

UK Newsletter 18

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The Eindhoven Statement
DOCOMOMO exists to:

- 1 Bring the significance of the Modern Movement to the attention of the public, the authorities, the professions and the educational community concerned with the built environment.
- 2 Identify and promote the recording of the works of the modern Movement, which will include a register, drawings, photographs and other documents.

- 3 Foster the development of appropriate techniques and methods of conservation, and disseminate knowledge of these throughout the profession.
- 4 Oppose destruction and disfigurement of significant works.
- 5 Identify and attract funding for documentation and conservation.
- 6 Explore and develop knowledge of the Modern Movement.

Editorial

Whatever you may think of Prince Charles (in my case, nothing whatever) it is his comments on architecture that display his misconception most vividly. In pleading with architects to show self-control and consider the environment and placemaking (which he believes to be a totally new concept within the profession), he seems innocent of those who exercise genuine control: Councils, and more specifically, the planning process.

Our Campaigns this issue (page 3) demonstrate this very clearly. North Kensington's Trelick Tower, and the Cheltenham Estate of which the tower is a part, was conceived and built as a whole, a transformative project that these days would be called 'regeneration', that combined nurseries, health projects, various sizes of flats, family housing, open space, sheltered homes and an old people's home; cradle to grave. Having despatched the latter by demolition, Kensington and Chelsea Council is now sniffing round the estate of 100 homes in two rows of houses and two lower blocks. It is heartening to see social tenants and some leaseholders, many of whom moved there from the nearby 'slums', ready to fight tooth and nail to save what they know to be unique architecture as well as their homes.

James Dunnett, with Jon Wright and Catherine Croft of the Twentieth Century Society, spent most of a Saturday visiting the estate and talking to residents, some of whom have individually approached English Heritage to ask for their houses to be listed.

Continuing the series of Docomomo Study Tours, the Paris trip in spring (page 4) visited a variety of houses that you could only find in France, and Philip Boyle's review is no less than a love letter. Caroline Maniaque's



talk on Le Corbusier's Maisons Jaoul (page 5), based on her book that has now been translated into English for the first time, gives body and substance to the more experiential visit of our colleagues.

As a complement to the festival of Corbusier this spring, with the Barbican exhibition, accompanying books and seminars, we look back to Sunand Prasad's Annual Lecture on Modernism in India (page 6), and forward to the exhibition and seminar on furniture from Chandigarh (page 7), being shown at University of Westminster 20 to 28 June, and 1 to 12 July.

New government guidelines to encourage Councils to build social and mixed tenure housing include joint developments where the Council's contribution is the land, and the developer builds, both sharing income and responsibilities on completion. This can only tempt Councils further to regard any areas of green space between buildings as potential development sites, with consequent detriment to the original and new residents. While planning laws are being reviewed to allow our renewed enthusiasm for building affordable housing, and while CABE is insisting on high standards of quality, who now is fighting for the

preservation of green space? Is it just to be seen as a vacuum to be filled?

In June 2007, Docomomo co-chair James Dunnett spoke against such a scheme near his home in Islington, and we summarise his representations (pages 8 to 9). Sadly his argument was ignored and the development allowed.

We were delighted to celebrate the centenary of Leslie Martin's birth with an evening looking at perimeter planning and courtyards (page 10). Bjorn Linn, Professor Emeritus of Theory and History of Architecture at Chalmers University, Gothenburg spoke on Perimeter Planning – an alternative to the freestanding block?, and here reviews his life-long research. The evening ended with a seminar on Leslie Martin's courtyards by James Dunnett (page 11); a substantial debate ensued involving one of Leslie Martin's key collaborators Lionel March, once Rector of the Royal College of Art and later Professor Emeritus of the University of California, Los Angeles.

We are very grateful to all our contributors, many of whom write summaries of their seminars especially for our Newsletter.

Emma Dent Coad

Campaigns

In a recent blog, Friends of the Central Library campaigner Alan Clawley reckons John Madin's 1973 Brutalist classic could still be listed. And he wonders why the building designed to replace it is so devoid of detail. 'There is no more detail about the proposals on display than there was on 2 April after which we put in a Freedom of Information request for the plans, sections and elevations on which the architects Mecanoo should have based their design, showing what each floor is used for and where the escalators, lifts and other services are located. So far we have received nothing. This confirms my impression that the designs are very sketchy and of the kind that a first year architecture student could have produced in a matter of weeks.

Which leads me to wonder why the new library looks like a post-modern office block that only needs a big sign on the front saying "Grade A Offices to Let" for the image to be complete.

Could it be that in response to public opinion and the economic recession the Council is now hedging its bets by commissioning a building that is so bland and indeterminate in function that it could be sold or let for offices to make up for their failure to get them built elsewhere in the City? Mere speculation of course.

Alan Clawley is chair of Friends of the Central Library.

Campaigns

James Dunnett, Alan Clawley and Emma Dent Coad

Goldfinger's **Edenham Way** is under threat as Kensington and Chelsea Council seem intent to continue the act of vandalism perpetrated on Goldfinger's old people's home, by commissioning a study on the possible demolition and redevelopment of its neighbour Edenham Way, part of Cheltenham Estate that includes Trellick Tower. Local people signed a petition to save their homes and create a conservation zone; this was supported by hundreds of residents as well as architects, historians and conservationists. James Dunnett gives his thoughts on the estate he worked on as a member of Goldfinger's team.

'Goldfinger is still not recognized for what I believe him to have been - a great architect whose quality is as evident in his small buildings as in his large. He achieved a one-off striking gesture in Trellick. The terrace houses were originally beautiful - the proportions of the windows within their ply panelling were very harmonious in a grand and highly architectural way. If there is any respect for post-war architecture within English Heritage the significance of these buildings should be recognized and they should be joined in Trellick Tower's listing - just as the whole of the Barbican is listed.

