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Planning Matters

It is hard to believe that the Willis Faber and Dumas building (1) is fifteen years old, and in this 100th edition of the Newsletter it is still hitting the headlines by receiving yet another international and prestigious design award. This latest award is the first RIBA Trustees' Medal, and the building as a result was officially acclaimed as " the finest work by a British designer anywhere in the world, completed between 1965 and 1983". We are proud to have such a building in this town. We also look forward to the prospect of other inspirational new buildings in Ipswich to complement our historic architecture, which the Willis Faber and Dumas building itself is becoming a part of, without our scarcely noticing. Surely, too, it won't be long before this building is statutorily listed.

The activity of planning applications being lodged in the first half of this year is still frenetic, although there is a marked drop from the height of the same period last year. The monitoring of the more sensitive and "controversial" schemes received by the Borough is still being maintained by the panel which continues to be an important part of the Society's work. The role of the panel is different from the "Conservation Panel", or what was previously known as the "architects' panel", who were consulted by the Borough as a matter of course on applications of importance. These panels have been the subject of renewed scrutiny recently after a lobby of 100 backbench Tory MPs (Sane Planning Group) urged compulsory, paid design panels to assist local authority planners in monitoring the design of new buildings. Chris Patten, the Environment Minister, has, however, rejected such reforms along with other proposed new design controls in favour of giving applicants and their architects one last chance to improve the quality of major schemes. 'Me job of our team of volunteers therefore remains a worthy task, where we as an independent group are free to influence an element of aesthetic control in addition to the other criteria that we consider in assessing applications.

Since the last time that I wrote this column, when I mentioned the problems encountered by the erection of satellite dishes on properties, the BSB "squarial' has arrived. Currently, a single satellite dish erected on a wall of a building does not require planning permission. However, a second aerial will. This regulation may help to restrict the proliferation of unsightly aerials or dishes, especially where TV addicts wish to watch both BSB and Sky television. We understand that there is also a Parliamentary bill on this subject, where it is proposed that planning permission is required for all dishes, etc. I wish the bill the best of success.

The local authorities have this year consulted the Society on a number of local planning issues. Firstly, the "Transport Policies and Programme" report was issued by the Suffolk County Council, outlining the county's strategy for highways improvements for the forthcoming plan period. The Society has been considering the contents of the Halcrow Fox Report that has more relevance to Ipswich, in particular, on a strategy to link the central dock area of Ipswich with the A45 at the Orwell Bridge.

Secondly, there has been a series of draft policy documents issued by the Borough for consultation concerning the following topics:

- (a) Shopping Policy Guidelines
- (b) Wet Dock Policy Guidelines
- (c) Policy Guidelines for the Central Ipswich Area,

The most remarkable advice from these reports was that given by the Retail Group, consultants to the Borough, who recommended that the floorspace in the Ipswich central area dedicated to

shopping needs to double by 1993. Also, the consultants reported that they wished to see the market relocated to occupy the current site of the Tower Ramparts bus station (2, page 2).

Lastly, we were asked to comment on the proposed new conservation area at Whitton. This has been at last ratified. We are, of course, hopeful that the docks area, too, can be designated a conservation area, for which, like the Whitton project, we have been campaigning for a long time.

There have been a number of major planning applications lodged recently, all of which we have inspected and commented on. There has been much speculation about sites near the docks. We have commented on a scheme to redevelop the Felaw Street Maltings as offices (3, page 3), a proposal for the redevelopment of Cliff Brewery as an office campus, and another interesting attempt by Contship to moor a vessel permanently in the Wet Dock for their private use. The applications affecting Cliff Brewery are particularly sensitive in that there is now a collection of listed buildings on the site.

Whilst we are experiencing a lull in housing development there have still been quite a few major residential applications either lodged or decided recently. First, the long-awaited outcome of the Thorington Hall appeal has been announced, granting approval for a major housing scheme now that the highways matters have been resolved. Secondly, 56 acres of vacant land against St Clement's Hospital was proposed for another major housing development. Smaller schemes for approximately 150 homes each were lodged for sites at the Tolly Cobbold sports ground and at the former site of Holywells High School, Landseer Road Wing. Lastly, a decision on the outcome of the current proposal for the site of Ipswich High School for Girls (5, over page) has been reached and approval for an outline residential scheme given. The application, however, is unlikely to be implemented until a new replacement school is up and running, which seems some time off.

In the field of cultural buildings, we welcomed the proposal for a new Art and Design centre for the Suffolk College. The proposed building, however, as a celebration of either art or design, was disappointing. The exciting proposal, on the other hand, for the new European Visual Arts Centre, to be situated near to the College and within the dock area, will surely set its sights higher than the College in this respect. EVAC is expected to be the subject of an international design competition which we await with interest.

Finally, Ransomes Europark has received a good deal of publicity at its launch recently. The business park was approved under an outline application some time ago, so shortly we should expect a number of detailed applications concerning individual units. Even though part of the site falls outside the Borough boundary, the Ipswich Society will endeavour to view such schemes with interest.

