



## Inscribing Design on the Nation: The Creators of the British Council of Industrial Design

Lesley Whitworth

This article is derived from a larger study of the consumer education work of the Council of Industrial Design, founded in Britain in 1944. My particular aim is to develop a convincing account of the personal interactions that propelled the Council into existence following decades of relative inertia around the issue of industrial design, which was viewed as significant, but had so far failed to achieve the prominence associated with a dedicated state-aided body. In so doing, I stress the importance of the presence of individuals drawn from the worlds of business into the administration of the wartime state.

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The introduction to the 2005 Business History Conference in Minneapolis referred to the way in which, “Throughout history, firms, industries, regions, and nations have demonstrated remarkable capacities to transform prevailing business practices and reorient economic activities.”<sup>1</sup> The achievements of wartime states are a case in point, and those of the British state under duress have attracted a considerable body of commentary. In response to the theme of “Reinvention and Renewal,” however, in this article I bring forward material related to the creation of a seldom-referenced body intended to have a pronounced effect on material conditions and prevailing industrial practices in the post-1945 world. Brought into being in the waning moments of World War II by Britain’s

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I acknowledge the award (RES-143-25-0037-R0536) made by the Economic and Social Research Council with the Arts and Humanities Research Council, which underpins my project in the “Cultures of Consumption” research program (see <http://www.consume.bbk.ac.uk>). “Towards a Participatory Consumer Democracy, Britain 1937-1987” is concerned with the consumer education work of the Council of Industrial Design and draws extensively on archival repositories, particularly Council papers held at the University of Brighton. The Council was re-named the Design Council in 1972 and is still in existence, albeit with a redefined mission statement and a greatly altered *modus operandi* (see <http://www.designcouncil.org.uk>).

<sup>1</sup> Business History Conference, 2005 Meeting Call for Papers, Spring 2004.

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URL: <http://www.thebhc.org/publications/BEHonline/2005/whitworth.pdf>.

coalition government, the new organization was named the Council of Industrial Design (CoID, the Council) and was given the seemingly precipitate task of promoting “by all practicable means the improvement of design in the products of British manufacturing industry.”<sup>2</sup>

I have two main aims: first, to rescue the Council from relative obscurity, and second, to offer a more thorough account of its inception, one that goes beyond administrative orthodoxy and acknowledges the formative role played by business people in its shaping. I contribute to David Edgerton’s thesis that businessmen’s role in the wartime state was of greater significance than that of academics.<sup>3</sup> I also counter the prevalent impression of civil service conservatism and resistance to change. Accounting for the creation of the Council is important because no assessment of its later activities and achievements can be satisfactory without some measure of the hopes invested in it by its founders.<sup>4</sup>

The main task for which the Council of Industrial Design was brought into being was the catalyzing of attitudes toward design: design that is shorn of its superficial stylistic associations and defined as a powerful and wide-ranging set of decision-making practices. It is an integral part of modern manufacturing processes, but one with which British industrialists professed neither familiarity nor fascination. Design in its fullest sense incorporated aspects of consumer research, materials analysis, production planning, promotional and publicity operations, and enhanced operability and functionality in finished products—a definition that would have gone unchallenged among forward-thinking American producers. But all of these elements were typically assumed by most British manufacturers to be either interior concerns of the engineering process—therefore requiring no specialized attention—or largely unnecessary; the view was typically taken that British goods would continue to sell themselves, just as they always had.

Through the application of design thinking the Council, with its appointed members and its modest permanent staff, was intended to

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<sup>2</sup> Letter from Hugh Dalton to Sir Thomas Barlow, 19 Dec. 1944, reproduced in Council of Industrial Design, *Council of Industrial Design First Annual Report 1945-1946* (London, 1946), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Articulated most recently in a paper delivered to the Business History Unit Seminar at LSE, 10 May 2004; David Edgerton, “The New Men and the New State: Businessmen and Scientists in British Government during the Second World War.”

