

Town Planning on Display

A timeline of Australian planning exhibitions 1912-1951

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

Marco Amati
La Trobe University
m.amati@latrobe.edu.au

Exhibitions played a vital role in promoting the benefits of modern town planning through the first half of the twentieth century. They helped convey the environmental, economic, and social dividends of strategic and statutory planning to the broader community as well as constituting a vehicle for planning advocates themselves to showcase advances and best practice design. Internationally, a series of influential events, such as the Royal Institute of British Architects Town Planning Conference in London in 1910, provide a major window on the development of the planning movement. What of the Australian scene? This paper surveys the national, city and touring exhibitions held in Australia during the major propagandist phase of the planning movement to inquire into the ideas, ideologies and legacies involved. It presents a typology of different exhibitions before zooming in on a series of thumbnail sketches in a chronology of individual exhibitions. Across the evolution of planning preoccupations conveyed, ecological issues emerge as a secondary concern alongside the main priorities of housing, traffic, playgrounds and land use zoning. The paper connects to the 'experimental cities' conference theme in revealing how the ideal city environment was portrayed by early planning advocates.

Keywords: planning exhibitions, Australia, twentieth century

Introduction

The visibility of planning has been central to its professional distinctiveness. The first half of the twentieth century was the heyday for a culture of exhibitions that was central to the emergence and maturation of the planning profession as it sought to comprehend and address the challenges of urbanization. Early on, major international exhibitions captured the globalisation of the planning

movement. National events linked the mission of planning with national development. City events captured the key market for planning ideas and addressed both metropolitan and central city concerns. Local events reflected the importance of community involvement and place-making. Criss-crossing all scales were travelling exhibitions assembled by various educational, professional and public interest organisations to promote planning as an instrument of urban reform. Planning was still rooted in voluntarism, there was much experimentation in various approaches to city, suburban and regional improvement, and the case had to be built for more decisive and sustained state intervention into the processes of urban development including housing provision and environmental management. Once that breakthrough was attained, in most western nations in some form by the late 1940s, the halcyon days of the exhibition were over. While communication strategies became central to planning agencies, the role of the exhibition as an earnest gesture of general civic education became much rarer.

The story of town planning can thus be told through exhibitions. although ultimately they constitute just one component of more complex processes of information and image transfer involving books, journals, lectures, and study tours (Freestone and Amati 2014). Notable events punctuate many national and international planning history narratives: the New York 'Congestion Show' of 1909, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) international conference and exhibition in London 1910, the peripatetic Cities and Town Planning Exhibitions of Patrick Geddes into the 1930s, the Ghent Congress of Urbanism in 1913, the Festival of Britain 1951, the activities of CIAM, exhibitions attached to meetings of the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning through the interwar years, and so on (Hall 2002; Ward 2002). A great and climactic surge of exhibitions in the 1940s was driven by the anticipation of post-war reconstruction as well as the release of iconic, integrative strategies such as the County of London and Greater London plans of 1943-1944 (Larkham and Lilley 2012).

This paper plots an Australian narrative of planning exhibitions in the first half of the twentieth century which parallels the emergence and evolution of an exhibition culture globally. It identifies a sequence of events which captured the planning *zeitgeist* of their times through assemblages of plans, maps, photographs, diagrams, charts, models, films, life-size installations and other display techniques. Exhibitions were also hubs for spin-off events especially speeches and symposia. They represent one 'window' on the evolving concerns and *modus operandi* of the early town planning movement, particularly in how ideas were disseminated, interpreted and adapted (Diefendorf 2013). Their visual content gives them intrinsic appeal, which connects to a growing interest in visuality in the social sciences (Rose 2012).

This paper begins by more precisely defining the exhibition as a typology of interest in planning history and presents a listing of the main events in Australia during the first half of the twentieth century. The main body of the paper is organised in five decadal sections. These each present chronologically a sequence of thumbnail sketches of key events that attempt to capture the main content, concerns and actors involved. The paper concludes with broader findings and reflections on the significance of these events in the development of Australian planning thought.¹

Planning exhibitions in Australia 1912-1951

The survey period from just before the first world war to just after the second is a crucial formative period in Australian planning. This half century witnessed the evolution of a distinctive and widely shared model of ideal urban environments that laid a platform for the emergence of statutory planning systems designed to realise such environments at regional, metropolitan, local authority and neighbourhood scales (Freestone 2010). Through this period numerous exhibitions of one kind or another were staged. Displays dealing with improving the built environment surfaced in diverse contexts: state and city fairs and shows; celebratory anniversary events; architectural exhibitions; 'Ideal', 'happy' and 'modern' homes exhibitions; public health, local government and social welfare events; design competition shows; and displays of student work. Of central interest in this paper are those events which were usually explicitly branded as 'town planning' exhibitions and were complete enterprises in themselves, not part of broader exhibitionary events. They were not necessarily stand-alone with a number associated with conferences.

