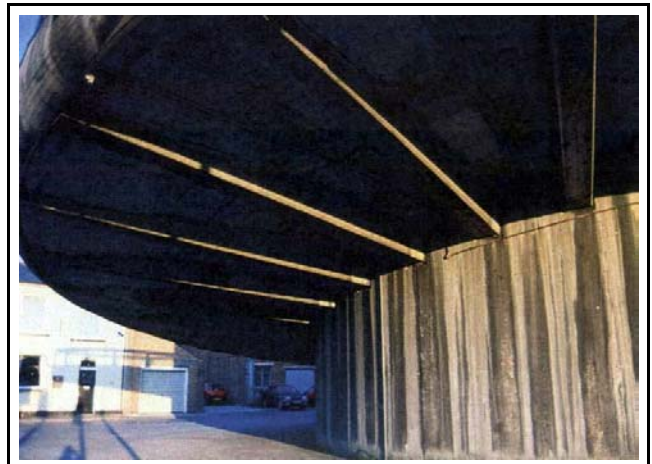
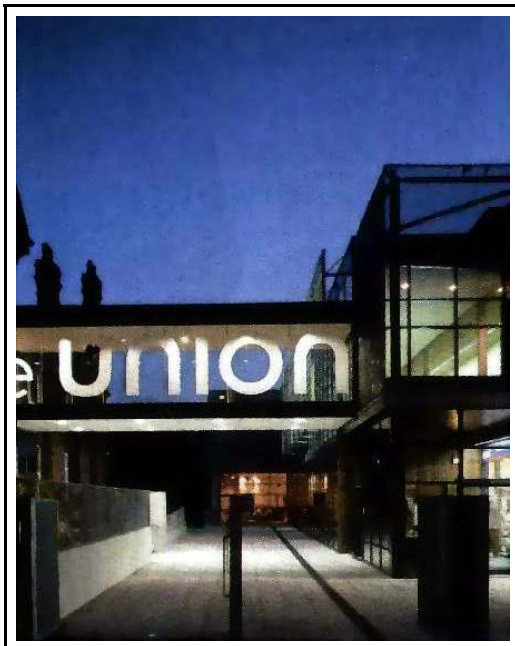
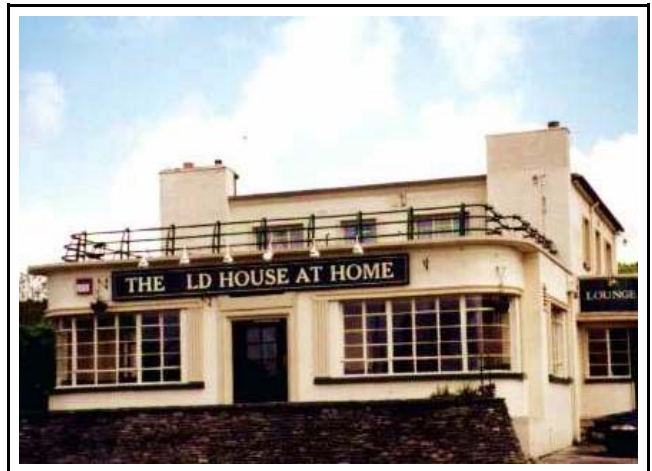


The Portsmouth Society

Registered with The Civic Trust

Annual Report 2004

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Portsmouth Society Annual Report 2004

This has been a very busy year for us, with an unusual number of concerns: the City Plan, the expansion of Gunwharf Quays, the University's Milton campus redevelopment, the threat to Eric Rimmington's unique mural in Trafalgar House, and our final attempt to save the Tricorn.

Architecture Week seminar

For the third year we held a very well attended Design Seminar in June in the Portland Building, on how to achieve design quality at the same time as high density, including tall and zero energy buildings. The three excellent guest speakers had achieved this difficult trick: Bill Dunster designer of the zero energy BEDZED in South London, which we subsequently visited; Dinah Rooke of the Peabody Trust, which sponsors innovative housing design; and Roger Zogolovitch who had squeezed a high density development into an almost impossible site beside the railway embankment just out of Waterloo. The day was a great success. The afternoon tours of high density schemes in Portsmouth provoked impassioned debate.