'The quality of his thought and feeling extends right through his work, for example in the beautiful brick detailing of the terrace houses and their garden walls on the Edenham Estate, and the way that honey-coloured calcium-silicate brickwork with bull-nosed corners related to the mid-brown ply panelling. Without that beauty of detail the towers themselves would not have the power they do.

'When laying out the Estate Goldfinger selected the site for the Old People's home knowing that it would be a low building (two storeys at most) and placed it in front of the

Tower where it would not block views towards the Tower from Edenham Way nor views from the Tower because it would in fact be lower than the top of the garage 'plinth' structure on which Trellick stands. Its garden provided an attractive and much needed green foreground to the view of the Tower from Edenham Way. So any new building on that site that attempts to exploit the site more intensively by being taller or less 'green' will obstruct those views and thus interfere with the setting of the Tower and the composition of the estate.

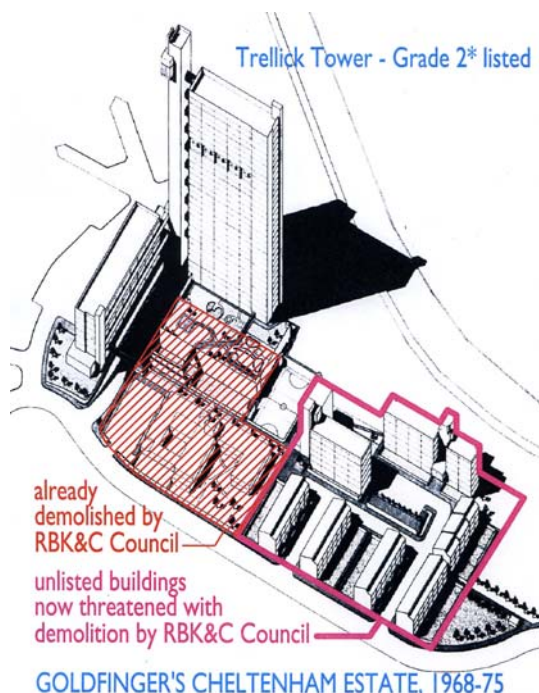
'In my view the whole Estate should be regarded as a masterpiece of post-war architecture by an individual artist-architect on a par with Mies van der Rohe (we don't have many) and treated accordingly. The fact that EH allowed a crude and unnecessary replacement of the windows on Trellick itself when they would not have allowed such crudity in an 18th or 19th century building of comparable importance testifies to their relative indifference. This is a test case.'

City University London's principal buildings from the later 1960s and 1970s were designed by Richard Sheppard Robson & Partners. A public consultation (of the usual tendentious character) by Islington Council on the Planning Brief for their future has just been completed, to which DOCOMOMO-UK has responded. The text of the Draft Brief reflects the negative attitude that persists towards buildings of the period, even ones by a firm that has several contemporary listed buildings to its credit including Churchill College Cambridge, and Imperial College Student Residences, London (of which much was nevertheless demolished). The City University buildings are described as having 'Poor engagement with the public realm at street level... inactive frontages and uninspiring facades, with certain buildings of particularly poor visual quality'. Under the guise of 'improving access and sustainability', many of their distinctive features would be demolished and unsuitable additions made to the remainder. Whether they are liked or not - and they are in fact a good example of this practice's robust work - it should be recognized that such treatment will not improve them but degrade the whole university environment.

The symbolic power of Lubetkin's 1938 **Finsbury Health Centre**, especially at a time when the general level of health among poorer people seems to be falling, cannot be lost on its supporters. In another - will they? won't they? - Council saga, Islington Council first decided to put up the Grade I listed building for sale after splitting up the various health services, then had a rethink. At the time of writing this review is still under way. No Council should be able to get away with the time-honoured 'let's leave it to rot then say it's falling apart and we can't afford to fix it' technique of disposing of listed buildings. High quality buildings that are well maintained can go on forever; people last much better if well maintained too, and it would be a great shame if the fabric of this iconic building was separated from its purpose.

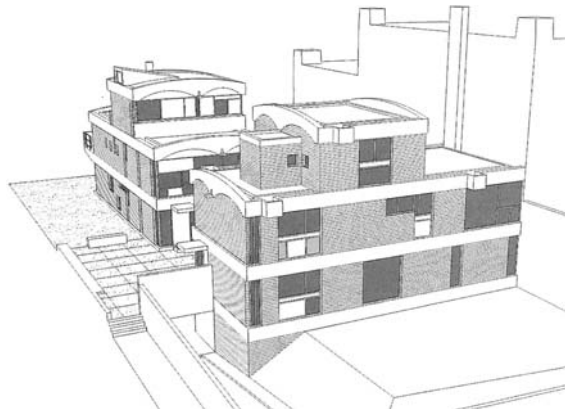
Opposite:
James Dunnett with Jon Wright and Catherine Croft of the Twentieth Century Society at Goldfinger's Edenham Way.

This page:
Diagram explaining Goldfinger's Cheltenham Estate, 1968-75



Les Maisons Jaoul

Caroline Maniaque



Caroline Maniaque from the University of Paris spoke to Docomomo members about the publication in English of her book on the subject of their upcoming visit, Le Corbusier's Maisons Jaoul, 1951-5.

This page:

top: Alvar Aalto, Maison Carré, Bazoche-sur-Guyonne, 1959, sectional model.

middle: Le Corbusier, Maisons Jaoul, Neuilly-sur-Seine, 1951-55.

bottom: Chareau, Bijvoet and Dalbert, Maison de Verre, Paris, 1931

Opposite:

top: Amongst many drawings and objects from the Le Corbusier archive Maniaque's book also includes views of a new computer model.

bottom: Cover of Maniaque's new book.

Of all Le Corbusier's most important works, the Jaoul Houses are the least well known. Le Corbusier dedicated four years of intense design activity to this project, maintaining a close personal relationship with the clients. André Jaoul, (1887-1954) and his son, Michel Jaoul and their wives played a significant role in the evolution of the houses. Insights based on conversations with the clients provide part of the originality of this book.

