

Portsmouth Society News

The Newsletter of the Portsmouth Society - Spring 2001

CONNAUGHT DRILL HALL UNDER THREAT



The Connaught Drill Hall in Stanhope Road in the City Centre (opposite the Zurich building) is under threat of demolition. A developer is proposing to build an 11 and 16 storey block of flats and study bedrooms for student accommodation. We understand the need for student residences but the Drill Hall is too precious to lose and there are many other sites for the type of development proposed. Suggestions for reusing the Hall include a site for an indoor market. What do you think?

A potted history

The Connaught Drill Hall was built in 1901 for the Territorial Army and designed by A. Bone, a local architect. He was particularly well known in the area for designing public houses, many of which survive today. The Connaught is built of red brick with castellations

along the walls. It forms a kind of facade for the commercial part of the city centre which is divided from the civic centre by the railway and station. It is mainly one single uninterrupted space with the roof supported by steel trusses. Particularly noticeable is the way in which the architect has turned the bend of the road by a series of stepped frontages.

Recent use

Largely unused since the Army declared it surplus to requirements about three years ago, the building, which is owned by the Connaught Drill Hall Trust (and not the MOD), has had intermittent use as an overflow sorting office for the Post Office.

The future

One obvious and suitable reuse would be as a covered market. Another would be as a performing

space or covered sports space for the university. The Portsmouth Society strongly believes that the building should be preserved as it is a valuable asset and forms an important boundary commercial part of the city centre.

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Gunwharf Opening

Our first thoughts are: Better than Southampton, but not as good as Bluewater. That is - architecturally speaking. The development is a tremendous achievement, a very welcome investment in Portsmouth's future. The quality of materials and finishes is high, though the design could have been much more exciting.

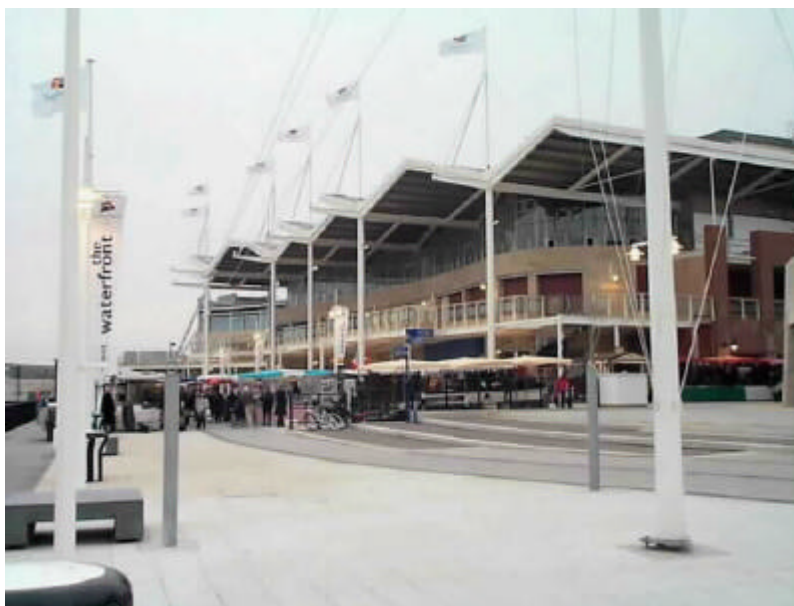
It's marvellous to be able to see the harbour, and indeed out through the harbour entrance from this angle. Since 1709 when Gunwharf was first developed on mudflats, only military and navy personnel have had access to this particular piece of harbourside, and now we can all enjoy it.

We like the generous spaces inside the shopping malls, and the new quays. It's nice to be able to walk around in the fresh air - till our hands reminded us how cold it was. The mini-cascades like weirs were fun; we look forward to seeing the landscaping finished.

But give or take the odd torpedo, cannon, capstan or figurehead, the history of the site has more or less vanished: the ward room, petty officers' mess, sick bay, gun-boat sheds, Warrior block have all been demolished. The one remaining historic building, the Vernon Building looks fine - in the late stages of being converted into a Gales pub. The old Gunwharf wall has disappeared, presumably encased somewhere in the vast car park, whose well-lit white spaces are a welcome contrast to many dingy grey underground parks.

