

# Portsmouth Society News

The Newsletter of the Portsmouth Society - December 1995

## Design Awards 1995

This year's entries for the Portsmouth Society's Design Awards produced a wealth of clever reuses of old buildings. There were three that were so excellent that the judges decided to give them all Best Restoration Awards. Each presented a different challenge to the designer.

### Restorations

No.7 Boathouse in the Dockyard Heritage Area was restored and converted by the Naval Base Property Trust from a workshop for the repair of HMS Victory into a popular restaurant, dockyard museum and shop, in a few short weeks in 1994 to be ready for the 50th Anniversary of D-Day. The architect was Terry Wren of the City's Design Service and the contractors were Warings. The restoration boldly included a strikingly modern all-glass front wall incorporating the entrance and a shop window.

Southsea Police Station, once the Passenger Transport Offices, in Highland Road, had been empty for several years when the County Council had the inspiration to convert it to new public use.

The architect, Colin Swift of the County Architect's Department, met the challenge and actually improved the building, restoring the tiled staircase and board rooms and inserting the 'high tech' police communications and security requirements without impairing the integrity of this basically fine building. The staff, most of whom used to work in the ugly cramped station in Albert Road, were over the moon with the improvement in their working conditions.

The challenge of what to do with the huge empty Eastney Barracks barrack rooms has been magnificently met by local firm Gudgeons of Fareham. They had been advised by the worldly wise not to waste their money in Portsmouth. Nobody would buy flats there. In fact they could have sold many times over the apartments in Gunners Row, the main barrack block, which has been imaginatively converted to the design of Paul Evans of the Hedley Greentree Partnership and completed by the current owners, Redrow Homes.

### New Buildings

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## Shocked Sir Norman shown the door

"Oh my God," said Sir Norman Foster, when Building Design showed him this striking Portland Stone addition to his 1971 IBM building in Cosham, Hampshire. The alterations were commissioned by new occupant the Inland Revenue and carried out by Woking practice Maurice Fielding & Associates as part of a total refurbishment of the building, which was originally conceived as a temporary structure.

"We decided that rather than trying to copy Sir Norman Foster's tinted glazing, we would go for something very solid," said project architect Paul Roberts.



The Twentieth Century Society was also horrified. Consultant director Ken Powell said: "I think one has to say that demolition of a building like this would be more merciful. This is the equivalent of sticking a mirrored glazed extension onto a Georgian building, which would not be allowed. It indicates the total contempt in which our modern heritage is held." English Heritage historic buildings inspector Diane Kay called the original "a very fine building of its time".

## Design Awards 1995 (Continued from page 1)

The judges: Wendy Potts, Head of the Portsmouth University School of Architecture; Peter Fallor, Professor of Architecture at Stuttgart University; and Celia Clark and Betty Owen of the Society, had no hesitation in choosing the new Solent Infant School, partially sunk into the slopes of Portsdown Hill at Farlington, as the Best New Building of 1995. The Headteacher, Sylvia Hunter, and her deputy had visited many new Hampshire schools and drawn up a shopping list of what they wanted. Kate Macintosh of the County Architect's Department turned this into an exhilarating design. The west end of the school in red brick echoes the fort on the hill above. The classrooms have wide south-facing open air balconies for outdoor work. The wedge-shaped hall is a beautiful flexible space which raises the spirit, and the staff room is a cosy hide-away.

The judges also highly commended two other new buildings: the Ticketing Office in the Dockyard Heritage Area, which all visitors pass through, and which, though constructed in steel and glass, has been designed by John Winter to echo in subtle ways features of the old boathouses nearby; and the sparkling, very well

detailed, 'Blueprint' terrace of industrial units on the Hilsea gasworks site, designed by Thorpes, an Arundel firm of architects. The team were delighted to find that all the four occupants were engaged in manufacturing. The turnover of the firm they visited had gone up by leaps and bounds in the few years they had been there.

