Pier Luigi Nervi and the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford

by

Malcolm Airs

The proposal in 1966 to build a new Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford by the internationally renowned Italian architect and engineer Pier Luigi Nervi in partnership with Powell and Moya elicited great excitement amongst architectural critics. It also encouraged the nascent conservation movement to campaign for the preservation of the planned Victorian North Oxford suburb and encountered strong opposition from parts of the University establishment. The evolution of the design and the ultimate failure of the project is fully explored for the first time and provides new evidence for the inspiration for its circular form and the choice of architects against a background of growing appreciation for Victorian architecture.

The concluding paragraphs of Howard Colvin's *Unbuilt Oxford* are devoted to the failure to build a new Pitt Rivers Museum designed by Pier Luigi Nervi in collaboration with Powell and Moya which, he lamented, 'has deprived Oxford of a spectacular architectural concept which would have delighted many besides anthropologists'. In a resonant passage he went on to claim that

> The project was, perhaps, the last chance for the university to build in the twentieth century something that would take its place with the Divinity School, the Radcliffe Library and the Ashmolean Museum as a major work of European architecture.[1]

Colvin attributed the failure to a lack of funding but the story is much more complex than that simple fact and it is worth exploring at greater length to chart the evolution of the scheme over a decade of strong personality clashes and the rise of the conservation movement.

The vast collection of 'ordinary and typical specimens' assembled by General Pitt-Rivers to trace the ethnological and archaeological development of artefacts was given to the University of Oxford in 1883 and housed in an extension built in 1885-6 at the back of the University Museum. Under the first two curators the collection greatly increased both in scope and size to create the wonderfully overcrowded display which is now part of its legendary charm. The juxtaposition of similar objects from different geographical regions and periods of time in tightly packed show cases has enabled generations of visitors to make their own connections – although legend has it that there have been occasions when notices have been displayed saying 'This case is not intended to illustrate anything except our lack of space'.[2] In 1948 the museum expanded into a three storey

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wing to the east and in 1961 there were discussions about another possible extension to the south together with the insertion of a floor into the space of the main hall. However, in his review of the Science Area, Lord Holford suggested that a new site altogether should be found for the museum and recommended that the University should explore the possibility of relocating to 56-64 Banbury Road. In August 1963 St John's College provisionally agreed to sell the site to the University together with 11 houses in Bradmore Road.[3] The college had already helped to accommodate the expansion of the Science Area by selling land on the Keble Road Triangle to the south of the Banbury Road site where the Dyson Perrins Organic Chemistry laboratory had been built in 1957-9 and the nine-storey Engineering tower had followed in 1960-3. Both buildings were designed by Basil Ward of Ramsey, Murray, White and Ward and were uncompromisingly modern in their architectural approach.[4]

The discussion over a possible move coincided with the appointment of a new Curator to the museum – only the third Curator since its foundation. Bernard Fagg was the son of an antiquarian bookseller. He had studied classics, archaeology and anthropology at Downing College, Cambridge. His career had been spent with the British Colonial Administration in Nigeria where he conducted important archaeological excavations. In 1952 he founded the first National Museum there which he designed himself and which was built by direct labour under his supervision. He became its Director in 1957. He was appointed to the Pitt Rivers in 1963 but did not take up his post until 1 January 1964.[5]

He was a man of enormous drive and energy and in Oxford he embarked on a mission to transform the Pitt Rivers into a modern museum worthy of its remarkable collection. Even before he was officially in post he began to formulate his ideas for a new building to house what he called a Museum of World Ethnography on the proposed site in the Banbury Road (Fig. 1).[6] St John's had been in discussion with the University about developing this part of their estate as early as June 1961as the original leases began to fall in.[7] The architect Lionel Brett was commissioned by the College to prepare a masterplan which envisaged new university buildings on both sides of the Banbury Road in a continuous development from St Giles to North Parade and Norham Road.[8]

In discussions with the City Council, the University was advised that any non-residential development 'might have great difficulty' and the proposal prompted one councillor, Ann Spokes, to start campaigning for the preservation of the existing buildings. However, by January 1963 when they were considering the change of use of 58 Banbury Road to the Admissions Office, the planning committee had slightly softened their stance and it was reported that they 'would regard, for example, the Pitt Rivers as a development more compatible with the residential area than office use'. This encouragement of museum use was confirmed in a discussion between the City Architect and the University Surveyor the following month specifically for the frontage land between Wycliffe Hall (No 56) and Wolsey Hall (No 66).[9] Again the phrase 'compatible with a residential area' was used although it is not clear how a museum of the enormous size envisaged by Fagg was any more compatible than an office use and one suspects that the City Council was blissfully unaware of the scale of Fagg's ambition. In addition to a new museum in excess of 300,000 square feet, he was also proposing that accommodation should be provided for a number of academic institutes of related study which would include the Departments of