Tricorn

From last autumn, we spent much time and effort in trying to save the Tricorn from demolition. Rodney Gordon (the original architect) addressed a very well attended meeting on 5 November. He and Mick Morris (a local architect) both submitted their ideas to Centros Miller (the developers and part-owners) as to how the Tricorn might be altered to meet what were supposed to be the requirements of both the developers and the City Planning Officer for what is now called The Northern Quarter. We met them, expecting at least to see plans and drawings; but there was nothing on the table, only vague ideas. It was then that we decided to take what would clearly be the highly unpopular step - the election literature of all three political parties had firm undertakings to see Tricorn demolished - of applying for spot listing as a stay of execution, an attempt to prevent demolition at

Our proposal for listing, in spite of attracting the utmost hostility of The News, attracted some powerful and articulate support. Sir Colin Stansfield Smith, the former County Architect, said "This is a unique and seminal building of the 1960s. Its tough, macho quality, with its profiled and sculpted concrete . . . has a poignant relevance to that decade and the naval city of Portsmouth in particular. . . . Listing would give Portsmouth a second chance to appreciate that the Tricorn is a valuable legacy, something to be cherished rather than discarded. Daniel Libeskind, one of the best known architects in the world at present, remarked, on a visit here a few years ago, that Portsmouth was to be congratulated on having such a gem of the 1960s. Catherine Croft, director of the 20th Century Society, says "The Tricorn is perhaps the most flamboyant of British brutalist buildings, a truly great British piece of architecture". She regards the Tricorn's expressive design as preceding and influencing great British buildings of later years, such as Richard Rogers's Lloyds Building in London.

Our reply to the question who do we think we are to be advocating a course clearly against the wishes of a majority of the population is that the majority are against the building as it is, not as it could be. They haven't seen, as we have, impressions (which The News refused to print) of what it could be: a sparkling building with the concrete painted or re-clad, an uninterrupted light and airy ground floor, with maisonettes on the sturdy first floor Charlotte Street frontage with cars coming up to the front doors, and the top car-parking tray glazed in as a café/bar/ winter garden taking advantage of the wonderful views over the city and harbour to Portsdown Hill, while still retaining the unique sculptural form. We think it is our job to let people know what could have been done with it.

The Minister, Lord McIntosh, conveyed his decision not to list to us on 12 March. We were not surprised by the decision, given the weight of opposition whipped up by The News's campaign against the Tricorn and us, by the Council and the MPs. But we were surprised by the grounds for his decision, which did not refer at all to the official Planning Policy Guidelines (PPG) No.15 which list the criteria for listing of twentieth century buildings. CABE also let us down, saying that reuse proposals 'were not viable'. In our letter of protest we said that our plans by Finch Mackintosh and Mick Morris, retaining the unique sculptural form, had not been debated in the local public domain, because of the News and BBC South censorship. At national level, however, press and tv coverage was unprecedented. The Times, Independent and Guardian G2 gave more or less even handed accounts; Channel 4 and Endomol for BBC 2 Restoration have recorded programmes about the Tricorn to be broadcast in June/July. But when it came to the start of demolition on 17 March, we knew we could not compete with the fireworks, triumphalist speeches and 1812 Overture. We hired a trombonist from the BBC Symphony Orchestra to play the Last Post on the north side, facing Jeannie Kershaw's

artworks recording people's thoughts and feelings about the Tricorn, 75% of which were in favour of keeping it. TV coverage on BBC1, BBC South, ITN, and John Snow on Channel 4 was amazing: he held a lump of Tricorn concrete in his hand, and both Rodney Gordon and Owen Luder were interviewed. We are planning a Tricorn Fest in June, to celebrate the creativity the building continues to inspire, with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Tricorn will continue to live on in memory, film, photography and art.

Development of Gunwharf Quays

Gunwharf has won a commendation from the British Urban Development Association (BURA). Berkeleys now propose a massive extra development on their Gunwharf Quays site - way beyond what was envisaged in the original planning brief. We were invited to negotiations on the designs both by the City Planning Officer and Berkeleys themselves. We like to think that the improvements owe something to us, via our pressure to refer them to English Heritage and CABE, with whom there was much negotiation over design.

