

# From Swinging London to the World's Greatest City

The NLA's Peter Murray gave this talk to the BCO's NextGen group in February, interweaving his career over the last 55 years with some of the key moments in the development of London that he witnessed

RIGHT:

Banham and Price:

Drawing by Peter Murray



I arrived in the capital during the climax of Swinging London in the 1960s, but it was 40 years before I heard anyone convincingly talk about London as the 'world's greatest city'. That was at a dinner of the City's Planning and Transportation Committee when Simon Thurley, then Chief Executive of English Heritage, used the term in the context of the history of London. He compared it to other 'greatest' cities like Athens, Rome or New York; the last of which has only been going for 400 years - in contrast to the Square Mile's couple of millennia.

The term has been used more actively since 2000 by London's elected Mayors. Boris Johnson used it all the time; Sadiq talks about making London the 'greenest city in the world' and 'the most sustainable city in the world', all part of the Mayoral spiel. I do agree with them that right now we are the greatest city in the world, but when I arrived 55 years ago it didn't feel like it. It was swinging but it was shrinking, shoddy and short on investment.

I trained for my first three years of architecture degree at Bristol University but moved to the Architectural Association in Bedford Square for my 4th and 5th year. I was a great fan of Archigram and its leader, Peter Cook, was 5th year tutor at the AA. The group was like a pop band, they were publishing a fan-

tastic magazine, and they were producing radical paper schemes like Plug In City, Instant City and Walking City. This was the future. At the time I was inspired by new technology, the space race and NASA hardware (the US Apollo manned flight program was in full swing) - the stuff of high tech.

Soon after I got to London I started a magazine called Clip Kit - with fellow AA student Geoffrey Smyth. We looked at topics like technology transfer from industry into architecture; we got very excited by things like neoprene gaskets - in those days they didn't exist in architecture, only in cars and planes and space modules. Apart from Archigram, my mentors at the time were Rayner Banham and Cedric Price. Banham was the author of *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* but most importantly he wrote a fantastic column in the *New Statesman*. He was the first person I came across who wrote about architecture in a way that the wider public could understand and has inspired me throughout my career. Cedric was one of the great architectural thinkers of the post-war period. His ideas were driven by the idea of architecture as a service, not architecture as object.

Swinging London made the front cover of *Time* magazine. It was pop art with Richard Hamilton, Peter Blake and David Hockney; it was pop music with groups like The Who, The Kinks



Peter Murray chairs new London Architecture



and the Rolling Stones. Although Liverpool was recognised as the home of the Beatles, London had a strong homegrown culture. There was fashion in the Kings Road (Mary Quant), Kensington High Street (Biba) and Carnaby Street where Irvine Sellar, who went on to build The Shard, started his business career.

While I was still trying to finish off my thesis I was offered the job of writing about design for Nova magazine, a women's magazine with a strong feminist agenda - very trendy and cool. They were exciting times: one of the benefits of being a journalist is that you get to meet the people who are driving the agenda -



fashion designers, musicians, artists and writers.

I drove around in a Mini, with a paint job by an RCA student with suitably pop words like 'zoom!' and 'wow!' inspired by pop artist Roy Lichtenstein. I was interested in lightweight structures and featured inflatables in the magazine.

The 60s were lively and optimistic, and then suddenly, everything started to go downhill fast. In 1973 we had the oil crisis. Crude prices went up by 400 per cent, damaging the international economy. The Government enforced a three-day week. The economy went into free fall and there was very little work for architects. On top of that government policies were designed to move people out of London. The Location of Offices Bureau moved workers to the new towns or even further afield. There was a view that dense cities were bad for you and everyone would prefer to live in the country. This meant there was little commercial development in London (but scarcity pushed up prices - not what the government expected) and no investment

ABOVE:  
Ring road protest  
Photo by Peter Murray

London Festival of  
Architecture Clerkenwell 2004

LEFT FROM TOP:  
That Mini;  
PolyArk bus;  
Early BD cover

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RIGHT:  
Blueprint cover  
Philippe Starck



>>> in infrastructure; public transport was pretty bad.

In the early 70s I went to work for Architectural Design magazine. As a result of the energy crisis, one of the key issues we covered was sustainability: about alternatives to fossil fuels and reducing the energy consumption of buildings. So we wrote a lot on alternative lifestyles, solar energy, passive design and recycling. But then the UK discovered oil in the North Sea, and we forgot about the energy crisis for three decades.

