

Portsmouth Society Annual Report 2009-2010

Unveiling our Design Award plaques this year, the Lord Mayor, Councillor Terry Hall, a member for twenty years, praised the society's record in working for the city's improvement and raising ambition about its future. There have been several key developments this year – as well as some enjoyable trips. The collapse of our parent national body, the Civic Trust, was followed by an intense year of consultation of our sister societies. The launch of its replacement, Civic Voice, is to be held later this month. The judges were impressed by the high quality of the entries to our design competition. The loved/hated Tricorn has been memorialised in a impressively illustrated book designed and published by Gail Baird and Dan Bernard of 131 Design Old Portsmouth. We have initiated a tree wardens scheme in the city, but the bid to inscribe Portsmouth Harbour and Spithead on the World Heritage list was postponed in February, just at the moment when the Department of Culture, Media and Sport called for bids to be submitted.

The Civic Society Initiative was launched on 1 June by Griff Rhys Jones and Tony Burton whose post for a year was supported by the CPRE, RIBA, National Trust, the Esme Fairburn Foundation and English Heritage. Meetings were held throughout the country to identify what the thousands of grass-roots societies require of a national body. David Baynes arranged our Portsmouth meeting for local societies, chaired by Tony Fooks of the Civic Trust South East - which still exists. We identified our myriad activities, and how we would like to move ahead: through partnership with strengthened local government, two-way working with younger people in formal and informal education, and influencing and contributing to central government plans and policies. The new national body should offer access to expertise and information (legal, architectural advice, updated planning information, legislation etc); local group interaction (information exchange, volunteer experts, annual conference); a national communications hub with access to other information sources and campaign reports by other groups or outside bodies; national leadership, internet technical support; and advice on running groups and on grants/loans provision. We attended the regional conference arranged by the Guildford Society and the national one at Blackpool with Paul Woodman of the Portchester Society. There was a broad consensus on these aims, but to finance them we need to raise our subscription, as we are doing tonight.

The Admiralty Quarter, the megastructure of over 500 flats in Queen Street designed by David Richmond and Partners for Crest Nicholson, with its lovely secret garden two storeys up above the carpark for the naval base heritage area has already won several national awards. It stands head and shoulders above most commercial residential building in the city, so the judges chose it as one of our three Best New Buildings this year. We were pleased that Downland Housing Association's Priory View flats, by far the best of the three blocks of social housing south of Fratton Bridge also merited our award, not least for the superior space standards of the rooms compared with private housing. Councillor Cheryl Buggy, city Design and Heritage champion, felt that we should also award the timber framed house in West Street Old Portsmouth, although we have not seen its interior. We commended the university's Denis Sciama building by Van Heyningen and Haward architects – as did the Civic Trust Awards – which were floated off before the Trust's demise. We had to redefine our reuse/restoration category for the ingenious extension of an electricity substation in St. Ronans Road Southsea into a light filled house designed by Stuart Bone. St. Jude's School's local history roundel designed by pupils with the help of artist Kevin Dean won Best Landscaping. We have a bumper crop to consider next year: the Mountbatten Leisure Centre has already won a 'Bad British Architecture award'....

The Tricorn Life and Death of a Sixties Icon, the book which I compiled from Robert Cook's interviews, explores what makes an architectural icon – and what unmade it, setting the building within its architectural context: Brutalism and the 1960s. The book draws on two sources not usually combined: a collage of documentary material, and the rich seam of people's memories. It documents the Society's long drawn out struggle to save the building and the reuse plans by Kate Mackintosh and Mick Morris. Every time we sell a copy, people tell us more stories: see the Tricornbooks blog. Keep them coming! As locals will know, the 1812 Overture and the Last Post

were played at its demolition - a reflection of the Tricorn's heroic status in people's imagination. A full colour reprint is in preparation. The Society's book *Maritime City Portsmouth from 1945 to 2005* is also being reprinted.

We are delighted at the progress Pauline Powell has made with the tree wardens scheme. The initiative was supported financially by Southsea Town Council, now no more, and Hilsea Ward Councillor Donna Jones. It is pleasing to see this follow-up to the Society's early initiative in the 1970s when we counted all the street trees in the city, in preparation for tree preservation orders on the important ones.

Three and a half years' work on the World Heritage bid, including a successful launch in January 2008, and nearly sixty presentations to enthusiastic interested groups all over the area, was put into jeopardy, postponed by a meeting with the Leader of the Council, Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson on 16 February. He proposed to commission a 'commercial' report, interviewing the major stakeholders on how they see the advantages and disadvantages of inscription onto the World Heritage list. His fear is that it would inhibit investment and economic development, but recent research, for example for the Lake District, demonstrates that the reverse is true. A workshop with the reluctant planners in the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Gosport run by those with experience of World Heritage site would be far more informed and productive. Hampshire County Council may fund the report.

