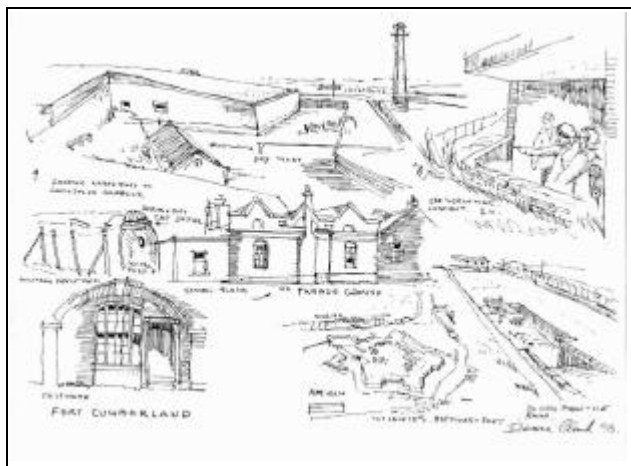


Portsmouth Society News

The Newsletter of the Portsmouth Society APRIL 1995



Fort Cumberland - Future in Trust?

site.

On January 14th a tour of the Fort was conducted by Malcolm Hill and attended by just about everybody who knows anything about Fort Cumberland. At a meeting following the visit it was resolved to set up a Fort Cumberland Trust. Unfortunately a subsequent meeting arranged for 13th February was cancelled and since that time there has been no further progress. It is a pity that a promising start has faltered at such an early stage. Let's hope it is just a temporary halt.

The Portsmouth Society has been concerned for many years at the deteriorating state of Fort Cumberland, situated on the eastern tip of the Eastney Peninsular. English Heritage, the current custodians, are keen to give it up and are seeking alternative uses for the large

THE TRICORN - PART OF OUR HERITAGE

The impending sale of the Tricorn by Taylor Woodrow to Ashurst Properties has sparked off a real threat to the building which has suffered for many years from verbal attacks: ugliest building on the South Coast; a pile elephant's droppings (Prince Charles). Nobody would deny that the building is shabby, that much of the concrete is stained and some of it crumbling: but it is not structurally unsound. It is a building people love to hate; but it is in fact not as unpopular as it is made out. I found that a group of the Town's Women's Guild, which I addressed recently (about the work of the Portsmouth Society) were not at all hostile to it, quite the contrary, and at our March monthly meeting I was praised for having 'gone public' in its favour. My personal opinion which I voiced in *The News* and on local TV has been backed up by the Executive Committee and we have now applied to have it listed.

The Tricorn has a most distinctive silhouette, visible as you approach the centre of the city and unlike so many modern buildings it is designed to fit its triangular site, which it does very tightly. Also it is unique, a familiar part of the city's townscape, and has become almost a symbol of Portsmouth. You know you are here when you see it. We feel that it is a landmark building of its time and is an important part of recent heritage.

This is what David Lloyd, the architectural historian, well known to members of the Society, wrote about the Tricorn in 1974 in his book *Buildings of Portsmouth and Its Environs*:

"At the north end of the shopping centre is one of the most interesting pieces of recent development in the city, the Tricorn Centre, designed by Owen Luder and completed in 1960. It is a complex structure, including provision for shops, offices, multi-storey car parking, a wholesale market and a number of flats. In form it is a romantic piece of 'concrete sculpture' on a huge scale, conceived at a time when visibly daring construction in concrete, exploiting unusual shapes, was very fashionable. The shape of the Tricorn as seen from the road to the north-west suggests allusions both to an Arabic city and to an oil refinery, expressed in the medium of concrete. The effects of the horizontal 'trays' of

car parking space separated by dark space are dramatically exploited as are, still more, the concrete driveways up the round towers at the angles. The main building is massively chunky in form, and the irregular skyline is punctuated by round topped turrets.... At ground level there are intimate courtyards of shops with connections to the narrow Charlotte Street with its open air market."