The tower block 'East Side Plaza', 29 storeys with 6 flats per floor, the largest building on the site, is now egg-shaped in plan with a diagonal sliced-off top; both changes contributing we think to an improved appearance, added to by the addition of balconies at almost all levels. This, we hope, means that the flats will not be air-conditioned as in the original design. We are less satisfied with the other building, 'Ariadne'. In its original form it presented a most unattractive side to the railway; but it has also been improved with a more modelled appearance. This building will contain Gunwharf's first 'affordable', key-worker, accommodation on the site, 126 units - many too few, and a nursery whose outdoor space will always be in shade. We don't understand why the planners do not insist on many more, considering the huge number of luxury flats for which permission has already been given. Negotiations are still going on with regard to the open space at the northern end of the site, originally planned as an arena. Then it was to be the site of a maze design by Adrian Fisher (no longer, regrettably, based in Southsea). Both these ideas have been abandoned. We have had to accept the demolition of Donegal Lodge and the archaeology of the King's Mill; but we objected to the very awkward arrangements for pedestrians leaving the site from the Vernon gateway, without success.

City Plan

We made some twenty objections as well as several expressions of support (where we expected there would be opposition) to the draft City Plan. These were heard by the inspector, Mr Stephen Amos, in April and May last year.

We urged the reinstatement of the proposal, deleted at some stage of the Plan's evolution, for the provision of at least 1,250 units of affordable housing.

We proposed reinstatement of the City Council's commitment to restore and refurbish Hilsea Lido with its swimming pool and paddling pool.

We opposed removal of the tennis centre in Cambridge Road., and also the concentration of all sports facilities at the Mountbatten Centre. We think it desirable that people living in the south western part of the city should be able to play tennis without having to travel several miles.

We proposed that Southsea shopping centre at least as far as the Queens Hotel should be added to the list of places served by the monorail. Not to do so while serving Gunwharf Quays is contrary to the city policy that Gunwharf should not compete with Southsea.

We urged provision for the completion of the harbourside millennium walk with an automatic openable bridge across the Outer Camber near the Bridge Tavern.

Notwithstanding the rejection of the Town Green at St. James's Hospital, we strongly supported the commitment that the land should be retained as public open space.

We opposed the Copnor Freight terminal for intermodal freight provision for the commercial port, on the grounds that to do this will put extra heavy lorries on to the roads - Eastern Road, A 27 and M275.

We proposed instead that the Station Street terminal of the approved LRT be physically linked to the rail tracks in the low level Portsmouth & Southsea Station, and that the LRT route along Stanhope Road as far as Edinburgh Road be upgraded from light to heavy rail in order to provide a heavy rail link for freight traffic at night from the main line at Portsmouth & Southsea Station via the old Dockyard route into the Dockyard at Unicorn Gate and thence through the Dockyard to the Commercial Port, serving the Dockyard, Vospers shipbuilding sheds, Flathouse Quay, Albert Johnson Quay and the Continental Ferry Port. The (very infrequent) trains would cross Market Way at quiet

hours with the signals at red for the road traffic. The Dockyard link would facilitate all-rail supply from the three-services MOD supply depot at Bicester. The scheme would be a pure road to rail transfer of freight.

We proposed that the Copnor terminal be available for local freight, e.g. ash from the incinerator, recyclable material from the Materials Recycling Facility in Quartermaine Road and recycled newsprint to the News Centre and any other intermodal traffic.

We strongly supported adoption of Dockyard Circular Road as public highway [subsequently withdrawn by the new management of The Dockyard].

We were able to put in a word for good landscaping and public art, which was still not in the plan.

Milton University campus

Plans for the reuse of the University's Milton site were complicated by the question as to whether or not part of the site should be used for a school to replace the special schools, Futchter and East Shore. Discussion about the planning of the site was begun before the schools question was settled. Roger persuaded the councillors to reject the first application, and despite much local opposition, planning permission was surprisingly given for three two or three storey blocks of flats, one of which would be affordable. The block facing Milton Road, of three rising to seven, meant the loss of quite a few very large trees.

The university sold the whole site to Barratts who then sold on the school site, although the city had wanted to buy the school site directly from the University. We objected to the plan on the grounds of loss of trees and dull design. The school was to be of single storey at the rear of the site. We suggested that, rather than waste valuable city land with a single storey building, the school should be accommodated in the ground floor of a multi-storey mixed use building, with upper floors used for offices or housing - giving the building the great advantage of being occupied at times when schools are at their most vulnerable. Innovative design would have kept access to the different sections of the building quite separate. But it was not to be. At the chaotic meeting of the Development Control Committee Councillor Lee Hunt made all the running. Neither the Foster Building, nor the distinguished Dymond Building on Locksway Road were listed and there was nothing, other than protest, that we could do to save them.

