

PORTSMOUTH SOCIETY EIGHTH ANNUAL DESIGN AWARDS 1990

Every year the Portsmouth Society, the amenity society for the city of Portsmouth, gives an award for the Best New Building and the Best Restoration or Renovation completed in the year ending the previous December. We look for buildings that add something distinctive to their surroundings, are well designed and enjoyed by the people who use them. This year ten buildings were nominated in the New Building category and five as Best Restorations.

The Civic Trust, the Portsmouth Society's parent body, has for many years given Civic Trust Awards nationally. The results for shire counties are to be announced shortly.

New Buildings

THE ARCADE HOTEL, WINSTON CHURCHILL AVENUE

This 'budget' hotel, built to a standard French design and method of construction, represents the extension to the UK of a French chain of hotels. The Portsmouth hotel is the first to be completed. The curved pre-cast concrete panels forming the outer walls were imported from France but the rest of the materials are from British sources. The architects were Fowler Design and Build of Bournemouth and the builders Taylor Woodrow Construction.

Undoubtedly this hotel fulfils a need for a budget place to stay combining cheapness with a certain standard that includes an en-suite bathroom for every room. However we were very critical of the public spaces which we felt gave no joy and were somewhat dispiriting. There seemed to be a missed opportunity which had nothing to do with keeping down cost, more with lack of inspiration. The bathrooms, squeezed into the curves of the concrete panels, were tiny although they did have the advantage of daylight. We did not like the bunk beds suspended above the others nor the roughcast walls of the bedroom corridors. The staff facilities seemed very good and the needs of babies and the disabled were well catered for.

HMS TEMERAIRE, BURNABY ROAD

This, the Royal Navy's lavish new sports complex, is, we were told, the envy of the other services - understandably so. The architect was Mr D.Vanoli of the Property Services Agency, Croydon office; and the builders were Higgs & Hill of New Maiden.

It is built in white concrete blocks, a good choice of material in the context of the site which faces Landport Gate. However its design bears little relation to the Victorian gymnasium alongside, which is connected to it and which, after being converted into squash courts, was the winner of our 1987 Best Restoration Award. The swimming pool is superb, a really lovely, beautifully proportioned space; but the two gymnasia were not as good as the old Pitt Street one. The offices in the building were particularly pleasing and welcoming. We liked too the features of the boundary walls which recall the style of the old Pitt Street Baths which this building replaces. The only complaint we heard was of the shortage of accommodation for spectators in the gymnasia where all sorts of indoor games and matches are played. This is apparently due to the fact that this is a 1974 design only recently carried out. We seriously considered this building for the award and warmly commend it.

THE CASCADES CENTRE

This covered shopping mall in the city centre is liked by traders, particularly because of the security it offers, and is said to have increased trade in the city. The architects were Tripe & Wakeham and the builders Taylor Woodrow Construction. We felt it was let down by the interior design. The ceilings were restless and fussy and all the fittings looked confused and the signing was poor. Internally it was hard, cold and very noisy; but beautifully clean - not a

single blob of chewing gum on the paving. The main entrance from Commercial Road is undistinguished and confused in design; but the Kingswell Path entrance further to the south has a much more friendly aspect, almost reminding one of a Brighton 'Lane'. The open glass lifts are attractive but the water feature which certainly does not cascade is rather pathetic and very noisy. (This is being remedied, we understand). We could have done with something like the Emmet clock in Nottingham.

As a whole we thought the centre compares unfavourably with similar centres in other cities and we positively disliked the forbidding Colditz-like frontage to Unicorn Road. The adjoining much-maligned Tricorn, though dirty and crumbling, is essentially a much more interesting building and if it can be refurbished and linked in with the Cascades, as the Council were originally promised by the Cascades developers, then the combination of the two could be something Portsmouth could be proud of.

THE BRIDGE CENTRE, FRATTON ROAD

As a Society we cannot help regretting still the decision of the Co-op to demolish the splendid classical department store of 1947 which this centre replaces. We still think that all that this centre now contains could have been put with advantage in the old building or behind it. The architects were M. W. T. of Southampton (Mr Andrew Cooper) and the builders Geoffrey Osborne of Chichester.

The scale and variety of the Fratton Road elevation is in keeping with that side of the street, though the architecture is undistinguished, and it is much lower than the old four-storey building, thereby destroying the city-scale which was once a feature of this part of the street. In contrast with the Cascades the entrance is well marked. Inside there is an agreeable human scale and friendly atmosphere. This is very much a neighbourhood rather than a city shopping centre. There is a good mix of shops including the only Saturday afternoon-opening post office in the city. (Could not the Cascades match this?). The rear view of the centre consisting as it does of a huge corrugated aluminium box with no attempt at architecture is something of an affront, we thought, to the residents who have to look at it across a sea of ill-concealed parked cars.