I have spoken to Owen Luder, who is president-elect of the Royal Institute of British Architects, and he tells me that he built something like it at Gateshead in the 1960s but the silhouette was not as spectacular and it did not have the curves in the concrete that are such features of the Tricorn. So far as he knows the nearest thing that anybody else built was in Ipswich; but that has now been demolished.

The Tricorn is certainly unsatisfactory as it is; but Mr Peter Galloway, a Havant Architect, has done some designs for converting it to provide leisure, restaurant and residential use, so that this part of the city centre can remain alive in the evening after the shops have closed. This is surely what we very much need. Just having a hundred or so people living there would make a huge difference and add to that a multi-screen cinema, a bowling alley and some restaurants what a transformation that would bring to our dead night-time city.

The potential new owner plans to demolish it and replace it with a series of "retail warehouses" of which Portsmouth, like everywhere else, has more than enough already. More importantly such a low scale and low density use is entirely inappropriate for an important inner city site and we understand that the planning department think so too.

We have therefore written to the Department of National Heritage asking that it be listed. We know that the Department is at the moment considering the listing of forty other post war buildings including two retail buildings in London. As a multi-purpose building the Tricorn should be even more eligible.

Tricorn Challenge! - see page 8

REES HALL - A VICTORY FOR PASTICHE

The university have now obtained planning permission to demolish Rees Hall (The former Royal Pier Hotel) and replace it with a replica, a pastiche, of roughly the same overall dimensions, but with greatly increased capacity - to accommodate 270 students as compared with the present 100. This will be achieved by inserting an additional floor without raising the roof line.

The existing building stands in a key position, prominent from the sea on the approach to Portsmouth Harbour, also an island landmark marking the end of the Terraces which once faced the ramparts of the fortress town of Portsmouth, as well as being a 'bookend' to Southsea Terrace and effectively marking the end of Southsea before the distinct gap separating it from Old Portsmouth.

In May 1994 the Portsmouth Society and the University of Portsmouth held a public seminar on the University's estate policy. One of our aims in holding the seminar was to get then the university authorities to declare publicly what were their intentions for Rees Hall which we knew was in a sorry state. We suspected a policy of demolition by neglect. But active demolition, which must have been planned at that point, was not mentioned by either the then Vice Chancellor, the then Pro-Vice-Chancellor (now the Acting Vice Chancellor) nor the chairman of the Governors, all of whom spoke. Their Master Plan was discussed but it did not include the redevelopment of the Rees Hall site.

The university makes a major contribution to the city's economic and cultural life which we welcome. Our concern is with the environmental quality, with the contribution of high standards of

architectural design to the well-being and appearance of Portsmouth. We look forward to the completion of the university's new buildings in Portsea and on the White Swan car park and we have commended the design of the Trust Building, one of the new student hostels on the QEQM site. For Rees Hall we would have welcomed either thorough refurbishment, with some demolition of the clutter of buildings at the rear, or demolition with replacement with a first class new building of our time - either as a result of a design competition or of invitation to the County Architect's department who have a nation-wide reputation for the quality of their new public buildings.

Because of the importance of the site and the complexity of the issues involved we asked the Secretary of State to call in the application; after consideration, he declined to do so. We wanted a public inquiry so that the whole matter - for example the possibility of building on other university-owned sites - could be publicly debated. This is not possible in the planning committee who have to consider the application as it stands and not the possibility of alternatives. The university resented our doing this but we in turn resent their lack of frankness at the May 1994 seminar.

The replica building will now go ahead. When we first formed the society in 1974 this was just the sort of change we were most keen to prevent. Until recently the planning committee had the advice of the City Architect. Now there is no City Architect and the committee receive no professional architectural advice in reaching their decisions - and it shows! *CCIRJ*

St Mary's Church Fair

The Society will be mounting a stand at the annual May Fair at St Mary's Church on Monday 8th May (VE Day) from 10 until 4.30. Come along and support us and, if you have time, help man the stand! This is always a very enjoyable occasion with the church and grounds given over to stalls and displays by local people and organisations. The best view of Portsmouth can be seen from the tower and a quiet glass of real ale enjoyed in the CAMRA tent!