<sup>4</sup> The material in this article complements my papers, “The Creation of the British Council of Industrial Design: Re-investing Design with Hope,” paper presented to the Economic History Society conference, Leicester, England, April 2005, on the radical orientation of key Council personnel, and “The ‘Buying Public’ and the ‘Shopping Public’: Defining the Audience for Early Council of Industrial Design Consumer Initiatives” paper presented to the Social History Society conference, Rouen, France, Jan. 2004, which explored the exemplary propaganda and public relations skills they shared.

contribute to the re-invigoration of Britain's postwar manufacturing sector and to help it address the onslaughts of competitor nations in the struggle for economic ascendancy in the emergent postwar world. By championing high design standards, the Council and its work were also regarded as crucial to the avoidance of a long-term balance of payments crisis, as levels of home consumption normalized in advance of the disengagement of home industries from systems of wartime production control.

My conviction that the Council warrants closer scrutiny is based on its broad conceptualization—the innovative, even audacious, combination of industrial and social agendas set by its creators—in combination with the government funding that underpinned its structure and enabled its early promotional activities.<sup>5</sup> The Council strove to nurture a symbiotic relationship: it would encourage industry to supply well-designed goods that would better serve users, thus helping the profile of British exports, while at the same time encouraging the British public to recognize and demand such goods, thus contributing critical mass to the battle to drive up standards.

Optimally, designers could improve profit margins for producers while enhancing the satisfaction levels of end-users. It was this impressive roundness of conception, this circularity of benefit, that enabled the valorization of design as a potent social and economic good by a committed few (among them enlightened manufacturers, educators, artists, and politicians) from at least the later part of the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> A steady stream of committees, reports, investigations, and campaigning bodies that propounded this view followed and achieved for it limited state endorsement.<sup>7</sup> Accounts of the Council (almost universally in texts of a design historical nature) present it as a natural corollary of all of these incremental steps.<sup>8</sup> Before 1944, though, all had stopped short of establishing a permanent, dedicated, grant-funded organization through which to promulgate better design standards. I contend that the judicious interaction of a unique set of individuals, some drawn from the world of business and co-opted into the administration of the wartime state, finally brought such a grant-aided body into being at this point.

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<sup>5</sup> It was intended that industry would ultimately be induced to contribute to the Council's budget, but an agreement was reached with the Board of Trade that little in the way of financial support from that source could be expected in the early years. The Council's initial grant was for £55,000.

<sup>6</sup> The Royal Society of Arts (properly the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) was founded in 1754, for example.

<sup>7</sup> It is beyond the scope of this article to enumerate all of these.

<sup>8</sup> Correlli Barnett, *The Audit of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation* (London, 1986), 270-71 and 294-96, provides an interesting exception to the design-historical rule.

### Dispensing with the Politicians

Accounting for the creation of the Council of Industrial Design is by no means as straightforward as it might first appear (see Figure 1). Previous scholars have referred to the way in which the new body appears to spring “almost fully formed” into the administrative records of its sponsor, the Board of Trade.<sup>9</sup> Historical convention would ascribe responsibility to the



FIGURE 1

An early meeting of the Council of Industrial Design

Source: © Design Council Archive, Design Archives, University of Brighton.

Board’s president, Hugh Dalton, but that is unsatisfactory. A more administratively orientated explanation would reference key documents (findings, position papers, and so forth) that brought the decision incrementally closer. The Council’s own account of its origins, contained in an appendix to its first annual report, identified eight reports from the preceding dozen years that it viewed as “particularly noteworthy” in relation to its inception. It also referenced a series of other reports as well as the century-long campaign to raise design standards in British manu-

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<sup>9</sup> Patrick Maguire and Jonathan Woodham, in conversation with the author. See for example their jointly edited *Design and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain: The Britain Can Make It Exhibition of 1946* (London, 1997), which is tantalizing rather than transparent on the subject of the Council’s formation.

factured goods.<sup>10</sup> A fuller account is given in a book published a decade later by a staff member who identified ten design-related organizations or institutions whose foundation pre-dated the Council's, each of which contributed something to the maintenance of a campaigning momentum for such a body.<sup>11</sup> Detailed consideration of these would doubtless generate a highly nuanced and illuminating account of the context for the Council's creation, but would still fall short of explaining the final impetus to act. Given the longevity of the debate and the bewildering array of complementary actors, it makes sense to look for the individual or individuals who, in the not necessarily propitious conditions of total war, finally succeeded in pushing forward an emphatic resolution.