Arising out of the debate on this application was the matter of councillors' interests. New rules have recently been introduced with the entirely laudable object of preventing corruption; but the way they are working in cases such as this is to debar from debate the very councillors who have personal knowledge of the case and know what they are talking about. The chair of the committee who lives opposite the Milton site was warned that if she was seen to be taking any interest in the matter of the future of the campus, or attending any meeting where it was to be discussed or even talking to interested parties, she would be committing a criminal offence. She was even forbidden to attend the Milton Neighbourhood Forum, which is her ward. The old 'pecuniary interest' rules at least allowed for dispensation to speak and not vote, when the political balance would otherwise be affected.

The Old House at Home, Paulsgrove

Roger James was approached by Councillor Patey to ask if there was anything he could do to save this pub from imminent demolition. It is a remarkable building of 1930s Art Deco design with curved main windows, finished in smooth concrete. It stands out among the neighbouring brick houses and bungalows. There is no other pub here in Modernist style, although there are just a few cubist houses nearby, in Jubilee Avenue. Those in Craneswater are now unrecognisable. We applied to get the building listed, and succeeded. It is now being converted into flats, while retaining the essential architectural features.

50 High Street, Old Portsmouth.

We opposed the application to demolish this house, part of what is in effect the eastern range of the Cathedral Close, backing onto the gardens of Penny Street. The Twentieth Century Society and English Heritage did not recommend it for listing, which was disappointing because it and its neighbours were designed by the distinguished architect of the 1950s, Mike Goodair, noted for the pair of monopitched houses in Queen's Grove and the two terraces of self-build houses, also monopitched, in Somers Road North and St Paul's Road. His work was celebrated in a School of Architecture dissertation which we hope they will publish. We objected to the six storey replacement on the grounds of excessive height; but the application was withdrawn, and the developer is now living in the house.

Design awards

Professor Peter Faller, Terry Carter, Celia and Deane Clark judged our annual design competition in September. The Best New Building and Best Restoration stood out without question. They were the Student Union building in Cambridge Road (also winner of a Civic Trust Award), and Art In The Park, the imaginative conversion by Mark Lewis and his partners at Art and Soul Traders, of the park keeper's lodge in Victoria Park, now a vital focus for artists and the local community. Other new buildings earned commendations: the Downlands Housing Associations development of terraced houses on the edge of the old tow path at Milton, and the creation of the new garden restaurant behind Rosie's Wine Bar in Elm Grove. The commended restoration was the Tourist Information Centre on The Hard. No one landscaping scheme came up to the standard to be rewarded as 'Best', but three schemes were commended: the opening up of the old no-go area between Guildhall Square and the Station (although the pedestrian crossing arrangements leave something to be desired), Halsea Lido's new bridge, and the beautiful refurbishment of the Naval War Memorial on the sea front

Rimington's mural

We heard that the pub chain Wetherspoons were in process of acquiring Trafalgar House in Edinburgh Road, a hostel owned by the university. We knew that there was in a basement room a remarkable mural depicting a partly imaginary view of Portsmouth from the Town Station painted by Eric Rimington in 1949. The artist had already received an abject letter from the City Museum and Planning Department saying they understood Wetherspoons' attitude, and that there was nothing they could do to prevent them from knocking down the wall with the painting on it.

We protested to the Wetherspoons managing director. He put us on to their architect and this resulted in a meeting on site between John Pike, City Conservation Officer, Angela Wait of the Imperial War Museum, the local representative of English Heritage, Roger James, and Trevor Brown, the caretaker of the hostel who was a noble defender of the mural. It later emerged that John Pike had already applied for listing of the building, and to our amazement it was granted - amazement because it is extremely unusual for a whole building (especially one like this of no architectural value or historic importance) to be listed on account of its containing one work of art. Work is now going ahead on the refurbishment of the building.

It needed no great ingenuity to devise a way in which Wetherspoons got what they wanted for this pub, while leaving the wall intact with space in front to view it. Later this year the work should be completed. Members are strongly recommended then to take a drink in the new pub when it opens and admire this remarkable work of art.