Planning exhibitions were often landmarks in the emergence of modern town planning consciousness. They reflected the synergies between town planning and broader urban and social reform aspirations. They were staged to sell planning ideas, values and techniques - almost invariably in the modernist tradition thus capturing a scientific ideology based around premises of order, hierarchy, linearity, functionality and efficiency (Greenhalgh 1990). Their target was frequently not just one place but a more sweeping re-ordering of urban space. They were unabashedly "propagandist" in an era before that term took on negative connotations. They aimed to "educate" the community to planning aims and agendas to ensure greater understanding. This represented a form of community involvement, although far more passively than by today's standards. These early events were also a means of communication within an evolving professional milieu; that is, a way of codifying standards, building consensus, stimulating discussion and debate amongst an emerging cadre of experts.

By these criteria a total of at least 19 landmark events in Australia can be identified, as summarised in Table 1. Some of these events were singular exhibitions over in a day or two; others were roadshows and travelled between cities over many months. There are likely to have been more events, particularly at the local level, which have fallen under our retrospective radar, but we are confident that Table 1 constitutes an authoritative inventory of the major events in the first half of the twentieth century. The twin peaks are apparent: first, the 1910s when the planning movement first coalesced as an organised entity seeking to establish its social relevance and political legitimacy, and then the 1940s under the direction of a new generation of more professionally-inclined planners when it became apparent that the imperatives to inject greater oversight of resource allocation and spatial development could no longer be ignored by governments. The paper proceeds by describing each briefly in turn across five decades.

Table 1: Planning Exhibitions in Australia 1912-1951.

No	Dates	Exhibition	Location
1	1912 (June-July)	Exhibition of Federal Capital Designs	Melbourne, Sydney, and other capital cities
2	1913 (November)	Town Planning Display, Town Planning Association of New South Wales	Sydney
3	1915 (September)	Town Planning Books Exhibition	Adelaide
4	1916 (August)	Town Planning exhibition, Parliament House	Adelaide
5	1917 (October)	First Australian Town Planning & Housing Conference and Exhibition	Adelaide
6	1917 (December)	Town Planning Exhibition, Town Planning Association of NSW and Department of Local Government	Sydney
7	1918 (July-August)	Second Australian Town Planning & Housing Conference and Exhibition	Brisbane
8	1919 (November 1919)	First Victorian Town Planning Conference and Exhibition	Ballarat
9	1924 (February-March)	Sydney Regional Plan Convention Exhibition	Sydney
10	1925 (September)	Town Planning Exhibition, East Sydney Technical College	Sydney
11	1929 (December)	Town Planning Exhibition	Perth
12	1938 (February)	Town and Country Planning Institute	Sydney
13	1943-1944	Houses and Towns to Live In, travelling exhibition, Housing Commission and University of Melbourne Extension Board	Melbourne, Victoria and Tasmania
14	1944-1945	US Housing in War and Peace, travelling exhibition	Mainland capital cities
15	1944-1945	Housing and Town Planning, travelling exhibition, Commonwealth Department of Post-War Reconstruction	Sydney, Newcastle, Brisbane, Toowoomba, Adelaide, Perth
16	1948-1949	Town and Country Planning in Great Britain, travelling exhibition, British Council	Capital and regional cities
17	1948 (April-May)	Town Planning Exhibition, The City of Brisbane Plan	Brisbane
18	1948	County of Cumberland Planning Scheme, Cumberland County Council	Sydney city and suburbs
19	1951 (August)	Federal Congress on Regional and Town Planning	Canberra

The 1910s

Melbourne and Sydney, 1912

The decision of the Commonwealth Government to build a new seat of federal government and secure the best plan through an international design competition in 1911-1912 is hugely important in the history of Australian planning, also attracting international interest. It was always the intention to put the entries on public display in Melbourne following their judging in the ballroom at

