

PORSTMOUTH SOCIETY DESIGN AWARDS 1997

REPORT

The judges were Robin Partington of the Sir Norman Foster architectural partnership; Kate Macintosh OBE, formerly of the County Architect's Department; and Celia dark and John Holland of the Society.

The Winners

The Best New Building award of 1997 is being given to the Portland Building, Portsea, which contains the Schools of Architecture and Land and Construction Management of the University Faculty of the Environment.

It was designed by Hampshire County Architects led by Sir Colin Stansfield Smith CBE, Professor of Design in the University and formerly County Architect. He fought for an element which was not in the brief, the forum, a full height internal glass roofed court, which provides access to all rooms and staircases. It is intended as a demonstration building for architectural students, to include the culture of timber. The architect wanted to counteract the view that English architecture was just a matter of steel and glass.

As well as for teaching, the building is used continuously by the university for conferences and major events, as its lecture theatre is the biggest in the university. The brief was for a building which is essentially too small for its current usage. The number of students has since then vastly increased.

The building was placed on the perimeter of the site to create a sanctuary between it and the existing Buckingham Building. One of the many special features is that the building is designed on a natural ventilation strategy. The staircases have open risers so that air flows up to the glass towers which are a prominent external feature of the building.

There are two masonry walls of slab construction (no frame). A porters' lodge was planned; but the university couldn't afford to man it; so it was not built. The architect had designed a wing extending to the north; but that was axed half way through the design process. The bridges and covered ways which were to connect it to the Buckingham Building were also taken out. The roof top terrace space overlooking St. James's Street was a bonus.

The design is about the participation of users. The architect wanted the users to have a right to make a choice. So they need access to environmental controls, beginning with the opening of windows. The remote control is in the Estates Officer's office. There is neutral pressure level at first floor level with a manual a manual override, which resolves smoke control.

The performance of the building is being compared with a fully air-conditioned building by the Building Research Establishment which is monitoring it. Strathclyde have a computer model which was used for the design of the air movement.

In Portsea there is a problem of security. Sir Colin designed a grillage for the outdoor windows and he much regrets the substituted ugly standard screens. He demonstrated that without any aids a lecturer standing at the desk could easily make himself heard throughout the auditorium of the main lecture theatre.

Judges' comment: This is a lovely, uncompromisingly modern, yet unaggressive building, something the city can be proud of for many years. Its beautiful internal spaces and finishes and delightful outdoor space linking with the older Buckingham Building make it an outstanding contribution to the city. For the visitor the additional element, the forum, is a marvellous surprise and gives the immediate impression that this is indeed a special building.

Best Restoration

HMS Nelson - Gymnasium and Clocktower and associated buildings Building property consultants: Tony Hutchings, ex Windsor Castle, Brunei House, Portsea.

The prize for Best Restoration goes to work on the very large Gymnasium and its associated buildings in HMS Nelson, the naval barracks in Queen Street, Portsea. This is a building not easily seen by the public except for the clocktower and the upper part of the gymnasium which are visible over the rebuilt high wall on the north side of Alfred Road opposite the Roman Catholic Cathedral. Here the prize is for the enormously high standard of workmanship and attention to detail in replacing and repairing the decayed brickwork and stone to the highest standard, supervised with great enthusiasm by Mr Peter Williams, Principal Property Manager of HMS Nelson, and Mr Richard O'Shaughnessy, Establishment Works Consultant of Unicorn Consultancy Services Limited. The careful restoration work was spread over three or four years because of cost.

Clocktower: the bell was restored and now strikes on the hour. There was war damage and weathering. English Heritage insisted they kept the shrapnel marks. There is a new copper roof, and the clock face was regilded. There were no extant drawings, so photographs were used as a source. Repointing of the clock tower and main block was carried out in lime mortar.

On the gymnasium, where necessary replacement of decayed sills was carried out in Douling stone (The quarry is still open). It had become so friable it had delaminated. Roof: the gables were in terrible condition. The leadwork has been renewed over part of the building. The pitched roof was reinstated which is actually cheaper to maintain than the previous flat one. Plastic gutters and downpipes were replaced in cast iron. In the east facade the third doorway was reinstated according to photographic evidence in order to put back the balance of the design.

Judges' only criticism: appalling "prison yard" playground for young children . They should talk to Learning Through Landscapes at Winchester on how to enhance outdoor educational space.