The shops look enticing, though on our first visit we didn't spot any particular bargains, but despite what we are being told, Gunwharf does look like a direct threat to Southsea and Commercial Road shops. People are surely unlikely to visit both on the same trip.

The tower - if it is ever built - will surely spoil the wonderful new



view from the waterfront cafés and bars.

St James Village Green Inquiry

The public inquiry concerning the application by the St James Memorial Trust (supported by the Portsmouth Society) to register part of the grounds of St James Hospital as a village green was held in the Guildhall and ended on 28th February. The application

was opposed by the Secretary of State for Health who was represented by Mr Hobson QC. We were represented by John Saulet, a local solicitor with a wealth of experience in public inquiries., who generously gave his services.

The land being applied for is the square enclosed by trees to the immediate east of the main drive, being called the 'football field', together with some more ground further to the east but south of the former greenhouses, once

cultivated for vegetables and flowers. The 'cricket field', the area to the west of the main drive is already secured in the City Plan as Open Space. We, the applicants, had to prove that the area of our application has been used by the public for twenty years 'as of right' which is subtly different from with permission or with assumed permission, for such purposes as just walking, walking their dogs, flying kites, and children playing. Twelve witnesses gave evidence orally or sent in written evidence to this effect; and this evidence was not challenged. So we are confident that we have proved our case.

If the land is registered as a village green in such a quantity as to disrupt the plans of St James Hospital development, it is possible that there will be a consideration of any decision by way of judicial review. There are a number of points which have never been before the High Court before, for example the exact meanings of the words "significant number" when applied to the number of inhabitants within a locality or neighbourhood who must use the land in question and of course the meaning of the word "neighbourhood" in this context, and whether the policy of care in the community amounted to allowing the residents of a psychiatric hospital to go into the community or allowing the community to come into the hospital.

On the contrary, if it is thrown out, the St James' Trust and the Portsmouth Society may decide to appeal.

Cumberland House Natural History Museum

On February 20th there was a meeting of the full Council to debate the budget for the following year. Southsea Town Councillor Mrs Strange and I were allowed to make Deputations in

which we urged the Council to keep Cumberland House open as a Natural History Museum. There were many other matters debated, there were political changes in the control of the Chamber, but it was suggested that the Museum was given £200,000 for structural changes, and, I understand, cost of exhibits, and £60 000 for a years upkeep. Another £15 000 was suggested for publicity, but this was not passed by Council. These are subject to the decision of the Best Value panel.

There have been discussions by the Committee for Planning, Resources and Leisure, and the Panel for best Value. There is a general desire to bring the Museum up to date and in line with the National Curriculum. I have alerted the Authorities to the need for a Curator, a graduate Biologist with Museum experience to undertake this task; myself and other enthusiasts would be very willing to help in a voluntary capacity. There is a flourishing Society for the Friends of Cumberland House, organised and led by Mrs Strange.

Since that Council meeting certain non-elected officials have said that they would like to close the Museum, put much of the contents in store and put the best of the specimens in the City Museum in Museum Road. This would result in a much smaller Natural History display. The Butterfly House was purpose built by volunteers and is very attractive, it could not be moved to the City Museum.

The people of Portsmouth value this Museum in the delightful building of Cumberland House, and children love its small scale, its twists and turns, with a new exhibition or live animals at each turn. It is ideally placed, being near the Canoe Lake, the play area, the Promenade, thousands of people walk past. If only there were posters on the seaward side advertising it, if the new brown

road signs for Museums included it, the visitor numbers would soar. Already this year there has been a considerable increase in visitor numbers, and the Visitors book has pages and pages of protestations against its closure. There is an entry charge for adults, though entry to the City Museum is free.