One of the surprising aspects of the Council's history is the number of politicians whose interest in design was manifest and who might have taken a lively and knowledgeable part in its formation. Hugh Dalton, president of the Board of Trade at the time the decision was made, had some understanding of Modernism, lived in a privately commissioned modernist dwelling, and was capable of rhapsodizing over the natural aesthetic qualities of materials.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, an early Council member remembers Dalton as being primarily interested in design "from a social point of view."<sup>13</sup> He stressed this aspect at the Council's inaugural meeting, when he said that if it succeeded in its task it would improve every side of daily life and millions of men and women would be in its debt.<sup>14</sup> However, his memoirs reveal the distinct limitations to such an interest in the minutiae of everyday life. He wrote of the period after mid-1942:

Now that I was free from coal, I paid many visits to industrial centres; to Lancashire for cotton, to the West Riding for wool textiles, to Belfast for linen, to Stoke for the Potteries, and a

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<sup>10</sup> Council of Industrial Design, *First Annual Report, 1945-1946*, 31-32. The beginning of the campaign is strongly, but not exclusively, associated with the Great Exhibition of 1851.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Farr was the editor of its journal, *Design*, from 1952 and published *Design in British Industry, a Mid-Century Survey* (Cambridge, U.K., 1955); see Part II, 189-207, and 229-31.

<sup>12</sup> Hugh Dalton, *The Fateful Years: Memoirs 1931-1945* (London, 1957), 20 and 51. Appreciation of the inherent qualities of materials was considered essential to sound industrial design. Ruth Dalton is generally regarded as the inspiration behind their home, West Leaze.

<sup>13</sup> Gordon Russell, *Designer's Trade: An Autobiography* (London, 1968), 226. From being one of those appointed by the president of the Board of Trade to serve in an advisory capacity on the Council, Russell afterward became its second director, a full-time salaried position, which he filled from 1947 until 1959.

<sup>14</sup> Speech reproduced in the Council of Industrial Design, *First Annual Report, 1945-1946*, 6.

number of others. Most of my diaries for those days have lost all interest now.<sup>15</sup>

Again, in a lament arising from the sharp contrast between a Labour Party Conference and a conference with pram-makers, Dalton's inimical style betrays the dismay he felt at the role of

universal provider for the civilian population. I was expected to provide more prams, more razor blades, more alarm clocks, more tea-cloths for pubs, more children's shoes. . . . It was hard to prevent this mass of urgent, short-term human detail from blocking the vistas towards the brave new post-war world.<sup>16</sup>

Herbert Morrison, arguably the politician who articulated a vision for a reconstructed nation most energetically, took an intelligent interest in the subject of design. Perhaps surprisingly, he laid claim to a personal creative impulse in the foreword he wrote to *They Also Serve: The Story of the Shop Worker*.<sup>17</sup> Here he reviewed his youthful efforts at window display, reflecting on them as an expression "of proportion, of colour, of balance" from which he derived all the "satisfaction . . . of an artist," and he defied anyone to claim otherwise.<sup>18</sup> Two instances of his interest from later years serve as illustrations. One was the opening of a new Waterloo Bridge across the Thames in 1944, which came at the end of two decades of procrastination and highly contentious debate about the merits of reconstruction over refurbishment. Morrison was both closely concerned and strongly identified with the campaign for a wholly new structure, especially during his time as leader of the London County Council. Its eventual achievement owed a great deal to his personal involvement, and he regarded it as a triumphant vindication of his view that not all of the best architects were dead. The second was his disappointment that he had not in fact pioneered the design of the bomb shelter that came to bear his name, although he had mastered all of the relevant technical detail and was responsible for it achieving recognition as a superior design to that of the alternative "Anderson" shelter.<sup>19</sup>

Morrison's most substantial contribution to the Council may, however, have been the recommendation of the first director, S. C. Leslie, with whom he had been associated since 1937.<sup>20</sup> Stafford Cripps was acknowledged as having a phenomenal grasp of technical innovation

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<sup>15</sup> Dalton, *The Fateful Years*, 404.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 415-16.

