

Portsmouth Society News

The Newsletter of the Portsmouth Society - February 2002

Portsmouth Society Design Awards

The Portsmouth Society judges had a very wide range of buildings to choose from for its Best New Building, Best Restoration and Best Landscaping Awards 2001.

Entries included Milton Cross and Corpus Christi Schools, Sonata House: new flats at Port Solent, restoration of Williamsgate, the old guard house in Old Portsmouth, a rehabilitation centre at St George's Way in Portsea, Southern Water's Odour Control building at Eastney Pumping Station and the public loos at St George's Road, Eastney.

To win the **Best New Building Award**, the design has to give you a buzz of excitement, to fit in with the buildings around it, and the interior has to work well for its purpose. Disappointingly, this year, none of the new buildings had that "Wow" factor that makes for a winning entry. However, we will be giving a Commendation to the navy's Fire Fighting School, designed by Havant architect Peter Galloway, with its dramatic wave shaped roof on the prow of Whale Island.

For the **Best Restoration Award** we had several excellent contenders and decided to give prizes to St John's Catholic Cathedral in Edinburgh Road and the Old Customs House pub at Gunwharf.

John Wingfield, the cathedral's architect and the builders, Chichester Cathedral Works, had worked

closely with Canon David Hopgood both to restore features that had been removed or painted over, and to design richly coloured new features. These features included the new high altar, font, tiled floor, glass entrance doors and the dramatic lighting scheme which illuminates the beautiful timber roof.

Gales Brewery and architect Paul Boothby had thoroughly researched the Vernon's history, sourced authentic materials, and opened up this very early office building's interior to make it a very special and distinctive pub of great character.

The long-term restoration by English Heritage of several important buildings in Fort Cumberland as the National Archaeology Centre continues to be impressive. The Judges decided to commend the restoration by Bristol architect Niall Phillips of the Hospital as a reception centre, staff recreation and library and the ingenious conversion of the 1930s Motor Transport shed as a high tech archaeology lab. They hope to revisit the site as work progresses.

In the **Best Landscaping** category, we looked at the Millennium Promenade and the beautiful Porter's Garden just inside the Victory Gate of the Dockyard. It was agreed to

make an award to the Saluting Platform section of the Millennium Promenade, where the judges particularly enjoyed the S-shaped concrete seats and the garden.



Clockwise from top

The Lord Mayor unveils the plaque at St John's Cathedral

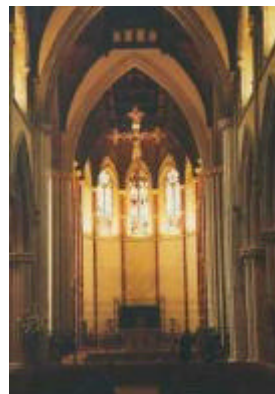
Interior of St John's Cathedral, Landport

RN Firefighting School, Whale Island

Porter's Garden, Dockyard

Millennium Promenade, Old Portsmouth

Old Customs House, Gunwharf the former Vernon



In this edition .. Pompey Speak, Disagreements with Government, Museums Future Assured, Seminar on Mobile Phone Masts, City of Culture?, Road to Rail for Freight, Design improvement - a Short-lived Vision?, Competition - win a book!, The Society - the way forward, Meetings and Events....

They will revisit the Porter's Garden next year when its hard landscaping will be finished and it has had time to mature, and consider the northern stretch of the Promenade through the Heritage Area at the same time.

Pompey as she is spoke

"Sweet'ear", "lover", "are you goin' up [to watch Pompey play]?" "Nah, ah'm goin' in today [to work], n'at" [and that]. "I'm goin' dahn Sarfsea".

"I've scrazed me knee, miss...." "E's a right dinlo".

We'd like to make a collection of Portsmouth turns of phrase, a part of the local identity. Dockyard phrases such as matey - a contraction of Ma'ties, an abbreviation of His/Her Majesties' workers - and the 'golden rivet' - are celebrated in a book published by the Royal Dockyard Historical Society, but there are few discussions on the local dialect and accent. Iona and Peter Opie who lived in West Liss collected *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (1977). They remark that "The curious lore passing between children aged about 6-14, which today holds in its spell some 7 million inhabitants of this island, continues to be almost unnoticed by the other six-sevenths of the population". They recorded the local variant on the avoiding cracks rhyme:

"If you tread on a crack, or tread on a spout,

It's a sure thing your mother will turn you out".

