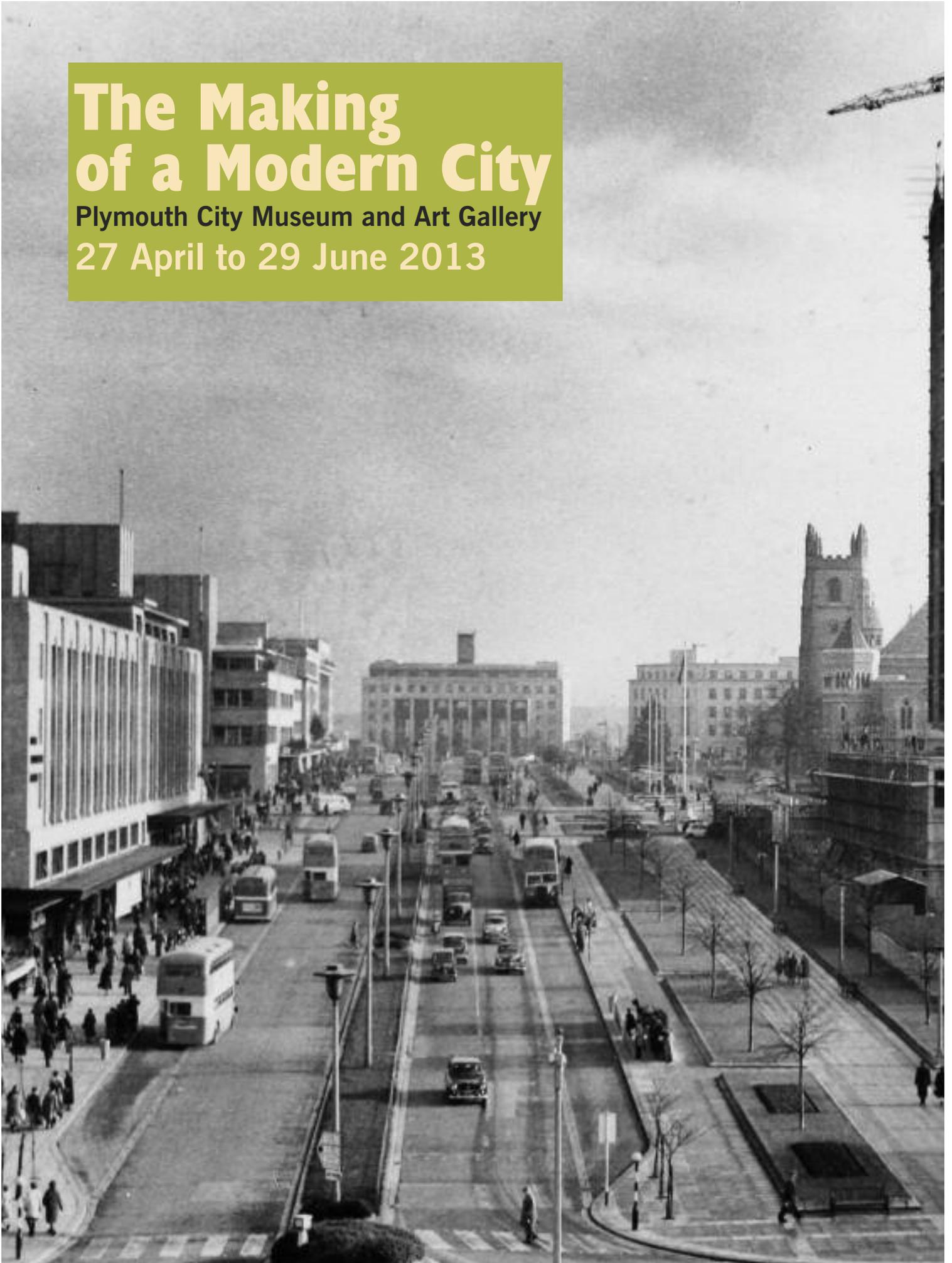


# The Making of a Modern City

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery

27 April to 29 June 2013



Teachers Pack

## Contents

About the Teachers Pack	3
Introduction to the exhibition	3
What was 'A Plan for Plymouth'?	3
Key figures in Plymouth's reconstruction	4
Ideas for activities	7
What can we do for you?	11
How to book a visit	11
Further resources	11

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The aim of this pack is to provide a way to look at, learn from, and engage with the various themes, characters, and artworks included in the exhibition **The Making of a Modern City** at Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, 27 April – 29 June 2013.