I have researched all the documentation for the design and construction of the houses and can present a full account of this for the first time. Emerging from this story, is an extraordinary journey of discovery in which Le Corbusier rethinks the fundamental basis of how to live in a house, trying out many different metaphors for the domestic. For example one elevation sketch (FLC 10303) might have the quality of a mediterranean vernacular cottage, while another (FLC 10343) might suggest a collective building such as a club house or even a factory. In the first conversation with the Jaoul family, Le Corbusier told them they could have vaults. The use of thin catalan vaults, made of tiles and bricks and articulated in major and minor bays, provided an essential sign of domesticity.

Le Corbusier also used this project to rethink his approach to construction and materials. Already in the 1930s, he had experimented with natural materials (stone, wood, tile), but in the construction of the Jaoul Houses a veritable dialogue developed with the Corsican carpenter, Barberis, and with the Sardinian mason, Bertocchi. From research and interviews, I have reconstructed this dialogue to demonstrate the richness of Le Corbusier's thoughts. The roughness of finish which so shocked Stirling, in his important review of the houses in 1956, was in fact carefully planned, following prototype trials.

The strong impression these houses make on all who visit them was in part due to their superb finish. Contrasting with the rugged exterior, the interiors are rich and warm, glowing with colour and vibrant with the textures of different materials (varnished wood, wood block flooring,

painted natural concrete, coloured tiles in the kitchen). Attention to detail in the fitted furniture was marked by personal touches by the craftsmen following Le Corbusier's advice.

In a wider cultural context, the design process for the Jaoul Houses reflects anxieties and concerns in postwar Europe, expressed by Existentialist philosophy, on the one hand, and l'Art Brut, in the work of Jean Dubuffet and Jean Fautrier. In fact André Jaoul was an art collector who owned work of this kind. The search for authenticity, both in the sense of the recovery of a lost, primitive innocence and a direct, haptic contact with natural materials, haunted artistic circles in the 1950s. The rooted, monumental, and picturesque quality of the Jaoul Houses attest to this phenomenon. Le Corbusier felt a personal debt to Jaoul for support during the war. His exceptional attention to the design process and his frequent visits to the house during construction and afterwards testify to the importance of this work in Le Corbusier's mind. The houses can be criticized and in the book I make an evaluation of the success and failure of different aspects of the houses.

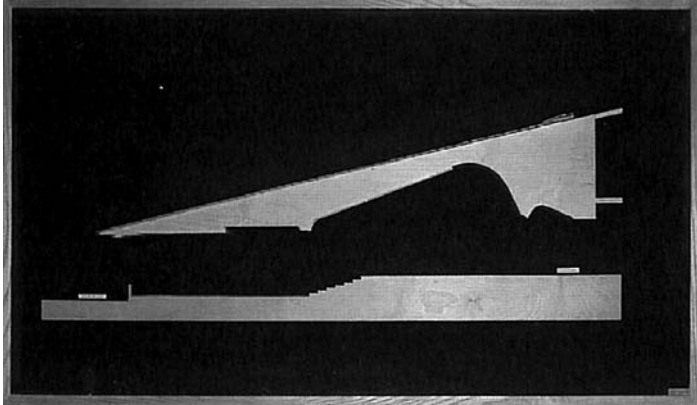
From the start, these houses have prompted a reassessment of Le Corbusier's architecture. Two generations of European and American architects changed their practice as a result.



The English translation of Caroline Maniaque's book, Le Corbusier and the Maisons Jaoul, (New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 2009) has now been published. Le Corbusier et les Maisons Jaoul, Paris, Picard, 2005

3 Houses in Paris Tour March 2009

Philip Boyle reports on the 3 day tour behind the scenes of three canonic houses



Three private houses for wealthy clients designed by the leading architects of modernism is going to be a heady brew of ambition, ego, and talent. Add to that, that they are located in Paris and a visit is irresistible, despite the current rate of the pound to the euro. What were they like? There were quite a few surprises.

The Maison Louis Carré, 1959 by Alvar Aalto, was a day trip to rolling countryside (no metro, no Boulevards). The first surprise was that the client Louis Carré, an urbane long time friend, flat dweller, and backer of a pre-war exhibition for his pal Le Corbusier did not go to him to design his country retreat/exhibition space/family house. No, he did not want 'a concrete box', and he did want 'a pitched roof' (doesn't that have a familiar echo for any practising architect?). Aalto apparently clinched the deal to get the job over a meal in Venice after a quick hike around his Biennale Pavilion.

Of course the pitched roof in the hands of Aalto became a single plane tilted to the exact angle of slope of the hillside site. Externally clad in local slate (a slight leaking problem, as a result of this degree of slope for the slates), never fear there is a concrete roof under the slates. Internally from the dominant roof slope, is suspended the tour-de-force of the house. A magnificent wave of a timber slatted suspended ceiling forming the

generous centre of the plan, a combined gallery and entrance, defining and linking the fairly modest spaces of the house. All is beautifully, expensively detailed, and for this reason alone worth a visit (if you cannot make it to Finland). However without the magnificent paintings Carré owned and hung (large Bonnard's and Leger's) the atmosphere is neutral and the house is without the overwhelming sensitivity and relaxed flowing you experience in, say the Villa Mairea or the Sanysalto Town hall.



Sticking with an art collecting wealthy client André Jaoul and his family. Le Corbusier did get a late Parisian house to design in the mid 50s. Although the design process was long and involved him seeing off a scheme by our own (and too neglected) Clive Enwistle. Familiar from publications and long puzzling over the plans, nothing prepares you for the shock effect of the old 'acrobats' balancing act with contradictions when you visit this house.