'Creams' or 'screams' was the local term for calling a truce. Pea soup is 'London fog' - an inversion of the usual saying; while spotted dick pudding is 'Bugs in the bolster'. Fatties were known as 'Fatty Harbuckle', which echoes the comedian Roscoe Arbuckle in an early Mack Sennett film.

Lots of these sayings are both ancient and constantly updated. Is there a modern version of this child's eye view of local schools?: "In and around Portsmouth, according to a small feminine informant, Daley's School is known as Daley's Cow-Shed, the Grammar School as the 'Glamour School' or 'School for Scandal', Kingston Modern is 'Kingston College for Clots', the High School is the 'Snob School' - those going there being 'High Snobs'... and those going to the Southsea Modern are 'Southsea Scum'."

Perhaps 'Banana splits' or 'Boomerangs' for Admiral Lord Nelson School's curious shape? Do local children still believe they must keep their legs crossed in an exam, if they hope to pass?

Margaret Guy, reference librarian of the Central Library, whose parents and grandparents were born and educated in Portsmouth said in an article in *Tradewinds*, Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce journal in January 1969 that she couldn't write an

article on local expressions, because she simply would not recognise a word that only locals use - because she was one of them. She cited 'slock' - what might happen to shoes after a short period of wear. The Oxford English Dictionary defined it as an obsolete word for slacken. "For some odd reason this expressive word has lingered on in this town with the original meaning but used only to apply to shoes".

People often remark that Pompey sounds like Cockney - for example in its flattened vowels, quite unlike the Hampshire accent, but I have not yet come across a convincing explanation as to why. Margaret Guy says Portsmouth must have imported other region's favourite phrases, as our population has always been an unstable one owing to the presence of the army and navy.

So over to you! An incomer like me has only a superficial knowledge, so please contribute your local lore.

Celia Clark

Making Common Cause -



The future of New Road Centre

Some time ago, the Portsmouth Society wrote to the chairs of the Neighbourhood Fora, inviting them to one of the Society's meetings as it was felt that, on occasions, common interests may arise. As Chair of Fratton Neighbourhood Forum I went along, and discovered this to be true. I have therefore written this article as Chair of Fratton Neighbourhood Forum and as a member of the Portsmouth Society's Executive Committee.

When Portsmouth City Council became a unitary authority, ownership of the New Road Centre passed to it from Hampshire County Council. The building, designed by T Hellyer and built in 1872, was one of the earliest Board schools in the county. Built of red brick with a slate roof and a prominent slate roofed tower it is something of a landmark in New Road and it appears in the City's list of buildings of architectural or historic interest. At the time of the transfer the rear part was in a seriously dilapidated state and the building overall was underused; part being used for adult education classes.

The Council was minded to demolish the whole building but the Society and the Neighbourhood

Forum, together with the ward councillors put the case for retaining the front part of the building, pointing out its historical significance, its tasteful design and local memories - often with strong family associations - related to the original school. It was agreed, however, that the rear part should be demolished to make way for a day centre for adults with learning difficulties to be run by Social Services.

What is the current position? The day centre is due for completion by May 2002 with work well underway. The rest has permission for conversion into houses but the developer has been trying to "sell on" this permission without success. Once again, the Society and Neighbourhood Forum have acted together. Through both Portsmouth MPs, who have been very supportive, the Forum approached the Department for Transport and the Regions (DETR) and also mentioned the views of the Society. We claimed that such a long delay - in theory up to five years - with no certainty as to the outcome, suggested to us that the planning laws need to be revised. The problem is not uncommon and often results in dumbing down of the original designs as the new owners do not necessarily employ the architects who designed the conversion.

I received a copy of a reply to Syd Rapson MP from Charles Falconer, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Regeneration. The letter states that section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 already provides a local planning authority with the power in certain circumstances to make good a loss of public amenity. If local amenity is being adversely affected by the condition of neighbouring land or buildings, the authority may serve a notice on the owner requiring that the situation be remedied. A copy of this letter has been forwarded to the City Planning Officer with the suggestion that the legal department should also be consulted.

*Terry Carter Society Executive / Chair of
Fratton Neighbourhood Forum*

Southsea Castle and D-Day Museum future Assured

As recorded in the Summer 2001 edition of the Society's newsletter Celia Clark and Bob Adderley made deputations to the Policy and Resources Committee and Bob Adderley made a deputation to the full Council, in July 2001.