GREENWICH COURT. KING STREET, SOUTHSEA

This is a development of 37 sheltered flats for ex-navy men and naval wives by CESSAC (Church of England Soldiers* Sailors' and Airmen's Clubs) in association with Greenwich Hospital who own the building. The builders were Henry Jones Construction Ltd Havant.

The building is fitted very well into a tight corner site which it certainly enhances with its attractive railings and landscaping. The extra funds made available by the Hospital's ownership showed in the superior quality - in finish, materials and space - of this building over the other Council and Housing Association sheltered housing schemes we have seen. The architecture was appropriate for the type though not outstanding. It appeared to us that the clients knew exactly what they wanted and the architects, James Harper of Portsmouth, were able to give it to them. The residents were more than contented with their lot; they were enthusiastic. A very happy balance seems to have been achieved between privacy and communal life. This was certainly one of the runners up for the award.

OYSTER QUAY, PORT SOLENT

This a horseshoe-shaped block of about 160 'luxury' flats designed by HGP Marintech Ltd and built by John Laing Construction. The style is deliberately different from the rest of Port Solent. We did not like the rear elevation as seen from the motorway slip road with the large brown areas surrounding the staircases. The green glass staircases themselves were very pleasant inside; and we did like the exciting sloping front to the marina with each flat set back a foot or two from the one below and with very generous full-width balconies. The

flats themselves are very well designed - the best in Portsmouth - and each contains interesting spaces. In some, but certainly not all, the kitchens were criticised as too small. The only criticism from residents was of smell and noise from the extractor systems of the Boardwalk restaurants; but it is hoped this can be remedied.

THE BOARDWALK, PORT SOLENT

This is an L-shaped two-storey arrangement of shops, restaurants (Italian, Mexican, Chinese as well as English) and offices fronting the south-east corner of the boat basin at Port Solent, designed by Mr Philip Parkinson of HGP Marintech and built by Sir Robert McAlpine & Sons. It has crisp black-and-white details in a modern interpretation of traditional timber-framing.

There are double walkways, a covered boarded one immediately in front of the shops - hence the name, and a lower level promenade at the water's edge. The whole design is well thought out using a variety of materials which complement the other buildings. Because there is overall architectural control, the individual shop signs are contained in a prescribed frame, achieving harmony without loss of individuality - another feature that would have improved the Cascades.

With the other buildings at Port Solent this one definitely helps to raise the local level of quality and we judged The Boardwalk to be the Best New Building of the year.

THE MERMAID, PORT SOLENT

This pub and restaurant stands at one end of the Boardwalk and was designed with it, also by Mr Parkinson, as one cohesive composition. It contains an exciting conical central space going right up through three floors. The interior decoration and fitting out (which cost more than the building itself) is by John Rogers Associates. The pub is lined in beautiful wood and is full of seafaring artefacts - boats, sails, ropes and every kind of brassware. It might be described as "over the top"; but we thought it very good fun. The one architectural detail we criticised - the fussy arrangement of balconies and stairways overlooking the verandah - turned out to be the work of the interior designers rather than the architect. Another criticism with which the licensee agreed, was of the unopenable wooden shutters which prevent customers in the restaurant from enjoying the fine view down the marina.

Port Solent

Last year we gave our Best New Building award to a trio of buildings at Port Solent. This year we have seen three more. The whole development is undoubtedly setting a high standard which we should like to see emulated elsewhere in the city. Mr Hedley Greentree, the senior director of HGP Marintech, is getting inquiries for the development of this kind of marina village, which was his idea in the first place, from as far away as Czechoslovakia and Japan.

ARTHUR DANN COURT, COSHAM

This a large block of Council-owned sheltered flats designed by Andrew Drysdale of the City Architect's Department with Noreen Moore (Interior Designer) and Hazel Hine (Landscape Architect). The entrance has a daunting appearance with a very large expanse of dark glass. This was in marked contrast with the welcoming entrance both to Greenwich Court, which we saw this year, and to Ian Gibson Court, a similar council-owned block which we gave our award to last year. Inside, the building is very spacious - almost too much so. There were triangular areas that seemed just to have been left over, though they could be used for residents' getting together. The colours which we found so exciting a feature at Ian Gibson Court last year were here, by comparison, insipid. We did not like the general arrangement of the flats. Those we saw had combined living rooms and kitchens, often

irregularly shaped. We thought separate kitchens would have been better, The residents - and the friendly warden - obviously liked the building but we, able to make these two comparisons, thought it not as good as last year's entry.