Elements of this pack can support your visit to the exhibition, and can also be adapted for use in the classroom pre- or post- visit.

Please refer to page 11 for guidance on how to book a visit.

## Introduction to the exhibition

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**The Making of a Modern City** celebrates the 70th anniversary of James Paton Watson and Patrick Abercrombie's 'A Plan for Plymouth' – the document outlining the proposed changes to the function and layout of the city centre and its neighbourhoods. It highlights the reconstruction of the city following heavy bombing during World War II, the formulation of the plan, the key people involved, the implementation of the plan, and the legacy we can still see today.

The exhibition takes a look into the City's archive collection and reveals previously unseen documents, plans and images that record the people, politics and places that shaped the city we know today. This exhibition is being held to coincide with the first-ever Plymouth History Festival, which will run throughout May 2013.

## What was 'A Plan for Plymouth'?

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'A Plan for Plymouth' was a report prepared for the City Council by James Paton Watson, City Engineer and Surveyor, and Patrick Abercrombie, Consultant Architect, published in 1943. It is essentially a document used to outline the proposed changes to the city centre and outlying neighbourhoods of Plymouth, written at a time when the city was in ruins following heavy bombing in World War II. Planning reports usually detail the impact of change upon the people and infrastructure of a local area when changes to existing buildings are made – in the case of 'A Plan for Plymouth', the report had to detail these changes on the entire city centre, the areas of the city where people were already living, proposed new areas of housing, and the areas around the city. As the plan states:

"Planning is not merely the plotting of the streets of a town; its fundamental essence is the conscious co-relation of the various uses of the land to the best advantage of all inhabitants. Good planning therefore, presupposes a knowledge and understanding of the people, their relationship to their work, their play, and to each other, so that in the shaping of the urban pattern, the uses to which the land is put are so arranged as to secure an efficient, well-balanced and harmonious whole."

'The Basis of the Plan', Chapter Four, page 28



Sir Patrick Abercrombie, Viscount Lord Astor and Mr James Paton Watson viewing the architect's model of the Plan for Plymouth, c1943 © Plymouth Library Services

### Lord Waldorf Astor

Lord Waldorf Astor was appointed Lord Mayor at the outbreak of World War II. He was only the second non-councillor in the city's history ever to be appointed, serving as a non-political leader until 1944. Astor was no stranger to supporting and representing the people of Plymouth, after a brief stint as a city MP in 1918-19. He supported the work of his wife Lady Nancy Astor who served as an MP in the city for over 25 years, after becoming the first woman MP to take her seat in the House of Commons in 1919. Lord Astor was committed to social, economic and environmental improvement, demonstrated by projects such as Mount Gould - a 'model housing estate', and the establishment of the Astor Institute and the Virginia House Settlement in the 1920s. In 1936 his work for the city was recognized when he was granted Freedom of the City. Although criticised in the 1930s for supporting a policy of appeasing Hitler, Lord Astor was a firm supporter of going to war, and it is perhaps at this time that his background and contacts became most valuable to the people of the city. It was Astor's personal contacts in Lord Reith, George Peplar, and Abercrombie himself that enabled the appointment of Abercrombie for a modest fee, and it was Astor's determination and commitment to the Plan that helped it to become the blueprint for the city of today.

## **Sir Patrick Abercrombie**

Regarded as one of the country's most eminent planners of the day, the appointment of Patrick Abercrombie gave the Plan for Plymouth the 'star' name it needed to raise the city's morale. With him he brought a large range of contacts including some of the country's leading architects, such as Thomas Tait and William Crabtree (who went on to be appointed co-ordinating architect for the Plan). By this time, Patrick Abercrombie had already planned Dublin City Centre in 1913, and formed the Council for the preservation of Rural England. He was also Professor of Civic Design at Liverpool University and Professor of Town Planning at University College London. Alongside The Plan for Plymouth, Abercrombie is best known for his re-planning of London, creating the County of London Plan (1943) and the Greater London Plan (1944) alongside JH Forshaw. Abercrombie was also responsible for post-war planning schemes for Stratford-on-Avon, Doncaster, Edinburgh, Hull, Warwick and Bournemouth. Abercrombie was knighted in 1945, received the Royal Institute of British Architects' Royal Gold Medal in 1946 and the American Institute of Architects' Gold Medal in 1950. This work has led many people to consider Abercrombie the country's greatest post-war planner. His work is still widely studied today and can be seen influencing architects and planners all over the world.