It was decided because of a lack of suitable entries not to make an award for Best Landscaping this year; but the judges did commend again the City Parks Department's splendid floral enhancement of the city, culminating in the blaze of colour in The Dell on Southsea sea front.. Next year they intend to judge in more detail than was possible this year the ongoing

### Dairy Dates

Meetings are held at 7.30 pm on the first Wednesday of the month in Room F, 3rd Floor of the Norrish Library, Guildhall Square.

#### Wednesday 6 December

*Christmas Meeting - please bring some food; wine will be provided.*

David Lloyd, distinguished architectural historian and co-author of the Hampshire volume of Pevsner's Buildings of England, on

#### **The Buildings of the Isle of Wight.**

#### Wednesday 1 February

#### **Review of the Society's Design Awards**

Best New Building, Best Restoration and Best Landscaping of 1995 presented by the four judges

#### Wednesday 6 March

Fraser Smith, Project Manager of Hampshire LRT, on

#### **Light Rapid Transit**

#### Wednesday 3 April

#### **Annual General Meeting and Member's Open Forum**

an opportunity for discussion on any topic of interest to society members.

#### Wednesday 1 May

#### **Portsmouth's Shopping Policy**

Speakers to be confirmed.

### The Tricorn

To our delight the Planning Committee responded to our well-argued case and threw out Ashcroft's application on the grounds of its poor quality. We are seeking a meeting with Taylor Woodrow, the owners, to explore the way ahead. The Department of National Heritage refused to list the Tricorn; but they did say that there should be a

## Chairman's Editorial What are civic or amenity societies for?

The Lord Mayor said at the opening of the School of Architecture students' exhibition Urban University on 13 November: "The city councillors don't always agree with you, but we respect your views. We value your place in the city."

### So what is our place in the city?

The planning system has had a place for public participation in development plans since the Skeffington Report's recommendation was introduced in the Town and Country Planning Act 1968. Planning authorities are required to give consideration to the expressed views of third parties on planning matters. So objecting to or supporting planning applications is one of two democratic rights we have, along with the right to vote in national and local elections.

The model constitution from the Civic Trust which civic societies use has two main clauses: that the society should work towards the highest standards of architecture and planning in their area of benefit, and that education - in its widest sense - is an important part of the process. Our monthly lectures and our comments on planning applications are part of that process.

Michael Carden of the Winchester Preservation Trust described members of local amenity societies as expert lay people who try to ensure reasoned argument about the future of the local environment. We are autonomous and not afraid to challenge council policy where we see it having a damaging effect. Our aim is to make a positive contribution to our local communities. As pressure groups we do not claim undue influence, but we have a right to be listened to.

For planners to be hostile to amenity or civic societies is the wrong way to respond to us. Confrontation is a waste of energy, while negotiation is a productive process. In whose name does the planning department do its work if not in the name of all local citizens? As citizens we have the right to interfere in the professionals' realm. We often do so from considerable and professional knowledge and experience of conservation and of the locality which sometimes goes back further than those of the councillors or officers. But we are not councillors. They have responsibility for taking decisions on our behalf. Our input does not diminish the role of democracy, it enhances it.

The welcome development of neighbourhood forums in Portsmouth is doing a great deal to lift the curtain of indifference described by Lord Kennet, Minister of Housing and Local Government in the 1960s. The General Improvement Areas showed how responsive local government could be: spending decisions were taken in close collaboration between residents, officers and councillors. People learn how to participate, and they continue to do so if it is a positive experience - that their views make a difference to the outcome. Apathy is the result of the failure to communicate by public bodies who have no listening or collaborative skills.

## The Good, the Bad and the Ugly - Improving the Standard of architecture in New Buildings

Southern Comfort Meeting - 21st October

This year the Portsmouth Society was host to the civic societies of central southern England. More than 120 people, some from as far as Reading and Weymouth, some our own members, with architects, student architects and planners, gathered in the Menuhin Room of the Norrish Library at the ungodly hour of 9.30 on a Saturday morning (keen!).