On behalf of the Portsmouth Society they pleaded for Southsea Castle and the D-Day Museum not to be discarded from the responsibility of the Museums and Records Service as was recommended in a detailed Best Value and Audit Review Panel Report that addressed the consolidation of the Museum's services on its current central location



Southsea Castle

After considerable debate the report was accepted by full council, subject to an amendment noting councillors' concern re the future of Southsea Castle and the D-Day Museum and requiring that any proposal for change of management status of either or both of these two assets should be referred to full council for approval.

It is gratifying to learn that on 31 October 2001 the Planning Leisure and Economic Development Committee approved a proposal that both the D-Day Museum, Southsea Castle and the Fortifications continue to be managed by and remain the responsibility of the City Council, managed through the Arts, Libraries, Museums and Records Division. Unfortunately, Cumberland House is still to close.

Bob Adderley

Disagreements with Government

At the time of writing two disagreements which we are having with the Government are still unresolved. In both we have had the active support of our MP, Mike Hancock, who has written letters to the ministers concerned powerfully arguing our case.

St James Town Green

The first is the case of the Town Green in the grounds of St James Hospital which we had regarded as a victory. As our members all know the inspector at the public inquiry which took place in February 2001 ruled in favour of the declaration of most of the area as a Green.

The City Council finally registered the area concerned in August 2001. But since then the Department of Health, on behalf of the Secretary of State the owner of the land, have announced their intention to take the City Council to the High Court demanding that they rescind the declaration. Roger James and Caroline Scott, in whose names the original application for registration was made, are cited alongside the City Council as co-defendants.

Mike Hancock wrote to the Secretary of State for Health asking him to call off the action. He received a

letter from the Minister of State at the Department, attempting to justify their action and saying among other things that 'as he would know' there had been a number of applications over the years to register parts of hospitals as town or village greens. Mike wrote again:

"The applicants and myself were not aware that there had been similar applications in the past, in fact we were under the impression that ours was a unique application. No mention was made by either side in the Public Inquiry of previous NHS applications and the Open Spaces Society who have assisted in most applications for village greens do not know of any other application on an NHS site. We think your officials may have misinformed you on this point. I would be grateful for clarification on what their intention was in doing this . If they were accurate I would like to know the details of the other sites."

"With regard to your third paragraph, it may not have been the intention of those who drew up the Commons Registration Act of 1965 to enable the registration of greens on hospital land; but it was certainly not the intention of the City Council's predecessors in buying so much land for the hospital, then the asylum, that it should be sold as building land. On the contrary they bought it to protect it from being built on. It was bought specifically for therapeutic purposes."

He made a further point in refutation of the Minister's claim that they were intending to replace some of the open space and then ended as follows :

"Finally, whether or not you are right about the law, the court will no doubt decide. I am surprised and angered that the Department of Health should put a technical legal point before the therapeutic benefits of patients and the recreational needs of my constituents in a city which is unusually densely populated and severely short of public open space."

"I look forward with great interest to your comments and I hope for action to retract from the your present position."

Eastney Sports Field

Our second disagreement concerns the 'consultation' announced by the Ministry of Defence on their proposal to build on the sports field at Eastney, the large green space to the east of the former barracks. As the land belongs to the Ministry they do not need planning permission, although they have to announce a consultation. We wrote to the City Planning Officer as follows:

"I am writing on behalf of the Society to object to the proposal to build living accommodation for 60 senior personnel on the sports field to the east of what was Eastney Barracks."

"This is the last remaining piece of open space in the south east corner of the city and surely should be allowed to remain as such. The building of residential accommodation here will be contrary to two aspects of Government policy. - the preservation of open space in densely built up areas and the siting of new residential accommodation on brownfield sites."

"The other proposed MOD residential accommodation - on Whale Island and in Matapan Road - is on brownfield land and reasonably close to existing MOD sites. The only MOD staff remotely near Eastney sports fields work at Fraser Battery which is intermittently under threat of closure. Even if it is not closed it seems unlikely that there are sixty staff there in need of accommodation."

"We think the City Council is to be congratulated on its success in conforming with another Government directive - the need to accommodate thousands of new housing units in the city without using up much greenfield land. It has done this, as you know, by conversion of large buildings, office and otherwise to residential use and extensive infilling. It is very unfair that the Government should then use the remaining greenfields for its own supposed housing needs. We hope you will be able to dissuade the MOD from building on this land."

Mike Hancock had already written to the MOD to object to this scheme and received a reply from the Under-secretary of State for Defence. It said, among other things, that 'Eastney sports field is one of a number of sites around Portsmouth for which applications for outline planning consent have been recently registered. The objective is to address the current shortfall in certain types of family accommodation . . . It has never been our intention to build on all the sites in either the near future or the longer term'. Mike is not satisfied with this and has written again, making the points that we made. We are grateful for his forceful action on our behalf in these matters.