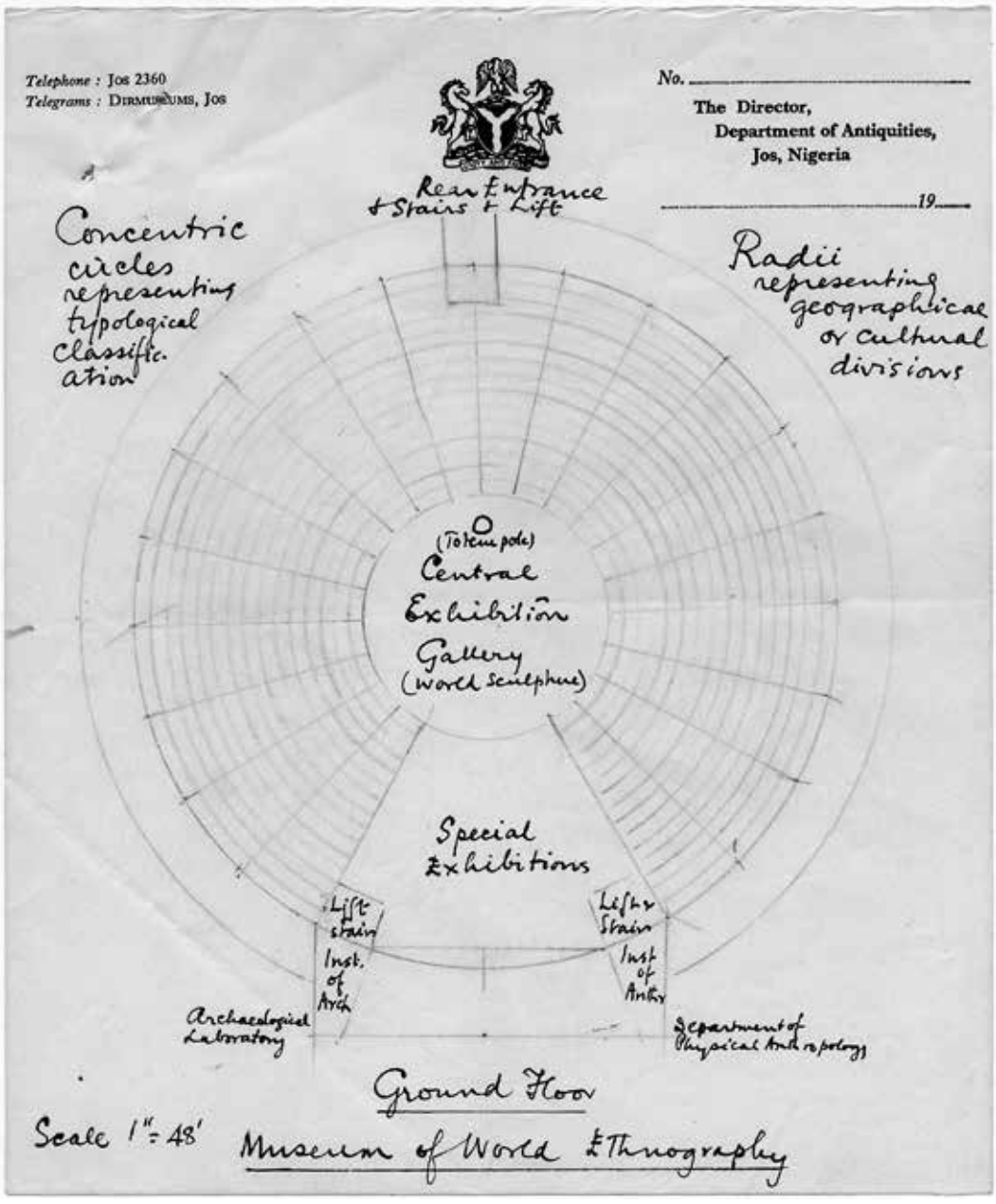

Fig. 1
Fagg's preliminary sketch for a Museum of World Ethnography, 1963.

Social Anthropology, Physical Anthropology, Environmental Archaeology and European Archaeology, together with research laboratories for archaeology and the history of art.

For the museum itself, Fagg saw an opportunity to introduce a geographical element to complement the typological principles which had inspired Pitt-Rivers. He believed that a division of the display space into different continents would inject a greater meaning into the study of comparative technology. He was also convinced of the fundamental relevance of ecology to both archaeology and ethnology and believed that modern methods of climate control would allow him to create a tropical and sub-tropical environment in the centre of the building with living botanical exhibits. He called this a 'climatron' after the world's first completely air-conditioned greenhouse which had been built in the Botanical Garden in St Louis, Missouri, and which had opened to the public in 1960. It was in the form of a geodesic dome with a height of 70 feet and no internal columns to support the structure. Fagg set out his vision in a letter from Nigeria to Sir Folliot Sandford, the University Registrar, dated 6 August 1963 with some sketch plans to show how it could be accommodated on the Banbury Road site. His accomplished sketches which worked up his original concept show a large circular building with a diameter of about 300 feet arranged over two storeys with a central climatron as phase 1 of a staged building programme with a 6 storey rectangular block to the north for administration and teaching as phase 2 and further blocks to the north along Norham Road for future expansion (Fig. 2). It is a measure of his ambition that his circular building was nearly twice the diameter of the St Louis Climatron.[10]

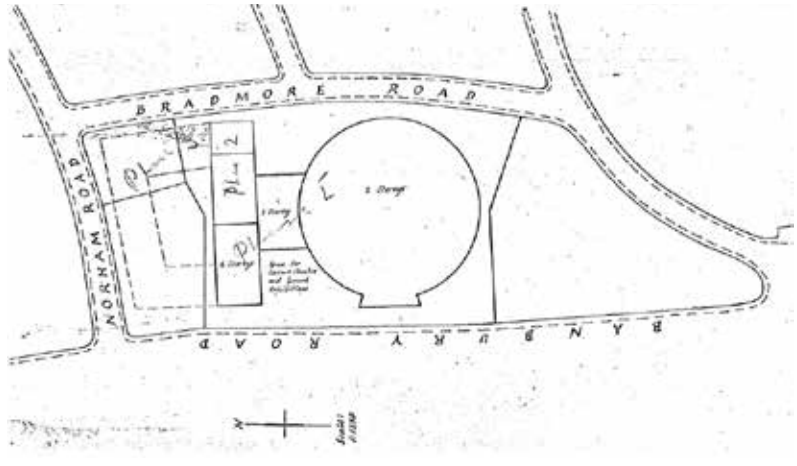

Fig. 2
Fagg's phased site plan for the new museum, 1963.
The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, UR/6/S/45. File 1

The initial response from the Registrar was one of extreme scepticism about the likely cost and to query the circular form. He stressed the need for professional architectural advice and added 'one possibility which occurs to me is Powell and Moya'.[11] Sandford took a special interest in architecture and the reason why he suggested this particular firm is clear from an exchange of letters the previous month with Douglas Harden, the Director of the London Museum, for whom they were designing a new museum in the City of London. Sandford commented that:

> Their building at Brasenose has been most successful, and I gather that Christ Church are very pleased with the preliminary plans for the new building south of Blue Boar Lane.