## **James Paton Watson**

Prior to his appointment as Plymouth's City Engineer in 1936, James Paton Watson had been a deputy engineer in Dundee, Borough Engineer and Surveyor in South Shields and Borough and Water Engineer for Scarborough. On coming to Plymouth in 1936 his chief tasks included turning Plymouth into a holiday resort and clearing slum housing. World War II broke out before he had chance to implement his ideas, and Paton Watson found himself in the middle of one of the biggest reconstruction plans the country had ever seen. An integral part of devising the Plan, Watson's ideas are apparent throughout, and indeed he is lead author in what at the time was widely known as the 'Watson and Abercrombie Plan'. It was at the implementation stage of the Plan, from 1944 onwards that Watson became the major player. Watson had to overcome many frustrations and barriers, including securing the necessary finances to counter its many critics. Abercrombie once described him as 'terribly stiff and uncompromising' and it is perhaps these traits that enabled the Plan for Plymouth to come to fruition.

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Undoubtedly 'A Plan for Plymouth' led to a bold and ambitious reconstruction programme for the City of Plymouth, resulting in the complete redesign and construction of the city centre, and the development of a number of new neighbourhood areas expanding the city far beyond its pre-war boundaries. However the Plan was never fully realised with a series of compromises being reached throughout the reconstruction period and a number of key players moving on, or finding their ideas being adapted by new figures in the city. Abercrombie had resigned as consultant to the city in 1947 and Lord Astor took an increasingly reduced role due to ill health, passing away in 1953.

The driving force behind the implementation of the Plan was James Paton Watson until his retirement in 1958, however he found himself at loggerheads with the City Architect, HJW Stirling (appointed in 1950) over a number of aspects of the Plan. Not least Stirling's plans for the new Civic Centre, which Watson felt was far too high and deviated from the original Plan. Stirling was to have a large influence over the implementation of the Plan and designed a number of the city's key buildings.

Although eventually designed and constructed under the direction of Jellicoe, Ballantyne and Coleridge architects, the vision for the Civic Centre was very much Stirling's. The work of HJW Stirling can be seen across the city from the redeveloped Guildhall and City Law Courts in the civic square, to housing and residential homes in the suburbs of the city.

For many the completion of the Civic Centre and the opening of the new Tamar Bridge signalled the end of Plymouth's reconstruction, with any work undertaken after that being seen as normal development.