Roger James

Greening the city

The Civic Trust's Civic Focus last autumn pointed out that in the age of the car the wonderful legacy of Victorian and twentieth-century parks and green spaces has been neglected. The Green Flag Awards give parks a new emphasis and identify models of good practice.

Sally Keeble, DTLR Minister for Regeneration said it is a government priority to improve the quality of the local environment ..."good quality parks and green spaces are crucial to the quality of life for people living in our towns and cities". The Treasury has indicated that this will be a priority area for the 2002 Spending Review.

The Civic Trust has set out in a paper the importance of involving community groups in the management and improvement of public spaces. We are delighted that councillors on the city's planning, leisure and economic development committee decided to increase the Milton St. James's Hospital town green to eight acres instead of five. Without the sustained campaign of the St. James Memorial Park Trust there would have been no town green.

Celia Clark

Seminar on Mobile Phone Masts



*"Orange" mast in
Mile End Road*

In December the City Council hosted a Seminar addressing Mobile Phone Masts and Transmitters which was organised by Alan Higgins the City Environmental Health and Trading Standards Officer. There are 58 radio base stations located on 53 sites in the City of Portsmouth located mainly to the west and south. Only eight of these are on land owned by the city and it has expressly forbidden them to be located in schools but they generate £46,000 per annum in rental.

Dr Michael Clark summarised the Government-sponsored Stewart Report which asserts that the radiation from mobile phones and their base stations is not considered to be a health hazard.

He advised that the function of the National Radiological Protection Board is to audit radiations - particularly at schools - to ensure that they do not exceed government limitations

Ms Nichole Hughes representing the Federation of Electronics Industry explained that the five major companies who provide the base stations locate them to serve the increasing demands of users of mobile phones. Industry has a ten-point programme of communication and consultation with the community to address public concerns about the location of base stations. They provided each Local Authority with their 'Roll-Out' Plans for the forthcoming year.

John Slater, the Assistant City Planning Officer, emphasised that the Government had ruled that provided that Industry certified that its base stations were compliant with the prescribed radiation limits then they were deemed not to be a safety hazard. Consequently the City Planning office totally ignored

objections from the public on Safety Grounds and only took account of what they termed to be 'normal' planning considerations..

Major questions concerning Safety, as raised during the earlier sessions, were repeated and were answered by assurances of safety. However it was noted by the audience that PCC would not allow any further base stations on City Land. The Operators confirmed that they would not site them on schools - unless specifically invited to do so. They stated that they were subject to no restriction to site close to schools. Operators preferred to site on high buildings or to use individual masts. It was practical to share sites but this invariably involved multiple and/or larger masts.

The Planning Office appeared to have taken no account of annual roll-up plans as submitted by individual operators; they preferred to treat each application on an 'as and when' ad-hoc basis with consequent confusion to the public at large. There was a clear consensus in the audience, as repeated by the Chairman, that it would be advantageous for the City to hold a meeting at least once a year to agree a strategy for the necessary location of further masts. This was suggested, by the undersigned, to the City Planning Officer some months ago; it was not acknowledged, let alone commented upon.

Bob Adderley

City of culture?

A year after the Campaign for the Arts in Portsmouth began the consultation process in the Royal Naval Museum, a Cultural Workshop was hosted by the City Museum to develop a cultural strategy for Portsmouth, which as directed by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, should be developed with local people. The facilitator, Bernard Seigal, reported that "One of the points that found echo around the workshop room was the sense that the City lacked self-confidence, that it was hampered by its own low expectations. [If this is true].then this will form a powerful, but perhaps largely unacknowledged, backdrop to a vast range of decision-making".

On the contrary, many of those present, including artists, pointed out that there is a lively arts scene in Portsmouth which exists, despite the lack of local authority interest or investment. Mark Bardell makes the point about under investment in his book - reviewed in this edition: "Many urban councils have developed the arts and culture as a way of boosting city recognition. In spite of a burgeoning student population, Portsmouth appears to find it difficult to give the arts a high profile". There are new clubs in Gunwharf, but are the existing arts venues accessible

to all in terms of price and transport? Jan O'Highway, Roger and I complained about the poor quality of decision-making in planning: too many bad and mediocre buildings - and a lack of civic pride in public buildings and spaces - points endorsed by many. Arts festivals and the string quartet competition were not sustained; there is no independent cinema. Portsmouth Arts Centre is set to close. City museums are closed or transferred to private trusts. Perhaps this low level of public activity is related to the fact that Portsmouth has the lowest council tax in Hampshire. We note the District Auditor's warning that the city could face a budget deficit unless there are tax rises.