The Councillors of the City of Portsmouth have voted to keep this museum open. The people of Portsmouth want to keep it open. How do we convince the non-elected administrators that the Museum must stay open and that a professional Biologist is necessary to revitalise this Museum and make it a flagship for Science as our great ships are for History? Let it not be said that in the 21st Century, with its dire ecological problems, Portsmouth has no use for Science! Let us not throw away our heritage; we must protect and display for future generations our fine collection of Natural History material gathered by previous generations. Let us keep it in the building that we know and love, which is in the path of the people who crowd to our seafront and Canoe Lake, and let it be given some skilled publicity.

Kathleen Lewis. 023 9273 2394

Landport redevelopment

In September 1999 we had nominated for a best new building award the recent redevelopment, mainly with two storey houses arranged around a central square, April Square, of an area of Landport of old four-storey blocks of council flats. On the morning when we set out on our judging visit we received a telephone call from the London architects, Levitt Bernstein, asking to be dissociated from the scheme. They had been the original designers; but the project had then been taken over by three housing associations who had



Two views of the April Square development in Landport

contracted it out on a design-and-build basis.

We invited David Levitt, the architect concerned to tell us what had happened and about the problems of low cost housing in general. Before his lecture to us this year, we took him to see what had been made of his design. We found it looking much better than when we had made our very unfavourable judgement eighteen months ago. In particular the central square was no longer a car park. It had been landscaped after a fashion although there were no seats.

Economy cuts

Mr Levitt looked at one of the three-storey blocks, which we had thought the best part of the scheme, and pointed out one by one all the features which the eye is naturally drawn to: the windows, the door, the balconies, the very prominent boxes for the electricity meters (which in his design had been hidden out of sight), the garden wall. Each one of these has been in some way pared down for the sake of economy.

Roger James

Regeneration of Housing in the Inner City

Lecture to the Portsmouth Society by David Levitt 7th February 2001

David Levitt began his lecture by showing a terrace in Bloomsbury dating from the 1740s, listed Grade II which was restored by a charitable Housing Association for 'people in necessitous circumstances' funded by Rugby School, at enormous cost, with hand-made chimney pots. These restorations [We have Portland Terrace and Southsea Terrace also restored at that time by HAs] proved too expensive, and associations now tend not to concentrate on the finer streets, because grants are not high enough to enable purchase and restoration. Developers have taken on some council blocks which had been hard to let, such as a LCC estate of 1936 in Battersea, sold in the 1960s, now all private flats, behind a fence and security system.

David Levitt had worked on the Brunswick Centre, Camden from 1962-67, which has just been listed Grade II. It is a multi-layered scheme, the first example of high density housing in low rise for the London Borough of Camden, with flats above a supermarket, shops and the Renoir Cinema. When the right to buy council flats came in it was very popular: a two-bed flat sells for £160,000, and a director of Sotheby's lives there! Levitt Bernstein have just been appointed to refurbish it.

Some private schemes, such as High Point in Highgate, are still going strong, but even high

quality architecture is not necessarily what residents want. The design of Keeling House by Sir Denys Lasdun, also now listed, was designed as a cluster block to reproduce the community structure in the sky. Its shape: shared spaces: lifts, corridors and access, requires a high standard of behaviour in the common areas, and high standards of maintenance, which local authorities find hard to fund. It got into very bad condition and hard to let. It was abandoned in the early 80s. After sitting empty for ten years, a canny developer bought it about three years ago, and the restored flats are now much sought after.

Urban renewal

In contrast, the Barbican would have been torn down if it was anywhere but where it is, just north of the City of London; but as successful high density private housing it has remained. So has Sheffield City Council's Park Hill in Sheffield, several times under threat of demolition, but now being renewed. He described what had happened to Deverill Point at Hackney Wick, which had run the gauntlet - with drug-crazed people at night. People living there had rebelled and formed a co-operative in what was the 'People's Republic' of Hackney, a huge complex of flats, the Holly Street Estate, with a two-mile long spine internal corridor, which was unmanageable. By 1992 the

residential community went down hill. Jobs moved away, especially key manual jobs. The estate had been built in the 1960s when there was full employment. Most were now unemployed, elderly, single parent families and relatively unsupervised young people. The stairs were used as refuse chutes; it was a paradise for mugging because there were loads of escape routes; there were dogs roaming at random; the shared lifts smelt terrible, and the shared parking was underground.