What redeemed it in our view was the excellent landscaping with the central pond and carefully detailed railing, the greenhouse that the residents can work in and small individual gardens available for those residents who want them.

All this was so good that one of our judges, Mr Andrew Pottinger of the architectural firm Cecil Denny Highton, said that we ought to have an annual award also for Best Landscaping and there and then he generously offered to finance it. So Arthur Dann Court receives the Portsmouth Society's first Best Landscaping Award.

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTERDAY SAINTS (MORMON), KINGSTON CRESCENT This large building has the status of a cathedral in relation to the other smaller Mormon churches in the area. Immediately behind the worship area and separated from it by folding doors is an equally large sports hall marked out for every sort of indoor game. When there is an exceptionally large congregation, the two spaces can be thrown into one. The architect, Mr Ian Kilshaw of Brewer, Smith & Brewer of Portsmouth, had done a good job considering the constraints imposed by his clients' standard and rather severe brief. Daylight is admitted to the front of the church only indirectly and no stained glass was allowed or any sort of art. The severity of the front elevation has been cleverly mitigated by integrating the design with the new office block next door. The builders were Ernest Ireland Construction.

Restorations

24 LANDPORT TERRACE - LEONARD GOLD

This was a careful restoration of the facade, a two storey arcade ~ with laying of nice paving in front - of this listed building (accountants' offices) in an early nineteenth century terrace. They have added exterior lighting which brings the details of the facade to life at night.

Explaining why they had gone to the trouble of putting the facade back exactly, Mr Christopher Evans, one of the partners said to us; "Any professional business has to project some sort of image" - an attitude we applaud. We hope this careful restoration will encourage other firms to take similar care of their historic premises.

THE ROBERTS CENTRE. 84 CRASSWELL STREET

This is the Portsmouth Housing Trust's day centre for the homeless - mainly for those in bed-and-breakfast who get turned on to the streets at 10 o'clock - created in a run down corset factory building off Crasswell Street. The architect, Tim Sage, from Portsmouth Housing Association's in-house team, clearly understood the needs and has made excellent use of this difficult building, producing nice bright spaces with good use of colour. The money necessary to complete the outside play area and link it with the adjoining public open space has run out. We would very much like to see this work completed and we look forward to the extension of the centre into the empty pub next door.

This centre clearly provides well and imaginatively for a real need and we have given it our Best Restoration Award for 1990.

KING ALFRED LIBRARY, ROYAL NAVAL MUSEUM This is the conversion of the first floor of the eighteenth century No.11 Storehouse of the Portsmouth Naval Base to house a library for the Royal Naval Museum - principally for scholarly use. This had been admirably done by Mr Fred Holding of the City Architect's Department with great respect for the old

fabric. Iron fire-escape stairs have been designed in keeping with the new fencing around the heritage area. The builders were T.Coleborn & Son of Portsmouth.

CRANESWATER MIDDLE SCHOOL, ALBERT ROAD, SOUTHSEA - restoration of cupola
This exact restoration of the cupola on the roof of this 1890s Board school - one of the few that are Listed Historic Buildings - was carried out by Mr Johnny Walker of the City Maintenance Department under the direction of Mr Dennis Berridge of the City Architect's Department. He said how much he had enjoyed doing it. The original cupola had become decayed and it might have been decided simply to remove it. We were delighted that the County Council decided on renewal. It was heartening to find how enthusiastic the head teacher and the caretaker were also. We hope that this may be the start of further restorative work internally and externally, for example to reinstate the main entrance, blocked by a fuel store.

35 VICTORIA ROAD NORTH. SOUTHSEA

This was a conversion of a large Victorian corner house from twelve bedsits into six flats. It was nominated because the hearts and hexagons decorating the outside were a humorous addition to the street scene. The developer and owner, Mr Thornhill, had reluctantly rendered over the facing brickwork because of its deterioration. He told us that his ambition was to build a folly - these whimsical decorations were the next best thing.

The judging team consisted of the Portsmouth Society's chairman, Mrs Celia dark, and treasurer Mrs Jean Thompson, Mr Andrew Pottinger of the architects Cecil Denny Highton of Old Portsmouth, and Mr Hugh Howard, chairman of the Fareham Society and formerly of the Portsmouth Management Centre,

The unveiling of commemorative ceramic plaques for the three winners: Best New Building - The Boardwalk, Port Solent; Best Restoration - The Roberts -- • Centre, Crasswell Street; and Best Landscaping - Arthur Dann Court, Cosham, was carried out by the Lord Mayor of Portsmouth on the afternoon of Wednesday 10 October.

R.J.