The Master Plan
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Acceptance by the Interim Council of the development proposed in these pages will conclude the first stage of this challenging assignment. It is the outcome of six months of carefully programmed investigation, analysis and design—a short time indeed in which to lay the foundations of a great new university. As this is a task to which many institutions have devoted years of preparation, it is the more important that this submission should be regarded as the beginning of planning, rather than the end. (Master Plan, July 1965)

Twenty-five years ago La Trobe University’s campus was an empty stage, awaiting setting, plot and players. So often, in the years since its transformation into today’s populous, landscaped city of learning, visitors have asked me: did you ever dream it would be like this? How does the vision compare with the reality, they ask, enthusiastically embracing the whole environmental spread of buildings, trees, lawns, streams and courtyards—intriguing questions for which I can offer no easy answers.

At the beginning the dream was ethereal: a collective aspiration diffused through the minds of the founders, but lacking a definitive focus. The Third University Committee, after considering some fifty-seven possible sites, had recommended and received Government approval for the transfer to the University of approximately 500 acres of vacant farm land attached to the Mont Park Mental Hospital, Bundoora. With the proclamation of the La Trobe University Act in December 1964, the Committee became the Interim Council, under the continuing chairmanship of Mr J. R. A. (now Sir Archibald) Glenn. When he telephoned on Christmas Eve of 1964, informing me of his Council’s appointment of my firm, Yuncken Freeman Architects, to undertake the master planning of the new University, and nominating myself as the responsible partner, my colleagues and I were precipitated into a new world. Here was a project large enough to stir the imagination and give scope for the creation of a total environment, yet small enough to offer the hope that its development could be comprehensively regulated; and one which offered the satisfying prospect of seeing the results in one’s own lifetime.

The political vision had been romantically summarised by the Minister of Education, Mr (later Sir) John Bloomfield, when presenting the enabling Bill to the Victorian Parliament. Recalling the benevolent influence of Lieutenant-Governor Charles Joseph La Trobe in the foundation of the University of Melbourne over a hundred years before, he concluded: ‘… my most satisfying reflection at this moment is that my father’s father sought for gold in our hills,
and he knew this city in the days of the man whom, at the behest of others, I am now trying to acknowledge. If Providence and this Parliament will it, my son's son may be taught in his aura and tradition."

When we came on the scene, the Interim Council, through its inaugural committees, was still developing its policies in such vital matters as academic planning, legislation, finance, colleges and housing. The timetable allowed only seven months in which to carry out planning research, develop a brief of requirements, and complete the master plan. This would leave only twenty months for construction of the engineering headworks and the design, building, furnishing and landscaping of the first academic buildings. Although this was obviously a high-pressure program, with many attendant risks, it was confidently assumed that it would be achieved, on time and without compromise. Which it was.

Looking back, I am amazed at what was accomplished in those first hectic months — by the Interim Council and its committees as much as by the consultant team of architects, planners, engineers, landscapers, costing experts and programmers that we had assembled. When we started in January 1965 it was a new type of problem for us, as for most of our colleagues. It was a challenge to excite the imagination and it unleashed great creative energy. Within three months we had made detailed surveys of the site, assembled a comprehensive data base, completed a world-wide investigation of outstanding new universities, and helped the Academic Planning Board to tabulate its requirements. By July, a comprehensive master planning report had been prepared and approved by the Interim Council. Buildings and site engineering works were being designed, the first trees were being planted and the bulldozers were waiting in the wings.

What followed was like the first stirrings of biological life: out of a sea of mud arose the beginnings of the plan's fulfillment. Ideas were being translated into construction; and that process continues to this day. I do not propose to dwell in detail on the long list of building and engineering works that have progressively transformed the farm into a campus. This chapter is about planning, which is to say the system whereby each of these projects was enabled to fit naturally and harmoniously into the total scene. However, in trying to recapture the mood and influences that prevailed and give something of the background to our quest for functional and environmental unity, the projects completed in the first ten years or so have particular significance, because they established the physical form and character of the University. The fact that their designers carried them through so closely in sympathy with the spirit and intent of the master plan was vital to its effectiveness. The authors of the main projects involved in this rather rare demonstration of professional co-operation are worthy of special note (See Appendix C).