I wrote about the ring road protests. The Abercrombie plan had proposed three ring roads - what is now the M25 and two inner ring roads. The protests marked our Jane Jacobs moment when people realised that quality of life was more important than roads. In the light of public reaction then, it's surprising that we haven't done more in the intervening period to improve our streets and reduce our dependency on the motor car.

Brian Anson was a friend and a member of the Architects Revolutionary Council. He led the campaign to stop GLC proposals to run a motorway through the middle of Covent Garden. Brian played a leading role in saving this part of London but would probably not approve of its current manifestation as the home of luxury consumerism.

The PolyArk Bus was a project I organised with Cedric Price. The idea was a bus tour around the country connecting different architecture schools to share expertise and people. There was no internet then and schools were very isolated. So Cedric's idea was that we should drive lecturers from one school to the next, armed with video cameras to share and promulgate information. It was based around a project at the AA where students had converted an old Routemaster bus and represented the sort of unconventional teaching that went on at the time at the AA.

But things were about to change.

Architects like Zaha Hadid and Rem Koolhaas were then stu-

dents at the school. In a video interview with Alan Yentob shortly before she died Zaha talks about other students at the AA being "anti architecture" and scorned student plans for sustainable communities in Wales. She wanted an architecture which was about form, about the object, not some hippy community. She saw the PolyArk Bus as the epitome of everything she hated.

At the funeral of Robert Maxwell in January 2020, Ed Jones commented on this period in the 70s when Maxwell left London to be Dean of Architecture at Princeton. He suggested this was when architecture moved from being a serious discipline into a "branch of the entertainment business". It was a key moment of change in the way architecture was perceived.

In 1974 I became editor of Building Design. One of the important issues we covered was building failures: the poor quality of local authority housing. Much of it had been built very fast and not very well. Fires like Summerland (50 dead) and the Fairfield Old People's home (18 dead). I thought back to these stories when I watched fire engulf the Grenfell Tower. I could not believe what I saw. Why hadn't we learned the lessons from the sixties? Why weren't the risks embedded into the culture of how we put buildings together? Compared to, say, the aircraft industry, the construction industry seems very bad at having any sort of institutional memory of what it has created and what mistakes it has made.

Another defining moment at that time was the report of the Monopolies Commission which proposed that the protective practices of the professions, including architects and surveyors, should be outlawed. This led to a radical change in the RIBA Code of Conduct. Fixed fees were forbidden and for the first time architects were allowed to actively market their services. Before the changes in the Code, you weren't even allowed

BELOW:  
Broadgate Exchange Square  
Photo SOM



to send a brochure to a potential client unless they had asked for it. What is now called 'marketing' in those days was seen as 'touting' for work.

In 1979 I moved from Building Design to the RIBA Journal. As editor I was on the platform at Hampton Court in 1984 when Prince Charles made his speech where he likened the design of an extension to the National Gallery to a "carbuncle on the much-loved face of an old friend". The impact was massive. First of all, it killed the practice of Ahrends Burton and Koralek who had designed the extension. Looking at the designs now, it's not that bad a building, and probably better than the one we ended up with by Robert Venturi. The debate that Prince Charles kicked off has continued ever since. For a long time it was a pretty useless battle over style, but in the long term, it has widened the debate about architecture and placemaking in a way that been more positive.