Government House in Melbourne. Various venues were canvassed including Parliament House at the top of Bourke Street and the Exhibition Building in the Carlton Gardens until Melbourne Town Hall was chosen, the exhibition opening 4 June 1912. Public response was enthusiastic and a reporter captured the duality of appeal: on the one hand the designs represented “the latest thought on city planning and city beautification, and on this account appeal strongly to professional and representative men”; and for the “average visitor” there was the fascination of viewing plans that were “someone’s ecstatic dream for spending many millions of someone else’s money”.² The entries were subsequently shipped by steamer to Sydney and displayed in the basement of Sydney Town Hall, opening 13 July 1912. Public interest was less enthusiastic partly because of the inclement winter weather but the arrangement itself was not well thought out: it was “next to impossible for a layman to tell where one set ends and another begins.”³ Nevertheless, the timeliness of this exhibition was well appreciated by JD Fitzgerald (1912, p5) and others seeking “the acclimatisation of modern town-planning upon Australian soil”. A public debate on practical versus aesthetic city planning was sparked through differing reactions to the winning plan by Walter Burley and Marion Mahony Griffin (Reps 1997). From Sydney those entries not acquired by the Commonwealth were returned to entrants. Copies were made for viewing in other cities.

Sydney, 1913

The year 1913 was critical for Australia as a nation as a “hinge-year” marking a broad acceptance of modernity and “a huge outpouring of energy, hopefulness and creativity” on the eve of world war (Hetherington 2013, p7). Establishment in Sydney of the Town Planning Association of NSW, the first of similar bodies in every state, marked the emergence of a formal town planning movement in Australia (Freestone 2009). To celebrate the occasion George Taylor organised an exhibition over three days at the Royal Art Society in Pitt Street “for the specific purpose of appealing to the public’s sense of the necessity of the movement” (Town Planning Section 1912, p92). The centrepiece was the display of the Griffin drawings made available for the occasion by Prime Minister Joseph Cook.⁴ Also exhibited were plans of various foreign cities, improvement schemes for Sydney, garden suburbs, slum housing, the work of some of “Sydney’s leading architects”, historic sketches and more of Griffin’s house designs and community plans from the US (Town Planning Association 1913).

Adelaide, 1915 and 1916

A bellwether of the enthusiasm for reform in Adelaide engendered by the arrival of Charles Reade as a town planning adviser to the South Australian Government was a special display of books on planning and the related fields of housing, architecture, landscape gardening, interior decoration and furnishing organised in the Children’s Room of the Public Library by the chief librarian Mr HR Purnell in September 1915.⁵ In August the following year, as parliament debated proposed planning legislation, Reade staged his own exhibition in the Railways Standing Committee room of Parliament House. This was well received but Adelaide City Councillors were conspicuous by their absence, miffed both at the embarrassing visual evidence of overcrowding on display and more fundamentally by the threat of proposed new planning controls from state legislation which imposed on their privileged autonomy.⁶ The display drew mainly from historic and contemporary material assembled by Reade in England and then Australia since arriving as an emissary of the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association in 1914. Many of these plans and photographs would resurface in later major exhibitions in Australia and New Zealand. Reade’s enthusiasm for visual

material mark him as a disciple of Patrick Geddes with whom he had revealingly spent a fortnight in 1913 preparing for Geddes' award-winning exhibition in Ghent (Reade 1914).

Adelaide, 1917

Reade was the mastermind behind the First Australian Town Planning and Housing Conference and Exhibition held in Adelaide from 17-24 October 1917. The conference proper was held in the Institute Building on North Terrace with 23 papers presented from leading figures including WB Griffin, John Sulman, W Scott Griffiths, WA Saw, and JC Morrell. The much grander but now demolished Exhibition Building nearby hosted a display assembled from diverse sources including the Commonwealth Department of Works and Railways, state governments, central city and suburban councils, private companies, and individual collections, notably from Reade himself. In various courts and sections were arrayed historic plans and pictures of Australian cities; plans of European, Canadian, and American cities; photographs illustrating city planning projects and garden cities; and ideal homes and related trade exhibits. The Griffin competition plans for Canberra featured but concerns about prospective damage saw the Commonwealth Government decide to restrict most future showings to photographs only.⁷ Many iconic images date to their showing in Adelaide in 1917, including the plans for Colonel Light Gardens and Dacey Garden Suburb. At the rear of the exhibition building a model children's playground was constructed and a conference surplus of £70/13/4 was later applied to the first permanent children's playground on West Terrace (Garnaut and Round 2009). A full sized model of a returned soldier's cottage was also erected to convey a desirable post-war housing standard but also attracting criticism for not giving sufficient weight to design considerations from a women's point of view (Gatley 2005). Each evening moving pictures of modern cities were shown with a musical accompaniment to illustrate international and Australian urban scenes, parks, gardens, model villages. The exhibition was conceived as a major exercise in educating the community. Reade was confident of the results: "taken as a whole, the exhibition is readily the best and most comprehensive collection of material ever brought together for enlightening Australian public opinion" (*Official Volume of Proceedings* 1918, p37). It helped build the case for governments to have "the power to control and plan out city and town areas in the best interests of the communities as a whole" (*Cities of the Future* 1917, p22).