<sup>17</sup> Philip Christopher Hoffman, *They Also Serve: The Story of the Shop Worker* (London, 1949).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, vi. The language Morrison used here is strongly reminiscent of Council statements.

<sup>19</sup> For both these instances, see Bernard Donoughue and G. W. Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician* (London, 1973). The shelter's actual designer was John Baker.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, for more details on their working relationship.

gained through his expertise in the field of scientific and patent law. His interest in design is less well known, yet he was a prewar activist in the campaigning Design and Industries Association (DIA), and as such unsurprisingly took a keen interest in the Council's activities between 1945 and 1947 when he was president of the Board of Trade after Dalton.<sup>21</sup> However, according to Dalton, Cripps did not hold "any office which brought him and me into intimate and continuous contact" during the critical phase of the war when consideration was being given to the formation of the Council.<sup>22</sup> Nor, though this was less significant, was he a member of the Labour Party at the time. Arthur Greenwood, Minister Without Portfolio, and from January 1941 until February 1942 responsible for the study of postwar problems and reconstruction, claimed in a speech made in 1929 to have "known the D.I.A. from its earliest days, and [to] have followed its activities with the greatest interest."<sup>23</sup>

Yet in Peter Clarke's recent work on Cripps, in Ben Pimlott's on Dalton, and in G. W. Jones and Bernard Donoghue's on Morrison, no claims are advanced for any of these three as the primary architects of the Council's invention.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, no mention of the Council appears in these texts at all. Nor, though Dalton refers proprietarily to the wartime Utility furniture scheme as "his," does he make any such statement about the Council.<sup>25</sup> This notwithstanding the fact that his memoirs for the relevant years were published just a year after the opening, with appropriate fanfare, of the Council's first permanent London "shop window" in Haymarket, Piccadilly, providing him with a memory prompt if such were needed (see Figure 2).

Greenwood's lackluster performance as a Minister resulted in his sacking from the War Cabinet with a negligible record of achievement. While all of these politicians seem likely to have been sure sources of support for the Council, we must look to a different layer of government to discern the motive forces behind the body's creation.

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<sup>21</sup> An insert in the *DIA Quarterly* of January 1931 identified Cripps as a Committee member of the Association.

<sup>22</sup> Dalton, *The Fateful Years*, 149.

<sup>23</sup> Speech made as Minister of Health to the Annual Dinner of the Design and Industries Association, reproduced in the *DIA Quarterly Journal* (Dec. 1929), 4-6. For more on Greenwood's association with reconstruction see Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London, 1975).

<sup>24</sup> Peter Clarke, *The Cripps Version: The Life of Sir Stafford Cripps, 1889-1952* (London, 2002); Ben Pimlott, *Hugh Dalton* (London, 1985); Donoghue and Jones, *Herbert Morrison*.

<sup>25</sup> On his attitude to Utility, see for example Dalton, *The Fateful Years* 406, or Alix Meynell, *Public Servant, Private Woman: An Autobiography* (London, 1988), 211-12.