Memorial Tree for Muriel Davenport

A good sized Holme Oak was successfully planted in memorial of Muriel Davenport just inside the Canoe Lake fence opposite the end of Granada Road on 21st February in the presence of several members of the Society including David Davenport.

Muriel was a member of the for many years and her cheerful support at the society's meetings and events is sadly missed.

UNVEILING OF THE 1994 DESIGN AWARD

In the afternoon of January 11th we started with the winner of the Best Restoration, Milldam House, an important building in the history of Portsmouth. It was an expensive project that possibly saved the building from collapse and netted the inspired change of use, now the Registry Office. Milldam House provides a fine setting for the important events in our lives, the enhanced staircase will not be wasted on brides descending from the first floor wedding room.

The Registrar and her staff heaped praise and appreciation on their new surroundings, newly furnished and neat as apple pie within a handsome Georgian building and landscaped approach. Our plaque is sited in the entrance porch. Builders and Council officials were present and thought, we felt that the City had gained a great asset, although yet to be seen by many it will quickly feature in the Portsmouth Heritage scene.

The second ceremony took us to Victoria Park, the temporary location of the Best Landscaping Award. Brian Kidd of the City Parks Department accepted the award on behalf of his Staff and his plant contractors whom he modestly praised for making possible the Flowering of Portsmouth in our historic year of celebrations, 1994. Flowers bloomed where they had never bloomed before on streets and squares and were so well tended they bloomed still in December. Residents also; Brian cajoled, encouraged and guided into making a contribution with his own Awards scheme for the most spectacular show. He has promised the same again for 1995 - what a joy! Council Officers, Parks Staff and representatives of Contractors supplying plants attended and we had a tour of the greenhouses. Celia Clark spoke on behalf of the Society.

Lastly to Copnor junior and Infant Schools, Copnor Road, for our Best New Building Award and our best ever attended ceremony for a building which may receive higher acclaim we felt. Linking two separate Victorian schools a fine and very modern building now provides backing facilities of hall, gymnasium, sick rooms and offices bringing the two older buildings onto the new they flow together. The older buildings

have been imaginatively repainted and refurbished, a modern spiral staircase to a mezzanine library floor in the Junior School was especially pleasing as was the Infant school central hall, with library shelves, comfy cushions and lantern roof with sun pouring in through and into the classrooms off.

Our reception here was exceptional, we were shown around by the Head Mistress, and her staff then gathered all the children into the playground to watch the unveiling of our plaque on the new building in front of their visitors - from the County Council, Councillors, Governors, Architect and Builders. A pin dropped at the Lord Mayor's suggestion of a 'count down' then some pretty convincing cheers as the plaque was revealed. The speeches reflected the long and hard struggle to achieve such excellent changes made along the way and the fight for the £1.5 million needed. The architects were praised for the vision of the new building - but the most touching of all was the unmitigating appreciation of an attractive Victorian school with the added best of the late 20th Century. Celia Clark was given flowers and Roger James a silver photo frame in appreciation for their long term involvement with the scheme.

All this was followed by an excellent tea in the new hall and a chance to talk to the participants. A pity that the report in The News did not reflect the true spirit of the day in text or pictures. Fortunately the school made up for that by their pleasure in being singled out by our panel of judges, a chance to celebrate and interact for those responsible; and for us to say 'thank you'.

MEMBERSHIP REMINDER!

Please remember to renew your membership to the Society as soon as possible as subscriptions became due on 1st April. There is a form provided to assist you with your renewal at the back of this newsletter.