Sydney, 1917

In December 1917 the Town Planning Association of New South Wales and the Department of Local Government combined forces to re-show the NSW contribution to the Adelaide conference in the Art Gallery of the Education Department building in Bridge Street. Featured were JJC Bradfield's plans for the city railway and harbour bridge, resumptions and wharfage schemes for The Rocks, various remodelling schemes, residential street designs by W. Scott Griffiths, and artistic posters.⁸

Brisbane, 1918

Adelaide 1917 was the prototype for the second national conference held in Brisbane from 30 July to 6 August 1918 sponsored by the Queensland State Government (Freestone and Amati 2011). With nearly 600 delegates, the scale was twice that of Adelaide. The exhibiton was somewhat inconveniently staged in the Exhibition Building on the northern edge of the CBD, a tram ride from the main conference venue. It was organised into various sections covering state government displays;

historic photographs; international developments; soldier settlements; local government, health and water and sewerage; a child welfare section featuring actual health and play facilities; and a poster display (arranged by JD Fitzgerald). Reade's collection of international and historic Australian material again featured (Catalogue 1918). The images supplied by local councils dwelt upon parks, public gardens, recreational facilities, general panoramas, and street and civic improvements. Environmental content was notably absent apart from reforestation and street plantings. On Machinery Hill in the wider Exhibition Grounds two ideal houses were erected to convey the desired standard of middle class Australian housing. Nearby were various machinery exhibits connected to the practicalities of local government engineering. A selection of mainly touristic films was also shown. This exhibition if only as a logistical exercise was an impressive achievement and while fragmented was arguably the most notable planning exhibition held in Australia before the Second World War. It helped sustain the planning cause into the early post-war years flavoured by the same repatriation theme of the conference. The expectation at the end of the Brisbane conference was for a third national event in Sydney in 1920 but this was abandoned when the NSW State Government declined to materially assist despite the Commonwealth Government setting in train acquisition of photographs and plans from "munitions towns" in Britain as well as diagrams illustrating general principles sourced from the London-based Garden Cities and Town Planning Association'.⁹

Ballarat, 1919

The first and last state town planning conference held in regional Victoria in November 1919 had an associated exhibition intended to reinforce the major theme of practical planning and to impart "the information which will overcome the apathy born of lack of knowledge and combat the opposition originating in selfishness". The bottom line was that it was "a citizen's duty to be behind this project, and an appeal is made to you now to play a citizen's part" (Catalogue 1919). The material assembled was a pot-pourri of plans, surveys and photographs with an emphasis on public infrastructure supplied by the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, Melbourne City Council, City of Geelong, various Victorian government agencies including the Country Roads Board, and the Melbourne Harbour Trust. There were special sections on Ballarat and Queensland. A decade after the event a residual surplus was directed to a new instrument of public information: a publicity and tourist information kiosk.¹⁰

The 1920s

Sydney, 1924

In February-March 1924 the Sydney Regional Plan Convention, a voluntary reform body formed to pressure the state government to commence a metropolitan planning scheme, staged an exhibition of plans and photographs in the galleries of the central city department store Farmer & Co. The principal aim was to illustrate "civic pride and progress in various parts of the World, with special application to the growth of Sydney, and stressing the urgent need for comprehensive planning for the City's future" (Regional Plan Convention, 1924). Material came from impressively diverse sources including the UK Ministry of Health, the City of Gothenburg, and the Mayor of Toronto. Lunch hour addresses were given by local experts including Leslie Wilkinson, BJ Waterhouse, John Sulman and Keith Harris. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that "considerable public interest is being shown in the exhibition".¹¹ But no tangible outcomes ensued and the idea which gathered support here for

an international or at least imperial exhibition in 1930-31 to celebrate the projected opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge also failed to take hold.¹²

Sydney, 1925

However, less than a year later came another exhibition, this time under the auspices of the Town Planning Association but with the central curatorial role assumed by the architect Gordon Keesing. Inspired by what he described as the New York model of annual exhibitions, Keesing's idea was to launch a similar program in Sydney to help cultivate a "civic pride which induces citizens to observe the architectural and structural improvements which are carried out from time to time".¹³ Held at East Sydney Technical College as part of a larger Health Congress, displays were arranged in groups representing government departments, local authorities, private practitioners and student work. The contemporary rebuilding of central Sydney under the Bradfield scheme remained an unavoidable centrepiece.