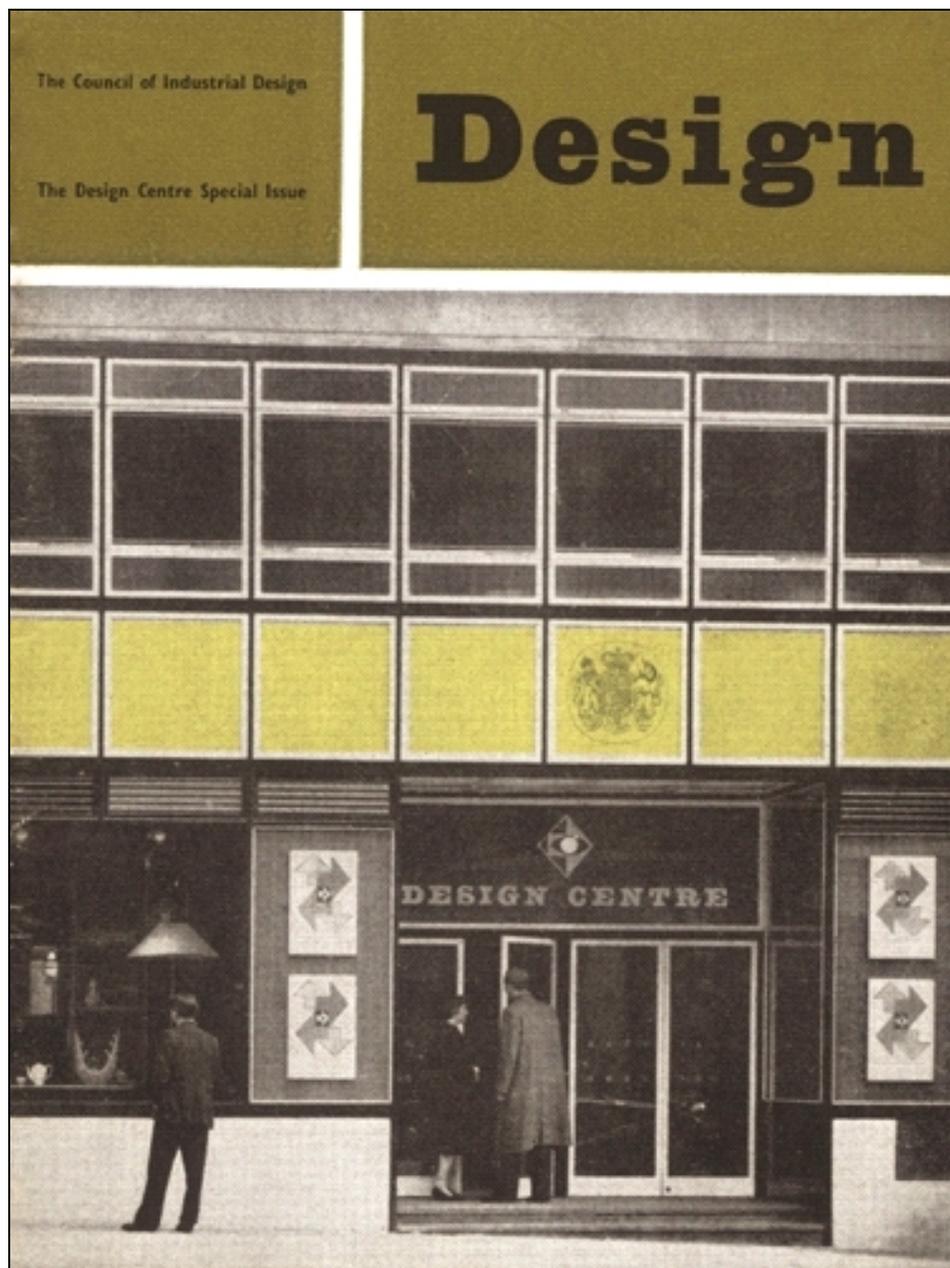


FIGURE 2

Front cover of the Council of Industrial Design's journal *Design*, showing the recently opened Design Centre in Haymarket, London, 1956.

Source: © Design Council Archive, Design Archives, University of Brighton.

### Civil Servants, Permanent and Otherwise

G. L. Watkinson, known as “Wattie” to his friends and colleagues, was a leading civil servant in the Board of Trade, credited with the propagation of a raft of primary initiatives that enabled the effective functioning of the country in wartime.<sup>26</sup> One colleague described him as “a remarkable and courageous innovator who knew exactly when not to consult his superiors.”<sup>27</sup> Another said that he was “the most imaginative, inventive, and inspiring boss [she] ever worked for.”<sup>28</sup> The second of these went further, suggesting that perhaps “his real métier would have been as a politician,” but certainly during that period when distinctions between civil servants and politicians were so much less important than the task at hand, he was “the right man for the job.”<sup>29</sup> Long before Hugh Dalton came to the Board of Trade in February 1942, Watkinson had demonstrated his capacity for creativity and independent action. He established an Import Licensing department as war was being declared, without the benefit of prior consultation with the Treasury, the Cabinet Office, or the relevant Permanent Secretary: an extraordinary bravura performance, and certainly not the last of its kind.<sup>30</sup> Four months later, he started another department, this time concerned with the Limitation of Supplies, and in March 1941 Control of Factory and Storage Premises (CF and S) followed.