As well as the regular checking of planning applications by our sub-committee, the Society has commented on and sometimes supported many city council and other bodies' proposals and consultations: Colas Street Tree policies, the joint City of Culture bid with Southampton, the draft Hard local plan, the Seafront Strategy, Sea change, the Theatre Royal's plans for a new studio theatre and other facilities, Transport Strategy, the North Solent Shoreline Management Plan.... We were disappointed that no city council representative attended the UniverCities event in London to report on the seafront consultation organised by the university school of architecture. The aim is to 'build up productive collaboration between cities, their places of learning and communities of practice'. Medway and Brighton gave full expositions showing the potential of such collaborations. Steve Bomford, Deane and I explained how enthusiastic the public response to the consultation about Southsea seafront was. We hope it will be reflected in city council action and investment – even in these straitened times. Yale University Press is in discussion with David Lloyd about completing his meticulous research on the South Hampshire volume of the Buildings of England. Society members and university students could potentially help him to describe the new developments in Portsmouth in the last few years.

Our newsletter and website, ably produced by John Holland, provide an essential communication with our members, and with the outside world. The Pompey lingo section still gets contributions – from all over! Our successful series of talks continue to educate and enlighten us: the climate change debate organised by David Baynes, Ray Riley on Portsmouth pubs stand out, though we wish he'd taken pictures of the interiors too....

We've had some interesting visits – some 'business' and some pleasure – ably organised by Bruce Oliver. The EC visited the Continental Ferry Port in November 2009 where the Port Manager, Martin Putman, explained the designs for the new passenger terminal to improve efficiency of operation and provide a pleasant environment for passengers. After a selection process engineers Halcro prepared the overall outline plan for a new light and airy terminal building to the east of the present one, changing the freight operations and the road layout. The terminal will open in 2011, and is expected to have a life of 30 years, designed to BREAM standards. The turnover of the whole commercial port is £33 million of which the ferry port contributes £16-18 million. Ownership of the temperature-controlled warehouses passed to the city when MMD was purchased in February 2008 and is now operated as a local authority-owned company. Albert Johnson Quay is also owned by the city. We also had a vertiginous ascent to the Guildhall's repaired bell tower, which is a contender in the Best Restoration Awards next year. Bruce Oliver organised fascinating trips by vintage bus and

boat to Chichester Harbour, and to Burseldon Brickworks. We are delighted that he plans to take us to Ryde this year. Ray Riley and I are to contribute to the Victorian theme of the Grammar Schools' Festivities this June, by his lecture on nineteenth century Portsmouth and my tour of Owen's Southsea. Can we suggest some new venues for Heritage Open Days this year – which don't have to be historic, but just not usually accessible?

As you know, my health has suffered severely this spring. I have to curtail activity which causes me stress, but it is with great sadness that I resign as chairman. I was the founding secretary of the society in 1973, and have served as an officer almost continually since, apart from one year when I was training to be a teacher. I represented the Society on the Civic Trust's first national Local Amenity Societies Committee, and its much later successor, the Civic Trust South East. I combined local and national action when I was Education Officer of the Civic Trust from 1989 to 1991, when I worked with the education officers of the National Trust and English Heritage to ensure that active local environmental education was in the first National Curriculum. It would be good to review the society's achievements – and some failures – over that long period of thirtyseven years. We've saved several buildings including the Palace Cinema, St. Agatha's, Rivers Street Hall (which won a national award), the Theatre Royal, St.Mary's House, the Tourist Information on the Hard....

Roger too believes it is time to go. He has served as Hon. Secretary almost since the beginning. While he was a councillor for Fratton ward for ten years, he took a very small part, but he has ably represented us at the council's Development Control/Planning committee many times when he has made deputations on our behalf. He can reasonably claim to have changed the committee's mind on several occasions.

The long campaign to save the Pyramids swimming pools has at last been vindicated by the transfer of management of the building to Southsea Leisure Ltd. More welcome news is the 99-year lease of Hilsea Lido to the Pool for the People group, and the sale of the Grade II* Beneficial School to the Groundlings Theatre company, which will use it as a theatre, dance studio, multimedia studio and rehearsal rooms. These transfers of local government assets to community oriented groups and the very unpopular closure of the Central Library for one day a week is a reflection of the longterm squeeze on local government finance. The growing pressure for 'localism' and more local autonomy does not, unfortunately, seem to be reflected in any election promises. We'll have to keep up the pressure through our new central body!"

What is so exciting is that the Executive Committee is being renewed with new blood: people with new ideas. In this pre-election period, what used to be called the 'Third Way' and is now called 'social enterprise' and partnership working. These are still not only valid, but essential if we are to renew local as well as national democracy. Our movement's aim is to shape our places by active participation. Long may we continue to do so!

Celia Clark 30 March 2010