This report is both a brief and a solution. For critical reasons of timing, it has been necessary to plan the University concurrently with the formulation by Interim Council of much of its policies. These policies have been clad with detail obtained by reference to the Committees of Council (and latterly to members of staff), and by the results of the planners' investigations at home and abroad. (Master Plan, July 1965)

In an ideal building world, the client knows what he wants and is able to provide a brief which clearly expresses his objectives. The architect takes it from there: there are well-trodden paths which lead to the conclusion of a normal building contract. In a project as unusual and complex as a completely new university, however, there are few precedents. Instead of a path, the planner faces a jungle. It is a unique experience; there are many issues, many committees, many ambitions. In university administrations decision making tends to follow democratic processes — admirable in drawing out collective wisdom, but not always to be relied on to keep pace with the exigencies of a high-speed, critical path, construction program. With only six months in which to research the problem, develop a brief and prepare the final master plan, one might have sighed for autocracy; were it not for the marvellous grasp and dedication of the members of the Interim Council and its committees.
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At the outset there was little for us to work on apart from a site, and a general intention that La Trobe would develop at a similar rate to Monash University, expanding from an initial enrolment of under 500 undergraduates to 10,000 over about ten years. It was simple enough to estimate the approximate extent of buildings, playing fields, car parking needs; but there were a thousand questions to be answered before even the first buildings could be located: the form they should take, their relationships to each other, the sort of environment in which they should be located, how they should be serviced, and so on. An established university is usually able to provide this kind of information by means of what is sometimes called an 'academic brief'—a working document that informs the planner of the client's practical and philosophical objectives, his space requirements, planning standards, enrolment projections, economic criteria and the like, all suitably tabulated for physical planning purposes. At La Trobe, where full time staff would not be available for several critical months, it became one of our first tasks—and one of the most rewarding—to help put this together. It was done, quite informally, in a fascinating series of question-and-answer exchanges, mostly with members of the University's Building Committee, Academic Planning Board, and Colleges Committee. (See Appendix C). These included some of the most eminent visionaries in our community, and it was mainly through our discussions with them that their aspirations started to merge into a shared concept that could be written down, debated, quantified and agreed to as a practical starting point.

Equally important was the task of getting to know the site. Although the Mont Park farm had seemed at first unstimulating, closer inspection revealed a number of subtle characteristics which tied in well with the picture that was emerging from the academic brief. We arranged for a series of surveys to be carried out, to provide a topographical and geophysical information base in which every contour, tree and other significant feature of the site was recorded. We obtained information about the soils, the vegetation, the prevailing winds, the climate and the frequency of air traffic. With future generations in mind, the appearance of the site before the first bulldozers moved in was recorded in a comprehensive set of photographs. More subjectively, three distinguished artists were commissioned by a group of well-wishers to record their impressions. Their paintings were probably the first gifts to the University, and are the foundation of its now extensive art collection.

By the beginning of April we had reached the half-way point in the master planning timetable—the time by which academic requirements needed to be matched to the site characteristics and a common set of principles established. This is a crucial stage in any planning problem in which the shimmering goal can only be brought into focus through step-by-step analysis and progressive consultation with the decision-makers. Options are available at every stage, and the emergent plan will be the sum of the choices made at each of the many forks and crossroads along the way.

In considering their choices, members of the Interim Council were not content merely to follow local precedents, old or new. Many older universities, both at home and abroad, were struggling to escape the tangles of obsolescence and expediency that difficult times and unlucky or inadequate planning had forced upon them. Since that time, some brilliant recoveries have been made (the University of Melbourne being a notable example), but in 1965 the older Australian universities had little to offer venturers in a new age. Not for us the tired, inflexible old buildings, the lack of space for orderly expansion, the hazardous roads, the 'temporary' sheds left over from wartime emergencies, the duco-infested landscape.