At each of these, Watkinson’s protégé, Alix Kilroy, a pioneering female civil servant, assisted him. Later Dame Alix, she was immensely capable and entrusted with the orchestration of many of her mentor’s visionary ideas. In association with Limitation of Supplies, Watkinson put out a call to university academics to work as clerks during the summer vacation, and Kilroy recommended her lover Francis Meynell, who wondered if he might be accepted as a “pseudo don.”<sup>31</sup> A number of facts recommended him to his new boss: the evident sincerity of his desire to be useful, Kilroy’s warm testimonial, and the market research experience he had gained as director of the creative department of a large advertising agency that was already doing work for the Ministry of Food. Meynell was also a poet, an exacting typographer, sometime Communist, and founder of the Nonesuch Press. His translation to civil servant represented exactly the transfusion of commercial expertise that so characterized the wartime administration’s rejuvenation. Meynell’s role monitoring the nationwide effects of restrictions in supplies was later formalized as Board of Trade Advisor on

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<sup>26</sup> Margaret Gowing acknowledges him as such in her contribution to the official *History of the Second World War, United Kingdom Civil Series*. Eric Lyde Hargreaves and Margaret Gowing, *Civil Industry and Trade* (London, 1952).

<sup>27</sup> Francis Meynell, *My Lives* (London, 1971), 261.

<sup>28</sup> Alix Meynell, *Public Servant, Private Woman*, 193.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 192-93; Francis Meynell, *My Lives*, 261.

<sup>31</sup> Francis Meynell, *My Lives*, 260.

Consumer Needs. At C.F. and S., Kilroy's new boss was Sir Cecil Weir, Controller-General of Factory and Storage Premises.

Perplexingly, in 1943 the names of Meynell, Kilroy, and Weir are linked together again in association with Industrial Design and Art in Industry, a subcommittee of the Post-War Export Trade Committee, notionally appointed by the head of the Department of Overseas Trade, Harcourt Johnstone. Johnstone seems an unlikely inspiration for such an initiative. "Rather a ridiculous person with not quite enough brains or energy," was how Hugh Dalton regarded him, and later on, "a damned fool," and, "not a satisfactory or loyal colleague."<sup>32</sup> If design were pivotal to Dalton, he would hardly have entrusted it to Johnstone, and similarly, if design were important to Johnstone, this would tend to have dampened its appeal for Dalton. Rather, the personnel involved, and the vision expressed are all the hallmarks of Watkinson's influence. In the 1930s, Watkinson had performed the role of Secretary to the Council for Art and Industry (CAI), a more limited prewar conception of a kind of CoID, sponsored by the government. He was therefore concerned with the production of a raft of CAI reports such as *The Education of the Consumer* and *The Working-Class Home: Its Furnishing and Equipment*, alongside others on training and industrial themes.<sup>33</sup>

In any case, in June 1943, before the "Weir Committee" had reported, a further inter-departmental committee was established to examine matters "of common interest in the field of industrial art and report on what now should be done as part of the post-war push," on behalf of the presidents of the Board of Trade and the Board of Education. This, the Meynell-Hoskin report delivered in January 1944, Michael Farr acknowledges as the true progenitor of the Council, a document that augmented the findings of the Weir Report of September 1943.<sup>34</sup> The autobiographies of Francis and Alix Meynell (née Kilroy), rich in so many respects, are elusive on this point.<sup>35</sup> The explanation for the fact that they do not reference the Meynell or Weir Reports as such may be that both reports were unpublished and therefore confidential. Alix Meynell describes bringing the modest "but still important" plan for a new Council of Industrial Design to fruition through the simple expedient of setting up "a small committee to finalize our plans . . . which met in my room on the eighth

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<sup>32</sup> Pimlott, *Second World War Diary*, 464, 813, and 839. Johnstone was a Liberal, appointed to lead this Board of Trade satellite ministry by Winston Churchill when he became Prime Minister. Dalton was accountable for Johnstone's actions but lacked formal control over them.

<sup>33</sup> Council for Art and Industry, *The Education of the Consumer* (London, 1935), and, *The Working-Class Home: Its Furnishing and Equipment* (London, 1937). This Council was suspended at the outbreak of war, never to be reconstituted.