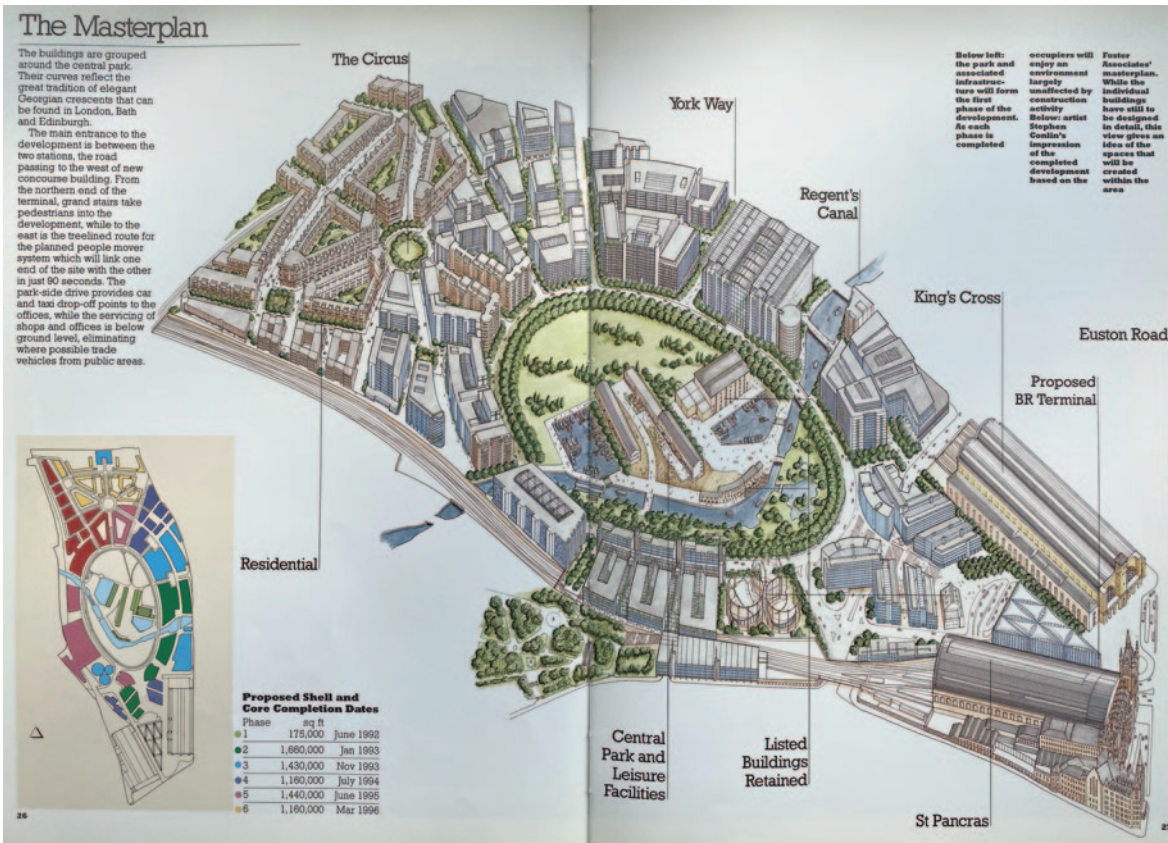
I started Blueprint magazine in 1983. I got together a whole team of people, with Deyan Sudjic as editor and Simon Esterson as designer, and we worked on it for the first year or so on a purely voluntary basis. We had a group of journalists who would write stuff for free over a couple of weeks leading up to production and stuck all the pages together over a weekend, starting on Saturday morning and finishing it by four o'clock on Monday



LEFT:  
London Festival of  
Architecture Clerkenwell  
2004

morning and then sending it off to the printers. After a year it was beginning to get traction and became very popular amongst younger designers and architects, although it was written for a broader market than the professional magazines around the time. We set it up as a full-time operation with generous funding from people like Terence Conran, Richard Rogers, Norman Foster and Terry Farrell.

We published the magazine from 26 Cramer Steet, just off Marylebone High Street. We were put into the building with a >>>



LEFT:  
Foster Associates Master  
Plan for Kings Cross.  
Brochure by Wordsearch



>>> bunch of others by David Rosen of Pilcher Hershman. David has been very influential. He first guided Derwent London towards the sort of work they do - retrofit with good contemporary designers. He is very good at finding the sort of strange spaces that designers love. The occupants of number 26 turned out to be a highly influential bunch over the years. The group included Ricky Burdett (Architecture Foundation and LSE); Deyan Sudjic (Domus, Design Museum); Tim Marlow (Sky TV, RA, Design Museum); Sir David Chipperfield and Sebastian Conran. It was a key cultural hub; its diaspora has been very influential across various agencies in London.

