

A Case for Inquiry

The photograph published in *The Times* of yesterday was itself an eloquent explanation of the anxiety aroused by the proposal to erect an electric power station whose buildings would cut into the famous view of Durham Cathedral and Castle perched on their bluff in a loop of the river—a group of rare architectural beauty. This is one of the sites on which the buildings seem to grow out of their foundations, so that rock and structure form a unity, the Norman builders having been inspired by their opportunity to add loftiness to the strength which is usually the outstanding feature of their work. As a lesson in the significance of the Norman conquest the group is without parallel in England. The splendidly defensible site invited the erection of a castle ; the Normans planned a cathedral to accompany it. Nor must it be forgotten that it is only five years since a great enterprise of underpinning and restoration saved the castle from tumbling into the river and made it a secure home for university students for centuries to come.

This country is not a museum but the seat of a great industrial population, and the needs of economic development must be met. Yet there is commonly no reason why they should not be intelligently adjusted to aesthetic requirements, as they were not, for example, when the Faraday building was raised quite unnecessarily to a height which caused it to truncate the view from the west of the dome of St. Paul's. As the Master of TRINITY contends in his letter this morning, there may well be a test case here for the power of planning to reconcile utility with amenity. In the moderately worded statement published in *The Times* on Wednesday the managing director of the North-Eastern Electric Supply Company observed that a power station can be a piece of notable architecture—a sound enough contention, as Battersea shows. But his further observation that no other site was available strengthens the case for inquiry. On the evidence so far offered there is no clear reason: for selecting a

site in the Durham City area. If so, there is a clear reason for erecting it somewhere else. Now that the grid permits the distribution of electric power all over the country, it also permits the erection of generating stations in the immediate neighbourhood of the mines from which they draw their coal so that unnecessary transport costs may be avoided. A public inquiry by the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, an appeal for which has already been lodged, will allow the relevant arguments on both sides to be advanced and considered. A conclusive case for it has been established.