Our subsequent discussions with the Portsmouth Partnership identified another key factor. The classic action by the city over many areas of decision-making including the arts is always top-down: new ideas arising from residents are either ignored or taken over. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that Rotherham Civic Society won the Civic Trust's award for the most successful recruitment campaign, which included a professionally produced video, *Our Living Heritage*, while the Rotherham Council's inclusive Cultural Policy is identified nationally as a model. A far larger change of culture inside Portsmouth city council is needed (and asked for by the ministry) to accept local people as full partners - as diverse artists, audiences, creators, designers, musicians, poets, of different ages, tastes and customs - not only as 'customers' or 'consultees'. A partnership is perhaps beginning to happen in planning - but what about in transport, economic development, green spaces, culture and the arts?

Celia Clark

Road to Rail for Freight

The Society has been much concerned with schemes for transferring freight from road to rail. In pursuance of this idea Charles Burns and Roger James have had a series of meetings, first with Jeremy Clark, Assistant Port Manager, then with Commodore Boisier, Superintendent of the Dockyard and finally with Paul Newbold, City Planning Officer. To their surprise all these three had been thinking about the problem and were receptive to our ideas.

Blueprint for freight

The Ferry Port management are very keen and are working on the matter, Mr Clark told us. At Fratton Goods Yard there is not enough space left for the rail-road transfer operation and in any case heavy road traffic from Fratton Goods Yard would be most undesirable; but they are working on a new freight terminal at Hilsea on the 'Blueprint' former gas works land with a new siding parallel to the main line. This could get European funding to buy/lease the land



which needs decontaminating. Money is apparently not a problem. EU money up to £7.5 million is apparently available! Mr Clark said he was putting it to Committee in December [he didn't].

The freight would be transferred to lorries at Hilsea and moved by road via Eastern Road, A27/M27 and M275 to the ferryport. To us this seemed a fantastic and somewhat pointless scheme. Two trains a day with up to 30 lorry movements - Ports Creek bridge would need improvements to take the increased lorry traffic. Railtrack appears to be keen. A critical consideration is length of train. Below a certain length, trains are not economic. Upgrading is already in hand for Southampton to Midlands railway linking Portsmouth / Fareham / Eastleigh with higher loading gauge to accommodate containers or piggy backing - possibly next summer. Our old enemies, Hampshire Waste Services, are looking at the possibility of sending waste paper from the Recycling Centre in Quartermaine Road to a paper mill in Kent by rail from this proposed siding. The recycled paper would then return to the News Centre by rail.

LRT link

Charles then put forward his plan to cash in on the LRT permission. LRT would put a light rail track along Stanhope Road which, he suggests, could easily be upgraded to heavy rail (same gauge). With the change of Unicorn junction to traffic lights there was now a potential for a heavy rail link from the low level Town Station into the dockyard, - parallel to the old route that used to go from the high level station - and then on to the commercial docks and the ferryport, with one or at most two trains crossing the main traffic route in the middle of the night. Jeremy Clark saw the advantage of such a scheme; but he thought the Navy would never allow it, although he hadn't asked them.

We put the same scheme to Commodore Boisier who had given no thought to rail freight but made no objections. He gave us an assurance that there would be no security opposition to rail freight passing through the Dockyard, but he doubted whether there was enough room. He said that he regarded security as a 'soft' reason for opposition to any proposal. We see

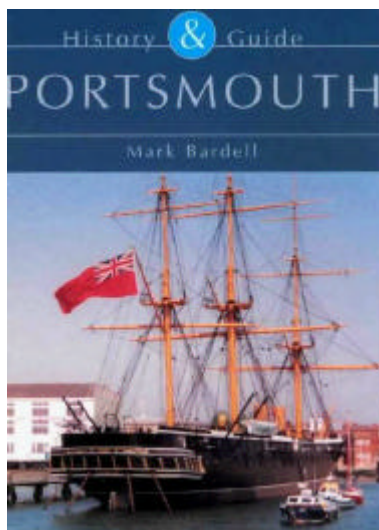
the trains as supplying both the Ferryport and the Vosper operation in the Dockyard, supplying the building materials for their huge sheds and shipbuilding materials

Paul Newbold was very receptive to Charles's ideas. He congratulated him on the first good idea of 2002. He thought it entirely feasible; but he expected great opposition from the developers of City Centre North to the running of dead-of-night trains across the main traffic route.