Of our post-war universities, the Australian National University in Canberra was the first and most ambitious. It had been conceived as a national research and postgraduate institution, and planned accordingly. When it became obliged, under political pressure, to combine with the primarily undergraduate Canberra University College, which was situated on an adjoining site, the ANU's long-range campus planning had to be drastically modified. There were valuable lessons for La Trobe in the ANU experience: it offered, on the one hand, a shining example of environmental design and, on the other, a timely warning on the importance of...
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incorporating sufficient innate flexibility in the long-range plan to accommodate major changes of direction. Elsewhere, interesting developments were taking place: the University of New South Wales was expanding; Macquarie was moving; new ground had been broken dramatically at Monash; a stimulating planning report for the future Flinders University was starting to be put into effect.

But there was also a ferment of new thinking in other parts of the world. Many new universities under construction or already established in Great Britain, North America and elsewhere were experimenting with new planning and building concepts, in response to changing social attitudes, educational patterns and teaching methods. They were facing the realities of the post-war demographic bulge with a vigour and philosophical diversity that could not be ignored. With scarcely a backward glance at dreaming spires, red brick, or ivy league, the new campuses were advancing into the new age. We wanted to be in the vanguard.

Our clients were well aware of the winds of change and it was vital that we should find out what was going on. So it was with their encouragement that I undertook a five-week journey, racing round the world from university to university at a most un-academic pace, to talk to those involved about their motives and methods and to study the resulting work. This kind of research on-the-run may seem superficial by academic standards, but five weeks was all the time that could be afforded. Despite the headlong pace, the trip was extraordinarily informative and quite invaluable.

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The Master Plan has been prepared under the guidance of the Building Committee, its details being presented to them stage by stage, and referred as appropriate to the Academic Planning Board and the College Committee. It is thus a collaborative interpretation of objectives... (Master Plan, July 1965)

The layout of the university clearly reflects the combined influences of site and academic objectives and their fusion into an integrated plan of development. The academic approach was positive and full of promise, whereas the physical approaches to the campus site were undistinguished. Once inside the boundaries, however, one could mentally screen out the peripheral blemishes and appreciate that they were merely wings on the empty stage, to be used or planted out as the mood took us. The opportunities for creating a new environment within the secluded valley became excitingly apparent. The planning and design conclusions that emerged were summarised at the time as follows:

1. The gently undulant valley calls for a horizontal rather than a vertical development.
2. Traffic problems should be forestalled by providing safe road systems and ample parking spaces, by grouping the main buildings within easy walking distance, and linking them with pedestrian concourses that by-pass motor traffic.
3. The plan must allow for a phased development in which the University is functionally and visually complete at each stage of its growth.
4. Within its framework there must be flexibility at all stages: flexibility for growth and change within the buildings and services, and in the nature and relationships of later additions.
5. There should be an affinity of design between all buildings and between buildings and the landscape.
6. The physical and economic necessities underlying each building problem should place no limits on design creativity; provided always that in the balance of taste, individual virtuosity is subordinated to the interests of overall cohesion.
7. To minimise problems of sun control, naturally lit spaces should face due north or south.
8. Rigid boundaries between Departments and Schools should be avoided, using modular integrated buildings as far as practicable for structural economy and to allow for changes of size and curricular requirements.

A further influence had been the condition attached to the transfer of the site under which
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the University was required to give back land for a new road link between the cities of Heidelberg and Preston. This new road was to relieve the serious hazard caused by general traffic using the private internal roads of the neighbouring Mont Park group of psychiatric hospitals as a through route. It was at first thought that the new road would follow a long peripheral route inside the University's boundary, thus leaving the bulk of its site intact. As we became more familiar with the academic requirements and with the characteristics of the site, we were drawn to a surprising and different conclusion, which came to exert a significant influence on the whole campus layout.