Accounts of the millennium tower

We wrote to the Local Auditor to ask if he could clarify the costs of the tower. There was the Council saying that none of tax payers money was being spent on it and there was The News and Councillor Hancock saying that £8 million of council tax money had been wasted on it. The figures we eventually got back were:

The spending to the end of October 2003 amounted to £22,213,423, funded from these sources

- Millennium Commission grant £12,858,287
- Berkeleys "contributions in kind" £3,130,000
- Berkeleys cash contribution £3,000,000
- Interest on cash contribution £165,000
- Portsmouth City Council, contributions in kind £455,600
- Ditto cash contribution £2,604,536

"There is therefore no direct charge to council tax payers, and the main impact on residents is the deferral of other schemes" We queried whether these figures included officers' time and where the City Council's contributions came from if not from the council-tax payers. We have not yet received a full answer. Roger James gave evidence to the inquiry about how the alternative design based on a dockyard crane with a restaurant in the short arm, which would have generated revenue, was never seriously considered, because there seemed to be no decision-making body with whom to raise it. Because of the mistakes by councillors and officers, Portsmouth council tax payers will now be £8m poorer.

Queen Alexandra Hospital

We objected to the ugly and unrelieved frontage of the mammoth new Queen Alexandra Hospital, apart from our criticism of the decision to build so big a hospital on that site, concentrating so many

resources there. We discovered that the architects had recently designed a new hospital at Swindon, very prominently visible from the M4. We went to take photographs of its extremely bland featureless frontage, similar to that proposed for the new QA.

Our photographs had some influence with the architects' panel who insisted on improvements to the south elevation and landscaping – by city officers. Some improvements were made, particularly to the appearance of the main entrance, which was originally both forbidding and dull. However the west face remained bland in the extreme. In spite of these and other criticisms, planning permission was granted on 31 March. One councillor, in seconding the approval, remarked that if you were being hurried into hospital you wouldn't worry about the colour of the brickwork.

IOW car ferry traffic

Roger James appeared before the Executive of the Council to try to persuade them to re-route the traffic to and from the Isle of Wight car ferry. At present it goes via the City Centre gyratory and the roundabout near the Grammar School and at times snarls up both junctions. Our suggestion was that the new traffic lights at the north end of Park Road should be used to allow the IOW traffic to use Park Road in both directions. We saw this rerouting as a first step. The next would be the removal of the ferry from the Camber to the Continental Ferry port or the Dockyard which we had proposed as an amendment to the City Plan. We did not win. The traffic lights and the Park Road/St George's Road junction had been paid for by Berkeleys and intentionally designed to ease traffic into Gunwharf

Theatres

We have to report with regret the failure of the lottery bids for both the King's and The Theatre Royal.

Railways

We have asked the City Engineer to raise the matter of the length of the Fratton platforms at their next occasional meeting with South West Trains. Fratton is the only station served by the 'fast' trains which does not have full length platforms. We explained that it would be an immediate help, and not cost anything, if ten-coach up trains would draw up in such a position that the rear five coaches were the ones with opening doors and that these should be along the rear end of the platform.

We also made the point that SWT had recently been granted funds for the improvement of stations. Could he ask them to spend it at Fratton, if not on lengthening the platforms, at least on escalators to the island platforms and automatic doors to the booking hall where one of the double doors is always locked, making it awkward for bicycles and prams? The very high density Football village proposed at Fratton should come to committee quite soon. It seems very odd, next to the very low density retail area next door.

Wider contacts.

Roger James serves as vice-chair of the city Environmental Forum. John Holland is a member of the Cycle Forum. Charles Burns, Terry Carter and Bob Adderley lead their neighbourhood forums. Following a contact at the Torbay Society's weekend showing societies the delights of south Devon, we will be showing the Salisbury Society round the city next week. Celia Clark is vice-chair of the Civic Trust South East, a member of the South East Forum for Sustainability's planning group, and secretary of the Southern Building Preservation Trusts group as a board member of the Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust. She and Deane very much enjoyed making the short architectural programmes for BBC South Today in connection with BBC's Restoration last summer, and recently on 60s buildings.

The Executive Committee and Officers

The Society would not be as effective as it is without the active involvement of many members, especially the Executive Committee, Betty Owen's inspection of planning applications, and John Holland's editing of the Newsheet and website, which has many hits and opens our activity to the world. We could do with a minute secretary, to relieve Roger James. The committee and officers offer themselves for re-election, and we would welcome members who would like to serve or take us in new directions.

Celia Clark, Chair, March 2004

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