As Celia Clark said from the chair at the

beginning, the talks had been designed to be controversial, to raise questions on how architects can be persuaded to design new buildings of quality, planners to accept them, and all of us to ask: what is quality in architecture?

**Michael Manser**, past president of the RIBA, architect of Eastleigh airport, 'scourge of planners', made us see architecture as a record of cultural change, every building a one-off, built for a specific

context, whether a shaded Palladian villa in Italy or, of the same period, the windowed Hardwick Hall; for a limited life - John Nash thought his houses would be replaced, so urged investment in the park; the new set next to the old without hesitation, as St Paul's, the first large dome in northern Europe. was the Canary Wharf of its time. The new was reviled as now: Blenheim was called 'execrable, within, without and all around', the Nash terraces 'violent transgressions of true taste', Buckingham Palace 'deficient in Grandeur', the Eiffel Tower 'of colossal vulgarity' and Charles Barry 'ought to be hanged' for perpetrating the Houses of Parliament. The shock of the new has been with us throughout the centuries, but in the past it was permitted; there was no notion of fitting into period or size, and some of the best streets, as for example St James's in London, show buildings from 1530 to the present. Heritage has been made by building the new. The problem today is that proposals for the new are censored by the planners.

**Bill Fergie**, Director of Development for Basingstoke, once an architect, had now been thirty years in planning, and could say that eighty per cent of planning applications had not been near an architect. Some bad buildings indeed were local authority built, on local authority land, where they could have demanded better, but firms of architects had designed them. Volume builders also had firm views on what the public would buy: dull buildings with 'colonial' porches, or barn-derivatives. Highway design once dictated the domestic environment, but now was much more flexible. Planning authorities should get tougher aesthetically and demand better



house design. Committees of architects trying to reach consensus were not the answer; three architects, three opinions. For public buildings the local authority is often the landowner, so a major patron, appointing the architect, as in the AA tower in Basingstoke and the Anvil theatre there. But the public has lost confidence in modern architecture. What then is the authority's role?

**Paul Finch**, editor of the Architects' Journal, though not an architect himself, often defends architects. Three architects, three opinions; that was a good thing. There was a place for ordinary buildings, not all could be unusual; but a wide range of choice was important, whereas the planning system made for uniformity. Architecture marked everybody's biography; and he showed his own through the buildings he had lived in, been to school in and worked in. Architecture made the future environment varied and interesting: the Barclays Bank 'Wulfitzer' building, Minster House the 'post modern Gothic' building in the City, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao with titanium panels, all had character and aroused discussion. Buildings lasted if they were useful, or could be adapted, like the old Charing Cross Hospital where he was born. Battersea power station on the other hand had lost its purpose and should be demolished. Architects needed a free hand. Planning committees and civic societies should not control them, the client's budget was restraint enough.

Authorities talked in terms of area for housing density.



Volume was a much more important measure. Some of the most expensive residential areas had very high densities in terms of people per acre. Referring to the Menuhin Room in which the symposium took place he said: "Think of this room, which as it is a pleasant space to be in, if its ceiling were ten foot lower". Some buildings should be decent quiet prose; others could be startling; often the startling new could be added to the traditional, as in the Sackler gallery in the Royal Academy. Modern architects were allowed to add new work, as there, at the back! Relationships to natural elements like the sea or a river were important as part of architecture. The accidental also was very important; there need be no notion of 'fitting in' - everything fits. It was important, he said, not to lose the sense of optimism and faith in the future. Architects are just as good now as in the past.