> We have ourselves twice asked them to design buildings for the University but on neither occasion have they been able to accept the commission.
>
> Perhaps, when we have taken the proposal to rebuild the Pitt Rivers a little further I could get in touch with you again.[12]

In his response to the queries raised by the Registrar, Fagg re-iterated his opinion that 'there is no practical alternative to the circular plan' and stated that he had no particular ideas on a suitable architect.[13]

Nothing much seems to have been done to take the project forward over the winter and it was only in March 1964 that it was put before the Building and Development Committee of the University. Here Jack Lankester, the University Surveyor, who had taken an intense dislike to Fagg's proposal, disastrously overplayed his hand. He began by expressing the view that 'the proposals were so unrealistic that it was difficult to know where to start'. He showed the committee an aerial photograph on which he had outlined a circle to demonstrate that the building would cover an area equivalent to the Sheldonian, the Clarendon Building and the Bodleian Library, and he stated that he was opposed in principle to a circular building. However, the committee unanimously concluded 'not only that the scheme is imaginative and worthy of the collections and studies concerned but that it is practical and achievable given the support of the University'. Such was their enthusiasm that Kenneth Kirkwood, the Chairman, wrote to the Vice-Chancellor the very next day to stress the strong support for what he called 'Mr Fagg's splendidly conceived building' and to urge the preparation of professional architectural opinion as soon as possible.[14]

As soon as possible is - at best - a relative concept, at least as far as Oxford is concerned. First, in May, the standing Commission on Museums and Galleries was consulted on the feasibility of the project and their glowing and positive endorsement was not reported back to the Building and Development Committee until January 1965. The University's response was to set up a working party to explore whether a satisfactory scheme on a smaller scale could be achieved. It reported back in May with a recommendation that the University should authorise Fagg to consult an architect and to seek to raise funds for the original scheme. So, finally, in June the Elevations and Choice of Architects Committee recommended that an approach should be made to Sir Leslie Martin, the head of the School of Architecture at Cambridge University, and a close friend of Jack Lankester. He had recently completed the St Cross building in Oxford and his advice had been sought by many vice-chancellors in that period of rapid university expansion.[15]

Martin's initial response, no doubt prompted by Lankester, was to propose a rectangular building. But after heavy lobbying by Fagg he was subsequently persuaded of the merits of a circular plan which he proposed to place on a rectangular podium with two circular linked galleries above and a central 'ecological exhibition'(Fig. 3). The north end of the podium would rise to 4 storeys to provide accommodation for the associated institutions and the main entrance would be from the Banbury Road with a direct line of sight into the ecological exhibition (Fig. 4).[16] He estimated that the building would offer 240,000 square feet and would cost in the region of £2m.[17] His preliminary plans suggest that he would have liked to have been offered the commission himself and on 21 September he joined Lankester and Sandford in a meeting with Douglas Murray, the

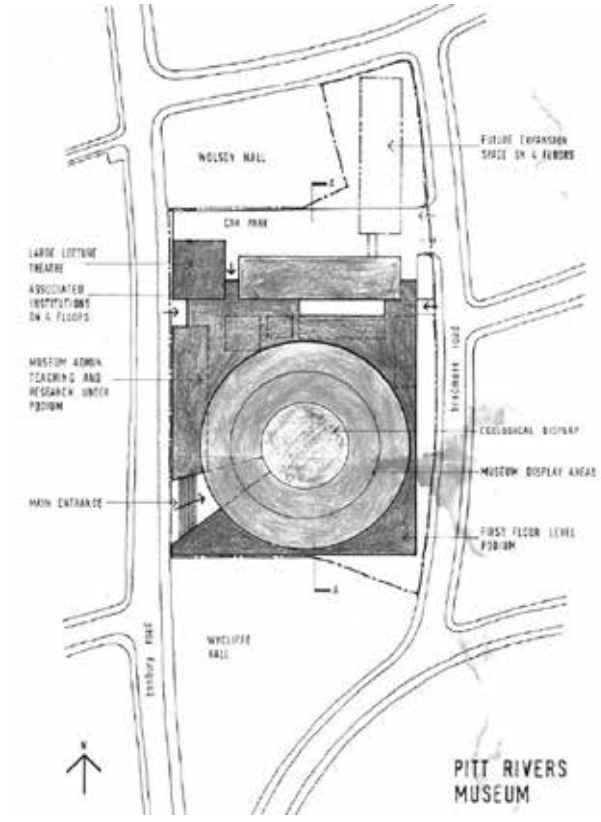

Fig. 3
Sir Leslie Martin's second plan, 1965.
The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, ET2/2/100

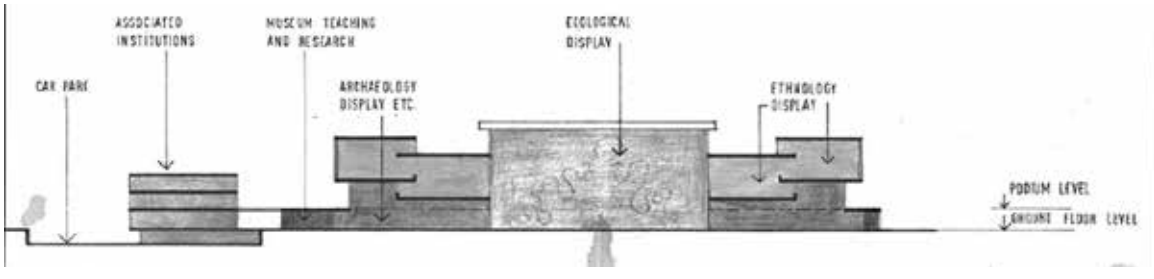

Fig. 4
Sir Leslie Martin's section, 1965.
The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, ET2/2/100

City Architect and Planner. Only Martin's initial proposal for a rectangular plan was tabled and when he received a note of the meeting Fagg wrote to Sandford to reiterate his desire for a circular building:

> I have never really understood the University's apparent nervousness about the circular building. If it is the fear of creating another Guggenheim Museum, there is absolutely no parallel! Frank Lloyd Wright must have had his tongue in his cheek!!