Other ideas

Other ideas that came out of these discussions: Jeremy Clark is keen to get more visits to Portsmouth by cruise ships. This depends on berthing facilities in the Dockyard. So far one cruise ship has been received there. There is no difficulty in getting the ships; it all depends on the Navy or MOD co-operation. We still want to urge the move of IOW car ferry to Ferryport or Dockyard to relieve the traffic near the city centre. Paul Newbold told us of a traffic plan which had not occurred to us - a new road connection using the Dockyard's internal roads to link the East Gate to the Heritage Area, bypassing the Unicorn-Queen Street bottleneck. We intend to meet Vospers if we can and to urge the setting up of a Dockyard Think Tank to include: Portsmouth Partnership, Strategic Partnership, Ferry Port and Dockyard and the City Planners.

Roger James / Charles Burns



Competition

Which film director made two films on location in Portsmouth in the 1970s? Which area probably provided the inspiration for the building that is now the Uropa Club in Guildhall Walk?

The first person to send the correct answers to Celia Clark (address on back page) wins a

copy of **Portsmouth History and Guide** by member, Mark Bardell. Published by Tempus Publishing Limited it is on sale at £10: a special rate to members, with free delivery in Portsmouth area from Mark Bardell, 44 Heyshott Road, Southsea, PO4 8BZ.

This new, enjoyably written history examines, with a fresh eye, the development of Portsmouth as a military and naval base, its place in national and international

history over the centuries and looks at its new role today as a university city, a home for some of the nation's preserved ships and as a major centre for the archiving of British naval history. It brings you right up to date, with descriptions of what you can see from cross channel ferries and the motorway.

New strands of history are popular and folk music and comparisons with Duisberg, twin city. Well illustrated with Mark's own photographs, a novel feature is the appendix: two guided walks, taking readers on a tour of the most important surviving historic sights and buildings of the city.

Celia Clark

The Society - the way forward

At the our December meeting, as a late change to the planned programme, we had a stimulating and productive discussion on the way forward for the Society. The evening was used for the 30 plus members to exchange and promote ideas, many of which can be used in future planning by the committee. Broadly, the suggestions can be grouped under the headings of publicity and membership, meetings and outings.

Publicity and membership

- Use our logo and slogan "Planning for tomorrow with good design for today". To lead to better recognition of the Society's role in the city.
- Use local media to publicise meetings and target special campaigns. It is important to be positive and to highlight successes.
- Advertise in museums, libraries, community centres. Produce a town map, a news leaflet, a list of events. Members are needed to distribute locally and regularly.
- Promote our Web site, update it more regularly.
- Get more members, especially from the younger age groups. Try to recruit from other groups and Neighbourhood Forums.

Meetings and Outings

- The Chairman's monthly & AGM reports are highly valued. "The highlight of our month", "keeps us up to date" were two quotes from the meeting.
- The monthly meetings could be more interactive. A suggested running order speaker first, coffee, chairperson, discussion.. Chair to highlight important topic at each meeting.
- Watch this space - many suggestions for future meetings & outings.

The meeting worked well and involved everybody Everyone agreed that the interactive members

evenings were useful and should take place at least twice a year.

Gill Norman

(Editor's footnote - can anyone help with the newsletter please? We need people who can use a word processor, who can precis articles (and enjoy it) - and if you can read the hand writing of some of our officers so much the better!)

... and a note from the Membership Secretary

As membership secretary I take this opportunity to remind members how you - our biggest asset - have it in your power to spread the word to your like-minded friends and contact organisations. Expanding our numbers would strengthen us as a group - we could do more.

I feel too many people outside the Society do not understand our reason for being, what we do and what we offer at such a reasonable cost. Please help us find ways of making the Portsmouth Society's name more readily recognised - appreciated and enjoyed.

Finally to all those who help make our limited funds go that little further by purchasing raffle tickets at meetings, by adding that little extra to their membership fees, by giving their time and resources at no cost, and to Andy Pottinger RIBA who kindly sponsors our Best Landscaping award - Thank You!

Jean Thompson



Civic Focus is the quarterly magazine of the Civic Trust (our parent body) and it is full of articles on planning, conservation, good design - with a national focus. To receive a copy please contact the Civic Trust, 17 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AW, telephone 020 7930 0914 or email corporate@civictrust.org.uk

Design Improvement - a short-lived vision?