Best Landscaping

Hilsea Lines

The Best Landscaping Award goes to the restoration and repair work on Hilsea Lines "Portsmouth's hidden jewel" done over the years by Ron Cooler, the Parks Department's Ranger, with a dedicated band of volunteers. The Lines form a linear park of woodland and water - the moat as well as Portsea Creek - and brick casemates, stretching right across the northern end of Portsea Island. The Lines are based on the ancient fortifications, totally peaceful except for the incessant roar of the motorway, and unknown to thousands of Portsmouth people. Ron has done marvellous work with teams of volunteers in repairing the damage done by motorcyclists and the great storm of 1987; in creating clearings among the densely packed trees and improving the paths and sightlines to make people feel safer and to encourage wildlife; in getting schoolchildren to grow oaks from acorns and plant them; and in constructing bridges. It is particularly his teams' work we are celebrating.

In 1996/7 work included path improvement; opening 'windows' to the moat. a new office and education room in a casemate; a field studies' centre for children was planned; improved wheel chair access; seedling oak trees planted by Northern Parade Primary School; summer play schemes; woodland regeneration and planting of Tipner Wood.

Other entries - New Buildings

St. Michael's Building. Architect: Ed Jones & Jeremy Dixon, job architect Mark Bunting. This is a very highly serviced building with very specific requirements: 45 fume cupboards and aseptic handling labs. The city planners were keen to have a landmark building not exceeding 5 storeys and stepping down to four. The imagery, explained by Ed Jones was "the head of a fish" "head of a fish". The footprint follows the site and the flat exposed face to the White Swan car park was cut off because there was a possibility of extension - the body of the fish. There is also the symbolism of white expressing the science function = cleanliness + the complex services.

St.Michael's is linked to the adjoining science building for which it provides the main entrance which is why the staircase in the lobby is raised.

The curved taut surface skin turning the corner surmounted by four funnels is the landmark suggesting the stern of a ship or scales of a fish. The large openings in the concrete frame form a regular grid on the car park facade, with references to classical architecture and to the modern movement.

There had been 13 changes of the brief because of changes in courses. There was a close relationship between Dr Jones, head of department and the designers. 'A joy to work with' -according to the architects.

Feedback from students was complimentary. The building already has nicknames the Titanic, the Steamer. The internal colours are the choice of the architects to identify where you are in the building. The red and blue staircases also have nicknames including arterial and venous (blood).

The space is designed to be flexible because what's happening now may not be happening in ten years - and change is already occurring. The labs also are white

because colour differentiation is an important process in pharmaceutical testing and it is symbolic of sterility. There is a contrast between working areas and meeting places with colleagues. The two ground floor lecture theatres hold 150 and 100. There has been positive response to the acoustics from the users. There is an induction loop. One of the most used rooms has a mock-up pharmacy, also used for seminars. The complex pipework is exposed and identified (but not colour-coded). In the adjoining lab there is a folding wall which can be open as an extension or closed for assessment. The syringe cabinets by the wall are moveable, with pipework for ceiling connections. Air handling and use of experimental gases are provided for.

Judges' comment: This is a serious piece of architecture, the result of a limited competition. It addresses real problems on a tight urban site surrounded by a pretty unfriendly environment. As a landmark building, it is head and shoulders above all the other schemes we saw, barring only the Portland Building; but the photographs in architectural magazines showed it having a greater presence on the site than it has.

It responds positively to the corner; but perhaps not enough, particularly at ground level. The facade turns its back on the main approach to the city, facing as it does the car park. The entrance is for both buildings. The lobby was felt to be a wasted opportunity. The double height entrance staircase dictated by the floor level of the adjoining building did not come off and was an anti-climax.

The fume cupboards were not expressed on the outside. The pipes ran straight up the window. The groups of vertical pipes did not relate to the window modules. The raw concrete of the staircases showed the effect of heavy use. The office corridors were very dark with rather grim MDF panels and very low ceiling height, deliberately dark and dour. The judges would have preferred something brighter.

The building seems to have been designed from the outside in. The lab design has no regard for external articulation. We realise that this may be the consequence of the many changes in the brief.

Harbour Court, offices for Blake Laphorn solicitors. North Harbour

The clients had asked for virtually a repeat of their building at Segensworth, which worked so well, with the addition of air conditioning and some other modifications. The design was also by Paul Jones. The North Harbour building was a design-and-build contract by Gatcombe House Property Development, a joint application with Tesco, built by Warings. The site is being developed as a business park by GHPD who relocated the allotments. The parent group is Heaton Holdings. GH Properties acquired the whole site. The land was acquired directly from Portsmouth City Council by Blake Laphorn. The building was specifically designed for BL's needs as a bespoke building with four raised access floors.