To which Sandford caustically responded '… is not Palladio's Villa Rotunda square even though it has a dome in the centre?' Fagg gave full vent to his feelings by attaching a heartfelt doodle to his file of the correspondence showing a smiley face in a circle and a sad face in a square (Fig. 5).[18]

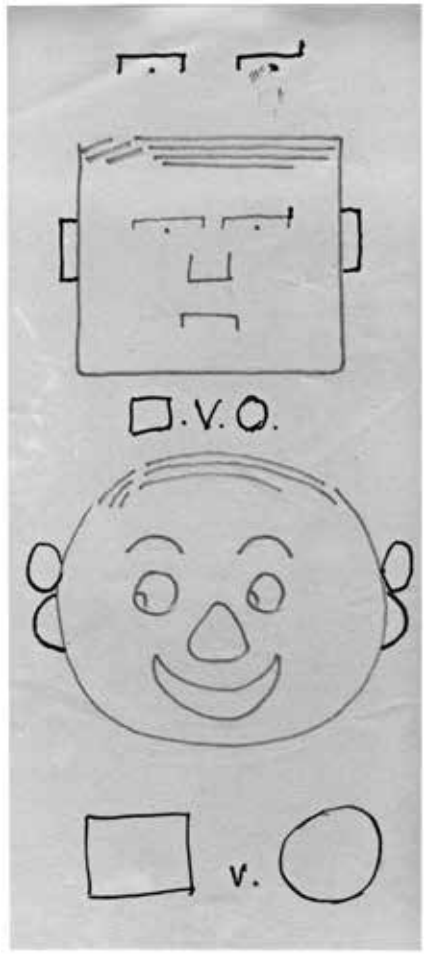

Fig. 5
Fagg's doodle, 1965.
© Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford

At the September meeting, Murray made it clear that the City had not contemplated such a large development on the site and would be particularly concerned about traffic generation. An informal consultation with the City Planning Committee took place on 9 November where some members praised the concept and it was suggested that parking should be provided for 200 cars, but a number of other members were less enthusiastic about the principle of development on the site at all.[19] As early as the summer of the previous year, Ann Spokes had persuaded the Ministry of Housing and Local Government to add Nos. 60 and 62 Banbury Road onto the provisional list of Buildings of Special Architectural and Historic Interest (Fig. 6). Their new status seems to have made little impact on the thinking of the university and it was not thought necessary to even mention it in the brief that was given to Martin. However, no doubt alerted by Spokes after the informal November Council meeting, the Ministry had written to the Council on 31 December 1965 saying 'we would like to see [them] retained if possible'.[20] Ann Spokes followed this up with a letter to the *Oxford Mail* published on 10 January 1966 urging that Nos.60 and 62 should not be demolished. This was picked up by the *Times* on 18 January with a piece headlined 'Oxford Asked to Save 2 Houses' which quoted Councillor Peter Spokes, the father of Ann, speaking on behalf of the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society that 'the University, in the Society's view, could well adapt and preserve these buildings'. The University, of course, took a very different attitude. A few days later Sir

Fig. 6
60 and 62 Banbury Road.

Kenneth Wheare, as Vice-Chancellor, wrote to the President of St John's that 'it is of course exceedingly tiresome from our point of view, and I imagine from yours as well, that questions have been raised about the possibility of preserving certain of the houses on the site' and on 1 February 1966 Lankester wrote to Murray that 'it would be impossible to incorporate these two houses satisfactorily into any plan to use the area for University purposes nor would it make sense to exclude them altogether'.[21]

With the tentative proposals now in the public domain, events began to move on rapidly. Congregation approved the reservation of the site for Pitt Rivers for an initial period of three years on 8 February 1966 and four days later the Buildings Committee recommended that the Committee on Elevations and the Choice of Architects should be consulted as soon as possible. Doubts were beginning to be expressed whether Sir Leslie Martin had the capacity to take on such a large commission now that he was engaged on preparing plans for a new Zoology building, and it was at this point that Sir Walter Oakeshott, the Rector of Lincoln College, made a crucial intervention. He was unable to attend the meeting of the elevations committee but he wrote to the Registrar on 23 February that if it were thought not

> desirable to employ Martin, then there would be a case for either inviting Powell and Moya on the grounds of their museum experience and good buildings here OR for the view that Fagg's very special requirements make this more of an engineering, rather than an ordinary museum, problem and that therefore we might invite an engineer-architect like Nervi to do the job.

He added that 'I can just imagine that that particular appointment might help Fagg in his fund raising. But I don't know of course whether Nervi would accept. We could however find out quickly.'[22]

Pier Luigi Nervi was then indeed at the height of his fame, with recent projects including the George Washington Bridge Bus Station in New York and the Tour de la Bourse in Montreal, as well as many buildings in his native Italy. Oakeshott, who had a flat in Rome, knew him well. In considering the possible difficulties caused by the listing of the two Banbury Road houses on the site, Oakeshott expressed the view that 'I should in no way object to demolition provided that the very remarkable porch of No.62 (which I don't understand) is preserved' (Fig. 7).[23] Within days, Murray had informed Lankester that the Planning Committee had agreed to the demolition of Nos.60 and 62 subject to the preservation of the sculpture and on 1 March the University submitted an outline planning application based on Martin's plans.[24]

Fig. 7
62 Banbury Road entrance.

The question of an architect was not considered by the Council of the University until 14 March when it was decided that Martin was too busy with other projects and it was agreed by eleven votes that Nervi should be approached with nine voting in favour of Powell and Moya. Oakeshott then wrote a seductive letter to Nervi explaining that 'for some years several of us in this university have been hoping that, one day, we could persuade you to do a building for us' and going on to say 'I remember your expressing some scepticism about the abilities of the English to handle [concrete] satisfactorily. Well – we now think that we are getting better at it. So please allow Mr Fagg and me to come and discuss with you'.[25] A meeting was duly arranged at Oakeshott's Roman flat