<sup>34</sup> Farr, *Design in British Industry*, 208.

<sup>35</sup> They married in 1946.

floor of the ICI building overlooking the Thames.”<sup>36</sup> This further committee, the precise timing of which is unclear, was presumably a “fine-tuning” exercise. The single individual whose membership extended across all three prefatory committees was Francis Meynell.

The timing of events is of interest. Energetic and diligent though Watkinson had been in his work at the Board of Trade, it was his assistance in the difficult matter of coal that brought him to the new President’s attention. Dalton writes that he “spotted him . . . for encouragement and promotion” soon after taking over the department.<sup>37</sup> In July 1942 Dalton was giving serious thought to “rearrangements near the top” and wanted “two live wires” in place beneath the Permanent Secretary to deal with home and external problems. Watkinson was to be the “live wire” in charge of home, and in September Dalton found him “very keen and good at his new job.”<sup>38</sup> In January 1943, Kilroy was put in charge of a new Reconstruction Department, formed in advance of Lord Woolton’s Ministry of Reconstruction, which began work in November of that year. She interpreted her position as a sure sign of “Wattie’s” hand in it, and of his determination to play a prominent part. In October 1942, he had already commissioned a research report from Political and Economic Planning into Household Appliances Produced by the Light Engineering Industries, which in its final version was suffused with design considerations and criteria.<sup>39</sup>

In 1943, the Weir Committee was established, followed by the Meynell-Hoskin Committee. Weir reported on September 23 of that year, and by October Weir himself had been lost, eagerly traded by Dalton for Douglas Jay from the Ministry of Supply.<sup>40</sup> Whereas Watkinson possessed the happy knack of making “all his staff, including cleaners and messengers, feel that they were valued individuals, all necessary to the smooth working of the department,” Dalton had a pronounced tendency in the opposite direction.<sup>41</sup> Watkinson and Kilroy’s interactions with him were challenging for, mistrusting civil servants, he deployed a range of tactics to undermine confidence and unsettle working relationships. The President careered between admiring Watkinson’s “ingenious suggestions” and implying that the whole team should be extremely grateful to have the benefit of Jay’s really “first class brain.”<sup>42</sup> After a particularly upsetting

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<sup>36</sup> Alix Meynell, *Public Servant, Private Woman*, 218.

<sup>37</sup> Dalton, *The Fateful Years*, 438.

<sup>38</sup> Pimlott, *Second World War Diary*, 468-69 and 487.

<sup>39</sup> For more on Political and Economic Planning see John Pinder, ed., *Fifty Years of Political and Economic Planning: Looking Forward, 1931-1981* (London, 1981). A version of the report was later published. PEP (Political & Economic Planning), *The Market for Household Appliances* (London, 1945).

<sup>40</sup> Pimlott, *Second World War Diary*, 651.

<sup>41</sup> Francis Meynell, *My Lives*, 261.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 641 and 651-52.

breach of civil service protocol, Kilroy challenged his behavior and felt she noted an improvement in their dealings thereafter.<sup>43</sup>

It is difficult to imagine, however, that she would enter enthusiastically into a series of dining engagements with him. Nevertheless, this is what happened throughout 1944. On March 2, July 28, and September 21, Dalton's diaries record lunches or dinners with Kilroy and Meynell, sometimes with others, but sometimes not, as on the middle occasion when he hoped "finally [to be] briefed on Design."<sup>44</sup> The most persuasive interpretation of these meetings is as proof of Meynell and Kilroy's shared commitment to the proposition of a Design Council, and of a momentum-inducing and concerted final push for action. It is interesting to note Dalton's apparent status throughout as a recipient of things, rather than a donor: hospitality, information, a planned introduction, and a book of Meynell's poems. This last may have bemused him, but he recorded enjoyment of these occasions, and Meynell thought him "charming," "in his private and social life."<sup>45</sup>

