



Lusaka: The New Capital of Northern Rhodesia (Studies in International Planning History)

Meller Helen

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This short account of the planning of Lusaka as the new capital of Northern Rhodesia, written for its official opening in 1935 as part of jubilee celebrations for King George V, was printed in a limited edition specifically for that event, and is now very scarce and difficult to obtain, but deserves to be made more widely available for scholars of planning and urban history, and especially all interested in African urban development.

The planning of Lusaka was a prestige project for British indirect rule administration in Africa during the 1930s, in the recovery from the Great Depression, and was claimed as an example of British garden city and town planning expertise being applied overseas to its imperial territorial acquisitions. Particular features of Lusaka's planning were the attention to public buildings, echoing on a smaller scale the grand imperial designs of Baker and Lutyens in South Africa and India, the importance attached to landscaping and tree planting, and the priority given to the new airport reflecting the great expansion of air networks during the 1930s.

The historical context also includes Lusaka's place on the projected 'Cape to Cairo' railway, and its importance as a colonial project at a time of rapid development by American and South African capitalism of copper mining in the Copperbelt. Town planning was seen in the Colonial Office as an important tool of colonial management, and successive colonial governors in Northern Rhodesia were associated with planning initiatives elsewhere. Lusaka capital city was seen as a demonstration project which influenced negotiations over planning the new Copperbelt mining townships. Lusaka's colonial origins are of increasing interest to present-day planners in Zambia, concerned with problems of rapid urbanisation and the recent recovery of the copper mining industry; it is also of wider interest for both its place in the history of town planning and garden city concepts beyond Europe and as a planned new capital in the Third World.

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