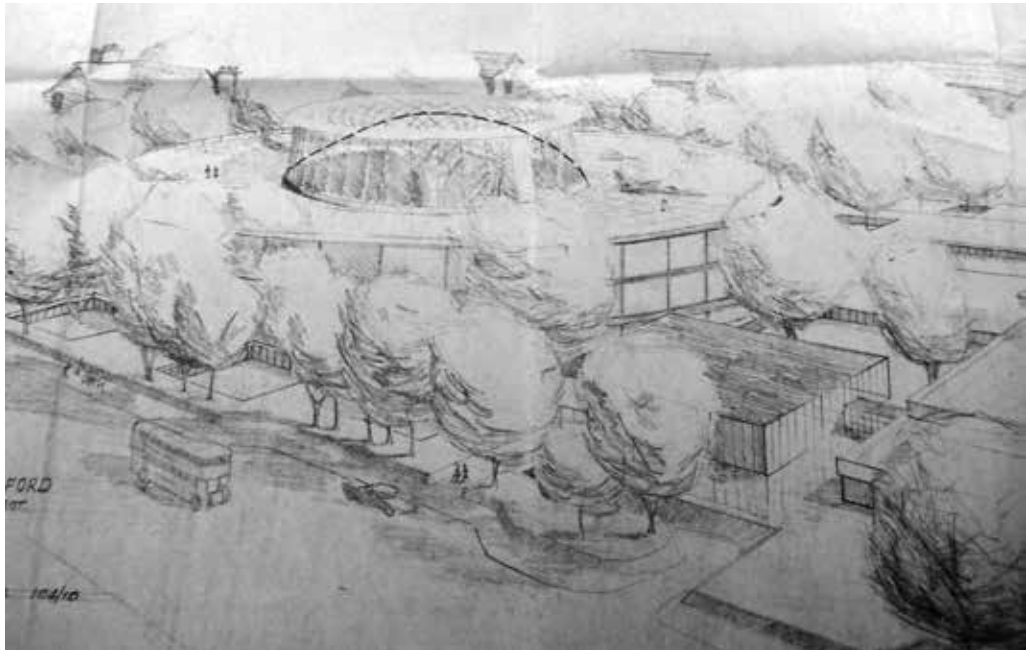

Fig. 8
Powell & Moya's first design, July 1966.
The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, ET2/2/101-164/15

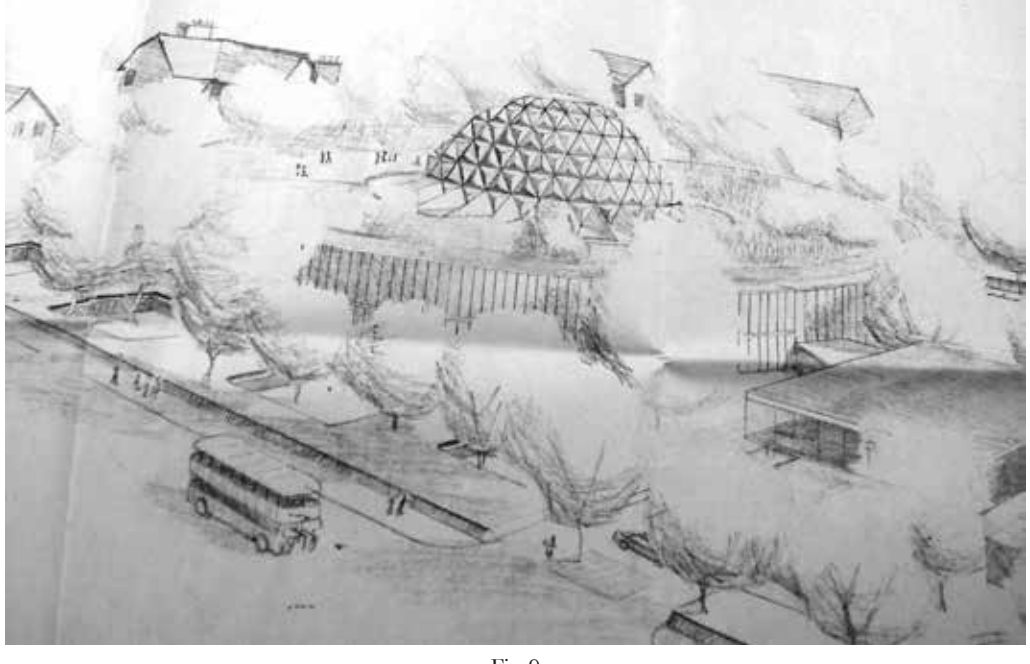

Fig. 9
Powell & Moya's revised design, September 1966.
The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, ET2/2/101-164/24

which he described in a telephone call to the Registrar as 'a great success'. 'The old boy' was very enthusiastic provided he could work in collaboration with an English architect. 'What interests him is the main structural problem only … and it was essential to have someone who knows the local rules associated with him.' He was worried to see how much had been done already by Martin but thought that it was possible to start again from Fagg's central idea. Oakeshott added that 'I am sorry to say that he cottoned on to the idea of the climatron like anything'. Powell and Moya immediately flew out to Rome and the partnership was sealed.[26]

However, back in Oxford things were not going so smoothly. The *Oxford Mail* reported that Peter Spokes on behalf of OAHS had again objected to the proposed demolitions saying that it would be a disaster if the museum was approved. He had seen models which he thought were quite revolutionary and quite out of keeping with the rest of the residential development in North Oxford.[27] This must have been the model of the Martin scheme that Fagg had taken to the bicentennial celebrations of the Smithsonian Institution in September the previous year when he took the opportunity to make a flying visit to St Louis to see the Climatron at first hand.[28] Prompted by Spokes the full City Council deferred granting outline permission in order that there could be further discussions with the University.

In the meantime Powell and Moya began to work up the scheme. In July they produced an aerial sketch with a flat roofed rotunda with an internal dome (Fig. 8) but by September – no doubt prompted by Nervi – this had been radically altered to feature a facetted dome as the roof structure itself (Fig. 9).[29] This was presented to the Committee on Elevations on 20 September when they agreed that it was compatible with the residential nature of the area. A detailed report on the proposal was compiled by Nervi and Powell and Moya running to sixty-three pages with a full explanation of the evolution of the design and the consultations that had been carried out together with technical appendices and a set of fully worked up plans. It is an extraordinarily impressive document in support of an outline planning application and there can be no doubt that its comprehensive form was a powerful factor in soliciting support from many quarters.[30] The basement was designed to accommodate the 200 cars required by the City Council with a ramped access from the Banbury Road. The lower ground floor was for storage together with a library, lecture rooms and offices. The upper ground floor was reserved for archaeology with ethnology on the first floor. Above the outer perimeter of the galleries would be a roof garden representing the temperate zone of ecology with the tropical and sub-tropical zones housed in the towering central dome (Fig. 10).[31] To the south would be a linked rectangular block containing office and research space for physical anthropology arranged over six floors. The ceiling of each floor in the central rotunda was of a different pattern using the 'Nervi construction system' to avoid flat suspended ceilings. The drawings were complemented by two beautifully detailed models made by Richard Powell Associates (Figs 11 & 12).[32] It was a breathtakingly bold concept which totally ignored its North Oxford context. The incorporation of features such as the green roof over the galleries and the tropical plant house were innovations that were far in advance of their time and the opportunity to secure a building by an architect of such international renown as Nervi greatly excited the architectural world.