**Kenneth Powell**, once architectural correspondent of the Daily Telegraph and now consultant director of the Twentieth Century Society

asked: What makes a good building? What is good design? As members of the public, most of us see buildings in a context in which they speak of power, as they have through time, castles, churches, the railway station, the bank. A 'free hand' can mean the arrogant destruction of dockland in favour of Canary Wharf; on the other hand planning can produce an illiterate classicism. Planners should encourage and allow for architectural genius. France, once the most centralised country in the world, has decentralised. Local authorities, and particularly mayors have real authority, act as patrons of fine architecture - often by British architects who don't get the chance to build here. He gave the example of Nimes where Sir Norman Foster had built a spectacular modern building facing the Roman Maison Carree. In Britain we have gone the other way. Local authorities have been stripped of powers by the Government turning off money and resources. This is morally and politically wrong. Where public money is spent with firm taste, as in the Louvre and its modern addition, or in provincial towns where the mayor has real authority, as in Nimes, the results are spectacular and enormously enhance the reputation of the place.

## Heritage Open Days

We arranged for four places, not normally open to the public, to be opened up for this year's Heritage Open Days on 16th and 17th September, organised on a nation-wide scale by our parent body the Civic Trust.

We arranged for the empty top floor of the tower office block, Baltic House, to be open throughout the Saturday and Sunday. To our amazement 1,089 people came on the two days and took away 150 of our leaflets. The attraction of the place is that you see not only the whole city and across to the Isle of Wight, Chichester cathedral spire and Fawley, but

you look down on the fascinating endless comings and goings of the Ferry Port.

Almost as many - 1,010, 491 on Saturday and 519 on Sunday - turned up at Tredgolds in Portsea, the Victorian

ironmongers, preserved and restored by the County Council. The very popular Wardroom at HMS Nelson drew 220 people in the 2 hours of Saturday afternoon and Commander Wills, the Commanding Officer there, was very pleased. He is willing to repeat the process next year. The Society is very grateful to him.

Finally, 67 turned up for the tour of Hillsea Lines by Peter Cobb, most did the 1 hour tour but 22 stayed on for a 3 hour tour. The Musicians Union



*Above: Visitors look out over Portsmouth from the top floor of*



*Right: Deane Clark sketches the view to the south.*

# Letter to the Chairman

*From Pam Bollam, Secretary of the Weymouth Civic Society on the subject of the*

## **SOUTHERN COMFORT MEETING, 21st OCTOBER 1995.**

Dear Mrs Clark,

Weymouth Civic Society was represented at the above meeting by John Reeby, one of our Committee members. He has reported back to me that the meeting was most successful and well organised, and wishes me to pass on our congratulations to all those responsible in making it such a worthwhile event. We shall be making a bid to host the 1997 Southern Comfort meeting here in Weymouth.

However, during the open forum, he and other members were horrified by the comments of a Portsmouth planning officer who attacked the role of Civic Societies in the planning process and implied that they merely obstructed him in the processing of planning applications.

This is contrary to our experience in Weymouth, where we enjoy a most constructive relationship with our local planners and other officers. They accept that our expertise makes a valuable contribution to their deliberations. We have a plans sub-committee which meets monthly to coincide with the Borough Council's Committees and our views are included in appropriate Committee reports. Co-operation such as this does, we know, take place elsewhere. It would be unfortunate if the opinion expressed at the Conference was allowed to go unchallenged.

## Naval-gazing

*Reproduced from The Architects' Journal, 26th October 1995.*

To Portsmouth on Trafalgar Day - the occasion a day conference organised by the Portsmouth Society and featuring, among others, Michael Manser and AJ editor Paul Finch. The debate (on improving the quality of new buildings) was lively, with Sir Colin Stansfield Smith among the speakers from the floor, but the high point of Astagal's day was the afternoon tour of the Portsmouth dockyard - in a vintage open-top double-decker.

Under the expert guidance of a retired shipwright (*Brian Patterson*) the tour took in not only the 'historic' dockyard with the magnificent Victory and Warrior (as well as the remains of the Mary Rose, described, not altogether inaccurately, as 'the world's biggest piece of driftwood') but also the large operation area still occupied by the Royal Navy.