Perth, 1929

This event in December 1929 was multi-coded: it celebrated Western Australia's centenary, was intended to increase public awareness of planning possibilities following passage of the *Town Planning and Development Act* in December 1928, and helped focus the deliberations of the Town Planning Commission appointed to canvass future options and needs for the Perth metropolitan area. It was held in the Council of Industrial Development Hall in Barrack Street, spilling over into a supper room in the Town Hall. The exhibition was the initiative of the Town Planning Association of WA with key organisational roles assumed by the Secretary LG Taylor assisted by Ethel Joyner, one of the few instances where the contribution of a woman to these events was publicly acknowledged.¹⁴ While concentrated on local problems, a notable inclusion was a group of 30 plans and diagrams supplied by St Louis-based consultant Harland Bartholomew and Associates.¹⁵

The 1930s

Sydney, 1938

In the "roaring" 1920s the accent of the exhibitions was on harnessing and steering growth. In the Depression the planning movement lost much of its steam as public policy and reform activity was directed to more pressing concerns of employment and housing. Consequently this was a fallow time for classic planning exhibitions and reporting dries up. There is a record of one staged in Sydney in early 1938 by the Town and Country Planning Institute of Australia, a new professionally-orientated body aiming at supplanting the amateur contributions of the Town Planning Association.¹⁶ This rekindling of enthusiasm was to be taken up much more vigorously in the following decade.

The 1940s

Melbourne and beyond, 1943-1944

The first major event of the 1940s, the "Houses and Towns to Live In" exhibition in Melbourne, was an adult education initiative of CR Badger, director of the Melbourne University Extension Board.

The Housing Commission of Victoria financed it with exhibits prepared over six months by its Architects Panel comprising Harold Bartlett, Frank Heath, Best Overend and John Scarborough (Housing Commission of Victoria 1943). This exhibition was intended to show “what good national, regional town and country planning and good housing could and should play in the postwar lives of the people”. It appears to have been inspired at least in part by a project of the Workers' Educational Association in London (Riddell c1942). The target was emphatically the general public: “Public demand will ultimately produce positive results. Planning is essential” (Catalogue 1943). The well-documented exhibition was a mix of plans, charts, photographs, and models with lettering, posters and humorous sketches drawn by June Morton, a seventeen-year-old art student at Swinburne Technical School (Cooper 1943). Noteworthy exhibits were Heath's model of a neighbourhood unit, a scientifically based-concept for structuring community life then gaining in popularity, as well as his plan for future development of Swan Hill employing the same concept (Darian Smith and Nichols 2010). The Exhibition opened 4 October 1943 in the State Electricity Commission showroom in Flinders Street in the city. It then travelled through various Victorian country centres where the Workers' Educational Association operated and reportedly across Bass Strait to Tasmania. It did not prove the immediate catalyst for a planning school wished for by the University Vice-Chancellor.¹⁷ But it certainly catalysed the general propaganda effort with much of the material being adapted for re-use in the Department of Post-War Reconstruction's exhibition in 1944-45, explaining why the latter was not shown in Melbourne.

USA touring exhibition, 1944-1945

The showing of “US Housing in War and Peace” resulted from a visit by Dr HC Coombs, Director-General for Post-War Reconstruction to New York in 1944 and taking in a version of the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). He was “so impressed by the story it had to tell that he felt it must be seen by Australians at first hand” (Cooper, 1944). What came to Australia was a special international touring exhibition also shown in Britain and developed by MoMA with the assistance of leading housing reformer Catherine Bauer (Amati and Freestone 2013). Sponsored by the US Office of War Information, it was predominantly a black and white photograph exhibition depicting pre-war and emergency housing community planning achievements with a major emphasis on prefabrication as a modern building technology. The exhibition was opened by the US Ambassador in Sydney on 14 August 1944 in Sydney.¹⁸ It subsequently travelled to Canberra, Melbourne, Brisbane, Townsville, Adelaide, Launceston, Hobart, ending its tour in Perth in June 1945. The exhibition was described as a “powerful stimulus” of broad practical relevance to Australia (Cooper 1944).