The plans and the models were presented by Powell and Moya to the City Planning Committee on 28 January 1967 which was recorded as being 'favourably impressed with the proposals' and invited the University to resubmit their outline application. One month later the committee recommended approval subject to the agreement of the full Council. After a debate lasting 1½ hours on 18 April planning permission was finally granted by the narrow margin of thirty-two votes to twenty-nine.[33]

The way was now clear for Fagg to raise the enormous sum of money necessary to make his dream a reality. It was a major challenge. The project had been costed at £3,640,000 excluding all fittings and professional fees, plus an endowment of £2¼m that the University required for its future upkeep. Moreover, in allocating the site, the University had only given Fagg three years to secure the funding. An impressive fund raising committee was established with a list of patrons including the Emperor of Ethiopia and the President of Senegal, André Malraux as French Minister for Cultural Affairs and Claude Levi-Strauss together with distinguished sponsors such as Sir Mortimer Wheeler and Sir Julian Huxley.[34] Fagg threw himself into the campaign with extraordinary energy, lobbying friends and connections on both sides of the Atlantic. He took the models to a number of international conferences and solicited the support of the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations but failed to persuade them to come up with the funds.

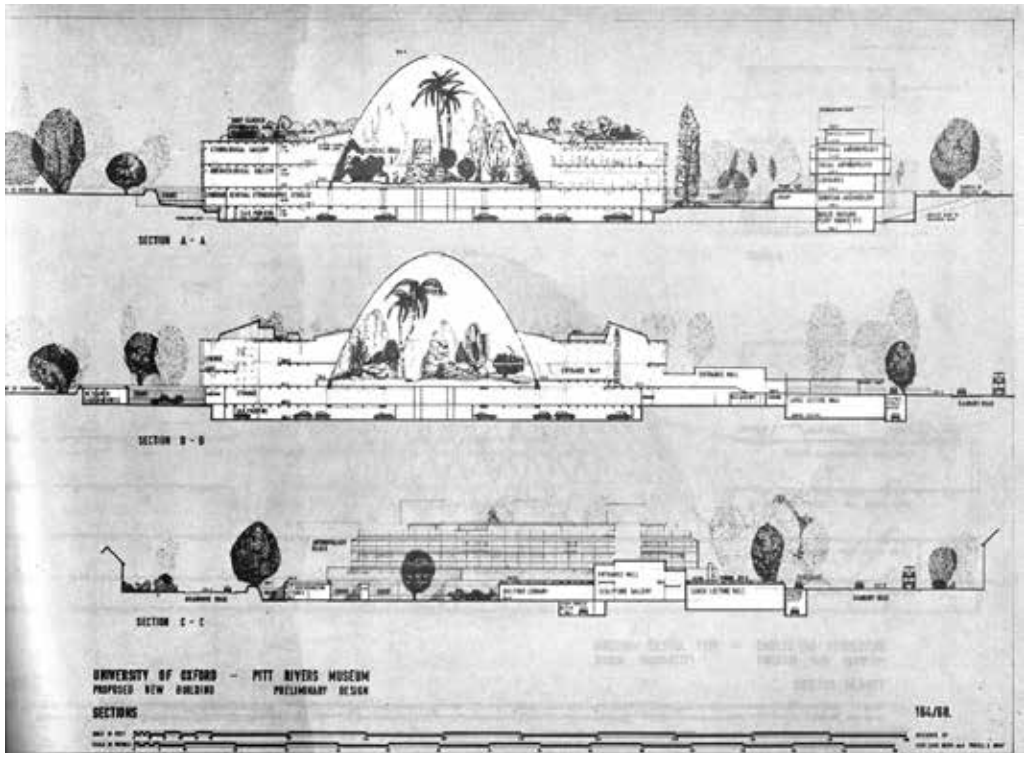

Fig. 10
Outline planning application sections, 1966.
University of Oxford Estates Services

In the meantime there was growing pressure to recognise the architectural and historic value of Victorian North Oxford. The implications of the Leasehold Reform Act of 1967 had prompted St John's to begin selling off the houses on their North Oxford estate and there was a perceptible shift in the value that the new house owners placed on their neighbourhood.[35] A scholarly paper on the history of Nos.56-64 Banbury Road by E. O. Dodgson was published in *Oxoniensia* in 1967 and in about the same year her sister, Catherine Cole, established the Victorian Group of OAHS to lobby for the preservation of the suburb.[36] In February 1968, 62 Banbury Road was added to the statutory list of Buildings of Special Architectural and Historic Interest and this at last gave it some real protection. However, in April an extraordinary letter to the University from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government admitted that the listing had been an 'administrative error' and that there had been a prior agreement in 1966 between the Department and the City that neither 60 nor 62 would be listed. Nevertheless six months' notice of the intention to demolish 62 was now required. Within a week, Murray on behalf of the City Council had informed the University that this requirement would be waived.[37]

In March 1968 Nervi came to London to receive the gold medal of the Institution of Structural Engineers and went on to Oxford where he was photographed with Oakeshott and Moya admiring the model. The visit prompted Nicholas Taylor to write in the *Sunday Times* that 'there must be someone who has £3 million and desires certain immortality by having his name identified with one of the few great 20th century buildings in Britain'.[38] Taylor was a committee member of the Victorian Society and was taken to task by Peter Howell, an active member of the OAHS Victorian Group and a resident of North Oxford. In private correspondence Taylor conceded that the site was unfortunate but reiterated his view that 'if it is (sadly) a choice between William Wilkinson and Nervi, it would be ridiculously parochial not to choose Nervi. It's like saying you would rather have merchants' houses on the Cambridge Backs than have King's Chapel'.[39]

However, King's College Chapel was built at the direction of a wealthy benefactor and Fagg was not having any luck in finding a twentieth-century equivalent for his Oxford project. Worn out by his efforts, in May 1968 he suffered a stroke and was incapacitated for the rest of the year. When he did return to his post he was confined to a wheelchair. It was becoming increasingly clear that there was virtually no possibility of raising the necessary endowment and the fund raising committee was quietly dissolved.[40] The target had been enormously ambitious in an era when professional fund raising had yet to become an established discipline. Despite the support of so many influential figures across the globe it is clear that many within the University were not persuaded of the feasibility of a project on such a scale. As early as 11 February 1966 Sandford had written frankly to Fagg:

> It would be dishonest if…I did not make it clear that I have never been a supporter of the 100% Fagg scheme, and that openly and in committee I have consistently taken the view that I thought that it was too large to be realistic…I believe that there are a great many people who want to give you a chance, but are by no means committed to the scale or detail of your proposals.[41]

Following the dissolution of the fund raising committee, Kenneth Kirkwood, one of its members and a champion of the project from its very inception, wrote to the Assistant

Fig. 11
Model showing temperate zone roof garden and half section of the dome, 1966.