Then in 1986 Deyan and I were asked to curate an exhibition

BELOW:  
Living Bridges at the RA  
1996



at the Royal Academy on New Architecture. The show included several exhibits which were significant for the development of London over the years. Richard Rogers proposed a bridge across the Thames to replace Hungerford railway bridge and importantly, on the Victoria Embankment, he proposed a park. Ken Livingstone and Boris Johnson both supported the idea until it was finally dropped in favour of the current E-W segregated cycle route. Rogers also proposed pedestrianising the area around Trafalgar Square - a project that was to be delivered a decade or so later by Norman Foster. The exhibition was important in promulgating an alternative view of architecture to that of Prince Charles, but also promoted these three architects, and British architecture, onto the global stage.

In the mid-80s, Stuart Lipton was developing Broadgate and he wanted better quality comms materials than was available at the time, so he asked the Blueprint art department to design brochures for the new development. Rosehaugh Stanhope was the developer. Godfrey Bradman of Rosehaugh was the financial genius; Stuart the development genius. Working with them together was tough as their relationship was pretty dysfunctional. If Godfrey said something should be white, Stuart would want it in black. But they did produce this amazingly influential development project; it was another key moment. Broadgate provided the large floor plates needed for post-Big Bang London; under Peter Rogers it changed the way that we build buildings; Broadgate was the first time I'd seen a site that looked like a factory production line rather than a rubbish dump. Stanhope had been to the States to look at the way they put buildings together. In the 50s and 60s, the quality of US office buildings was way ahead of the UK. So buildings were steel construction, space was delivered to shell and core for the first time, and specifications were more efficient than accepted London practice (the Stanhope team were behind the first BCO spec). They researched what occupiers wanted and this guided the content of the brochures and documents we designed. Wordsearch grew out of this work with Rosehaugh Stanhope. I'm not involved anymore, but it is has grown into the largest specialist communications company for architecture and real estate in the world.

One of the reasons why it was successful was because the content was based on sound research - a lot of it coming out of DEGW, founded by Frank Duffy and John Worthington. Frank had done his thesis at the AA on burolandshaft and became the guru of office fit-outs. DEGW's Orbit Study which dealt with changing technology in office buildings was hugely influential.

Broadgate was also important because of the provision of public space, enhanced by a comprehensive art policy. Broadgate Circle, based on the Rockefeller Center in New York was the first temporary outdoor skating rink in the capital. Now it is a place for cocktails.

Broadgate also changed architects' views of working on office



LEFT:  
Richard Rogers at the RA exhibition  
'New Architecture: Foster, Rogers,  
Stirling' 1986

buildings. 'Commercial' architects were rather looked down upon by their peers at the time. But Peter Foggo of Arup Associates made it respectable. He had done very little commercial work before One Finsbury Avenue Square and was well respected by other architects. Suddenly designers were keen to take on commercial work.

At the same time, Wordsearch was working on the early documentation for Kings Cross - a proposed development by the London Regeneration Consortium made up of Rosehaugh, Stanhope and National Freight. The masterplan was by Foster Associates with a large park in the middle, offices to the south and rest to the north, as now. This never happened, because of changing plans for St Pancras and the financial crisis following the stock market crash in 1987. I still have documents which say 'Phase 1, proposed shell and core completion date Q1 1992!' As a result of the crash, Rosehaugh went bust and Stanhope was forced to sell Broadgate to British Land.

The recession at the end of the 80s, which continued into the middle of the 90s, was a desperate time for construction and development but at the same time, London started to emerge as a world city. It happened despite the GLC being closed down by Margaret Thatcher in the mid-80s; strategic planning was done by the London Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC) and businesses got together to respond to the challenges of emerging globalisation. Wordsearch designed the City Changes exhibition in Royal Exchange organised by the City of London and the Architecture Foundation which look the key projects which were then under construction - none of which were tall buildings. The City and its planning director Peter Rees were implacably opposed to high rise at that time.

At the same time, there was a whole other undercurrent of work emerging, led by Derwent Valley (now Derwent London).

They saw the possibilities of refurbishing older buildings, putting in good entrances and proving a pretty basic spec. Wordsearch worked with Derwent almost from the start. Derwent changed the conversation, set the pattern for premises for the dot-com boomers and the future of retrofit.

During the 80s Wordsearch worked on the majority the major developments in the City of London. While the recession continued our workload was helped by the IRA who damaged a host of buildings with their bombs outside the Baltic Exchange in 1992 and Bishopsgate in 1993. The buildings were refurbished and marketing material produced and the insurers paid the bills.