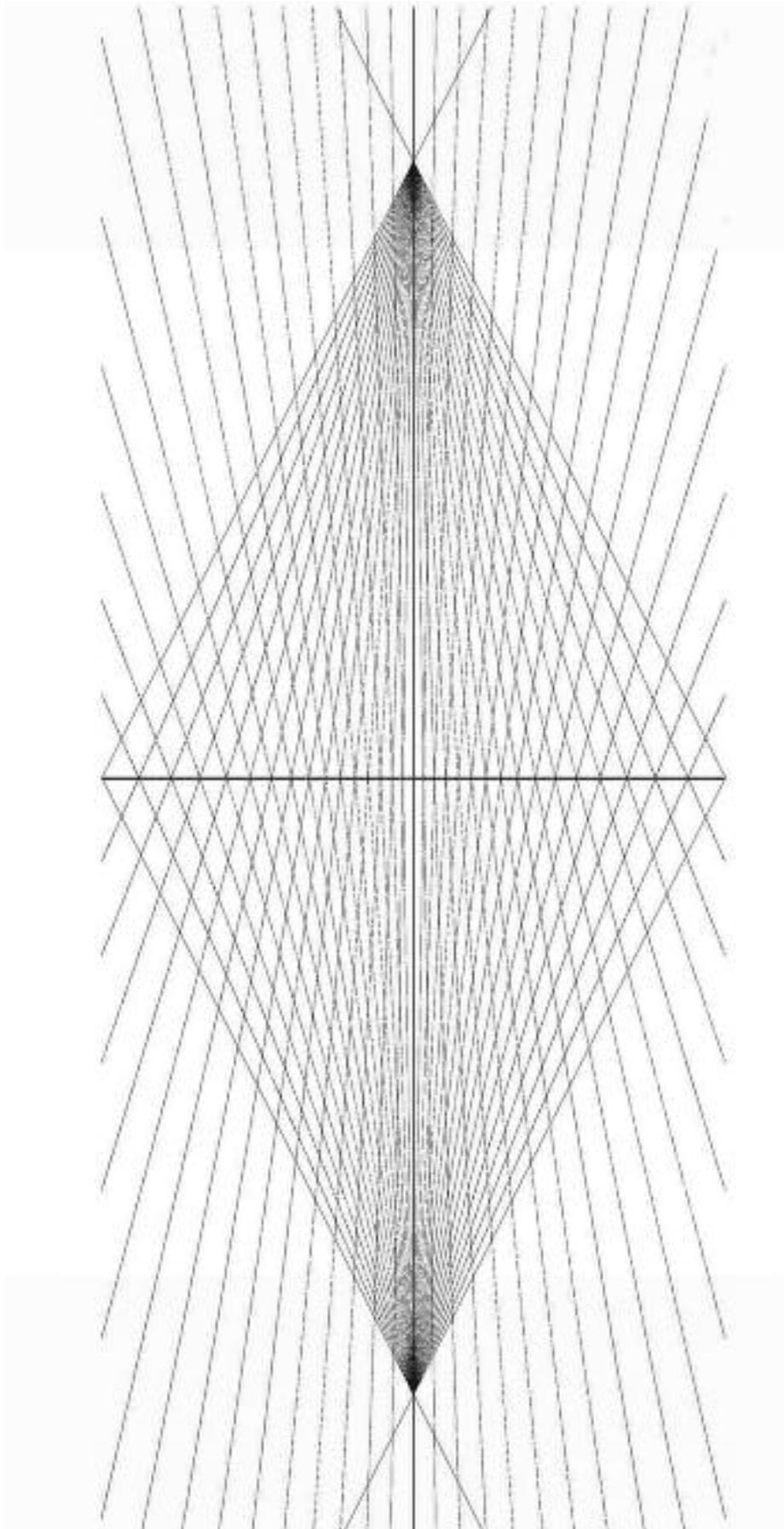
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## Redesign the City

Using a pre-war map of Plymouth from the collection of Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, why not ask your pupils to become a city planner by redesigning the City Centre map? Ask your pupils to look closely at the pre-war map and a post-war 'A Plan for Plymouth' map – the differences between them are significant. Planners for the 'Plan for Plymouth' had to consider a number of different factors when redesigning their plan – transport links, public services, cultural and educational areas, shopping areas – you will need to consider all these when designing your version of Plymouth City Centre. Will there be any key new buildings, and which architects might you want to design them? What kind of views will the people of the city be able to see? How easy will it be to get across the city on foot or by car? What buildings may you have to remove to build your vision of the city, and what support for or opposition to the changes do you think there might be?

## Architectural Masterpieces



Following on from the **'Redesign the City'** activity, ask your pupils to take one building from their new plan, and draw it using two point perspective. We have included a blank two-point perspective grid for the pupils to use for this activity. Two-point perspective differs from one-point perspective (the single 'vanishing point') and three-point perspective (two 'vanishing points' at either side of your paper and one at the top) by allowing you to draw buildings as if you were standing in front of them, looking at the corner of the building. Remember to include ideas for materials for your 'key building' – Portland stone, granite and brick if you want to follow the City's post-war buildings, or steel, glass, wood or tile if you want to change the materials used. Why not look at the websites of leading architects working today for inspiration?

For inspiration:

Caruso St John Architects - <http://www.carusostjohn.com/>

David Chipperfield Architects - <http://www.davidchipperfield.co.uk/>

Zaha Hadid Architects - <http://www.zaha-hadid.com/>

Heatherwick Studio - <http://www.heatherwick.com/>

Jamie Fobert Architects - <http://www.jamiefobertarchitects.com/>

You could extend this activity if you use a program such as Trimble SketchUp in school, drawing your model in the normal way, and printing views of the building from a number of different angles. Why not add a number of models to one large map, and create a 'virtual walk-through' of your city?

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## Mural, or something else?