Fig. 12
Model showing section through the archaeology and ethnography galleries, 1966.

Registrar bitterly criticizing the Vice-Chancellor for referring to 'your project' when it should have been 'ours' and pointing out that 'no working academic has the time or the resources to give all the attention that is required for the effective persuasion of large-scale benefactors'. Kirkwood was still seething two years later when he copied that letter in a confidential note of 6 November 1972 to Ray Inskeep who had recently joined the Museum as Assistant Curator:

> Some day when you dine I will give you a frank account of the sad story. The operation was, in my own opinion, not very well handled and of course it suffered the tragic setback of Bernard's stroke only some six months after the appeal was under way. Life would have been easier for me had I accepted an invitation to heap the blame on Bernard. The argument was that others had been misled into thinking that Bernard had already been assured of a very substantial sum which justified his high hopes. I did not think this was just.[42]

The University publicly announced the abandonment of the project in the autumn of 1970 and immediately came under renewed pressure from OAHS and the Victorian Society to retain the existing houses. The museum began to consider whether it could meet its objectives by expansion on its existing site and John Rhodes, then a junior curator, drew up what was described as an 'ambitious' plan to insert three floors in the existing gallery and to build a six storey extension to the south.[43] The plans were presented to the Sites and Buildings Committee on 28 November where the Surveyor praised them as 'ingenious'.[44] By this Lankester was probably expressing his relief that the museum had finally abandoned the circular form and after detailed consideration it was decided to focus on an 'austerity scheme' on the Banbury Road site in order that the existing Pitt Rivers location could be given over to the demands of science.

Fagg had not entirely given up hope of building a reduced version of the Nervi scheme at a lower cost. In January 1971 he arranged a meeting with Powell which Lankester refused to attend. Fagg was firmly rebuked by the Registrar and told in the clearest possible terms that the appeal must be abandoned and a scaled down version would not be acceptable to the University.[45] But still he would not give up. Clandestine meetings were held in his own house with Powell in 1972 and late in 1973 exploring the possibility of a smaller rotunda behind the façades of the Victorian houses on the Banbury Road. When Lankester got wind of them he wrote a furious letter to the Vice-Chancellor in 1974.[46] This was the last faint echo of what the *Dictionary of National Biography* called 'a noble plan that failed'. Fagg retired in 1975 and Nervi died in 1979.

Having decided not to pursue the Rhodes scheme, by late 1971 the Surveyor was proposing to retain the houses on the Banbury Road frontage and to build in stages a series of linked one or two storey structures in the gardens at the rear which would house new galleries. This was a triumph for the growing public interest in the preservation of North Oxford. Both OAHS through Catherine Cole and the national Victorian Society through David Lloyd were pressing the University to find new uses for the houses now that the planning permission for the museum had expired. There was a perceptible shift in attitude in the City Council, too, now that they had appointed their first professional Conservation Officer. In 1972 the conservation area was extended to include the museum site and No.60 joined No.62 on the statutory list. In April of that

year the University submitted an outline application for the conversion of the existing houses and the staged construction of new accommodation for the Pitt Rivers museum. In May permission was granted.[47]

In working up the scheme there was some debate as to whether an outside architect should be employed, but in the event it was designed within the Surveyors Department who came up with a number of single storey modules with flat roofed links and a long pitched roof block behind the houses on Bradmore Road. The first phase of the development was behind 60 Banbury Road which was allocated to the museum in 1973 (Fig. 13). It included a link with no.62.[48] Building work commenced in 1976 and was completed in 1977. It proved to be a very troubled development and poor Fagg from his retirement home at 45 Woodstock Road must have been bitterly disappointed to see his dream gradually diminish before he died in 1987. Although the shell of the new module had been built, it suffered from unsatisfactory environmental conditions for museum display and it was left unoccupied. Air-conditioning was installed in 1982 to address the problem but it was not until 1985 that it was finally officially opened and named the Balfour building after the first Curator of the Museum. Even then, the hunter-gatherer displays were not installed until 1988 when Fagg was already dead. This remote outpost of the Museum was never a success with visitors and in 2001 the public displays were closed and it was converted to a conservation laboratory.[49]

In 2007 it was acquired by Kellogg College who had purchased 62 and 64 the previous year. In a sensitive scheme by Berman Gueddes Stretton it has been remodelled as the dining hall of the new college (Fig. 14). By then the rejuvenated Pitt Rivers had taken the wise decision to revamp their original building with a major refurbishment of the public galleries and a new extension by Pringle Richards Sharratt which echoes the sketch proposals put forward by John Rhodes forty years previously. The result has been widely acclaimed and the museum has become one of the most popular visitor attractions in the United Kingdom. Although Colvin might have been disappointed, the recognition of the intrinsic architectural importance of Victorian North Oxford and the Pitt Rivers Museum in its original location can be seen as notable achievements of the late twentieth- century conservation movement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study began as part of the process of understanding the history of the site on the Banbury Road which was purchased by Kellogg to provide a home for the new college. My research has benefitted greatly from the personal knowledge of John Ashdown, the then City Conservation Officer, and from Peter Howell and Ann Spokes all of whom played an active role. My exploration of the archival sources was helpfully assisted by Catherine Williams of Estates Services, Phillip Grover at the Pitt Rivers Museum and the staff of the University Archives. Tanis Hinchcliffe kindly commented on an earlier draft and I am grateful for her suggestions. I am particularly indebted to Dr Michael O'Hanlon for his advice and suggestions when he was Director of the Museum.