ST JAMES HOSPITAL SITE - 475 Houses and Flats

Regular readers of the Society's News may recall that a campaign to recognise the unique nature of the St. James Hospital site and its value to the City of Portsmouth began in 1988 when the Wessex Regional Health Authority's plans to reduce occupancy at the hospital from around 400 patients to 80 were first published.

At that time the Society was a prominent objector at the Public Inquiry into the development of the Warren Avenue playing fields, owned by the Health Authority, on the northern border of the St. James site, for housing with the consequent loss of open space, mature trees and attendant traffic problems for the area.

The Inspector found for the Authority, outline planning permission was granted but land values fell with the housing market and the site remains undeveloped and its permission expired. A smaller area adjacent to the playing fields at the hospital's rear exit received planning permission and has been developed by Crest Homes with the wilful loss of a charming avenue of mature cherry trees but the funding for traffic lights at the end of Moorings Way as a 'planning gain'.

Despite planning permission to a build bungalow-style complex in the south eastern corner of the hospital site to serve behaviourally disturbed and brain damaged patients, the Health Authority failed to proceed. The Planning Committee on 22nd February 1995 received a fresh application for this unit in the form of 3 health care buildings providing secure accommodation for patients and a 14 bed home at the hospital main gate area, effectively blocking the view of the cricket pitch open space.

At the same time the Health Authority published its Draft Master Plan for the site which received very strong opposition at a Milton Neighbourhood Forum meeting on 1st February, where the Health Authority's architect was bombarded with

protests at the high level of new housing which had been introduced into the remainder of the site - 475 homes in houses and flats. Scepticism was expressed at the developers' ability to protect the trees on the site and the Council's ability to prevent traffic chaos throughout the area between Moorings Way and Locksway Road as the cars of up to 900 new residents and 1000 extra students planned for the QEQM site at Furze Lane, spilled out into Milton Road each day.

Consequently a number of deputations spoke at the 22nd February Planning Committee Meeting whose members expressed concern at the fragmented approach to determining the future of this site. The Society's Executive Committee added its objections, not to the provision of facilities for patients, but to the further housing development of the site, the encroachment into an area on the City Plan as public open space and the apparent loss of the former school building north of the Chapel as well as expressing concern at the threat to the trees which have not yet been the subject of tree preservation orders.

The City Planning Officer's recommendation that an informal presentation be made on the proposed Master Plan showing preservation of existing trees on the site, how the City Plan open space criteria could be maintained and how the level of proposed development would not give rise to unacceptable levels of traffic on the adjoining highway, was welcomed by the Committee.

It is anticipated that the Health Authority's plans for the site will return to the Committee before long. Your Society has commended these further requirements being placed on the Health Authority and emphasises the retention of the public open space in its entirety in accordance with the City Plan. We shall be monitoring the revised Master Plan as it emerges and shall continue to express the views of the Society on the future on what has been a tranquil haven for so long.

Albert Road Annexe, Cosham

Early this year a member alerted us to the possibility that Albert Road School in Cosham, used for adult education by Highbury College, was under threat of demolition. We have had an exchange of letters both with the Principal of the College and with the Premises Manager. It transpires that they are planning to pull it down and replace it with a new building, because they have been advised that the costs of repair will be prohibitive. We are still trying to persuade them to take advice from historic buildings experts.

Over the years we have had a lot of experience in trying to save historic buildings; and we usually find that the advice of ordinary architects is at variance with those whose job it is to save buildings and restore them. One of the problems with Albert Road School is the considerable internal height. This is something that the County Architect's Department have met in Victorian schools throughout the county; and in many cases they have turned it to advantage by installing a new floor in the roof space, thus reducing the excessive heating costs and providing extra accommodation at a reasonable cost. We have followed the advice of both the city's Historic Buildings Architect, Terry Wren, and the county's Historic Buildings Bureau, headed by Deane Clark, is free. So even if they were to come up with impossibly high figures for repair and restoration the college will have not lost anything. In the school grounds there is a second world war air raid shelter of a type now rare - almost listable in its own right!