Post-War Reconstruction touring exhibition, 1944-1945

The “Follow the Red Footsteps” exhibition slotted into the general educational activities of the Commonwealth Department of Post-War Reconstruction, an instrumentality charged with managing the national transition from war to peacetime across a variety of fronts: economic policy, industrial, rural and regional development, social welfare, and housing and planning. It was curated by John Oldham who has been involved with the Australian contribution to the New York World's Fair in 1939. It opened in the ground floor showroom of the Sydney County Council in August 1944 showing simultaneously with “US Housing in War and Peace.” The primary rationale was “to educate the public on the necessity of modern town planning and better housing”.¹⁹ The ulterior motive was to secure a foundation of support for the housing and planning reforms recommended by the

Commonwealth Housing Commission and necessitating a national involvement in urban development, a prospect at which the states would ultimately balk (Freestone 2012). The exhibition was quite modest in scale and prepared on a tight budget. Graphics from the Victorian Housing Commission exhibition the year before were reduced in size and incorporated as informational elements within new panels. This was the first exhibition to really reflect the influence of advances in exhibition design and wayfinding abroad. The influence of the 'New Architecture' exhibition in London in 1938 was evident in the staging with curved panels, raised lettering, and paired photographs and models (Gold 1997). It subsequently travelled to Newcastle (October), Brisbane (November-December), Toowoomba (early 1945), Adelaide (March-April), closing in Perth (June-July 1945).

Great Britain touring exhibition, 1948-1949

The "Town and Country Planning in Great Britain" exhibition which toured Australia in 1948-49 drew from previous exhibits which the British Council toured through Europe but was purpose-assembled for Australia and New Zealand. In several venues it coincided with a national lecture tour by Sir Patrick Abercrombie (Amati and Freestone 2009). The British Council, like the US Office of War Information a few years earlier, was an agency promoting a specific national paradigm of planning and its exhibition similarly illustrates the diffusion of international planning ideas through official bi-lateral trans-national channels. Australians remained receptive to messages from the "mother country" and the Commonwealth and State Governments which underwrote the cost of touring were committed to awakening public interest in town planning.²⁰ The Exhibition opened in Melbourne on 27 September 1948 and was seen in nearly 30 towns, including all the state capitals, by the time of the last showing in Hobart in November 1949. Largely through plans, diagrams and models the exhibition covered the redevelopment of central areas; metropolitan planning for Middlesbrough, Manchester and London; the development of New Towns; and regional planning. The models had great appeal; much of the other content put together by a London Committee with input from the RIBA and the assistance of the design guru Mischa Black remained uncompromisingly technical.

Brisbane, April-May 1948

Brisbane City Council staged an exhibition in association with its draft city plan in the City Hall basement from 29 April to 16 May 1948. This appears to have been the first major event of its kind in Australia and was staged by the city planner Frank Costello, an architect-planner committed to promoting understanding of planning through the community and later as an educator at the Queensland Institute of Technology (Freestone and Low Choy 2013). It attracted an average of three hundred people a day.²¹ The display was organised into around 60 standard display panels covering the historic growth of the city; planning for future transport, sewerage and water supply needs; proposed open space and foreshore improvements; neighbourhood planning; commercial and residential architecture; down to everyday city details such as provision of bus shelters, shop awnings and street furniture. Far-reaching proposals on view included new city centre improvements, a metropolitan green belt, and a land use zoning scheme. Postwar economic rectitude and municipal politics in Brisbane in the 1940s conspired against direct implementation through major public expenditure but this was a significant early contribution to an evolving planning, development and design agenda for the city (Freestone and Low Choy 2013)

