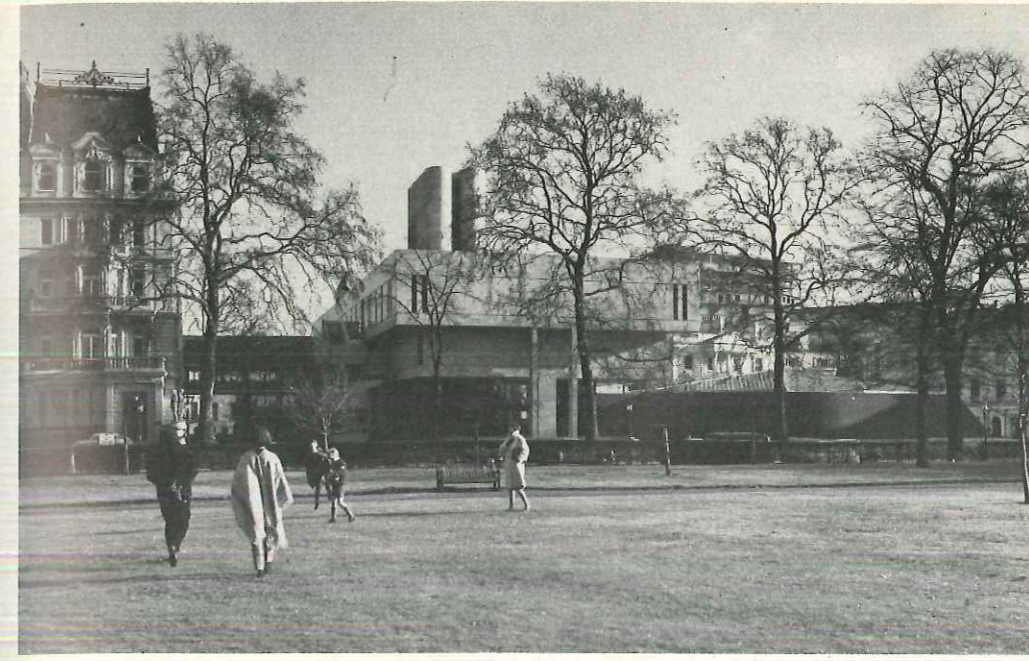


the Engineers and was in charge of heavy earth moving equipment. Our job was to make advance airfields and we flattened everything in sight in order to make these rapid airfields. I made one of the first airfields of the war at Arremand, Normandy. I off-loaded all the equipment in 12-feet of water."

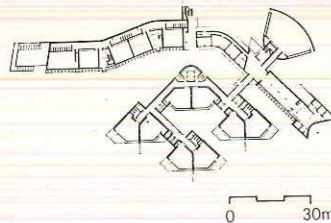
This little known aspect of Lasdun's career is important from a number of points of view, not the least of which is the comment he made in our interview that "I found those earth-moving machines extraordinarily exciting and I liked making hills, banks and ditches". He commented: "It is earthbound architecture that I am interested in", a reference back to his war years, but an idea reflected in the layout of the University of East Anglia.

After the war Lasdun returned to London and to the firm Tecton. It was a questioning



Lasdun continued to be interested in school building until the opportunity arose to design the Hallfields school. This school was different from almost anything else being designed in Britain at the time. The infants classrooms were clustered around a court and the junior block was serpentine shaped, constructed in specially designed dry-assembled precast concrete parts. It looked to some critics at the time more inspired by Niemeyer than Le Corbusier; it was in fact Lasdun himself finding a creative chord.

He recalls: "Some of the feeling of putting people and buildings around a space, as distinct from anything else, so that they could all communicate with each other, even though they were only five-year-old children, was something that was going to come up again, say in East Anglia University, where the whole plan is centred