The thin sloping urban infill site dominated by a vast party wall on the south side is unpromising to say the least. The complicated brief resolved into two houses at right angles to each other and taming the intrusive party wall so that it forms a sheltered garden are breathtaking moves. The ramped split of foot and car access into the slope that lead from the ordinary street up to the entrance court is a short 'promenade' both direct and simple but magnificent and evocative of Mediterranean precedents. The diversity and richness of all the individual rooms within the two houses is achieved by the subtle disposition of light, colour and texture illuminated through the variety of window sizes/positions allowed by the sheer quantity of external wall gained from the decision to put house blocks at right angles; both open and private in the most restricted of contexts. Everything is informed by the 'patient search' from previous decades of houses. All the early inventions such as the '5 points' are there in some form if you look for them.

What the Jaoul Houses share with the Maison de Verre (1931, Chareau, Bijvoet and Dalbert) is that they both had a hiatus in the construction process between the

completion of the main structure and the window and partition stage. For Jaoul, Le Corbusier spent a long time over the joinery and 'pan de verre' services and finishes, while the brick and concrete shell stood finished before construction was allowed to proceed.

For the Maison de Verre after the unprecedented steel underframing was put in, it was not clear how long it was before Dalbert's unbelievable metalwork was installed. But the sophisticated complex internal planning, and the use of varying degrees of transparency probably results from what must have been intensive bouts of communication between client, designer and fabricator at critical points throughout building process. It could not have been thought up as a whole before hand and is a lesson in collaboration.

We all know from publications the resultant beauty of all three of these houses. What visiting them brings out is what extraordinary processes in their putting together were involved in their realization. What price persuading a client and their builders that sequence and time to think, as you go along might sometimes be so rewarding in the end?



The Problem of the 'Modern' in Indian Architecture

RIBA President Sunand Prasad presented the Docomomo-UK Annual Lecture



As the Chandigarh furniture exhibition approaches, we look back at Sunand Prasad's Docomomo Annual Lecture 2007, where as RIBA President he reflected on 'The Problem of the "Modern" in Indian Architecture'.

Prasad's PhD subject was the urbanism of North India, and his interest in Le Corbusier (co-author of the Hayward exhibition catalogue of 1987) means he is well qualified to review this subject. He discussed the value of the traditional dense towns built around the courtyard form of introverted house, with the streets between being no more than narrow alleyways. He had lived in such a house while carrying out his research and found it to be well suited to the climate and rich in potential for social interaction. However, access for modern services – such as Western-designed fire engines – is difficult if not impossible.

Many Indians chose to move out to Western style accommodation, but this rejection of the traditional urban forms may be more pragmatic than ideological. Le Corbusier was a great admirer of traditional forms which he first encountered in Algeria, but he made no attempt to emulate them directly at Chandigarh, but adopted the modern approach – and was criticised for it. A number of Indian architects have attempted to bridge the divide, as Le Corbusier did in a subtle way himself, and this may prove a way forward.

Prasad comments thus: 'Chandigarh is in many ways a failure in urban terms; the traditional Indian city is much better adapted to the climate, and now with our understanding of

energy use and sustainability the old morphology will prove more relevant than ever. The traditional city is unsuited to modern fire engines, but how odd to decide to re-plan the city rather than redesign the fire engines? Western fire engines were taken on in India exactly as they were, like an incontrovertible fact. That is the 'Problem with the Modern' in India.

'In the West the discontinuity that the Modern represents is of a far lesser order than the discontinuity the modern brought to the colonised world. In the west, side by side with the industrial revolution and its eventual aesthetic manifestations, there arose reforming and corrective tendencies – the Factory Acts, the Child Labour Laws, eventually the conservation of threatened 'heritage' – the

'antibodies' so to speak. No such process exists in India, indeed it is difficult to discern such a thing as critical culture in India. The urban morphologies developed over 5000 years were abandoned within 50 years – whatever the rights and wrongs of that, one thing is for sure: it was done with no serious analysis whatsoever.

'Chandigarh may be far from a good example of urbanism or sustainability, but its citizens are proud of their city and there is nowhere else like it. It remains a favourite posting for the employees in the public or private sector and is spawning its own optimistic and can-do culture. Whatever one may say about the city, the Capitol is a sublime essay in architecture. The enormous spaces between buildings have no functional logic; rather if Le Corbusier wanted to push the buildings apart so as to hold as much sky as possible between them. That is what gives them their mysterious power – like the ruins of a civilisation that is yet to come.'



Furniture of Chandigarh - Corbusier & Jeanneret

An upcoming exhibition at the University of Westminster supported by Docomomo

'I say it with pride. Finally here at 67 years of age ...I was able to erect an architecture which fulfils day to day functions but which leads to jubilation.' Le Corbusier

This exhibition is the first public display of a unique private collection of furniture originating from Le Corbusier's Chandigarh. The furniture was rescued by a chance encounter. When on honeymoon in India, John O'Shea and his wife Richa spotted a pile of abandoned and broken furniture in Chandigarh and recognised its provenance. After painstaking restoration, the collection comprises one of the most complete anthologies of Corb-Jeanneret's vision of the total environment.

At the end of the Raj, following the division of the Punjab with Pakistan, Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret had the extraordinary opportunity to plan an entire new regional capital. Dramatically sited on a plain at the base of the Himalayas, Chandigarh is one of the great modernist cities.

Le Corbusier envisioned a city comprised of distinct zones and neighbourhoods, all in the shadow of the Capitol Complex featuring the iconic Secretariat, Legislative Assembly and High Court.

The commission to design a new city afforded Le Corbusier and his collaborator Pierre Jeanneret the opportunity to realise their ambition of designing a total environment. The task involved designing infrastructure, landscape and buildings allowing the designers to work at all scales from the master plan down to the minutest detail of furniture and interiors. The furniture collection expresses the architects ideas and approach to form at the intimate scale of the functional object.

This less widely known furniture from Chandigarh reveals the two architects' move to ever simpler, non-mechanically made, hand crafted, 'objets d'une réaction poétique'. In a departure from their earlier aesthetic of mass produced tubular steel furniture, the Chandigarh items demonstrate a 'mass-individuality', as no two pieces

are truly identical.

