

BUILDING A BETTER BRITAIN

The Aims of Her Town Planners, Explained by One of Them

IF you are a citizen of Wellington or Auckland, Christchurch or Dunedin, you do not have to be told about some of the inconveniences of city life. You may be proud of your town and jealous for its history and character, but the tiring daily journey into the centre of the city by road or rail shows too clearly the muddled, inefficient way in which too many of us live amidst a jumble of shops, houses, factories and public buildings. London, and indeed England generally, has lately tackled this problem boldly, from the social, economic, and industrial planning angles. In spite of post-war difficulties, England has already made considerable headway, and if New Zealand takes heed of what a British Town and Country Planning expert has to say, it, too, may be able to profit from the mistakes of the past which are common to both countries.

The Listener interviewed the other day Clough Williams-Ellis, an architect and town-planner, past president of the Design and Industry Association, chairman of the Council for the Preservation of Rural Wales, an active member of a great many other bodies concerned with town and countryside amenities, and the author of many books on such subjects. "First of all," asked *The Listener*, "what is your mission here?"

Here For Fun

"I'm bound to admit," he said, "that I am here very largely for fun. After all, the best fun in the world is to see new things and meet new people. I'm an inquisitive sort of person and I like to know the how and the why of things."

"Any other reason for visiting New Zealand?"

"Oh yes a most important reason. We have a daughter and a son-in-law at the Animal Research Station at Ruakura, near Hamilton, and they have just presented New Zealand with twins—a boy and girl."

"Our son-in-law is a New Zealander —Lindsay Wallace—who, early in the

war, gave up his work on biology and joined the New Zealand Navy under the 'B' scheme. The authorities, however, soon sent him back to his proper job as a biologist. He and our daughter found themselves as colleagues, working at the same lab-bench at Cambridge—that's how they met—and now, here they are, and here are we to visit them and our New Zealand grandchildren."

"Had you known any other New Zealanders before coming here on this, your first trip?"

"Yes; Anthony Wilding, your great tennis-player. We were friends at Trinity, Cambridge, over forty years ago. But most of my contacts in New Zealand have something to do with town and country planning, and I am meeting as many of your architects as I can. Today I was taken by the Mayor of Wellington to see what the city is doing about planning—an impressive beginning—and I hope to tour most of New Zealand before I return home to tell the English town-planners what I have seen and what you are up to."

What a Site!

"Do you realise that we have our own special problems and that we have only one and a-half millions of people in a country the size of Britain, that has nearly fifty millions?"

"Indeed I do; and some of us think it might be easier for England if she had fewer people to look after. I was tackled by a Press reporter just as I was sailing here from Sydney. He wanted my final impressions. I said, 'By God, what a site, by man, what a mess!' I wonder what he made of that!"

"Would you say the same of Wellington?"

"No; Wellington hasn't gone too far yet. I see there a place not yet ruined, and God send that it won't be. It has still its chance of splendour, if it will take it."

"You've seen something of the city?"

"Only in two days so far. I am frightened to learn that your hills are

not as completely sacrosanct as I believe, and as surely they should be. I gather that there is perpetual pressure to encroach on the heights for building. In London—on paper—we have established our green belt and we hope it will be kept in fact and in perpetuity. But we have watchfully to resist constantly attempted nibblings here and there for housing sites."

"We still have some good bush over the harbour in Wellington."

"Yes, and in that you are better off than a good many places which seem to have squandered their birthright for a mess of cottages."

"You know about the Hutt Valley population?"

"I am told that there are about 15,000 commuters to and from the city daily:—

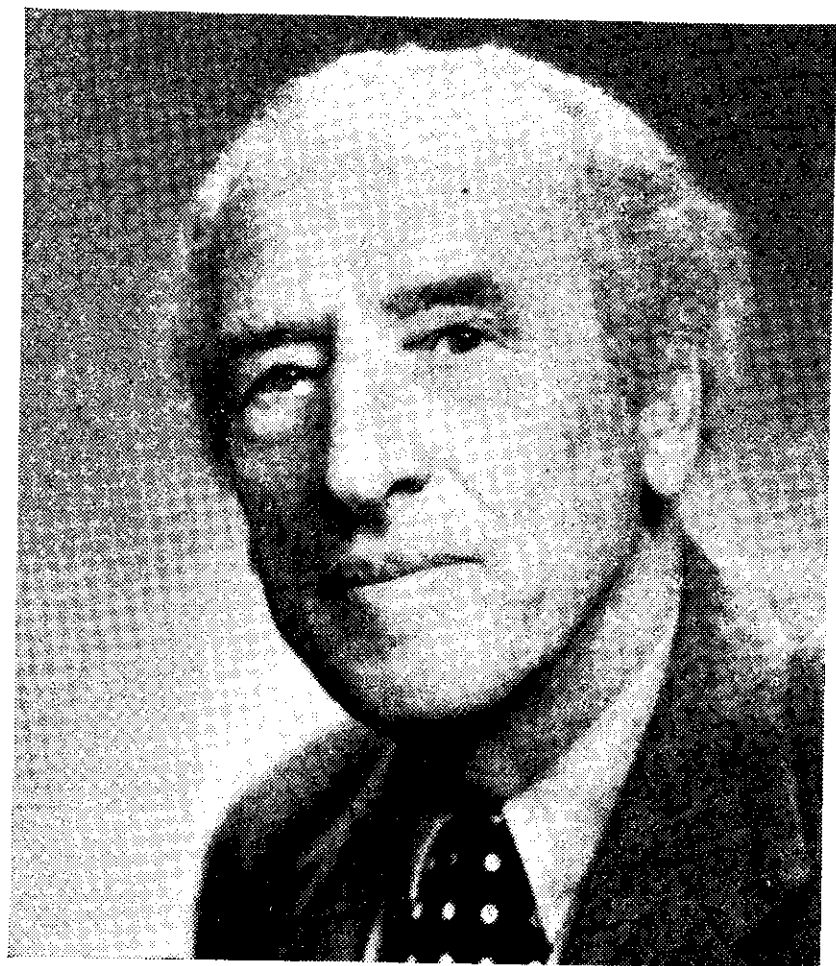
Commuter, one who spends his life
In riding to and from his wife;
Who shaves himself and takes the train
And travels back to shave again.

"In England, you know, we have a lot of bypass roads. But we were getting to the stage of actually having to bypass our bypasses:—

They threw out a grand new bypass
When the first was a chockfull street;
The glorious day isn't far away
When London and Liverpool meet.
And nothing remains of England
Where the country used to be;
But a road run straight through a building estate
And a single specimen tree.

"Town planning should be based on a civic diagnosis—as your Wellington planners are well aware. We have everything to do with a town graphically depicted on maps, showing density of population, where the people work, where accidents happen, income levels, vital and other relevant statistics. No responsible town-planner will prescribe

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CLOUGH WILLIAMS-ELLIS

Spencer Digby photograph

"I like to know the how and the why of things"



WARTIME HOUSING DEVELOPMENT near London. Post-war planning aims at a more radical shift of population and industry