unlike you never academically trained for the job. My lectures were an agony to me, my talks and addresses very ordinary. I wrote no books. I relied almost entirely on experience of town planning in the Ministry but made no name for myself outside it ... I have no great thoughts on the subject. Unlike you I was never dedicated. Often I was sceptical and inwardly critical of much town planning activity, so many plans, so many words, so much talk and so much paper.

Drafting his own story, Stephenson provides a more buoyant appreciation of Kennedy, albeit forged in the 1940s: “An architect of ability, he had nous, intellectual integrity and a dogged determination to do things properly [and] an unusual capacity for hard work and mastery of detail.”
This is a more comfortable summation. Kennedy remained an architect and an accidental planner with a vision forged in wartime and early postwar Britain. It didn’t always translate well to the planning environment of provincial New Zealand. But while Kennedy may not quite make it into the ranks of the great men of planning history, the two very different halves of his planning career were nonetheless impressive in their depth and scope. Formal recognition of that is the CBE awarded in 1951 in recognition of services to town and country planning in Britain and his NZPI Gold Medal for exceptional service to planning in 1985.

There were three big shifts in his career. One was migrating to New Zealand, which he ultimately did not regret despite a lingering homesickness for the English countryside. The second was the move from architecture to planning, which he did feel more ambivalent about, describing himself on more than occasion as “an erstwhile planner”. Third was the step from practice to academia which he declared in his valedictory NZPI address as undoubtedly a good thing:

I first entered university life late in my own life, not until 1957 in fact. I have not regretted it. It has done for me what it has I hope done for most university staff and students. It has enlarged my own understanding of the world around me and by the intellectual stimulus it has provided made me think more deeply than I otherwise would have done of many things (Kennedy 1969, p16).

Kennedy is representative of the quintessential architect-planners of the post-war era, interested in more than just individual structures, seeking to understand their relationships in space and piecing together the fragments of the built environment into cohesive economic, social and visual wholes. But just as his individual architectural skills were effectively collectivised in local government settings before the war, so too there is no truly tangible planning legacy in New Zealand which can be unambiguously called his own. The high profile engagements in Auckland and Wellington were necessary steps in complex histories of urban placemaking but in their own right “ended up in tears, really - great schemes which just got watered down and watered down to the point that there was nothing left.”

In 1958 he wrote the Commissioner of Works declaring that “as the first occupant of the Chair of Town Planning in New Zealand my concern is to further and stimulate interest in Town Planning.” It was as an academic that he made his major contribution to planning. At the University of Auckland, he assembled as impressive a teaching staff as then possible. His full-time colleagues were united and loyal; they respected his directness, his integrity, his worldliness, his experience, his pragmatism, his loyalty; and his immersion in and knowledge of current events. He could be a harsh critic but didn’t spare himself, as evident from this account. He was a good manager bringing to bear his senior British experience from both private practice and the civil service. Many of the graduates from the first decade went on to distinguished planning careers in New Zealand and Australia. Bill Robertson recalls that Kennedy “was responsible for broadening and enhancing the education of many students who went on to contributory careers in planning and related disciplines.” I leave the final word to his friend and colleague Jim Dart:

The classes he had were with senior professionals from Auckland who came up the hill ... They gradually wove what they gained from Kennedy into their own thinking, their own work,
whether it was harbour board work or ministry works, roading or first attempts at regional metropolitan planning ... He opened the eyes of many people.39

Acknowledgments: This is a first and incomplete précis of RT Kennedy’s life but I am grateful for the assistance of many people in getting this far and would like to acknowledge Philip Kennedy for readily opening up personal records and memories; Wendy Garvey, Julia Gatley, Errol Haarhoff (all University of Auckland), Katy Gribbin (University of Liverpool) and Caroline Miller (Massey University, who also valuably critiqued an early draft in unlocking resources, and to a small team of former students and colleagues more than happy to share their recollections: Jim Dart, Mike Pritchard, Robert Riddell, Bill Robinson, Dick Smythe, Ted Thomas and Michael Wearne. I also acknowledge the valuable commentaries of two anonymous referees.

1 See Wright (1982), Cherry and Penny (1986), and also the autobiography by Stephenson (1992).
6 RT Kennedy to G Stephenson (GS), 27 April 1983, Gordon Stephenson papers, University of Liverpool Archives, UK.
7 RT Kennedy to J Dart, 18 October 1990, personal papers, file box in possession of Philip Kennedy.
8 J Dart, interview, Auckland. 7 August 2012; P Kennedy interview, Christchurch, 2 June 2012.
9 RT Kennedy to Tony & Susan Cox, 4 December 1992, personal papers, file box in possession of Philip Kennedy.
10 RT Kennedy, Notes for a Talk, Otahuhu Rotary [typescript], 23 June 1959, Kennedy Papers, University of Auckland, Architecture Library, Box 7.
11 RT Kennedy, Talk, Traffic Tangles, North Island Motor Union, Wairakei. 18 September 1960, Kennedy Papers, University of Auckland, Architecture Library, Box 15.
12 RT Kennedy to J Dart, 19 April 1986, personal papers, file box in possession of Philip Kennedy.
13 Robert Riddell, 27 June 2011, Phone conversation.
14 Michael Wearne, 22 July 2011, by email.
15 H van Roon, Auckland, 27 September 2012; RB Smythe, by email, 14 November 2011.
16 Bill Robertson, 20 July 2011, by email.
17 RT Kennedy to Jim Dart, 29-2-1984, personal papers, file box in possession of Philip Kennedy.
References


Kennedy, RT (1957) “Planning the University”, Civic Digest, June, 17-18.


Kennedy, RT (1965) “Planning and the Public Interest”, New Zealand Local Government, June, 3-5.