The shortest and most economical route for the new road would have been along a diagonal line roughly bisecting the site from its south-east corner in Heidelberg to its north-west corner on Plenty Road, Preston. A campus divided by a major traffic artery seemed, at first, unthinkable; but we were interested to note that by slightly bending the diagonal line southwards, the northern part of the site would be sufficiently enlarged to accommodate the whole academic building complex, whilst the flatter land south of the line would be ideal in size and terrain for outdoor sportsgrounds. A bridge would be needed near the mid-point of the new road, to maintain reasonable gradients across the valley and allow the passage of potential flood waters.

We recalled the busy ring road at the University of Mexico which divides the academic centre from the adjacent sporting facilities, including the famous Olympic stadium, and the clever underpasses that give safe walking access between them. It was only a short step to the realisation that if the bridge were widened sufficiently, the campus could flow beneath it in a generous landscaped sweep through which not only flood waters, but also pedestrian and vehicular traffic, could all be given safe passage.

The bent diagonal alignment had the further advantage (so far only partially realised) of bringing vehicular access close to the centre of University activity. The main entrance could thus be marked, not with crested piers and wrought iron gates but, in true 20th century style, with a landscaped, free-flowing clover-leaf intersection. This was agreed: the first of the proposed dual carriageways and bridges was constructed and duly named Kingsbury Drive, in honour of a local war hero.

Although only one of the clover-leaf ramps has been built so far, it illustrates the potential of what I have always regarded as the University's natural and most interesting approach. Entering the campus by this route, the whole southern aspect of the academic complex comes dramatically into view, framed by the bridge. Continuing up the valley, the road skirts the lakes to reach the security gates. Beyond them, if dreams come true, the Great Hall will be seen rising from the waters and reflected in them. As traffic intensifies, it may well become necessary to complete the original plan by duplicating Kingsbury Drive and adding the missing ramps to make this a full clover-leaf intersection. It would be a considerable relief if this could be planned in such a way that the on-grade junction of Kingsbury Drive and Waterdale Road, with its frustrating traffic lights, could be eliminated.

The Interim Council's desire for a compact central core had been well supported in our investigations. In the new universities we had visited there was a growing emphasis on the desirability of easy access between departments, of minimising delays in getting from lecture to lecture and from seminar to library, and for encouraging social intermixing rather than departmental isolation. The principle was exemplified in a number of American universities which had adopted a rule that academic facilities should be contained within a circle that could be traversed on foot in ten minutes. However, concentrations of buildings bring concentrations of people. Buildings have to be stocked, serviced and maintained, and these necessary activities require vehicles. People and vehicular traffic do not mix well and should be segregated. Therefore, the ten-minute walking circle containing the main university buildings needed to be planned as a pedestrian precinct, with vehicular traffic confined to outside its boundaries. This concept developed into the dual ring road system that now operates at La Trobe. An outer ring road (formed partly by the curving portion of the new public road)
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provides unrestricted access to the general parking areas, the playing fields and the security-controlled gateway to the inner campus. The inner road, accessible only through the controlled gateway, enables essential service vehicles, departmental cars and other authorised traffic to gain access to the buildings in the inner campus from the perimeter, without crossing the internal pedestrian routes. This circular complex of buildings, carparks and traffic routes could be fitted neatly into the enlarged northern sector of the site, leaving generous reserve space beyond the outer ring road in which ancillary developments could be accommodated.

The essential thrust of the overall plan was to have on the periphery an outer ring road with associated car parks, enclosing an inner circle of college sites which, in turn, enclosed the academic heart of the University. In this central area the Library and the large lecture theatres were deliberately placed around a two-level 'Agora' in order to generate the greatest concentrations of student movement at that point. As I wrote in 1967, the aim was to create a 'clustered Bohemia' where all members of the University would meet and mingle. The Agora was envisaged as 'a bustling precinct where one can shop, take a snack, scan notice boards, see a lunchtime film, attend meetings, entertain parents and friends — a forum where exposure to the richness and diversity of the academic community is inescapable.' In the central area, between the Agora and the colleges, were the teaching and research departments 'broadly zoned into Arts, Social Sciences, Physical Sciences and Biological Sciences.' Sites for a possible Medical School and for a teaching hospital in the north-west corner were to be linked by a system of elevated concourses designed to 'provide swift and safe pedestrian communication between departments at a higher level than service traffic.'