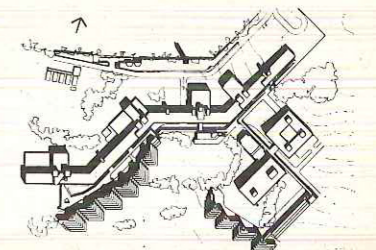
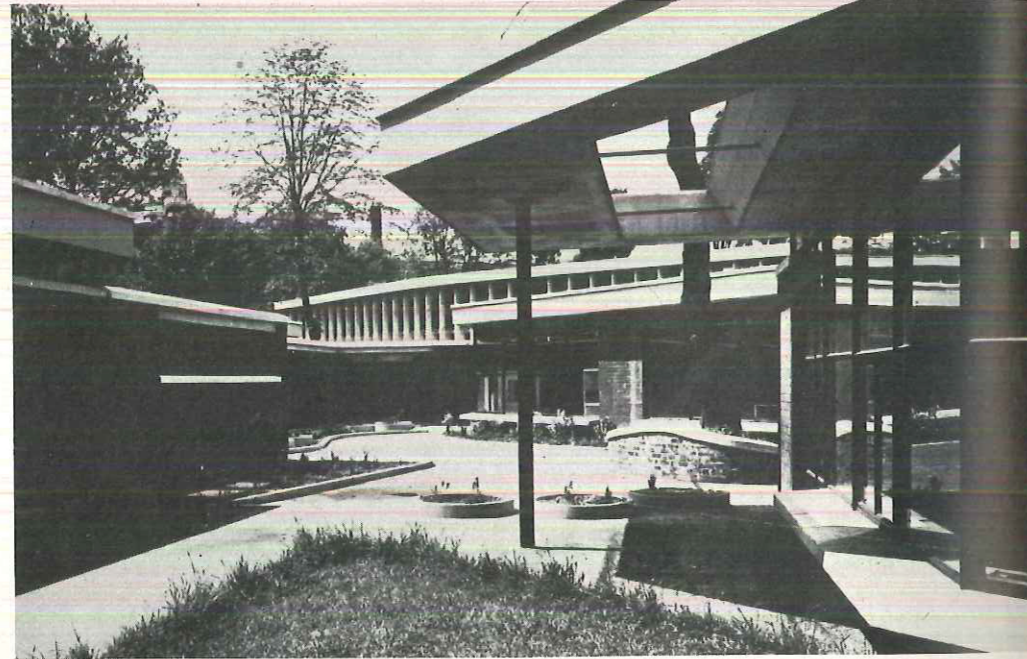


period for Lasdun and his colleagues; indeed, with the return to normality controversy was in the air. Tecton, and Lubetkin in particular, was attacked as formalist but Lasdun felt that he wanted to go in another direction. "I wasn't sure which direction, but there was a definite change in my outlook and attitude although it was not to emerge for a while yet. I was doing the Paddington scheme with Redhouse and Drake presumably at the moment when Tecton were under the attack for formalism". Tecton was dissolved in 1948 and the Tecton Paddington housing scheme was completed by Drake and Lasdun.

At the time of its completion Lasdun had a telephone call from Maxwell Fry saying that he was off to Chandigarh with Le Corbusier and asking him to look after his office. Drake joined him as a caretaker for Fry and Drew's practice; they did not lose their own identity as designers in this involvement. It was at this time that they were introduced to working in the Tropics.

But a more exciting job was underway at Paddington. His Hallfield Primary School marked the beginning of an important new phase in his career in 1951, as well as a significant shift in architectural ideas in the year of the Festival of Britain.

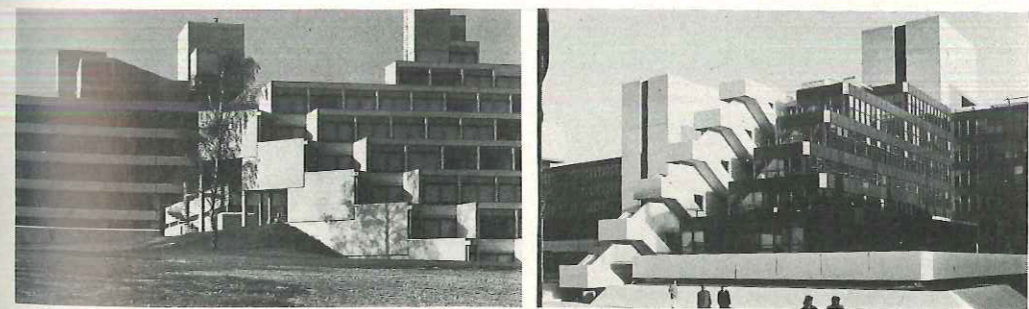
In the late thirties Lasdun had, with Wells Coates, gained fourth place in the *News Chronicle* school competition.



not on the buildings but on the space. I think that although architecture is of course cerebral, it's also partly instinctive. There is a thing called gut reaction in architecture which I am not ashamed to admit operates in this office quite a bit. It's not necessarily a popular way of discussing architecture, but I believe it to be a true one. I've always been aware of a self-conscious influence between what people write and what they do, and this goes for Corbusier as much as for anybody else."

Following the school Lasdun's work led to the experimental residential "cluster" blocks at Bethnal Green, which in their way were two further points of reference in the changing postwar architectural scene in Britain. Influenced this time by Kevin Lynch's article on the *Grain of the City* Lasdun recognised that cities do not grow in enormous pieces but that it was possible to "take an area which had had six houses on it previously and actually develop into something of substance in quite a small area . . . that came straight out of the infants' cluster block (Hallfield School) of 1951 into Usk Street and then into Fairbairn Street".

In fact it gets left behind as a solution to housing by the very different programme for the luxury flats at St James's in 1958, followed two years later by the remarkable Royal College of



Opposite page
Top left: Denys Lasdun
Top right: House at Paddington 1938

Middle and far left: Hallfield Primary School, Paddington 1951
Below left: Cluster block, Bethnal Green 1955

Below right: 26 St James's Place 1958

This page
Top: Royal College of Physicians 1960
Middle and far right: University of East Anglia 1962-68
Above left: UEA biology building and residences
Above right: Development for the University of London 1965
Right: National Theatre and Opera House project 1965