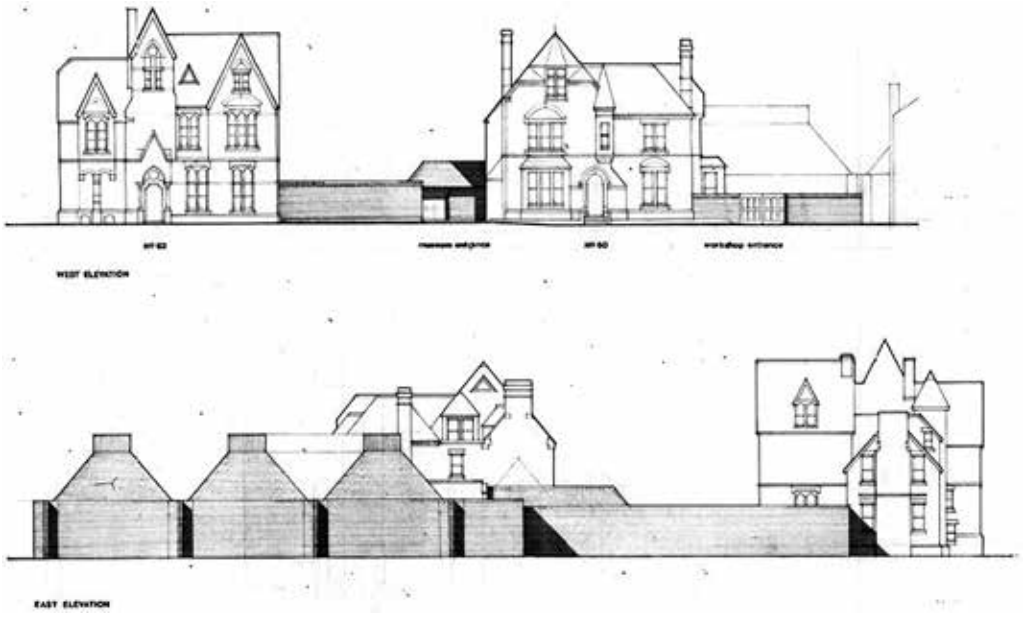

Fig. 13
Planning drawings for 60 and 62 Banbury Road, 1973.
University of Oxford Estates Services

Fig. 14
Kellogg College dining hall.

NOTES

Most of the information for this account has been derived from documents held in three separate archives in Oxford: unclassified papers in the archive of the University Estates Services, the University Archives in the Bodleian Library (cited as UA) and the Pitt Rivers Museum (cited as PRMP). Michael O'Hanlon's recent book *The Pitt Rivers Museum: a world within* (Scala, London, 2014) provides a thorough history of the museum from its origins to the present day.

1. Howard Colvin, *Unbuilt Oxford* (New Haven and London, 1983), 186-7.
2. Beatrice Blackwood, *The Classification of Artefacts in the Pitt Rivers Museum* (Oxford, 1970), 8. The most comprehensive account of the museum is Michael O'Hanlon, *The Pitt Rivers Museum: a world within* (London, 2014).
3. Estates Services papers.
4. GeoffreyTyack, *Oxford, An Architectural Guide* (Oxford, 1998), 304-5; Tanis Hinchcliffe, *North Oxford* (New Haven & London, 1992), 204-5.
5. Thurston Shaw, 'Bernard Fagg', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* vol.18 (Oxford, 2004), 891-2.
6. PRMP, Box 15.
7. Hinchcliffe, *Idem*.
8. UA, UR6/S/45. File 1.
9. *Idem*.
10. *Idem.*
11. *Idem.*
12. *Idem.*
13. *Idem*.
14. *Idem.*
15. UA. UR6/S/45. File 3.
16. UA. ET2/2/100.
17. Estates Services papers.
18. PRMP. Box 14, folder labelled 'N.P.R.M. Phase Two'.
19. UA. UR6/S/45. File 3.
20. *Idem*.
21. UA. UR6/S/45. File 4.
22. *Idem.*
23. 62 Banbury Road was designed by E. G. Bruton for the Revd. R. St John Tyrwhitt who was vicar of St Mary Magdalen. Tyrwhitt was a distinguished artist who contributed to the decoration of the University Museum. The sculpture over the entrance has been attributed to John Hungerford Pollen who designed the entrance portal to the Museum and was a friend of Tyrwhitt. It illustrates a quotation from the Book of Proverbs, XXX.29, although quite why this theme was chosen is not clear.
24. *Idem.*
25. PRMP. NPRM General volume 1.
26. UA. UR6/S/45. File 4.
27. *Idem.*
28. PRMP. Box 14. Fagg was in Missouri on 15 and 16 September 1965.
29. UA. ET2/2/101 – 164/15 and 164/24.
30. Estates Services papers.
31. There is a detailed analysis of the layout of the galleries in George W. Stocking Jnr., 'The Spaces of Cultural Representation, Circa 1887 and 1969: Reflections on Museum Arrangement and Anthropological Theory in the Boasian and Evolutionary Traditions', Peter Galison and Emily Thompson (eds.), *The Architecture of Science,* (Cambridge Mass.& London, 1999), 172-6.
32. The models have been recently recovered from storage and are now in the Pitt Rivers Museum.
33. UA. UR6/S/45. File 5.

34. PRMP. Box 7.
35. For a full discussion see Hinchcliffe, *op.cit.*
36. E. O. Dodgson, 'Notes on Nos.56,58,60 and 64 Banbury Road', *Oxoniensia*, XXXII (1967). P. Howell, obituary for Catherine Cole, *Oxoniensia*, LVII(1992).
37. UA. UR6/S/45. File 5.
38. PRMP. Box 7.
39. I am grateful to Peter Howell for showing me a copy of the correspondence.
40. UA. UR6/S/45. File 6.
41. PRMP, N.P.R.M. General, vol.1.
42. PRMP, Box 17.
43. Copies of the proposal are held by Estates Services.
44. *Idem.*
45. *Idem.*
46. PRMP. Box 15.
47. UA. UR6/S/45. File 6.
48. The plan and elevations of this phase are held by Estates Services.
49. UA. PM3/7/23.