No master plan, however long considered, should be devised as in inflexible mould, but rather as a guide to the fulfillment of a concept within which adjustments can be made to accommodate changing academic needs ... The [La Trobe University] Master Plan, in its site layout and general recommendations, lays down a discipline which offers a fair guarantee of efficiency and architectural cohesion. Within it lie quite broad areas of freedom for academic and architectural expression. The significance of this discipline, in which practical and aesthetic considerations share equal importance, may not be evident for some time ... (Master Plan, July 1965)

No doubt the terms 'Master Plan' and 'Master Planner' have different meanings to different people. In the La Trobe context, the Master Planner’s role was one of generous scope and special professional interest. The University’s letter of invitation had stated: The Master Plan will provide a unity of conception which, while possessing a unique architectural character of its own, will enable freedom for the exercise of creative imagination by the individual architects ... [The Master Planner] would be required also to take responsibility for the coordination of all engineering services on the site ... [and] expected to co-ordinate the work of the architects of the individual buildings, in order that the characteristics of these buildings will contribute to the planned overall pattern of the University as a whole.

The machinery for putting this magnificently understated brief into effect involved a great deal more than a roll of drawings, a plastic model and a bound report. These are important tools, but have the drawback of trying to give a static representation of a fast-moving train. As a university develops, there is a constant need for interpretation and adaptation of its physical planning to meet new requirements, and further safeguard the future. The recognition that needs must change with time is itself an important element in the plan. This point was emphasised, in the late 1950s, by the distinguished English architect, Sir Hugh Casson, in his development report to the University of Birmingham:

It is a truism that a university is a society founded for the advancement of learning and the dissemination of knowledge. This means that it is constantly changing, always on its way, its work never completed. Departments expand, contract, quadruple in size or virtually disappear within a few years, often in defiance of the most knowledgeable and expert forecasts. Any attempt to constrict the building’s movement, either academically or physically, seems doomed, and rightly doomed, to failure.
For all these reasons, historical data on which the master plan was based — demographic, geophysical, educational, philosophical, structural and aesthetic — are recorded in the master planning reports, as are the principles by which we hope the future may flow logically out of the past without loss of capital investments or spiritual direction.

Today, few people who visit or work on the campus are likely to give a passing thought to the carefully studied design processes by which the original physical environment was transformed into something unique and identifiable that of La Trobe University. They might admire the ornamental lakes and streams, little realising that they are part of a tightly engineered system of flood control. As they move through the buildings, courtyards and gardens, it is unlikely to cross their minds that they will be walking over a subterranean labyrinth of service access tunnels and ducts through which the engineering and communications services are distributed all over the campus and linked to the public utilities systems, with never a pole or a power line in sight. The fact that such diverse essentials as super-heated hot water, cold water, gas and electrical services and an ever increasing range of electronic communications lines invisibly follow their predestined routes from building to building, and that they do so in a landscaped environment in which pedestrians are protected from traffic, and buildings from fire and flood, well illustrates the diversity of considerations that had to be resolved into a unified system, namely the master plan.

I was fortunate to be able to call on consulting engineers of outstanding skills and experience to advise on such vital matters as traffic engineering, hydraulics and flood control, civil and structural engineering, energy sources and reticulation, acoustics and other specialised considerations. (See Appendix C). There were also programming experts to develop and monitor critical path timetables to ensure that the many strands of research, design and approval were brought together on time and in the right sequence; and costing specialists to guide the planners in keeping development costs within budget.