Mr Martin Bird who had acted for the partners showed us round. The project manager from Warings was also there. Mr Bird said Segensworth was a commercial building with more meeting rooms. Here meeting rooms for 1 to 1 or 1 to three are needed for matrimonial, property and criminal proceedings. The reception area was changed in order not to frighten the private clients. They stretched the wings by 2.3m so that in terms of £ per sq. foot, this building gives a better return with more people

in it and much more working area. But the substructure was more expensive because of the long piles and the need for a ventilated undercroft to vent methane gas. This had changed the economics. The access flooring and air conditioning proved a huge advance on the Segensworth building. The heat generated by the print room was transferred to other spaces.

Other requirements were sound-proofed spaces for dealing with private clients. Because of the interference from the Admiralty Research establishment which transmits electromagnetic pulses unacceptable to computers, they considered putting the building in a steel box, which would have been expensive. A cheaper solution was found: they put aluminium faced insulating plasterboard over the whole external envelope. This is what the Civil Aviation Authority uses in its Bursledon building.

Blake Laphorn like the outside of the building which they consider creates the right atmosphere for clients. A big box would have resulted in a completely soul-less building though it would have been efficient financially. The facades were expensive. In relation to context. The Port Solent development on the other side of the motorway also uses buff brickwork. They believed that it slotted into the existing environment, rather than standing out on its own. Blake Laphorn felt the two buildings were distinctive and the design hallmarks the building. They wouldn't change anything. They look forward to the construction of Paulsgrove Halt to make it more accessible. As in law courts small areas and lobbies are essential; but Blake Laphorn wanted to avoid small areas where staff might waste time in social interchange.

Judges' comment: Lobbies shouldn't be designed out - compare Fosters bank at Frankfurt which has gardens in the sky specifically asked for by the client, because people are at their most creative when talking to others.

A crisp building but it completely ignores the site. A different, directionally orientated plan form would have been more responsive to the proximity of the motorway. The air conditioning was necessary as a solution to the problem the clients themselves had created - the deep plan with perimeter offices.

Rees Hall, Southsea Terrace - University hall of residence.

This is a new building on a very prominent site, the effective south west corner of Southsea, where there was previously a hall of residence that had once been the Pier Hotel. The old building had been considered too expensive to repair and by rebuilding the university were able to increase the number of student rooms from about 90 to 269 and give them all en suite facilities. The judges were taken round by Mr Rutter of the architects PRC. The university wanted to reproduce the appearance of the old building as nearly as possible. The increased accommodation had been achieved by adding a new wing at the rear and fitting in an extra floor within the same overall envelope. Some of the windows in the new rear wing had had to be angled to prevent overlooking of the flats of Southsea Terrace. The ironwork on the front of the building was to be replaced. The planners insisted on 34 car parking spaces - mainly to placate the residents opposite who feared that the area would be littered with students' cars - as well as racks for 222 bicycles. The Society would have preferred either to rehabilitate the old building or to replace it with a frankly

modern building rather than a pastiche, and they had opposed the planning application on these grounds.

Judges' comments: they thought the reception area and the public rooms on the ground floor most unimpressive and not very welcoming, particularly when viewing the building as a conference hotel. The stairs leading down to the semi-basement refectory were uninviting ("servants" stairs) although the refectory itself was very pleasant. The individual students' rooms were well planned and reasonably roomy and of course those on the south side have marvellous views. The rooms were quite the best of any of the halls of residence which we have visited in the last few years, comparing particularly favourably with Harry Law House which we saw last year and criticised severely for its total lack of social and communal space. There, as in Rees Hall, there appeared to be an excess of car parking provision, considering that both buildings are in easy walking distance of most of the university facilities. However the blame for this must be laid at the door of the planners rather than the architect or client. The courtyard could be made much more civilised with some landscaping treatment.

We criticised the way in which the building on the Bellevue Terrace side seems to float off the ground because of the prominence of the underground car park. The architect had wanted to close these ground level gaps but his solution to the problem had been regarded as too expensive.

The Clarence pub. Long Curtain Road

It cost £1.86m. It has 280 seats, 50 on patio, designed to be 'in keeping' with surrounding buildings. The blue arches come from the reclad pier building. Whitbread's have a standard internal module for all their pubs. Family orientated - and for use by business people and locals. In Newhaven there is a similar pub in a sea front location. The site is exposed. There are glass panels to protect the sitting area and a sliding awning over. The architect was Whitbread's Property Development, the Drove way, Hedge End. The intention was to keep the building aesthetically bland. It has two gables, one of which is unused. One contains the manager's flat. The maroon colour scheme is the company colour. The building stops with an unfinished wall. It is intended to extend it as a Traveller Inn with bedrooms. The property department of Brewers' Fayre will give information on planners' stipulations for the site.