Sydney, 1948, March-November 1948

Meanwhile in Sydney the Cumberland County Council had also commenced an elaborate exhibition schedule in releasing its blueprint for the metropolitan area. The Council was established under the 1945 Local Government (Town and Country Planning) Amendment Act and was given three years to prepare its plan including the exhibition of detailed zoning proposals, one of the earliest formal exhibitions of a statutory planning scheme in Australia. This was held from 8 March to 30 June 1948 in the CENEF building in Castlereagh Street.²² New regulatory controls were described via 15 coloured maps, drawn at a scale of 20 chains to 1 inch showing land-use zones.²³ A range of organisations was invited to inspections and daily attendances fluctuated between 250 and 800 visitors. The Council's exhibition prompted nearly 3000 objections resulting in many minor amendments but within a month new plans were readied for a second exhibition in the Sydney Town Hall from 27 July 1948 to coincide with the formal handover of the plan to the Minister for Local Government. This was a more artful event designed "to give graphic and dramatic presentation of planning proposals to build up public interest".²⁴ For nearly a week the County Plan and supporting data were on show in the Main Hall and Basement of the Town Hall. Johnson (1997) explains the visual strategy as promoting a synoptic, totalising view, with visitors asked to see Sydney from the planner's birds-eye view. At the same time, the Council was preparing for a third showing of the plan in suburban halls for two or three days at a time running deeper into the second half of 1948. A fourth related event was a further display of the revised statutory plan in the light of submissions from 8 June to 15 July 1949 at the NSW Department of Local Government and nine suburban locations. By that time the Council had received and had to deal with tens of thousands of comments and objections. Very quickly the role of the planning exhibition had moved from a rather generalised instrument to win the hearts and minds of the community to a set piece opportunity for members of the public to ascertain just how they would be directly impacted by concrete planning proposals. Feedback from this point on was not always complementary (Johnson 1997). While educational exhibitions would not disappear in Sydney or elsewhere, the interface between the visual information prescribed by the planning system and the community would take on very different meanings.

The 1950s

Canberra, 1951

But there was one major goodwill exhibition to be staged. In 1951 a congress in Canberra was convened by three separate professional institutes then operating: the Town and Country Planning Institute (Sydney), the Planning Institute (Melbourne) and the Town Planning Institute of South Australia (Adelaide). This led to unification and establishment of the present Planning Institute of Australia as the peak professional body with Professor Denis Winston as inaugural President. The conference was held on 10-13 August 1951 as part of Canberra's celebration of the Jubilee of Federation. William Holford and George Pepler were guests of honour from Great Britain. Some 170 delegates attended the sessions held at the Albert Hall. Featuring prominently was an exhibition covering the subject of town planning in Canberra. The Department of the Interior prepared a display which resurrected the original Griffin plans as well more contemporary long range development programmes and models of other new development underway in the national capital. Special talks were given by Charles Daley (Executive Member, National Capital Planning and

Development Committee) and Trevor Gibson (Senior Town Planner, Department of the Interior) with a response by Sydney architect BJ Waterhouse. The organising secretary of the conference was Peter Harrison. He had been involved in the Cumberland County Council exhibitions in 1948 and a few years later would become chief town planner of Canberra's National Capital Development Commission. Harrison became a champion of the Griffin plan which had been sorely neglected as an actual guiding city strategy (Harrison 1957) despite its periodic celebrity status at Australian planning exhibitions since 1912.

Conclusion

Planning exhibitions offer a compelling yet curiously overlooked organising device for conveying visually the emergence and evolution of planning thought (Freestone and Amati 2014). The Australian narrative commences at the very time a formal community planning movement emerged from the early 1910s and climaxed in the early 1950s as planning practice entered a new era of professionalism organised nationally. That the Griffin plans for Canberra featured prominently in the NSW Town Planning Association's display of 1913, the first national conference and exhibition in 1917, and the Federal Congress on Regional and Town Planning in 1951 underscores both the importance of the federal capital project in the formative years of modern town planning in Australia and the role of exhibitions in highlighting that importance.

Almost all the events remembered here were linked to other historical occasions and contexts. These were not exhibitions for their own sake but events calculated to celebrate or secure support for other causes (e.g. state centenaries and new planning legislation in Perth in 1929; lobbying for a planning bill in Adelaide 1916 and 1917; establishment of a planning school in Melbourne in 1943; support for Commonwealth leadership in urban affairs in Sydney in 1945, and so on). In these terms exhibitions were far from neutral, beneficent exercises in public enlightenment but rather intentional political actions in pursuit of particular ends.

Their role in the international diffusion of planning ideals is evident. While most of the Australian exhibitions were home-grown affairs, they nonetheless were open to overseas content and visitors were able to scrutinise relevance for local conditions; indeed, this critical stance was encouraged by progressive advocates like Charles Reade from the 1910s. Reade is the most influential figure of that early era with a huge appetite for promoting planning and links to the British town planning and garden city movements. In the 1940s the conduits are distinctively institutional with the expansionist propaganda of the US Office of War Information and the British Council. Better land use zoning, site planning, housing and development controls persisted as the main ambitions of the movement to express deeper-seated concerns about the order and efficiency in the built environment.