Another speciality which called for particular skills and experience was that of landscaping. Landscaping is often thought of only as providing pleasing surroundings to buildings and other structures but it also has important functional uses: proper attention to landscaping can minimise dust nuisance, can provide shelter from the wind, and can also provide necessary shade from the sun. In early 1967, I commented that, in relation to the Bundoora site, it was our intention to use landscape 'more than any other feature, to weld and unify the campus.' I added that it was this consciousness of the importance of landscaping that led to flood control measures being designed as a system of streams and lakes rather than drains, for example; of access roads as parkways; of car parks as glades.''

I had nominated Professor Lindsay Pryor of the ANU for this role. He and I had collaborated successfully on a number of projects in Canberra when he was in charge of landscaping there for the Department of the Interior. His experience in bringing botanical delight into the then vast, empty spaces of the national capital was unique, and he was thoroughly familiar with the special problems of universities. His presence in the planning team added an indispensable dimension to our enterprise. While his approach was no less scientifically-oriented than those of the engineering consultants, there was an underlying aesthetic consequence to his contributions which he understood and manipulated to splendid effect, in a way that is immediately appreciated by the lay observer. Everybody loves a garden, whereas the brilliant engineering works, subsumed into the landscape so effectively as to seem part of the natural order of things, are taken for granted.

At this point I must claim some credit for architectural perceptions. It has been said before that an architect is jack-of-all trades and master of none. I plead guilty, for without these magnificent specialists beside us, our planning would have been toothless. But I rejoice in what I see as the architect-planner's proper role: of probing out the human and physical elements of a problem, of analysing the components, of getting the right advice, of understanding the options and selecting from them in such a way that there is harmony between the parts, and unity in the whole. There is no single 'right' solution to this kind of problem. The
answer is a conditioned response to all the factors that impinge on it, and it may take many forms. The solution finally adopted is part reasoned, part spontaneously revealed, after exhaustive and often frustrating exploration. Of all the alternatives, it is the one that feels right and can be proved right by rigorous back-checking. It is a product of one's experience and perceptions, and it does not come out of a computer.

Architects' perceptions vary widely, of course. In the case of La Trobe, the authors of the early buildings were asked to subscribe to the over-riding perceptions embodied in the master plan; that is, to restrain the urge for extremes of individual expression in the broader interest of campus-wide cohesion. Was it too much to hope for the sense of unity that distinguishes a Georgian London square, or a hill-side village on a Greek island, or Jerusalem, built over millennia of the creamy stone on which it stands, but which is so rarely found in this, our land of contrasts run riot?

To my eternal gratitude, these colleagues entered into the spirit of ensemble, rather than one of virtuosi competing for attention. They collaborated as a group in establishing a common approach, based on a range of materials, planning principles and design elements, and these they applied sympathetically and imaginatively to their individual projects. Their buildings, designed in an age when architectural gymnastics are widely mistaken for creativity, are models of restraint, and the key to La Trobe's environmental cohesion.

Pending the appointment of foundation professors, the planning of academic departments has been sketched in only lightly; other details are still in need of definition. On the other hand, the Interim Council and its committees have been quite definite about the kind of university they require. (Master Plan, July 1965.)

When master planning started in January 1965, the University had no administrative staff to support the voluntary, part-time membership of the Interim Council and its committees. The Building Committee, under the vigorous chairmanship of Mr B.J. (later Sir Bernard) Callinan, provided us with an enlightened and responsive reference point. As dreams gave way to action, a more detailed level of liaison became necessary. David Myers has written of the consistency of our respective thoughts about the development of the site. I often wished for closer contact with him during those formative months but alas, he was mostly in Canada and unable to take up his appointment as Vice-Chancellor until September.