The three constraints of money, materiality and climate that dominated the entire project of Chandigarh had a strong influence on the furniture. Local craftsman used vernacular techniques to construct the pieces from readily available materials such as Indian teak, rosewood and cane. The exhibition reveals how the furniture of Chandigarh shares a common language of 'ultrafunctionality'; from the utilitarian pieces designed for clerks and office workers, to the



symbolic and monumental pieces that furnished the courtrooms of the Palace of Justice.

The exhibition is a culmination of a five-year project by the owners of the collection that started with the discovery of the discarded furniture. After salvaging the pieces the owners embarked on a passionate journey to research, catalogue and carefully restore the collection.

Photographs from the recent publication 'An Indian Grammar' by Swedish artist Mats Eriksson reveal the habitation, beauty and decay of the buildings today. Alongside the photography exhibition a specially commissioned film will be premiered. 'Chandigarh - From A New Architecture' captures the spirit of the city as it is today, and reveals how the inhabitants have re-appropriated Le Corbusier's grand project.

The exhibition in the P3 space is commissioned and funded by the Ambika P3 programme and curated in association with the owners of the collection.

Docomomo UK is helping to organise a seminar within the exhibition space on 20 June. Speakers will include Docomomo International chair Maristella Casciato, Peter Carl of London Metropolitan University and Flora Samuel of the University of Bath, author of *Le Corbusier in Detail*.

P3, 35 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5LS
Open 20 - 28 June 10am to 9pm everyday
And 1 - 12 July Wednesday to Sunday 10 am - 6pm
Admission free
email: P3.exhibitions@westminster.ac.uk

Opposite:
top left: Housing in Delhi
bottom right: Housing in Chandigarh
middle: Manhole cover with Chandigarh plan
This Page:
Two of the pieces of Chandigarh furniture on display. A bench from a courtroom, and a bookcase from a judge's study.



Watch this Space!

James Dunnett



Opposite: Copenhagen Street with breathing space and foliage replaced by factory-aesthetic housing packed onto the site
This page: Messiter House before, and losing its essential green outlook.

REPRESENTATIONS AGAINST THE GRANTING OF PLANNING CONSENT FOR A BLOCK OF 19 FLATS between MESSITER HOUSE and COPENHAGEN STREET, BARNSBURY ESTATE, LONDON N1

Presented by James Dunnett, MA, Dip Arch (Cantab), RIBA

at the Planning Appeal Hearing on 12 June 2007 on behalf of The Islington Society, DOCOMOMO-UK, and local residents.

'My particular interest professionally and historically is in ideas of urban form and in the aspiration of the architects of the Modern Movement in the twentieth century to create a green city – one with true urban density, yet one where every resident would enjoy ample sun and light, and an outlook over greenery. A leader in this quest was Le Corbusier (1887-1965), the Swiss-born architect and urban theorist who influenced architects worldwide, including in this country, and whose influence can be seen in the later, post-war, phase of the Barnsbury Estate, of which the site in question forms a part. His slogan was 'Light, Space, Greenery!' His ideas and aspirations are currently little recognized, which is why projects such as we are discussing today are entertained, but the benefits of his quest can clearly be seen in the estate. The outlook from Molton House is a very attractive one over pleasant green spaces, and it is shared by most of the flats in Molton and Messiter Houses. It is these benefits that the residents stand to lose as a result of this proposed development and of others that would doubtless follow in its train.

'My own involvement in the specific planning issues surrounding this corner of Islington first arose with my attempt to oppose three or four years ago the building of flats on the south west corner of Barnard Park, alongside Copenhagen Street. These flats will have blocked the longer views of Barnard Park from a large number of flats in Molton and Messiter House. But no sooner were these flats complete than the planning application was submitted which is being appealed today, to build on the green space on the other side of Copenhagen St, which will have the effect of blocking their foreground views of greenery as well. Though not classified formally as public

open space in planning terms, these green spaces are a vital part of the attractions of the Estate.

'The advance made in post-war estate planning under the influence of le Corbusier can be clearly seen by comparing the pre-war part of the estate with the post-war. In the pre-war estate the accommodation is exclusively in 5-storey gallery-access blocks aligned quite closely alongside the road and forming quite tight internal courtyards with little room for greenery, and offering little opportunity for longer views. The effect is quite heavy and monotonous and it has scarcely been relieved by recent attempts at cosmetic improvement.

'After the war, lifts and central heating became affordable, and it was realised that as a consequence it would be possible to build taller blocks which could be set further apart, and with more pleasant green and usable spaces separating them from one another and from the roads around the site. The whole environment is softer, lighter, and brighter. This was made possible by the fact that Messiter House and Molton House are eight storeys tall. This possibility of building taller also made possible more variety in the height of buildings, with the result that in the post-war part of the Estate there are buildings varying between three and eight storeys in height, rather than the uniform five storeys of the pre-war part. The heavy pre-war cantilevered access galleries on every floor were replaced by the light structural grid of the eastern face of Molton House, and in the case of Messiter House, by recessed galleries on alternate floors allowing the maisonettes of which this block is comprised to have as good an outlook in both directions. This arrangement – reminiscent of le Corbusier's famous housing 'Unit' in Marseilles, as also are the stilts or 'pilotis' on which it is raised – means that Messiter House has no 'back' and 'front' – its outlook and appearance are of equal importance in both directions, and the green space was equally intended to flow continuously through from north to south, under those pilotis.

'It should be plain by now, that the plan to build a four-storey block of flats on the green space forming part of the Estate between Messiter House and Copenhagen Street is entirely contrary to the principles on which the estate was built, and destructive of its principal attractions. There may

be some people who have mixed feelings about the architectural appearance of the blocks – and I do not myself claim that they are of listable quality, even if I find them reasonably attractive – but there can be very few people who do not consider the sweeping green and treed spaces that run throughout the post-war part of the estate to be very attractive indeed. To build the proposed block close in front of Messiter House is to deny altogether that principle for free flowing green space, and to set up a narrow, heavily overshadowed space between the two blocks that will remain forever grim, and will provide no compensation at all for those in Messiter House who will in consequence lose their views over the near green space on the near side of Copenhagen St and towards Hemmingford Road and the western part of Barnard Park beyond it.