Levitt Bernstein won a competition, and with a developer worked out a masterplan, linking up streets which were there originally before redevelopment in the 1970s. It wasn't a paradise then: the yards had unpleasant industries, causing smoke, bad health. Other areas were to be demolished. Tony Blair lived in the surviving area which was not demolished and is now a conservation area. The streets were the crucial thing - as a normal way of life. Tenants now have either a three bedroom house, front garden and gate, or family maisonette below and two floors of flats above.

They have gained immensely. For example, attendance at GP's surgeries went down 25%, employment is going up - even in the lawless borough of Hackney, where nobody dared to park. Of the four tower blocks, one was blown up, one chosen by residents to be refurbished for over 55s. It has been given a number in the street, not the name of an elderly councillor, so the stigma of living there has disappeared. It also has a concierge, and secure courtyard. This is the current solution for 1960s estates.

Car provision

Car provision is important. Even people on benefit have cars. They can buy them for £500. The standard in Hackney is 75 for every 100 dwellings. They have

got to be where people can see them from their front doors. In wide roads they can be parked at right angles, with tree planting. Some London schemes provide no car parking at all - as recommended by the Urban Task Force. [Portsmouth still specifies 1 ½ spaces per dwelling.]

The Government is trying to encourage housing for rent; but it is not enough to have socially segregated housing schemes, they must be mixed communities, different social groups. There is a shortage of private tenanted accommodation, and what there is is expensive and poor in quality. Developers are exploiting Victorian and Edwardian houses with little maintenance being carried out, and with unsafe gas appliances and a lack of fire escapes.

The Landport scheme

Why wasn't the design for Landport, Portsmouth successful? The responsibility can be laid at the door of the previous government. It believed that local authorities were not responsible bodies for providing housing - so they gave the task to housing associations, which rent housing back to local authorities.

There were problems with funding/foundations etc.; so housing associations were "risk averse", and design-and-build contracts were negotiated on a timed brief. Schemes like Landport were handed over to design-and-build contractors whose single purpose was to do the jobs at fixed prices and make a profit, but cutting out as much as possible. Windows, doors, balconies, landscaping, parks, gas meters - none are as Levitt Bernstein designed them. The changes were introduced as part of a package deal.

CABE (Council for Architecture and the Built Environment) was set up to improve the quality of design and to introduce it as part of package deals. The three HAs

which did April Square, like most other HAs, but unlike the old local authorities, have no in-house architects on their staff, The way to spread the word about the importance of good design is by example, organising campaigns and using examples of very good schemes, getting them design awards.

The quality is getting better than five years ago. It is important to stress good design when schemes come up for planning permission. Attention to detail is important. Half the cost is covered by subsidy and the land cost is also fixed. You can only alter the quality. Now architects are free to work with private developers to increase the return in affordable housing. Housing associations are getting very large and very rich with huge assets. Things go in cycles and there may have to be a new provider.

Celia Clark.

Architectural Competition for Old Portsmouth?

Following the rejection by the Policy and Resources Committee of the proposed new housing on the former Wightlink site at The Point in Old Portsmouth, the City Council is considering launching an architectural competition for the redevelopment. This was at our suggestion as the two proposals so far have not given justice to this prominent site.

Scepticism

As ever, there is scepticism in the city because the last competition of this nature resulted in the now demolished Portsdown Park. We are confident, however, that the competition will give us a quality development and look forward to seeing the submissions.

The Draft City Plan

The draft City Plan is now available for inspection and we urge you to look at it and make comments. There have been public exhibitions at various locations throughout the city and the plan may be viewed at the Civic Offices. We were initially concerned that the plan is treated ward by ward and not by subject (e.g. housing, transport) which does give it a fragmented view though it is interesting to see policies for your local "patch". We had difficulty finding some of the policies, for example the proposed station for Copnor lies, in fact, in Milton.