Southern Comfort '95

The day-long meeting, known as Southern Comfort, of civic societies from all over the south of England will be hosted this year by the Portsmouth Society at the Central Library on Saturday 21st October 1995. All members of the society will be welcome to attend and especially anyone who can help with its organisation either beforehand or on the day. A sub-committee will be formed to organise this event. If you can assist in any way, please contact the Secretary.

Millenium Project

The ambitious project to celebrate the millenium has been published in The News but not yet endorsed by the City Council. The tower at Gunwharf has been designed by Hedley Green-tree and Sir Michael Hopkins (of Lords mound stand fame) was an adviser. Paul Spooner, Marketing Manager has assured us that there will be a chance for the public and us to have our say. We have urged that our proposal for a footbridge to be designed by Santiago Calatrava at Portsbridge should be considered. Portsbridge is very much in need of enhancement; the Portsmouth Harbour entrance is already dramatic. Does it need anything else?

DIARY

All meetings are held in room F on the 3rd floor of the Portsmouth Central Library, Guildhall Square starting at 7.30pm, unless otherwise stated.

Wednesday 5th April

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING with guest speakers David Goodman and Anthony Perry on

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHICHESTER SOCIETY

Wednesday 3rd May

BUILDINGS OF THE ISLE OF WIGHT

David Lloyd, Architectural Historian.

Wednesday 7th June

Speaker to be announced

Wednesday 4th October

THE PORTSMOUTH ROAD,

Matthew Alexander, Curator of Guildford Museum.

Wednesday 1st November

Speaker to be announced

Wednesday 6th December

Speaker to be announced

Local Government Review

The decision we have been waiting for - on whether Portsmouth is to be granted unitary status - has at last been announced.

Portsmouth is to cut free from Hampshire and run its own ship. We remain to be convinced that our particular interests: town planning, architecture, open spaces and civic design will be at a high standard. We will no longer be able to play one authority off against the other - as we have done

The tower block at the QEQM site of the University is set to be demolished. Known locally as the Leaning Tower of Portsmouth, we have asked the authorities to record it before it goes.

MEMBERSHIP

Please send this form with your cheque made payable to **The Portsmouth Society** to:-

Jean Thompson, Hon Treasurer,

The Portsmouth Society, 4 Malvern Road,
Southsea, Hampshire, PO5 2NA.

Please enroll me/us as:-

ORDINARY MEMBER	£4.00
JOINT MEMBERSHIP	£6.00
STUDENT	£3.00
SENIOR CITIZEN	£3.00
JUNIOR	£3.00
CORPORATE	£25.00

I/We enclose subscription of £ _____

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

More Power to the Lists

In changes announced recently by the Department of National Heritage and of the Environment local councils are to be given new powers to control the key architectural features such as doors and windows in buildings in conservation areas. Changes are not necessarily ruled out, but councils will now be able to influence the way they are done. We are pleased to hear this. The laws on conservation areas often seem to have few teeth to prevent the erosion of historic features. Government approval will not be required but local residents will have to be consulted.

However there is also a proposal that owners of buildings being considered for listing should be informed in advance. We are writing to the Secretary of State for National Heritage urging him not to make that change. Early in the life of the society we had a bitter experience with regard to an 18th century waterworks cottage in Havant Road, Farlington.

We had heard that the cottage was to be sold and that the new owner wanted to build new houses on the site. We applied for spot-listing. When we heard that our request had been granted we delightedly told The News which carried a headline about our victory. Early next morning the bulldozers moved in and smashed the cottage to a tangled mess of timber and rubble. The official notice of listing had not yet reached the owner who got away with a fine of £2,000 - a drop in the ocean of the profit he made on the site where two ugly houses now stand.

THE PORTSMOUTH SOCIETY

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