‘Though the ideal of the green city was given its most potent impulse by a Swiss in the middle years of the twentieth century, it actually has English origins, in the garden squares of Georgian England, and the communal gardens of Victorian London, and then in the Garden City movement, that was seen throughout the world as an English development. Certainly Le Corbusier himself was a great enthusiast of it and came over in about 1912 to visit Hampstead Garden Suburb, which he studied closely. In due course however he came to feel that the same idea had to be applied to the inner city, not just outlying areas, and hence he gave birth to what he called the ‘Vertical Garden City’, or the ‘Green City’, whereby not just cottages but blocks of apartments were spaced out with green spaces between them. The Post-war phase of the Barnsbury Estate is one product of his influence forty years later. Just as you would not stand a chance of getting permission to build in the front garden of your house in



Hampstead Garden Suburb, so also you should not have a chance of getting permission to build on the front garden of a block of flats in the Barnsbury Estate.

‘There are many other housing estates in Britain and particularly in the former LCC area reflecting the ideal of the Green City, and even more particularly in the former Metropolitan Borough of Finsbury - now the southern part of Islington - with its listed estates designed by Tecton from the 1930s. If permission is granted for the present application, not only are other green areas in the Barnsbury Estate at risk, but so are the green spaces on many other similar estates throughout the country. When such estates were laid out following ‘slum clearance’ it was common in the LCC area to leave standing public houses that may have existed on the site, and these often stand isolated somewhat incongruously on the corners of former streets. That is what happened here with The Crown on the corner of Copenhagen St and Muriel St. It would seem that The Crown has at some time subsequently been allowed to build a side extension a little way up Copenhagen St, and it is this that perhaps has given the developer the idea that they too could extend a great deal further up Copenhagen St. This would only be very much at the expense of the flats in Messiter House and Molton House, of the rest of the Estate by extension,

and of all those who have enjoyed the green character of Copenhagen Street, already compromised by the recent flats development on Barnard Park. This should not be allowed to proceed further.

‘Though the Islington Urban Design Guide is not by implication friendly to the Green City ideals, it generally requires under Section 2.1 that new buildings should

“create a scale and form of development that is appropriate in relation to the existing built form so that it provides a consistent/coherent setting for the space or street that it defines or encloses, while also enhancing and complementing the local identity...”

Clearly the proposed block of flats does not do that.

‘The need to build new housing clearly cannot mean that we should build in places that will make uninhabitable the housing that already exists, because that would be self defeating. If the 19 flats of the proposed block make 50 flats less or barely habitable there has clearly been no net increase in good quality housing. The flats in the proposed block will in any case be of questionable quality: those on the north will have an outlook

northwards directly over a busy road on which they front directly, whilst those on the south will have an outlook onto the narrow and heavily overshadowed space separating them from Messiter House. It is my contention that to make the inner city habitable we need to have greenery throughout it – not just in remote parks to which it is necessary to walk, but immediately outside our windows. As is well known, it is the desire for greenery that propels many people to move out to the suburbs. Urban Regeneration will not work without greenery – and it is vital for sustainability generally that it does work.

‘If we are to avoid the waste of energy and materials that is involved in mass long range commuting, then it is vital that we create and maintain a habitat in the centre of our cities that people want to live in out of choice. The proposed development we are considering today will work against that. There should be no question of the developer saying they will only fund necessary improvements to the Tenants Hall on the estate if they are allowed to build on its greatest assets – its green spaces. The many residents who have signed the petition in opposition to the proposed block of flats have shown how much they value the green spaces, the outlook, and the light that the Estate currently affords them.’

Perimeter Planning

Bjorn Linn on the quiet revolution in city planning - Courtyards, Block Patterns, and Urban Space

The continental 19th-century city was an enormous achievement. For a long time, all subsequent planning efforts have had to relate to it — in one way or another.



A fundamental factor was the privatisation of building land, which until then had been municipal property. This meant that the city was opened up to private investment and the possibility of profit. Capital was attracted, facilitating enormous expansion. A great part of this was carried out by small builders, tradesmen and merchants supported by mortgage banks. The expansion was regulated by planning policies which set building lines but permitted varied uses. "Public order" was a key objective, enforcing overall regularity (generally on a gridiron pattern) with façades subordinated to a general scheme. The inside of the block was little regulated, the narrow economical limits making for high exploitation with courtyards reduced to minimal lightwells. The small, often deep plots made it difficult to achieve good housing plans. The factors behind the problems were made clear by the German political economist Rudolf Eberstadt in his *Handbuch des Wohnungswesens* (1st ed 1909).

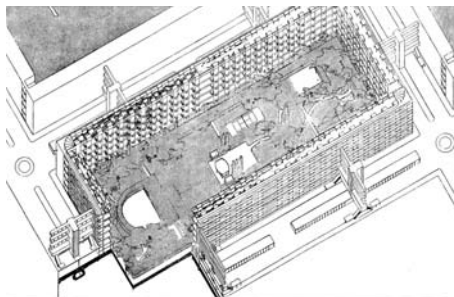
Unsatisfactory aspects of these flats were already being strongly criticised before 1900. Larger courtyards uncluttered by backyard buildings were demanded, and larger building units obviating the cramped plans were seen as necessary. This required a larger scale of developer. Industrial enterprises and philanthropic societies built some of the early examples, showing the way.

Development in this direction was powerfully assisted by the building crisis and housing shortage around the first World War, necessitating State support and engagement by cities in actual construction. Cooperative housing societies were also formed. The

means required to produce whole blocks and quarters as a single project were now available. Theoretically these large units could have taken any shape, but the architectural vision of reforming the closed-block pattern lay ready to use.