Some relief came with the appointment, in March 1965, of the University's first staff architect, Stewart Morton, as the foundation Buildings Officer. A month later, the redoubtable Frank Barnes took up duties, initially as Executive Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor and subsequently as Business Manager, a position he held until 1972 when he resigned to become General Manager of the Sydney Opera House. These two figures were central to the transition of the master plan from ideas on paper to concrete construction in the field. With Barnes' vision, drive and infectious zest for the finer things of life, and Morton's effectiveness in meticulously extending the spirit of the master plan into detailed project briefs, events started to happen with a new sense of purpose and reality.

There was something symbolic about the choice of the first two buildings to be erected on the site. The Interim Council, in considering the academic structure in its broadest terms, had determined that the spiritual heart of the University should be its library, that the domestic and social activities of both students and staff should be based on colleges, and the academic activities on schools. It was expected that these fundamental intentions would be given expression from the very beginning; this naturally led to the library and the first of the colleges (Glenn) being selected for the initial building contracts.

Obviously, the small enrolment of students in the first year or two would not fill a college or populate a library; but there were many advantages in building two major projects, rather than a multiplicity of small ones, and using parts of them temporarily for teaching and administrative accommodation. Dietrich Borchardt has referred to some problems arising from the 'tenancies' in the library building which now bears his name but they did not last long and do
not appear to have impeded the library's fulfilment of its destiny to become the 'heart' of the University.

The appointment of my own firm to design the library building gave us the opportunity of testing out some important aspects of our master planning theory. At the same time, Jack McConnell of Hassell and McConnell Architects, was putting his own delightful interpretation of the master plan into effect in the design of Glenn College. This was to be the first and last college that wholly met the original intentions of the Colleges Committee. The 'college concept' was more fragile than that of the central library, and failed to survive the climate of unrest of the early 70s to which Sir Archibald Glenn and Dr Myers have referred in their essays.

At the outset, Interim Council had decided that every member of the University, whether resident or otherwise, would be attached to one of a number of colleges. Each college would incorporate certain academic and union-type facilities. In the master plan, sites were allocated for up to ten of these 'college-unions' as they were sometimes referred to, to be developed around the perimeter of the academic centre. Of these, only Glenn and Menzies Colleges were built in accordance with the original intent. By the time the third college (Chisholm) was being designed a different feeling was gathering force, and in 1971 Council decided to abandon the requirement on all students, whether resident or not, to be attached to a college. This substantially changed the nature of the colleges, which thus became more akin to halls of residence. In these circumstances the case for providing a conventional central union became irresistible.

Finding a suitable site for such a substantial addition to the building program placed a severe test on the plan's ability to meet unexpected changes, since the central areas, in which a union building would be most desirably located, were already fully committed. The master plan, rising to the challenge, provided a prominent and accessible site. The Union building, although not strictly central, lies well inside the pedestrian precinct. It is a popular success and a credit to its architects.

Of necessity, the master plan included provisions for other dreams and assumptions which have slipped into limbo — so far without dire consequences. It has been kept under review and adjusted to meet new requirements, without sacrifice of its major characteristics. The University's inability so far to develop professional courses to the extent intended at the outset has meant that large areas reserved for such facilities as engineering workshops and a teaching hospital have been encroached on, but not, I think, irredeemably. The amalgamation of the University with the Lincoln Institute of Health Sciences and the siting of new buildings for its accommodation may close off some of these options; but ample scope remains for reinstating them in modified form and providing for further academic growth, as needs arise.

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The Master Plan ... embodies a certain discipline which, in placing some limits on freedom in individual buildings, adds greatly to the scope for significant architectural achievement. It has built-in factors of basic economy, flexibility and cohesion ... simplicity, and opportunities for some subtle values and perhaps some splendor to emerge. (Master Plan, July 1965)

At the beginning, our sights were set on planning to accommodate 10,000 students within ten years. A quarter of a century later, it is gratifying to reflect that the University has not only surpassed that goal, but also successfully weathered a variety of political, social and economic storms, without being seriously deflected off course — at least, in respect of its physical development. It must be admitted, however, that the tremors have been fairly minor on prevailing scales of global mischief; and twenty-five years is far too early in La Trobe's history to risk extravagant claims for the long-term success of its planning. In the shorter term, we know that the first several generations of students have studied, played and graduated in as good an environment as any in Australia. The plan's ability to deal efficiently with both expansion and radical changes of direction has been proved and I feel confident that the in-built provisions for flexibility, cohesion and adaptability will enable these things to continue to happen more graciously and expeditiously, and with much less cost, debate, compromise and disruption, than would otherwise have been the case.