Display techniques demonstrably advance over the five decades covered by this survey. The early exhibitions were primarily assemblages of things. Even the official proceedings of the first national conference in 1917 noted that the impact of the many and various sections was "diffuse" and that "town planning has been interpreted very broadly" (*Official Volume of Proceedings* 1918, p37). From the 1940s messages were transmitted in a less motley and more sophisticated way. This becomes evident in the post war reconstruction travelling exhibition of 1944-45 and the British Council exhibition of 1948-49 with input from Mischa Black, who by then had identified the 'exhibition designer' as a genre of architectural professional. Not only do the techniques of representation

become more artful and innovative but the intellectual frameworks which govern the exhibitions become more considered and thoughtful. While the exhibitions of the 1910s and the 1940s promoted a similar message of holistic urban reform, the latter were conceptualised within a much stronger hierarchical model from room to region.

All the exhibitions were serious business. As stated in the catalogue for the 1943 Victorian Housing Commission Exhibition: "This Exhibition is not intended for amusement or to fill in a few spare moments, but should evoke thought, study and ultimately, action" (Catalogue 1943). Although others in the same era adopted a more accessible tone showing films and moving to less static displays, there remained the impression that the accent on technical plans and diagrams nonetheless challenged the comprehension of the general public. At the breakthrough federal capital designs display in Melbourne in 1912, a reporter noted that "an examination of the plans shows that except to the expert they do not tell much".²⁵ Yet even in 1949 a British Council representative noted of their own touring exhibition that while interest among professionals ensured good attendances, it was perhaps too technical for laypersons.²⁶

Such observations make it difficult to evaluate the impact of these events. It is necessary to drill down into the circumstances of each exhibition, something beyond the ambit of this short overview. While the singular impacts of each exhibition need further research, in a cumulative sense they were undeniably important mechanisms alongside and interacting with a raft of other media for introducing, evolving and codifying town planning ideas and ideals in Australia in the first half of the twentieth century.

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² "Planning a City: Federal Capital Designs", *Argus*, 5 June 1912, p11.

³ "Capital City Plans", *Evening News*, 15 July 1912, p5.

⁴ "The Key to Griffin's Canberra". <http://blog.naa.gov.au/preservation/drawings/>

⁵ "Town-planning Exhibition", *Advertiser*, 2 September 1915, p10.

⁶ "Town planning exhibition", *Register*, 16 September 1916, p8.

⁷ "The Key to Griffin's Canberra".

⁸ "Town planning", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 December 1917, p14.

⁹ Commonwealth Offices, London to The Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 28 October 1919. National Archives of Australia, 1620/8.

¹⁰ "Country News", *Argus*, 22 May 1929, p18.

¹¹ "Regional Plan", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 March 1924, p8.

¹² "Town-planning. Suggested exhibition to be held in 1930". *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 March 1924, p8.

¹³ "Town Planning: The Associations' Work". Clipping in RGC Coulter, Book of Me, National Archives of Australia, M1535.

¹⁴ "Town planning: exhibition opened", *West Australian*, 17 December 1929, p18.

¹⁵ "Town planning: value of exhibition", *West Australian*, 31 December 1929, p3.

¹⁶ "Coming Events", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 February 1938, p8.

¹⁷ "Novel Features in Plans for Towns of Tomorrow", *The Mail*, 9 October 1943, p5.

¹⁸ "US Town Planning Exhibition", *Argus*, 30 September 1944, p14.

¹⁹ 'Planning for Better Living' (c1944), Newspaper clipping [no details] in John Oldham file, 'Planning for People 1937-1954'. Courtesy Tish Oldham, January 2012.

²⁰ AA235/1/34, Town and Country Planning Commission General Correspondence Files, 1 Jan 1944 - 31 Dec 1959: Exhibitions and Film Production 1 Jan 1949-31 Dec 1957. Memo R.A. McInnes to Hon Minister for Lands and Works Hobart, 12 Feb 1948.

²¹ "City Plan Show", *Courier-Mail*, 12 May 1948, p12.

²² "County Scheme Exhibition", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 March 1948, p4.

²³ Planning Scheme As Exhibited by C.C. Council 8 March 1948, NRS 13418 Cumberland County Council, Maps and plans relating to planning and development c1940-80, AO Map Nos 52869-52883 Planning Scheme as exhibited by C.C. Council at C.E.N.E.F 8 March 1948, Sheet No.1 – Sheet No. 15, State Records of NSW.

²⁴ Minutes of the Cumberland County Council, 3 December 1947, NRS 13384, 11/15133: State Records of NSW.

²⁵ "On Exhibition in Melbourne", *Daily Herald*, 6 June 1912, p2.

²⁶ The British Council – Fine Arts (General) Committee. "Report of Progress", April 1949, British Council records, Public Record Office, London.

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