One of the more contentious schemes was Paternoster Square. The original scheme by Arup Associate did not find favour with Prince Charles and he supported an alternative Neo-classical scheme by John Simpson. There was a public exhibition. Arup's scheme was displayed as an arrangement of perspex blocks; Simpson produced a beautiful and detailed model of his traditional vision which won the public vote hands down.

In the end, the idea of a trad scheme was abandoned and William Whitfield was brought in as master planner with buildings by Richard MacCormac, Eric Perry and Allies and Morrison. One of the reasons I am keen on this scheme is that I am a member of the Worshipful Company of Chartered Architects which is about to take over Temple Bar, built by Christopher Wren completed in 1672. It used to be on Fleet Street, the gateway to the City. It was removed in the late 19th century and relocated in Paternoster in 2004. We are going to make it the 'Architectural Gateway to the City of London' with events and lectures; it's going to be a great place to hang out for those involved in design and development in the City.

In 1996 I was asked to curate an exhibition on inhabited bridges at the Royal Academy. Nigel Coates was the designer and we put together a history of living bridges, we built exquisite models of Old London Bridge, the Rialto Bridge, unbuilt bridges and utopian ideas which were laid out along a model river with real water which ran through the RA galleries. We also had a competition for architects and engineers for a bridge across the Thames between Temple and the South Bank. Zaha Hadid won the professional vote, but the popular vote was won by French architect Antoine Grumbach. He came up with the idea of a garden bridge.

A few years later Nigel Coates invited me to a meeting with his friend Joanna Lumley in the Groucho Club to discuss the idea of a memorial to Diana which was going to be an orchard on a bridge - on the same site as the RA bridge. That didn't get very far. Then when Boris was elected Mayor she suggested it again, this time, with Thomas Heatherwick in tow. The rest is history. But I still believe it is a very sensible place to put a bridge. Abercrombie in 1944 plan had one at this location, Richard Rogers suggested one here, the Arup study on development sites >>>

>>> along the Thames said that this was the right thing to do, and TfL's business case was pretty convincing.

In the late 90s, we were building up towards the Millennium. The lottery was producing huge amounts of money, which was funding new projects. John Gummer, then Secretary of State for the Environment complained one day that all the jobs which were being given lottery money were going to architects over the age of 60. Clients were playing safe and using Rogers, Foster, Grimshaw or somebody who they felt would minimise risk. So, together with the Architectural Foundation, I put together the book 'New Architects' which publicised young practices and was aimed at Lottery project clients. It was published in 1999 - a new government had taken over and Chris Smith was the Labour minister in charge. Many of the new architects have gone on to great things and included firms like AHMM, Mikhail Riches, Hawkins Brown, Niall McLaughlin and Peter Barber.

At the start of the Millennium, I worked on the documentation for Stratford City - way before anyone had thought of putting the Olympics there. The masterplan by Fletcher Priest had a similar layout to the built scheme - there was retail proposed for where Westfield now is, an office development which is now Lend Lease's International Quarter, and a residential area which became the Athlete's Village. It was expected that Eurostar would stop there and it would become a major regional centre. Everything changed when Ken Livingstone wanted to put the Olympics there. The development team wasn't keen on

it but they couldn't stop it happening.

I've always been interested in tall buildings in London. In 1996 I had worked with Fosters on an exhibition for the London Millennium Tower that would be about the same height as the 22 Bishopsgate building is now and located on a site made vacant by the IRA bombs. At that stage, there was nothing else around it apart from the Nat West building. It was, by any calculation, hugely out of scale. Kvaerner, the developers dropped the idea and progressed instead with a lower tower - 30 St Mary Axe a.k.a. The Gherkin. It was the same height as Tower 42 at 180m. The City planners thought all new tall buildings should be that height.

The Heron Tower (230m) changed all that. Gerald Ronson didn't agree with the height restrictions so he went through an expensive public inquiry (£10m) which was fought very hard by English Heritage. Ronson won. And that started the whole shift to tall buildings. The decision made it so much easier for The Shard across the river, partly because English Heritage had spent all their money fighting Ronson. These decisions changed the skyline of London.

One of the remarkable things that happened was that tall residential towers started emerging when the economy was on its knees after the Lehmann crash in 2008. To track the growth of tall buildings NLA started doing an annual study on the pipeline of towers - those in planning or under construction.