Judges' comments: An insult to the site. Not just bland but actively boring. Why do the picture windows face the coach and car park and not the sea? Why is it not a celebratory building but instead boringly domestic in scale? Why is it so dark inside? Why doesn't the Fun Factory for children have any windows? This could have been built anywhere - except here! What were the planners thinking of?

Portsmouth Foyer

Architect: Ken Scadden. The client: Portsmouth Housing Trust. Ken Scadden proposed the site to the university as a hostel, but they couldn't fund it, unless the university entered into an open covenant. They couldn't fit everything into the existing plan form. As in the old, the new building was subdivided into small units. 100% site coverage has been achieved with no external walls apart from the front facade. There were level changes internally. The last use was a Chinese restaurant.

In the old building there are differences from the Edwardian hostel. The large internal spaces were inaccessible. A bridge link to Trafalgar House - another hostel - was proposed. The old building had many rooms with no natural light, no ventilation, and dormitory accommodation in the mansard. The facade was kept because of its contribution to the city. Also to do so avoided VAT. A let out had to be negotiated with Customs and Excise because it broke precedents.

The idea of using the site for a Foyer was given to Portsmouth Housing Association at a presentation at Alpha House. It has 108 bedrooms from second floor on five floors: seven storeys + administrative spaces for use by young people and community groups. Foyers are a French concept, developed after the second world war to improve the mobility of labour, now related to helping more unemployed people into work, especially young people. It has been going for five or six years in the UK taken up by the housing movement. PHA had taken the first step, well resourced advice and support. The capital funding was a government grant of £3m + £1.4m Housing Association grant, + £400,000. The revenue to run the foyer comes from the association's housing revenue budget, plus the European Social Fund and SRB. The accommodation provides a rental income that almost breaks even. There is also a special needs allowance from social services. There is a deficit of £20,000 in a budget of £350,000. To maximise the revenue there had to be the maximum number of bed spaces. SRB lasts for 7 years and ESF three. There is a lottery application for 1998/9.

The brief was written by Bob Paterson of PHA as developer. There was great debate about the public spaces, and what impact the main entrance to the Foyer should have. There is very little communal social space because private space has been maximised. There is only the lounge and cafe-restaurant off it. There is a gym to come.

Construction. The facade had to be shored from the inside or it would be too disruptive. The old hostel was a steel framed building. Permanent flying shores were constructed prior to demolition, reusing the origin. Alan Bushby, an engineer in Ken Scadden's office worked on the design. There were two phases: replication of the previous facade. Occupiers include university students including one third from overseas. So that there is a social mix.

Ken Scadden said that because of the charitable status they put in far more corridors. If it had been a commercial developer he would have said no. Yet it is not a cheap building. The challenge was to open up the space to provide accommodation whereas the old building had a random arrangement of beams and volumes.

The shutters were intended to give a slatted light and ventilation as well as privacy and a reference to the French . origin of foyers.

Judges' comments: As a result of the VAT ruling the Foyer has fallen between two categories. The well detailed old facade is now out of scale with the rest. The massing is a seven story building - a two and a half storey facade plus a three storey mansard. The cost of retention must have added to the costs. The architect was

forced to work with this brief. As a result the mansard was too high and dominates the cupola on the sky-line.

Restorations

Wetherspoons, Guildhall Square.

Architects: Nicholson Architects Partners. Job architect Stephen Stenson.

The Gas Office had been empty since 1994. The £700,000 contract for the pub conversion began in Jan. 1995 and was completed in April 1995. The shopfront facing Guildhall Walk was renewed, many of the capitals and cornices in the bar had to be renewed and 40 of the brick columns are new.

A disabled hoist had to be inserted. The colour scheme is in the company colours. Floral carpet, grey and topaz tiles - [intensely disliked by one of the judges]. Kitchen very small - mostly warming up because they buy in the food - and not well ventilated. Phoney mock panelled doors. There is a 800 mm void between 2 core floors.

Judges' conclusion: We were pleased to see a key disused building in the city centre reused for a social purpose, bringing life into Guildhall Square. The very large bar which ^ can hold up to 750 people is deservedly popular, and offers an enjoyable range of spaces from noisy to quiet, smoking and non-smoking. However the enormous amount of unused space in a building in a prime position is our main criticism. Upstairs the first floor is mainly unused - there is a small toilet block (female smaller than male!) and the plant room brutally disrupts a fine room, with holes punched through cornices and ceiling. There is a whole suite of offices on the 1st and 2nd floors otherwise unused. This will lead to decay of the building, especially if the upper floor is rarely visited to check for leaks and dilapidation. There are surely a range of uses which would not be incompatible with the pub. This is not a full enough use of a city centre listed building.