Roger Pratt

Editors look back

Editor John Brown, 1967-71

Time softens everything. I forget the arm-twisting and cajoling that made me editor in 1967. The promises of support - but not, alas, just yet ! - have joined the mistakes, misprints and missed deadlines in a rose-tinted blur. What a golden age it was !

When I actually re-read Newsletters numbers 10 to 24, once I have got over being impressed by the sheer quantity produced, a change of mood occurs. Much that occupied us then, now seems so trivial; most of it depressingly familiar.

Issue 10 (October 1967) made much of the Great White Horse inquiry. Great rejoicing that the hotel was saved ! Today's reader may be forgiven for asking, "Saved for what ?"

Peter Underwood reported on the Ipswich Expansion inquiry in Issue 13 (July 1968) and on the Minister's decision not to go ahead with expansion a year later. "Shankland who?"

Number 19 (January 1970), 20 and 24 (April 1971) record the saga of the Sailors' Rest. Another fine building saved for posterity ! "Have you looked at it recently ?"

On the other hand, there were brighter spots. Campaigns concerning both advertising hoardings and trees led to modest but lasting improvements. And continued reporting of the good and bad in Ipswich must have done something to raise public awareness of our urban environment.

Some things are much as they always were ! Every one of my fifteen Newsletters carried a plea for new contributors. And Adam Gordon (and, to be fair, one or two others) could always be relied on for an entertaining "Street Scene".

Plus ca change ...

John Brown

Editor Tony Hill, 1971-79

I remember well when John Brown, then editor of the Ipswich Society Newsletter, announced he was off to the South Seas for three years. I had just joined the Ipswich Society and, suddenly became the new editor! It must have been as difficult then to find volunteers as it is today - I was stuck with the job for about seven years.

I remember well the Sunday afternoons spent in Adam Gordon's office, sweating over the Roneo 750 duplicator which would send paper aeroplanes flying all over the room as soon as one's attention was distracted. I remember also the backache gained from collating and stapling 500 Newsletters, and the furry tongue from licking 500 envelopes! I remember the endless telephone calls and badgering which were always necessary to get the promised articles and the last minute information about the forthcoming events.

Looking back through some of the editions which were published during my term of office has reminded me of a few of the burning issues which are now long forgotten. For example:

In 1971, Mrs M White wrote....

"What about the awful congestion in the shopping area of the town, particularly Tavern Street? How much longer must we weave our way through a continuous string of vehicles, the drivers of which (no doubt very frustrated) in their anxiety, pay little heed to the pedestrian? Is our Borough Council really aware of this? Do they also realise the appalling condition of the pavements? Do they realise

that to reach the new Market, Greyfriars, (4 minutes from the Cornhill) means a walk up and down an underground way? Does anyone ever see the empty buildings, an old church in Crown Street, and a nearby garage rapidly falling into decay, and other buildings, even some houses which soon become rubbish dump?"

On the subject of Dutch Elm disease...

"Although difficult to identify at the present time of year, it is thought that the current outbreak of this disease will not prove too great a threat to the Town's elm trees. So far, only our Parks have been thoroughly examined, but it may well be that we as a Society can help to complete the task when the trees are again in leaf."

And in 1975, Jonathan Drake commented...

"To be optimistic, however, the new Entertainments Centre (Corn Exchange) given a more enlightened basis, able to take full advantage of its position in the middle of the town, adjoining the facilities of the Town Hall itself, seems to have every chance of filling a longstanding gap in the community, without visibly altering the area in which it has been built. Such environmental neutrality can hardly be claimed for Willis, Faber and Dumas: their new Head Office gives little to Ipswich other than employment for office workers (already in short supply) and the dubious privilege of an architectural wonder, which, although beautiful as it stands, has little in common with our streets. It represents just one more incursion into our historical town, and though its effect is to an extent minimised by its low height and adherence to the old street contours, the great block of black glass can hardly look anything but out of place."

With the benefit of hindsight, it is now clear that over the years the majority of the contributors to the Ipswich Society Newsletter "got it right" - it is very consoling to look back and realise how many of the causes for which we once fought are now "facts of life". It makes all that effort seem really worthwhile.

A.J. Hill

Editors Ian and Mary Chilvers, 1979-83

Shortly after joining the Ipswich Society in November 1978, I casually remarked to John Andreason that Ian and I would be happy to be of some practical use to the Society. (This was my first mistake !) Our offer was swiftly followed by a 'phone call from the then chairman, Bob Allen, who turned up on our doorstep a few evenings later accompanied by Tony Hill. "How do you feel about editing the Newsletter ?" I had in mind addressing envelopes or delivering Newsletters when I offered our help, not becoming editors. Still in a dazed state we found ourselves agreeing, not only to take over from Tony, who had given such sterling service for eight years, but also to produce something "a bit different" once a year. This saw the birth of the Ipswich Society Review, which was to be printed not duplicated and would include photographs and a cover illustration. Ian vividly remembers sitting with Bob Allen in his study waiting for him to finish his drawing of the Ancient House so that our new "baby" could go to the printers. I am pleased to say that the Review was very well received by the membership.