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We are frequently reminded that we live in an age of change. It would be surprising, and beyond all my expectations, if the next quarter century did not bring quite dramatic changes. Indeed, it could even be a sign of effete middle age if the University was not obliged to contemplate quite major changes in that period, to enable it to meet future challenges effectively. In doing so, I hope for only three things.

First, that what I have referred to as 'cohesion' will be jealously maintained. By this I mean the general character of fairly low, earth-coloured buildings, harmoniously unified in a landscape of shrubs, trees and water that is basically Australian in feeling and endowed with something of the timelessness of our continent.

Second, and preferably in my lifetime, I would like to see the Great Hall completed on its lake-side site, set against the deliberately fine-grained background of the David Myers Building. I say this not only because there is a real and practical need for such a facility, but also for the reason that the composition of buildings on the formal approach to the University from the south will remain incomplete without it. The quiet, consistent character of nearly all of the present buildings is one of the campus's greatest assets. In such a setting, it leaves scope for the occasional, well-placed jewel. The Great Hall site especially invites that touch of architectural exuberance that could give La Trobe what King's College Chapel is to its precinct in Cambridge and St Mark's Basilica to its piazza in Venice — the much-loved building by which an institution becomes identified.

Finally, and in all humility, I would like to see the appointment of an external planning consultant resumed. This post has been unfilled since my retirement as Master Planner in 1979. My experience in acting as site planning consultant to both La Trobe University and the ANU, through years of intense activity as well as years of doing little more than dream of better times, convinces me that the informed advisor from outside, regularly attending planning meetings and acting variously as watch-dog, critic and initiator, can play a vital role in helping a university maintain the high standards of physical planning and aesthetic quality to which its founders aspired. He is the 'seeing eye', unencumbered by internal politics and administrative routines, and detached from the contriving sectional interests that set traps for in-house planning staff.

I had been tutored in these matters in various places, and particularly by the central administration of the University of California, whose several beautiful campuses are models of efficient management and individual distinction. As I recall their rules, the master plan of each of these campuses is formally reviewed every year, and up-dated every five years. No buildings or grounds projects would be considered for approval by the Regents in Berkeley before the plans have been endorsed by the campus planning consultant and the consulting landscape architect (both prominent private practitioners) and the internal campus architect or buildings officer — a group which meets monthly to review and advise on every project and design detail that affects the environmental quality of the campus for which they are responsible. At La Trobe, which started bravely along similar lines, there has been no such procedure for over a decade — and it is starting to show.

... fulfilment will not come without interpretation. It is vital that the Master Plan should be regularly reviewed, refined in its detail, and adjusted within its general outlines to meet the new needs that undoubtedly will arise. Planning should be a continuous and evolutionary process ...

ENDNOTES
2. Roy Simpson, Master Planner, Yuncken Freeman Architects, 'La Trobe University Master Plan: A Report to the Interim Council, January-July 1965' (July, 1965)
3. The photographic record of the site as it was in 1965 was made by the distinguished photographer, Wolfgang Sievers.

4. The three artists were Charles Bush, Gareth Jones-Roberts, and the late Len Annois. Their paintings were donated to the University by Mrs Margaret Carnegie, Lady Potter, Mrs J.M. Baillieu, and Mrs R.C.M. Kimpton.


6. La Trobe University Interim Committee to Yuncken Freeman Architects, 28 October, 1964. The letter invited selected architects to apply for appointment as Master Planner of the proposed university.

7. Simpson, 'A University in the Suburbs...'

8. Simpson, 'La Trobe University Master Plan ...'