Portsmouth was fortunate enough to host the CABA (Council for Architecture and the Built Environment) - Making Places event - held in the marvellous setting of Boathouse 6 in two stages. The first, on the evening of November 5, considered "Good Design is Good Economics - how do you improve the public realm?" Developers and some councillors including the leader

and deputy leader of Portsmouth City Council attended lectures and presentations on design and economic development.

City Planning Officer, Paul Newbold, said that Portsmouth was determined to insist on excellence in design, and that public participation was good in the city [via the SRBs]. (We noted that we were unable to award any good new buildings in 2001, let's hope it improves from 2002). Paul Ramshaw, the city's urban designer spoke about the potential for upgrading the city centre, particularly for pedestrians.

Seminar

The next day was an all-day design seminar attended by Celia Clark, Roger James and Charles Burns, with Deane Clark, representing the RIBA. Those present were mostly architects and designers such as Paul Ramshaw and one planner, but no planning Councillors - a shame. We divided into groups and were given a free hand to redesign the city centre and to improve the realm of the pedestrian.

It turned out that the Society's PlaceCheck had paved the way very well for this. The subject was not the still awaited City Centre North (plans were expected in December) but the southern part of the city centre. Anything went. One group had to be restrained from demolishing the town station!

Another created a lake in Victoria Park, opening up the way under the embankment behind Victoria Baths. The theme of reconnecting Victoria Park to the city was taken up by several groups. Demolishing the university building astride the Millennium Boulevard in King Henry I, the telephone exchange and the 'toblerone' in Winston Churchill Avenue offered new opportunities.

The plans produced by the three design teams will be part of the city centre consultation. CABA would like a Design Champion in each city - could the Portsmouth Society fill that function? We are very pleased to be acknowledged in the draft City Centre Plan published in January 2002.

National priority

It's clear that at least at the level of rhetoric, upgrading the standard of architecture and public space is now a priority - at national and regional level. The South West Region has for example proposed new architecture and environment guidelines to advise councils on drawing up design strategies and development briefs, with a Web site highlighting good practice, with training to be via the regional centre for excellence being developed by the South West Regional Development Agency and the University of the West of England.

EH and CABE Overlap

English Heritage and CABE clearly have overlapping functions in this task. In January 2002 they jointly produced *Building in Context: New development in Historic Areas*, which examines fifteen case studies where new buildings have responded positively to their historic environment, showing that a high standard of design is possible on historically sensitive sites - something that they acknowledge is not generally happening. English Heritage and CABE do not always see eye to eye, as the row about Coppergate in York shows: EH said that the design of the proposed shopping centre around the historic Clifford's Tower had responded to the site, while CABE - and many local people, including our equivalent, attacked it.

Mediocrity prevails

After a heady few weeks, when we really hoped planners would go on rejecting any design which did not meet a new, high standard, it is sad to report two recent Portsmouth decisions where the old, mediocre level of design seems set to continue. Despite heavy and detailed criticism from both CABE and English Heritage, the Development Control Committee gave permission at the third go of the Amos Partnership's dull, dispiriting design for Canalside - the whole remaining south side of the new canal in Gunwharf.

Planning department staff agreed with us that the design is not sufficiently improved for such a prominent site. Although the 11-storey tower block at the end was removed and 20 units deleted, and an access through the eastern block added, the seven storey slab block still had the thin roof slab on the top storey and the rather busy facades, compared with the excellent seaward block already built on Canalside, which it seems to echo only at the western end. The long block will presumably cast shadows right over the canal. The eastern, landward end is particularly drab, and as this is likely to be an important part of the view if a new hotel is built on the adjoining site, it definitely needs to be rethought.

The whole scheme lacks any excitement or outstanding quality, which should surely be required in a conservation area. Instead of the second gap between the blocks in the second design, it has an uninviting opening which may or may not be glazed, preventing the public from seeing it as a public right of way. Those in wheel chairs will not be able to negotiate the stairs on the southern facade. English Heritage said that there should be a broad restriction on the height of new development to four storeys, or a fifth as a penthouse, to make this new quarter of town liveable, as well as in response to its historic character, established above all by Vulcan. "Now that Vulcan has acquired its new clock tower there is still no case for a 'free for all' on heights which is what this design... Implies... The considerable design advantage

of a common roofline, observed in the original Hedley Greentree proposals, has been thrown away."