I decided to do the study after I went to a presentation by

RIGHT:  
First sketch for NLA  
by Peter





Boris in a housing scheme over in Greenwich, where he said he had a target of 42,000 homes to deliver, "but that doesn't mean you're going to see tall buildings popping up all over the place" he exclaimed. I knew it did and thought an annual report would give some sort of clarity to the changing face of London.

In 2004 I started the Clerkenwell Architecture Biennale. I went to CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) to ask for funds. They said no, it's too local. So I immediately changed the name to London Architecture Biennale. The aim was for a festival that engaged with the community - unlike the Venice Biennale that has nothing to do with the local condition.

We kicked off the Biennale with Longhorn cattle, a breed which would have come down St John Street up until about 1712. We wanted to show that the whole of the geography of the area was determined by the history of drovers bringing cattle to Smithfield. We covered the street with grass and immediately people sat on it, lay on it, went to sleep on it. It's just amazing how a simple change like that alters public spaces and the way people use them.

In 2008 the Biennale took over Exhibition Road as a sort of pre-run of the shared space that was being planned by Kensington and Chelsea Council. The closure for a weekend convinced residents that the plans would not disrupt their lives.

The Biennale has morphed into the London Festival of Architecture and director Tamsie Thompson is doing a great job in delivering really exciting installations and programmes all over London; last year's pavilion at Dulwich Art Gallery designed by Pricegore and Yinka Ilori was a triumph.

In 2004 I was invited by the then chairman of the Building Centre, Michael Rose, to suggest how they could attract visitors to the building. The place was empty. I suggested an exhibition about London would attract everyone from visitors to locals. I got in touch with Nick McKeogh who was at that time with Pipers models and we put together New London Architecture, which has put the Building Centre back on the map and created an invaluable resource for London.

Then in 2006, I organised a cycle ride down to MIPIM in Cannes. There were 17 of us on the first ride - now there's over 200 people cycling down to the South of France raising about half a million pounds a year for charity. One of the great benefits is that cycling provides the very best networking - better than MIPIM itself. Lots of riders have got jobs out of the ride. It works because there's a broad mix of agents, developers, architects, engineers, contractors, materials suppliers and investors.

Over the last few years, NLA has undertaken a whole range of projects which I think have had a real impact on decision making in London and the way change is happening. We've done a lot of work on the Great Estates, looking at the role of stewardship and patient capital and how they have a role in new development as



well as old. We did an exhibition of 100 ideas for new housing several of which, like small sites, infill and suburban intensification are now part of GLA policy. Our Work London project highlighted the loss of industrial space because of the rising price of land for residential use.

Jules Pipe opened the show shortly after taking over as Deputy Mayor for Planning and the issues raised by Work London have been a key part of GLA policy since that time. In our exhibition London: Design Capital, we highlighted the importance of the construction industry sector to London's economy. London: Polycentric City changed the discussion around development in outer London. The study on London's knowledge economy highlighted a sector that is driving a different new economy from the financial sector which has been so key to London's economic health for the past 30 or so years.

This year we're going to be putting on an exhibition called The Changing Face of London. We did an exhibition of the same title in 2005. We're looking at the massive changes that have taken place over the last 15 years. Nine Elms was hardly on the agenda in 2005 but is now near completion; in 2000 Greenwich Peninsula was the site of the Millennium Village, set up by Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott but little happened until Knight Dragon from Hong Kong, began to develop at pace. The Olympics transformed Stratford a lot quicker than would have been the case with no games. We will track the changes that have taken place, but also ask the question around how things will shape up in the next 15 years.

So what have I learned over that long period that I've been in London? That in the 70s it was the pits with no investment or growth. So I know that good growth is better than no growth. Note to Boris: investment in other parts of the country should not be the expense of London. People often forget there are areas of real poverty in London, as bleak as any up north.

Retaining our global status is key; it is something that needs to be promoted by the Mayor.

Lastly, we should not forget that cities go up and they go down. I have told the story of Swinging London. That optimism in the 1960s soon dissipated in the 70s, and we should not be complacent that London will always hold its position as the Greatest City on Earth. I like to think we will - but we have to be very vigilant in the face of Brexit, Government policies and Coronavirus. ■

ABOVE:  
New Architecture poster

BELOW:  
Peter Murray 1969 photo  
by Adrian Flowers