The outcome was a building pattern of "courtyard" or "perimeter" blocks, generally of larger dimensions, where the whole was in principle one homogeneous building and the courtyard was one large, park-like space. This pattern preserved the fundamental urban dichotomy between two kinds of space: the wholly public exterior (street) and the semi-private interior of the block. Very often the latter was, however, accessible to the public, and sometimes — in large blocks — even treated as a public park.

The courtyard area might also be used for private garden plots, more or less connected with the ground-floor flats. This was of some importance in the economic crisis after the war, especially in Germany.



This courtyard pattern plays an important part in modern housing around 1920 in the Netherlands (Berlage's Amsterdam-Zuid, Oud's Tussendijken in Rotterdam) and in Germany, notably in schemes by Bruno Taut in Berlin and by Fritz Schumacher in Hamburg; also in the Viennese "super-blocks". It is also remarkable to see how dominant the pattern is in Le Corbusier's early urbanistic projects (the "Immeuble-Villas" of 1922–25). In many cases the large courtyard blocks were simply fitted into available gaps in the existing city tissue, but the full potential of the pattern was only achieved in wholly new-planned quarters.

The urbanistic dimension had been revolutionised by Camillo Sitte with his *Der Städte-Bau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen* (1889). Sitte has been much misunderstood. His stroke of genius lay in shifting the generative point of view from the administrator's bird's-eye view to the eyes

(and senses) of the person walking in the street. A Sitte plan cannot be understood if one is not aware that it is meant to be perceived by a moving eye, as in a film.

Now Sitte practically never observed the courtyards, but stayed in public space and treated the blocks as solid. But when a fusion between his vision and the courtyard-block pattern was realised, things started to happen. This can be seen in Amsterdam and Hamburg and especially clearly in Sweden, in the quarters planned by Per Hallman in Stockholm and Albert Lilienberg in Gothenburg, an internationally remarkable combination of Sitte's planning pattern with a limited building scale.

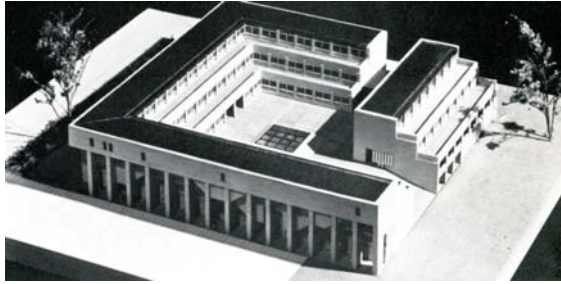


What was built in this way in the 1910's and 20's may be regarded as the final culminating phase of the "intensive" closed-block city pattern. In its evolutionary, "reformist" character, however, it came to be overshadowed by the more spectacular "extensive" pattern of free-standing slabs and towers which gained ground around 1930. The generative factor behind this pattern was the striving for equality for the individual flats. They should all have contact with the same kind of exterior space. "Objective" schemes for planning were drawn up, and they made a great impression on architects who had long admired what they believed to be the exact calculations in engineering science.

In the traditional city, it had been more or less tacitly understood that the life of the plan was not dependent on the life of each building. The plan was an ordering instrument, permanent and general. But with the functionally differentiated planning that found one of its first expressions in the courtyard blocks devoted purely to housing, the tolerance of the city for unplanned change began to be restricted. The plan had become tied to the building in a new way and would lose its justification if the building was demolished, for whatever reason. The city was becoming less predictable.

Leslie Martin's Courtyards

James Dunnett reflects on a life-long passion



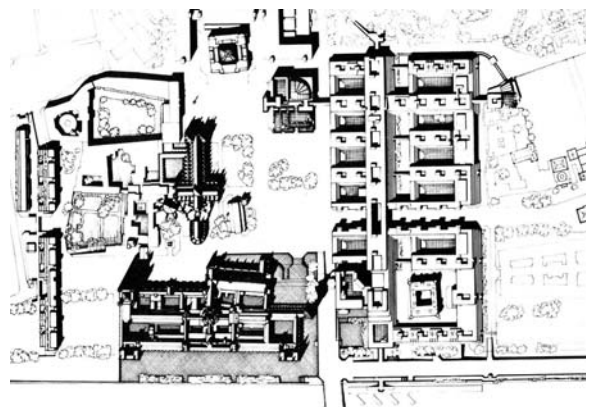
Opposite:
left: aerial view of Albert Lilienberg's Kungsladugaord quarter in Gothenburg
middle: Le Corbusier's Immeuble-Villas projects
right: Fritz Schumacher's 1920s Siedlung Bruchfeldstrasse in Frankfurt
This page:
top: Harvey Court (1960-62) for Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge.
bottom: Leslie Martin's plan for Whitehall (1965)

J. Leslie Martin, the centenary of whose birth occurred in 2008, was the most theoretically-minded of the post-war British architectural knights, and also the one with the most local authority and housing experience. Having, unusually, obtained a PhD at Manchester University with a dissertation on the family of fantastical eighteenth-century Spanish architects the Churriguera, he found himself head of the school of architecture at Hull in 1934, age 26. He then formed close links with the art critic Herbert Read and through him with Ben Nicholson and Naum Gabo, with whom he was to become joint editor of the publication *Circle* in 1936, a kind of counterblast to the International Surrealist Exhibition in London the same year, promoting the 'constructivist' approach to art – calm, rational, abstract, scientific. This was to characterise his approach to architecture and planning throughout his career. After acting as Deputy (with responsibility for the Festival Hall) then Head of the LCC Architect's Department (with responsibility for the towers and slabs of the Roehampton housing estate), he moved in 1959 to Cambridge as Professor of Architecture. Here he began his studies of the inter-relationship between Land Use and Built Form, inspired perhaps by his associate Patrick Hodgkinson's studies of 1957 for low-rise high-density housing for St Pancras, seen as an alternative to the concept of any form of tower in a landscape. Martin's move to Cambridge, with its sometimes serene medieval college courts as inspiration, may have reinforced his interest in the courtyard form as opposed to what he felt had become ossified Modern Movement formulae – but he was always careful to express this as a matter of rational choice, the merits of each to be analysed mathematically where possible prior to decision.