As noted in the exhibition, public art was not mentioned in 'A Plan for Plymouth', yet significant artists were commissioned to make art across the city. Particularly strong are the murals and architectural schemes made by artists in some of the public buildings across the city. With this in mind, we challenge your pupils to design their own work for a public space. It could take the form of a painted mural for the interior of your 'key building', a sculpture to be positioned in your redesigned city, or another type of artwork entirely. Recent examples of public art that have been commissioned for urban areas include painter Callum Innes' *Regent Bridge*, an installation of coloured lighting under a bridge in Edinburgh, painter Ian Davenport's *Poured Lines: Southwark*, a 50m painting in enamel on steel under a bridge in London, Susan Philipz, whose *Lowlands* was a 2010 commission for sound to be installed under bridges in Glasgow, for which she was nominated for the Turner Prize, and Richard Wilson's *Turning the Place Over* in Liverpool, where an 8m section of building was cut out and rotated in 3 dimensions while still in situ.

A more local example of major public art can be found in Victoria Park in Plymouth, where the artist Richard Deacon was commissioned to place *Moor* in 1990.

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## Walking the City

Why not organise a walk around the urban environment of Plymouth after a visit to *The Making of a Modern City*? Your pupils can see architectural drawings and models of the 'Plan for Plymouth' scheme, and then walk through the resulting urban landscape to look at any deviations from the plan, details that weren't included on the drawings or models, and even access some of the buildings interiors. Key buildings in the city include Thomas Tait's Dingles building (now House of Fraser), Jellicoe, Ballantyne and Coleridge's Civic Centre and Council House, Giles Gilbert Scott's Church of Christ the King, and B.C. Sherrin's National Provincial Bank (now Royal Bank of Scotland), though there are too many examples of quality architecture to list here. You could draw some of the buildings you see on your walk, note the building materials used across the city, or even map or survey the layout of the city, with overlays for pedestrian areas, transport routes, and the variety of building usage in the city centre.

A variety of walks could be undertaken – Plymouth's pre-war architecture, Plymouth's post-war architecture, Plymouth's recent architecture, or Plymouth's public art. We are more than happy to make suggestions for buildings or sites to visit. Please contact us using the email address at the end of this document.

**Please note:** any risk assessment required for walking around the city should be undertaken by the lead teacher. We do not provide risk assessments for this kind of activity.

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## Stories, stories, stories

The artefacts on display in the exhibition each have a rich story to tell – be it of city planners crowding around models, deciding on the future of an entire city, architects making drawings of buildings that have not yet been built, giving viewers a vision of what might be, or simple school log books, diarising the destruction of a school during World War II. The brilliant thing about artefacts from archive and museum collections are that they usually come with incredible stories attached to them already, from which we can paint our own picture using our imagination of the time and context they came from.

Imagine yourself in the situation of a child whose school was bombed during World War II. Perhaps you had to attend another school in a completely different part of the city, maybe without your friends. Perhaps you were evacuated during the war, returning a few years later to find your house in ruins. Possibly your favourite shop in the city centre was also in ruins.

How might you remember these experiences, so that it could be passed on to future generations? In the school log, it is recorded as a kind of diary entry. Newspapers record histories each day. Imagining yourself in this situation, you could write a diary, a newspaper entry, a short story, a play – or maybe you'd like to record a video-diary, or write an online blog?

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## What can we do for you?

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We are able to offer schools various options when visiting the exhibition. Visits can be arranged for anywhere between **one class** to an **entire school**. In many cases, a member of staff can be present to facilitate your visit. We are also very happy for you to visit as a self-directed group.

The exhibition provides a perfect opportunity for your pupils to experience nationally significant art first hand – and will act as a starting point for working in sketchbooks, fact finding, and talking about the themes that surround the exhibition.

## How to book a visit

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### Booking in advance is essential for visits

We want to ensure your group has the best experience possible when visiting, so please remember to contact us first before organising your trip. We are very popular with schools, colleges and other user groups, so our galleries can get very busy from time to time.

For enquiries for school visits, contact **museumvisits@plymouth.gov.uk**. Please have a range of possible dates available before contacting us, as it may not always be possible to offer you your first choice date.

Please remember to bring along sketchbooks and pencils for your visit, as wet materials, and also dusty materials will not be permitted in the exhibition galleries. If you have any questions regarding materials, please contact us using the email above.

## Further resources

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Many of our previous Teachers Packs, Notes, and Resources are available as PDF downloads from our website [www.plymouth.gov.uk/museumlearningresources.htm](http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/museumlearningresources.htm)



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