We were fortunate to edit the Newsletter during a very vigorous period of the Society's history. Looking back through the archive copies, I read again of the Society's concern for the Ancient House, the Bull Inn threatened by the Star Lane link road scheme and our views on the proposed Crown Street sports complex and the eventual building of Crown Pools. During this period the Society took the bold step of rescuing the Brett Drinking Fountain in Christchurch Park, when the

Council proposed to demolish it, and then embarked on a series of fund-raising events including the first Ipswich Society barbecue, all of which provided many articles for the Newsletter.

Our editorial efforts relied on the help given by Mrs Parsons who patiently typed three Newsletters a year, Mr Walter Wright who kindly duplicated them for us and the late Miss Madge Ellis, who diligently addressed the envelopes. She also corrected my distribution list. Unfortunately I never did manage to persuade her that Miss Watthews was not Miss Matthews despite a lengthy correspondence on the subject.

Ian and I would like to take this opportunity to wish Neil Salmon good luck as he becomes editor - there are times when he'll need it

Mary Chilvers

Editor Ed Barella 1983 - 1986

When I took over from Ian and Mary Chilvers, my aim as editor was to keep the Newsletter in the form which had served the members, as I thought, very well for several years. One minor aspiration I had was to give full credit to contributors by appending their full names rather than initials. The other desire I had was one which all editors attempt to achieve but never do, namely, to eradicate typing errors. I had had previous experience of editing a church magazine wherein errors were just as likely to arise despite the most assiduous scrutiny of the proofs. I was constantly alert to the fear that I might allow a report to be published about a church festival, say, in which "the choir led the sinning" ! I cannot think of any such error in the Ipswich Society Newsletter which might raise shocked eyebrows - unless you know different

I am envious of the success which Fiona Powell has achieved in the splendid face-lifting enterprises undertaken during her editorship. I feel for her over the continuing problem of errors creeping in despite the use of word processors which permit easier correction than cut stencils.

No editor can function in the production of a newsletter without the stalwart support of many other people, particularly the contributors of articles and also the worthy typist Mrs Parsons, who had unstintingly given her services for several years before that. Not least important is the willing band of collators, envelopers and small army of postpersons whose services are so far not superseded by even the most advanced Information Technology systems.

Ed Barella

Snippets

Publications

The Society postcards, 25p each or £1.50 for the set of six, and the booklet on the history of Pykenham's Gatehouse are available from Ian Chilvers or at Pykenham's Gatehouse Open Mornings, the third Saturday of each month from 10:30 am.

Floral Ipswich

The Society welcomes and supports the Chamber of Commerce initiative to revive Floral Ipswich and is sponsoring one hanging basket this year. If you would like to make an individual contribution, personal or commercial, please contact Tim Voelcker, Chairman of Floral Ipswich, tel. 215752.

Thornham Estate

Our March meeting was an appetiser for the summer visit to the Thornharn Estate. We were addressed by the education officer at the Thornharn Field Centre who described Lord Henniker's inspired decision to open his estate to the public for their enjoyment. Alongside the working estate there are craft workshops, a garden centre, the Field Centre for educational topics, a visitors' centre for exhibitions and Thornham Walks, twelve miles of way-marked footpaths revealing the beauty and history of the estate and the wildlife. Visitors' basic needs are also catered for with a picnic site, camping site and residential accommodation. I can promise a very pleasant outing for August.

Committee

We are pleased to announce that our Minutes Secretary, Janet Wyatt, has been co-opted on to the Committee of the Society.

BBC Radio Suffolk

We welcome this potentially valuable extension of local broadcasting with its emphasis on speech. The start of broadcasting from the new premises in St Matthews Street was accompanied by the BBC Radio Comes to Town travelling exhibition on the Comhill.

Geoffrey Ramsdale

Mr Ramsdale, the town's first Chief Planning Officer who was appointed in 1969, has recently retired. He has been involved in many valuable consultations with the Society, of course, and we wish him a long and happy retirement.

Environmental Improvement Scheme

The Borough Council has set aside £20,000 to build a scheme designed by students from Ipswich secondary schools. The competition will be judged in March, 1991. Winners of the previous competition were Northgate High School, with a scheme to improve access and parking at St Christopher's Church Hall in Renfrew Road. A splendid way to encourage interest in the efficiency and appearance of the town.

Giles' Sculptures

Members who have often commented on modern street sculptures in other towns (including continental ones) should have noted the proposal by the Ipswich Promotions Bureau to install a bronze sculpture of some Giles cartoon characters in the Tower Ramparts Shopping Centre by next Easter.

Norman Collinson Bequest

The Society has been able to use this welcome bequest in acquiring a suitable cabinet for our collection of photographic slides.

Felixstowe Society

Members of that Society were treated to a tour of the Ipswich dock area by Bob Allen on 7 April, followed by tea at Pykenham's Gatehouse.

High Street Museum

The refurbished Victorian Natural History Gallery was opened on 26 April. The Friends of the Museum have made some far-reaching proposals to incorporate the nearby Salem Chapel and the High Street premises of the Suffolk College Art School, soon to be redundant, into an enlarged museum scheme.