The Society was kindly invited by the City Planning Officer to the Civic Offices in March to hear about the plan and to answer our questions and comments. We will be submitting our comments in due course and will publish details of them in a later edition and on our web site (www.portsmouthsociety.org.uk). The plan itself is available on the City Council's web site at www.portsmouthcc.gov.uk

John Holland

The Mary Rose National Treasure

Martyn Heighton, historian and chief executive of the Mary Rose Trust, made us think again about this national - indeed, international - treasure on our doorstep. He produced a longbow; before the raising of the Mary Rose, none existed, so all thought about them was speculative; now we have 167, and know that this 1301b. one could pierce armour at 230 yards and the one with 180 lb. pull fired 300 yards. With archers firing 12 arrows per minute the effect was of machine gun fire, and these bows were more accurate than the Lee Enfield rifle of the 1918 war. But they required long and

exacting training, and would have been dangerous if they got into the hands of a disaffected populace (this is why the French did not use them). Here there were still some in use in the Civil War armies. The Mary Rose is a great source of objects previously known about but never handled.

Hi-Tech

The ship herself was technologically advanced for her day, the equivalent of today's nuclear submarine, being the first recorded ship with gunports and a smooth hull. The recovery of the objects was the largest underwater excavation ever undertaken, presenting special difficulties in recording the site of the finds because the ship lay on her side and objects were tumbled about, the silt could be sucked out of the ship but working conditions were still dim and difficult, and the usual 'layers' of a land dig could not be used. The ship contained the old alongside the new: old, dangerous, breech-loading guns alongside modern bronze muzzle-loaders beautifully decorated as befitted the Renaissance Prince Henry VIII.

Because the ship had been lived on for years (unlike a newly-launched sinking), its contents presented a slice of early Tudor life, with combs (including nit combs), thimble, whistle, book, carpentry tools the equivalent of today's, tankards and jugs in pewter and wood, a backgammon board and musical instruments, hand-held sundials, dividers and compasses, apothecary's jars and numerous pots and instruments of the barber-surgeon aboard. The galley has been reconstructed on land as there was no visible flue, it proved to work excellently without one, producing an intense slow-burning fire making excellent stews in its metre and a half long brass vessel, baking bread in its brick structure and roasting joints before the fire.

Centre of excellence

What is needed now is to make the most of this magnificent resource. It could make history come alive. Henry VIII came to the throne at 18 - why was he immediately building ships? His father must have begun this drive for sea power - why? How did relations with France compare with today?

What the Trust has already developed is a renowned centre of expertise in scientific conservation, contributing to the conservation of the sea henge of Norfolk, the Dover boat, and the Romano-gallic boat found off Guernsey and consulted world-wide on conservation. The Trust has a website at www.maryrose.org which gets 4 million hits a year and has won nine or ten international awards; now it is developing an interactive learning site in co-operation with the university and is already being used as a major teaching aid for children in the Midlands. In addition six books are due to be published shortly.

Future home?

A treasure such as this should be housed more appropriately, and not in a wooden building. A new Museum should bring together the hull (which is even now without its cabin divisions, and should eventually be viewed in a way that provides an experience of its size) and the objects from within it, relating them to the life of the time, not on the pattern of the usual 'maritime museum', but as part of the an imaginative use of the dockyard as a whole both as part of history and as a day and night-time resource for national and international tourism. One suggestion for the Museum has been to use, and enlarge, the 1938/39 Boathouse 4 if this can be done without destroying its structure, or to make a startling new structure on that site, if this can be done before London moves to take the Mary Rose into its collection of national treasures.

The Trust is not government funded, and has to pay its way, hence the very high price of tickets. What is needed now is vision in planning the future of the historic dockyard as a whole.

Betty Owen

Monorail Update



We confirm that Carr West, the monorail promoters, will be making another presentation at our May 2nd meeting. They have told us that they have made a number of changes in the route and hope to have defused the objection from residents of Clarence Parade.

Changes

Carr West plan to start from Queen Alexandra Hospital in the north and will avoid Hampshire and Landport Terraces; they will come from Gunwharf along Museum Road and then turn right along Kings and Bellevue Terraces straight to Clarence Pier.