Design brief required

We believe the Gunwharf conservation area would benefit from a design brief which includes Canalside, the hotel site and Ariadne. Given the city council's commitment to good design, we asked for the scheme to be rejected, and rethought, but despite the strong reservations of his officers, Paul Newbold himself recommended the scheme to councillors, who gave it the green light. Why?

An even more worrying case is the university's Business School in Portsea on the ice-cream factory site between Portland Street and St. James's Street - a very large multi-million pound development, which was apparently granted permission by city officers, without even being referred to committee, on the grounds that improvements to the design met objections, which included those from the Chancellor, Professor of Design and ourselves. We were not party to these discussions, and we wonder what function the Development Control Committee now has?

Room for improvement!

Other provincial cities "have a new generation of civic leaders who really do things well" according to Professor Peter Hall. Stuart Cameron, head of architecture, planning and landscape at Newcastle University says "There has been a very deliberate strategy to use the best in art and culture, including architecture, to drive regeneration. As Andrew Kelly says in *Building Legible Cities*: "We live in a global economy. As a result, cities have to rethink how they present themselves, both to their existing residents, businesses and visitors, and to the outside world". For Portsmouth, things are still not looking good.

Celia Clark

A History of Cambridge Barracks

Catherine Smith Portsmouth Grammar School Monographs 7.

This publication available from the school celebrates its purchase of Cambridge House from the Ministry of Defence in March 2000 which had been in naval use, separated from the school by a high chain-link fence. Its conversion doubles the size of the school campus, reuniting two parts of the former Cambridge Barracks. The booklet explores the evolution of barrack design and its inhabitants and documents changes to the site by the school since its purchase of the site in 1926.

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 6th February	7.30pm	Norrish Central Library	Portsmouth Society Design Competition - illustrated report from the judges of the 2001 competition plus your chance to comment on their decisions..
Wednesday 6th March	7.30pm	Norrish Central Library	Restoration of the Vulcan Building and other historic buildings - Morris Wordley, Clerk of works for the Vulcan Building restoration.
Wednesday 3rd April	7.30pm	Norrish Central Library	Annual General Meeting followed by an Open Forum where we will discuss the issues that matter.
Wednesday 1st May	7.30pm	Norrish Central Library	The Work of the Fareham Society - Brenda Clapperton OBE.
Wednesday 5th June	7.30pm	Norrish Central Library	Speaker to be confirmed.
Thursday 20th June	10am - 4pm	Menhuin Room, Norrish Central Library	Design Seminar 2002 - "Creating tomorrow's legacy today" - Following the success of last years' seminar, we will be holding another event to promote good design in housing.
21st - 30th June			Architecture Week 2002. For details see www.architectureweek.org.uk .
13th - 16th September		Nationwide	Heritage Open Days 2002

Portsdown Tunnels

Portsdown Tunnels is the name of a Web site devoted to the history of the many tunnels and underground workings to be found on Portsdown Hill. The site is the work of Bob Hunt who has been fascinated by the subject since he was a child. Having discovered that there is very little information about the tunnels to be found on the Internet, Bob decided to create a Web site and the result is well worth a visit. The address is: www.hunt999.freemove.co.uk.



Placecheck

The Portsmouth Society, with the support of Portsmouth City Council, held a National Placecheck Day on Saturday 21st September 2001. The title of the event was : **“Commercial Road South - re-integrating the Guildhall Square with the commercial centre of Portsmouth”**.

The purpose was to discuss what could be done to improve the area in front of Portsmouth and Southsea Station stretching from the railway bridge to the southern end of Commercial Road, to make it attractive and pedestrian friendly without obstructing the essential flows of buses and taxis.

Helped by the City's newly appointed Urban Design Officer, Paul Ramshaw, those taking part answered a number of questions about the area with the purpose of identifying the positive and negative qualities of the place. The results have been collated and submitted to the City Council.

Placecheck is sponsored by The Urban Design Alliance (www.udal.org.uk) comprising the Civic Trust, Institution of Civil Engineers, Landscape Institute, Royal Institute of British Architects, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, Royal Town Planning Institute and the Urban Design Group.

John Holland

The Portsmouth Society, Registered Charity no. 266116

Chairman: Celia Clark, 8 Florence Road, Southsea, Hants, PO5 2NE, Tel 023 9273 2912
Secretary: Roger James, 10 Captains Row, Old Portsmouth, PO1 2TT, Tel 023 9273 4555
Treasurer: Jean Thompson, 6 Livingstone Road, Southsea, Hants, PO5 1RT. Tel 023 9282 1667
Email: editor@portsmouthsociety.org.uk Internet: www.portsmouthsociety.org.uk