An early commission in Cambridge to study the possibility of redeveloping a very sensitive site on Kings Parade in the centre of the old town as student lodgings for Gaius College led to the development of an introverted courtyard scheme with stepped section, and when this was abandoned, the whole project was transferred to a suburban site with comparatively little alteration except that one side of the courtyard was reversed to look outwards towards greenery – the remainder continuing to look inwards to a hard paved court. Generally however, Martin retained the Modern Movement aspiration towards a green outlook and was ready, as in the slightly later building for Peterhouse college to build comparatively tall, in an Aalto-inspired stepped plan block, so as to reduce foot-print and take advantage of views over Fen Common.

The Gonville & Caius building, Harvey Court, was in fact the only classic courtyard structure that Leslie Martin was to build, despite a series of theoretical papers that was to emerge from the Land Use and Built Form Study Centre that he established, demonstrating the merits of the courtyard form as compared to towers or slabs. The expressed merit consisted primarily in the fact that the same accommodation could be provided in many fewer storeys with the courtyard form as against the tower form. This was especially true if the grid of courtyards was enlarged to form broad landscaped courtyards, with the proportion of land surface devoted to roadway between the courts much reduced.

In his seminal paper *The Grid as Generator* first given as the Gropius Lecture at Harvard in 1966, and referring to the theories both of Camillo Sitte and Jane Jacobs, Martin showed how Manhattan could be rebuilt with the same floorspace as landscaped courts only 8 storeys high: "If the area bounded by Park Avenue and Eight Avenue and Between 42nd and 57th Street is used as a base and the whole area developed in the form of Seagram buildings 36 storeys high, this would certainly open up some ground space along the streets. If, however, the Seagram building were replaced by court forms then this type of development, while using the same built volume would produce buildings only eight storeys high. But the courts thus provided would be roughly equivalent in area to Washington Square: and there could be 28 Washington Squares in this total area. Within squares of this size there could be large trees, perhaps some housing, and other buildings such as schools'.



With his colleague Lionel March, further applications of this theory were put forward at various scales, all of which decisively contributed from the late 1960s to the discrediting of 'tower blocks' as a built form. These were replaced with what were sometimes referred to as 'tower blocks on their sides' such as the Brunswick Centre. Indeed Martin's plan for Whitehall (1965) proposed the rebuilding of the entire Government centre along these lines.

Martin's work and theory merit detailed study which it is hoped a future DOCOMOMO-UK Conference may encourage.

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DOCOMemos

Dennis Sharp and Tim Bruce-Dick

The Le Corbusier exhibitions in Liverpool and at the Barbican proved very popular with professionals and young people alike although it can hardly have been seen as the retrospective a number of us were expecting.

The supporting events were most enjoyable and a useful source of information with the AA Le Corbusier Forum dominated by well intentioned and erudite academic scholars but with the exception of Pafford Keatinge Clay – who worked for Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright – missing out on the architects who adapted a Le Corbusier inspired language in this country. Seen among the large audience – Miller, Colquhoun, Neave Brown etc - quietly guarding their reflections and stories. This is something we are trying to change. DOCOMOMO UK will on the 19 May ran a Le Corbusier Forum: British Architects who made it happen hoping to hear the stories straight from the 'disciples' when they talk about Le Corbusier's influence on their careers. Along with the events and the exhibition there has been a deluge of books (good books I must say) that range from highly informative catalogues, Tim Benton's prize-winning textual comments and references on Le Corbusier's lectures called *The Rhetoric of Modernism: Le Corbusier as a lecturer* now issued in an English edition by Birkhäuser. There is an extensive and highly personal biographical account on Le Corbusier (*A Life*) by Nicholas Fox Weber published by Knopf and not forgetting Jean-louis Cohen's epicly monumental *Le Corbusier le Grand* which was published in 2008 by the heavyweight specialist Taschen.

After the success of this year's splendid DOCOMOMO/GLAC combined study tour to Paris to see the work of Aalto, Château and Le Corbusier (Studio, Les maisons Jaoul and the Swiss and Brazilian hostels) suggestions for next year's study tour would be most welcome, from members. The Working party Group have either Helsinki or Prague in mind. Do you?

Dennis Sharp has recently been invited to contribute to the assessment of the innovative and famous Walter Gropius Fagus Werk at Alfeld an der Leine (1911) for the

World Heritage list. It will to be submitted by the government of Lower Saxony next year. They will also join in the celebrations for the buildings' centenary in 2011. A unique works the Fagus still produces shoe lasts (no longer in wood but now fabricated from plastic) and attracts some 10,000 visitors per year. This pioneering example of a very modern factory was once described by Giedion as modernism's most successful early building with its unique working environment and well lit and ventilated interior in which administration and manufacturing methods coincide creating a happy work force.

Papers are being invited for the DOCOMOMO International conference in 2011 in Mexico City. Please visit www.docomomo.com/conferences_index

TIM'S TOURS

City University are almost certainly stopping many non-vocational courses this autumn thanks to the government withdrawing funding, but all is not lost as Tim Bruce-Dick is planning to carry on all four courses elsewhere.

Come on summer evening walks to see the best in contemporary architecture: for details visit www.timstoursandwalks.co.uk; there are new buildings going up all the time.

Spend a day visiting unusual new buildings on the annual charabanc tour Saturday June 27 2009 to leafy Sussex. Amongst others we will see buildings by Edwin Lutyens, Ted Cullinan, Craig Downie and Thomas Heatherwick. Visit the website for details.

Join us for my Architecture Courses 2009-2010 starting October 2009. These will probably be held at 70 Cowcross Street [courtesy of Alan Baxter Associates] home of 20th Century Society and Docomomo meetings. Please visit: www.Londonarchitecturecourses.co.uk for details.

I look forward to seeing you. If you have any suggestions for courses or events please contact me on 020 7485 8976, text me on 07944035574, or e-mail me on timbrucedick@yahoo.co.uk