'The dockyard has expanded as the Navy has shrunk,' we were told. But the Navy was present in strength, the ships towering over the buildings. The latter range in date from the 1760s to the present day, via some excellent nineteenth and twentieth century structures, products of what used to be called 'the functional tradition'. The functional spirit seems to live on in John Winter's new visitor centre, but what is the message behind the newish Victory House, a large naval headquarters building run up, in an illiterate sub-classical style, by McAlpines to the specification of an admiral?

## Public involvement in the Millenium Project

Letter to Councillor Leo Madden, Leader of the Council  
Dear Leo,

At the symposium on public art on 28 October and Paul Spooner's talk about the Project to the Portsmouth Society on November 1st, the people who attended asked what opportunities there would be for creative public involvement in the design and conservation aspects of the Project.

Our point in writing to you now is on the question of how to ensure that this £40 million of public money is spent on really splendid, nationally acclaimed designs of buildings and landscaping and conservation. In July we were asked by Paul Spooner to nominate a design panel to offer top quality advice on the draft design briefs, because advice at that stage is far more useful than commenting on finished designs. Although there seemed to be some urgency about it then, the panel still hasn't met. It should now perhaps be extended to include some nationally and regionally known figures.

Several councillors - and officers - seem to be worried that the Millenium project is like a runaway horse, which is no longer under the control of the city. Our question is - where is the democratic input here? Who is in control of it, and how will the Portsmouth representatives on the consortium be able to represent local opinion.

There are fears of the tower being the highest Macdonalds in the world. Can you publicly announce when there will be the first meeting of the design panel and a calendar of the stages to give opportunities for the public to comment as the project develops?

Yours sincerely

# Hampshire County Structure Plan

The Society has objected to several aspects of the County Structure Plan (Review). This is an abstract of our detailed objection which concerns transport and sprawl:

The plan proposes a number of Major Development Areas to accommodate 44,000 new homes in the county by 2011. We have objected on the grounds of transport and sprawl to one of these areas - to the west of Waterlooville where - 3,000 houses are proposed, and have suggested two other areas where development might well take place. It seems to us dangerous to plan a development area on the basis of an extension to the projected LRT system when the initial LRT route itself (Fareham-Gosport-Portsmouth) is still problematic. Waterlooville has no railway and the new development to the west of the town will be far from the motorway. As far as we know there is no immediate prospect of funding the enormous cost of LRT, in particular of the tunnel under Portsmouth Harbour.

If we must have a major expansion in south east Hampshire, we would press for locating it in the area between the M27 and Whiteley. An infrastructure of roads has already been laid out there with a few commercial buildings. This seems to us a much better area for major expansion - for a mixture of the projected housing need with the employment that is already starting to be provided there. It is near the M27 and between the Fareham-Eastleigh and Fareham-Southampton railways lines.

We support the proposal, which has been made but apparently rejected, to site a development area at Micheldever, south of Basingstoke. This seems to us an ideal site. It is very well situated for transport - astride the M3, the A303 and the main Waterloo-Southampton railway line. It would be free of the element of sprawl that applies to all the other proposals. It would be a genuine new town.

The plan for West Waterlooville goes against what are stated in the Plan itself to be guiding principles and with which we agree: "Emphasis is given to locating new development where there are opportunities to reduce dependency on the private car", "to look to existing corridors and networks as a basis to guide development patterns especially for housing, business, industry and leisure" and "to

make the best use of the existing transportation infrastructure for all modes of travel".