Southsea Loop

The monorail will then do a loop along the path that already exists on the Common to the small car park opposite the Queens Hotel. There will be a station there and the route will then continue along Duisburg Way to rejoin the route at the roundabout on Pier Road. The loop will be single track and in one direction.

Carr West have an internet site at www.vlrs.co.uk on which they

explain the principles of variable level rail systems and show examples of their implementation.

Stop The Grot!

The Portsmouth Society fully supports The News' campaign to rid our area of unwanted rubbish and mess. Call the Grot Line on 023 9240 6969 (select 4620) to report any rubbish, graffiti, abandoned vehicles etc. and let's get our city cleaned-up!

Images of England

The winter of 2000 saw the unveiling of the first 15,000 photographs to be displayed on the *Images of England* prototype website. This is the first stage in the site's development. It allows the user to search for images by type of building, date, county, historical figures or individuals associated with the building - and by photographer.

The project is managed by the National Monuments Record (NMR), the public archive of English Heritage. The website may be found on the internet at www.imagesofengland.org.uk - take a look for yourself!

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the society takes place at the Norrish Central Library on Wednesday 4th April starting at 7.30 pm. Should any member be interested in standing for the Executive Committee or one of the officers's positions then will they please contact the Secretary as soon as possible.

There will also be a short presentation from Cross Urban Regeneration, the firm who are proposing to redevelop the Tipner area of the east of the motorway which may include an IKEA store.

Tri-sail Advertising

Corporate advertising may be projected onto the Portsmouth's new sculpture, the Tri-sail close to the junction of the M27 and M275 motorways. We're not too happy at the prospect, and would prefer non-commercial images such as Lord Nelson or our historic ships. We feel that the Portsmouth Partnership have sufficient funding so as not to need the additional revenue.

The Kings Theatre

The future of the Kings remains in doubt but we support all efforts to keep the building in use as a Theatre.

The recent visit of the Royal Shakespeare Company to packed houses at the Mountbatten Centre demonstrates that there is a demand for top quality, professional theatre in Portsmouth and we hope that an operator is found to bring the Kings back to life.



Advertising on phone boxes

Planning minister Nick Raynsford has confirmed that the Government will shortly be launching a formal consultation on the issue of advertising on telephone boxes. This follows a campaign led by the Civic Trust and backed by an influential coalition of organisations including CABA, English Heritage and the Suzy Lamplugh Trust.

Unightly

The unsightly advertisements, which are placed without any regard to the streetscape, have so far appeared on 20,000 phone

boxes and it is expected that this number will continue to grow.

Safety and security

Phone boxes have become advertising hoardings but their nature places them outside the normal planning controls. Affected boxes allow limited vision out but effectively none from the outside into the interior thus posing a potential security and safety threat to users.

The Civic Trust is urging everyone to lobby the minister in charge of the advertisement regulations, Beverley Hughes, and local MPs. For more information contact Ben Webster at the Civic Trust on 020 7389 1375.



Meetings and Events

Here is a listing of the Society's meetings and events. Our regular meetings on the first Wednesday of each month (January, August and September excepting) at the Norrish Central Library, Guildhall Square, Portsmouth. There is no admission charge and all are welcome.

Wednesday 4th April	7.30 pm	Norrish Central Library	Annual General Meeting followed by a presentation from Cross Urban Regeneration, the firm who are proposing to redevelop the Tipner area of the east of the motorway which may include an IKEA store.
Wednesday 2nd May	7.30 pm	Norrish Central Library	Update on the monorail proposal , with speakers from Carr West, the company behind the scheme.
Wednesday 6th June	7.30 pm	Norrish Central Library	The Great Morass in Southsea . Speaker: Dudley Compton.
22nd June - 1st July	Daily	Norrish Central Library & other venues	National Architecture Week - exhibition, talks, guided walks. More details when available. Organised by the Royal Institute of British Architects (see www.architectureweek.org.uk).
Wednesday 4th July	7.00 pm	Meet at the Ferry Gardens, Gosport	Millennium walkabout in Gosport with Borough Landscape architect, Paul Best.

The Portsmouth Society, Registered Charity no. 266116

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We welcome new members. Please come to any of our meetings or contact Jean Thompson for more details.