Park Building 1907, University of Portsmouth

Head of Department: Dr David Cubitt

Architect: Teresa James, Whicheloe Macfarlane MDP, Anchor Business Centre, School Lane, Chandlers Ford

Project: to upgrade the building as part of the change of use from science and architecture to Humanities and Languages and introduce disabled access to the upper floors. The most significant part was the insertion of a lift inside the cantilevered staircase, the revamping of lecture theatres and the upgrading of existing fire precautions. The floor structure of the staircase is front to back.

A glass lift was considered but rejected as being too like a shopping centre. How could the cables be hidden? A solid walled lift painted white was installed. The bridges to the lift have metal railings in an attempt to match the very Tine balustrades.

Ground floor lecture Room: This was extended over the central aisle. It was turned through 90° and a projection box was added - in the next space - the library and resource centre.

There is a problem in dispute with the fire officer over the fire door to the secondary staircase which needs to be secure but operable in a fire. Kate Macintosh suggested a key in a box alongside or some other locking system. Terry Wren, city conservation architect or John Pike, conservation officer could advise.

The mosaics in the front entrance hall have been carefully cleaned and look splendid again.

Judges' comments: Projection room: the protrusion of the projection room into the resources rooms, spoiling them, could surely have been tackled in some other way. The insertion of a mezzanine in the top east wing was utilitarian and could have been much more interestingly handled especially the stair and balustrade. Nailing the trunking system to the wall was simply not good enough.

Front entrance: the neglected state of the exterior lobby, stairs and handrail detract from the enhancement inside. Ongoing maintenance is always a good long term investment.

Much more design thought was needed on the lift which completely spoilt the spatial excitement of the cantilevered staircase. A glass lift, with very careful detailing e.g. for the cabling (cf. the Sackler Gallery at the Royal Academy) or a perforated design would have been preferable. The interior of the lift in glass and walnut pattern and the side railings did nothing to enhance the building. The decision where to spend funds - on technical aids and seating - should be balanced by taking a longer term view of the buildings future as a whole.

It seemed to the judges absurd that reliance had been placed totally on an obviously not very imaginative architectural technician. What always irks us when from year to year we go round University buildings is why the University do not employ better architects. Why don't they ask advice from their own School of Architecture or the Professor of Design or, as in this case when confronted with a listed building, from the city's historic buildings architect? Good architects -especially those who are used to working in the public sector - are not necessarily more expensive.

Fuzz and Firkin, Albert Road

This is a conversion of a part Victorian and part 1950s police station. Client: Allied Domencq. Architects MacConvilles Planning Supervisors, 14 Richmond Place, Brighton BN2 SNA 01273 692611 & Portland Interior Design, Newcastle. It is one of a chain of 100 formula pubs including one planned in Denmark, some of which have integral breweries visible from the bar.

The police station had 18 different rooms. The main bar, holding 450 people, extending over most of the ground floor, is planned and decorated to a formula: dark wood, columns, beams, brass, curtains, lincrusta wallpaper. The brewery is in a corner behind a glass screen. The first floor is largely unchanged except for two flats, chill and bottle store and lifts. The exterior has been unified by the addition of castellations, false windows, additional keystones.

Judges comments: A welcoming bar with good beer and - a definite plus - the presence of the brewery, visible to the customers. Bare floorboards were welcome. They would like to have known the economics of conversion of an unloved building rather than demolishing and starting again.

Rearrangement of the layout of the brewery, particularly of the copper and washdown, would enhance viewing and function.

Fleet & Firkin, King Henry I Street

Architect as above. Interior designer ? as above.

The creation of a double height bar and balcony produced a spectacular space, with enjoyable kitsch fittings. Exterior brickwork not well repaired.

Judges' comments: We were impressed by the spectacular double height bar and liked the way this led to an upper gallery bar. We also very much welcome the reuse and rebuilding of this building which the Society have been concerned about for many years and attempted to have listed. It was not only in a derelict state. It was threatened with demolition by a scheme for redevelopment of the site.

Landscaping

St. Peters Church, Somers Road landscaping - by Simon Cramp of Hampshire County Council. An enhancement of a dull corner with some lovely details - the crown of thorns adorning a gate and other religious iconography. The change of style for the inner railings meant to signify a series of entrance zones. A pity they had not the money to replace the rest of the chain link fence.

St. Michael and All Angels, Paulsgrove by John Hawes of Portsmouth City Council. Railings and gates enclosing the church yard.

Judges' comments: a worthy scheme but the gates were under emphasised. The judges thought they should be more prominent than the fence. A good try.