It does seem to us that the whole plan for South East Hampshire is completely and most undesirably dependent on the LRT, most of which is only to be commenced during the Plan period. About LRT we, in the Portsmouth Society, have a sense of déjà vu. The very first public meeting we held after our formation in 1973 was concerned with public transport and the Assistant County Surveyor of the time told us that LRT was the way ahead. In 22 years nothing has happened, partly in our opinion because the wrong routes have been chosen. The county's own Transportation Study of the 1980s predicted that, yes, an adequate number of people would be persuaded to use the Fareham-Gosport-Portsmouth LRT but they would come largely from users of existing public transport rather than from car-commuters.

We have proposed that the first phase of LRT should be Portsmouth-Waterlooville, currently the second phase in the Plan, as this is the much used car route for which there is no parallel rail route. While LRT from Fareham to Gosport has a lot to be said for it we cannot believe that the cost of the tunnel from Gosport to Portsmouth can be justified. Furthermore it would undermine the use of the ferry route which needs only modernising.

We favour for the Portsmouth Harbour area a reliance on existing rail routes and buses - road buses, segregated buses and water buses. If LRT fails to materialise the new development area will be forced back on the car with all the problems to the surrounding areas that that brings.

In the whole section of the Plan devoted to transport there is no mention of water transport either for passengers or goods in this area which is permeated and dominated by water and owes its historic development to water. Rather than bypassing the Gosport-Portsmouth ferry in an impossibly expensive tunnel we think we should be developing water services from Fareham and from Paulsgrove, not only to Portsmouth Harbour station but to the Continental Ferry Port or Albert Johnson Quay, by conventional boat, hovercraft or hydrofoil. Even services across Langstone Harbour might be possible by hovercraft. There is well-established water transport organised by the MoD. Dockyard workers from the Gosport peninsula park their cars in Royal Clarence Yard and are daily ferried across the water to Portsmouth dockyard; and there is a service from Haslar also. Water transport has the

## Book Review: Local Attraction - The Design of New Housing in the Countryside - CPRE 1995

Since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, planners have been trying to make sense of "sustainable development" - the principle of "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

It is not difficult to understand such a concept in terms of conserving natural resources - fossil fuels, water, forests and the land - but it is less obvious in terms of building design. As it is now Government policy to make sustainable development the central plank of its planning policies, it is vital that the principle is understood.

If we are to leave anything of value to future generations, it is essential to maintain a sense of local distinctiveness and evolving traditions in the rural environment [and urban too? CC]. This is as important a resource as clean water or farmland.

The quality of new developments is often central to the public's willingness to accept change. Qualitative judgements should be as important as hard science and statistics in helping us move towards development which is more environmentally sustainable.

... Achieving sustainable development depends on successfully managing together existing traditions and new thinking. We need to build to last. We need energy and materials - efficient new housing which fits in with local building styles. Careful choice of materials can help ensure that new building reflects local tradition and can reduce the need for wasteful long distance transport.

... Where old buildings have to be demolished rather than refurbished, salvaged materials should be reused locally.

### Albert Road School, Cosham

The Department of National Heritage refused to list Albert Road School. We have offered to help the Neighbourhood Forum to work out a scheme for its reuse.

### Membership

To join or renew your 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 enrol me/us as:-

ORDINARY MEMBER	£4.00
JOINT MEMBERS	£7.00
STUDENT	£3.00
SENIOR CITIZEN	£3.00
SENIOR COUPLE	£5.00
JUNIOR	£3.00
CORPORATE MEMBER	£ 2500

I/We enclose subscription of £ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

### Commercial Road and Arundel

#### Street trees

Despite our protests and the worries of the arboricultural officer the horrid red tarmac remains round their trunks - exasperating and stupid!

### St Jude's Church

You may have read in The News of the launch of the appeal to raise £893,000 to restore Thomas Owen's St Jude's Church. As you know, in 1993 the planners threw out a scheme to replace it, as a result of campaigns by us and the Save St Jude's Society. We are now being asked to contribute to the £360,000 first phase to repair the tower and clock. The Save St Jude's Society is arranging to see the vicar to explore ways in which we can all work

#### THE PORTSMOUTH SOCIETY

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