Where Dalton more typically repelled people, Watkinson drew them together, building secure bases and networks from which to effect change. Where interactions between Watkinson and Dalton were marked by ambiguity and inconsistency, those of Watkinson with Meynell and with many others were of quite a different order. Watkinson attended Meynell's seventieth birthday celebrations, and Meynell wrote Watkinson's obituary for *The Times*.<sup>46</sup> A further illustration of this phenomenon is that the eventual Council of Industrial Design's first chairman was Sir Thomas Barlow, almost certainly at Dalton's behest (see Figure 3). Dalton described him as "one of the most outspoken, decisive and humorous of my advisors," someone whose advice was "nearly always right."<sup>47</sup> Though he thought of him as "my Director-General of Civilian Clothing," Barlow had actually been in place since 1941. Brother to a high-ranking civil servant in the distant Treasury, Tommy Barlow was a close personal friend of Meynell and almost certainly his recommendation to Watkinson once "Wattie," in typically timely fashion, was looking for someone to head up his carefully crafted response to clothing restrictions.<sup>48</sup>

We can make one further comparison between Watkinson and Dalton. Watkinson was a true innovator, a man who had ideas, whereas Dalton's reputation was as a recipient of ideas, someone who "gathers them

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<sup>43</sup> Alix Meynell, *Public Servant, Private Woman*, 211-12.

<sup>44</sup> Pimlott, *Second World War Diary*, 718, 774, and 793.

<sup>45</sup> Francis Meynell, *My Lives*, 273.

<sup>46</sup> Watkinson died 23 March 1974.

<sup>47</sup> Dalton, *The Fateful Years*, 410.

<sup>48</sup> Gordon Russell recalled that it was Barlow who first spoke with him about the possibility of setting up the Council at a meeting early in 1944; Russell, *Designer's Trade*, 225.

actively.”<sup>49</sup> Not content with facilitating at work, Watkinson also joined with Meynell and Kilroy in their evening discussion group called “Say It Now: Do It Now” begun at the war’s low point in early 1942. Characteristically the group also included among its number Dalton’s protégé Hugh Gaitskell and Raymond Streat, another businessman–civil servant, chairman of the Manchester Cotton Board and secretary of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce while Barlow was its chairman. It was Streat who originated the idea for the Cotton Board’s Colour, Design, and Style Centre opened in 1940, which was the model for the dedicated, industry-specific design centers promoted by the Council of Industrial Design after its creation in December 1944.



FIGURE 3

Hugh Dalton with Thomas Barlow

Source: © London News Agency.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> These words are taken from an appreciation of Dalton in *Labour*, Nov. 1936, which is reproduced in Dalton, *The Fateful Years*, 110.

<sup>50</sup> The London News Agency is a defunct agency; having pursued all possible lines of enquiry via other major image libraries as protocols require (Getty, Mary Evans, Press Association, and so on), I have followed the practice of the National Portrait Gallery, London, and the Imperial War Museum, London, in utilizing the image for web reproduction with full acknowledgement of its originator.

## Conclusion

On the evening after the announcement in Parliament of the appointment of the Council of Industrial Design, Hugh Dalton went out to dinner with Francis Meynell.<sup>51</sup> Alix Kilroy reflected with satisfaction that the four who had finalized plans for the Council in her office overlooking the Thames were each to be members of its advisory body, and Tommy Barlow, greatly liked by each of them, became its first chairman.<sup>52</sup> For neither Kilroy nor Meynell was the Council's creation their proudest achievement. Both led rich and fulfilling professional lives, the accounts of which bear comparatively few traces of these events. However, for the Council, the involvement of Kilroy and Meynell in support of Watkinson's endlessly innovative response to wartime privation and postwar planning, was crucial. The consummate civil servant, the politician *manqué*, and the eccentric interloper proved a most effective combination. Without their personal investment in the proposition of a Council, and the efforts each expended in keeping the issue before the president's eyes, it seems unlikely that such a bold plan would have been embarked upon even before the declaration of peace. Afterward, with the loss of businesses' revivifying influence on the wartime state, the moment may not have come at all.

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<sup>51</sup> 19 Dec. 1944; Pimlott, *Second World War Diary*, 820. The other guest was Ernest Pooley, later to become chairman of the fledgling Arts Council.

<sup>52</sup> Besides Meynell, these were Kenneth Clark, Josiah Wedgwood, and Gordon Russell; see Alix Meynell, *Public Servant, Private Woman*, 218.