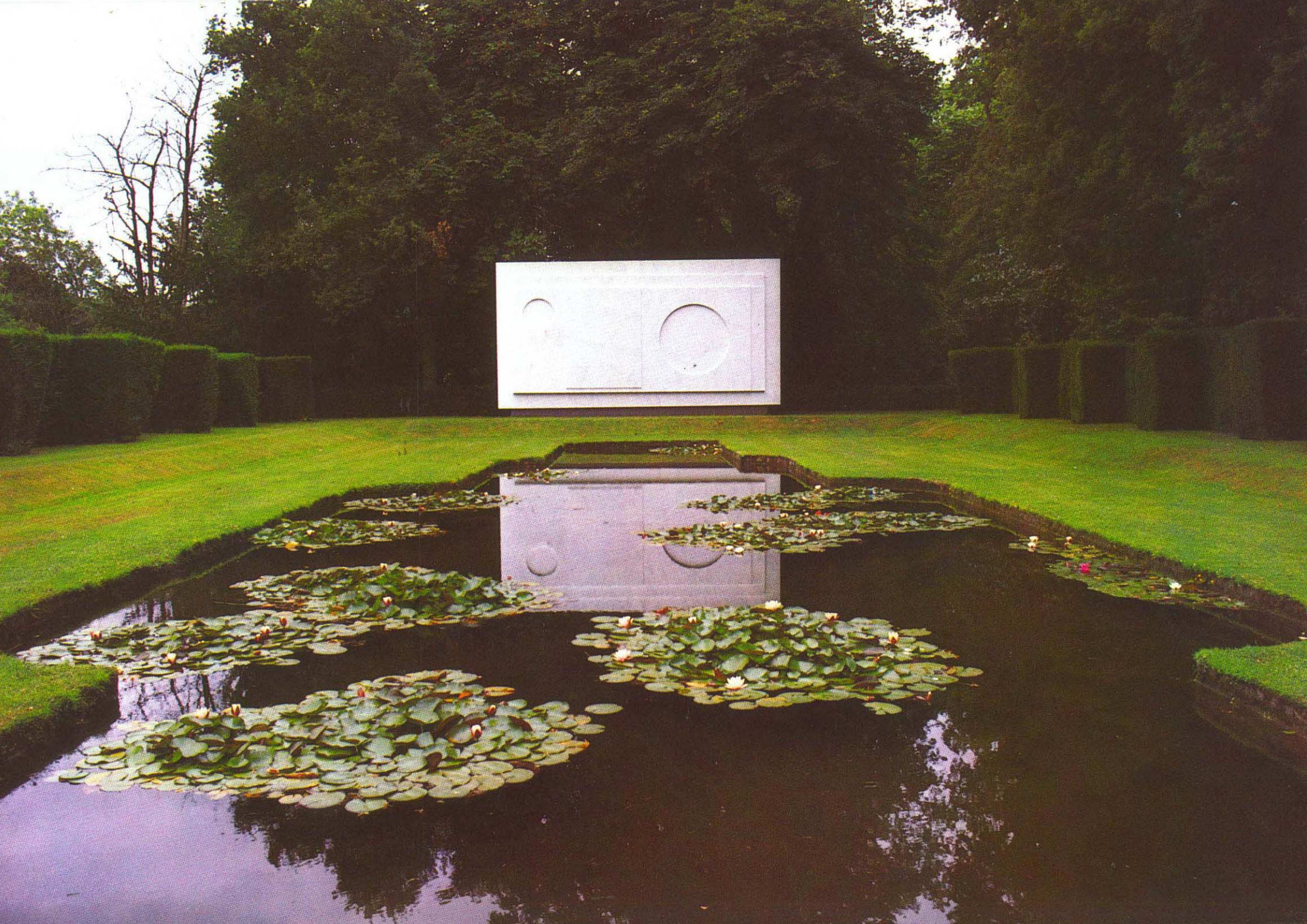


CONCRETE QUARTERLY 134



Cement and Concrete Association July-September 1982: Price £2.25



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Flux

There is, perhaps, no clearer manifestation of the state of the arts than the way that we dress. And a visitor to our country might well observe that, on this basis, anything goes today. Some people wear jeans to go out to dinner and beach clothes to go to the office. In days gone by – the 18th century for instance – formal clothes went with Mozart on the one hand and Nash on the other and you knew where you were. Nowadays formality is out – except for a tiny minority – and chaos, in the form of fancy dress, rules OK. The confusion can be seen throughout our society, from politics (noisier and noisier) to pop music (ditto and ditto), from coherence of speech (less and less) to convenience foods (more and more), and in all forms of endeavour from television (half of it horror) to transvestisism (a high art form), and from rock (what happened to tunes?) to religion (where are the leaders?).

In the field of architecture – that other manifestation of the state of our society – the bewilderment is only too apparent, viz any architectural award, competition or exhibition that you like to mention, where a baffling variety of styles and approaches will be applauded from the high classicism of Quinlan Terry and the high humour of James Stirling to the high tech. of Richard Rogers, Norman Foster and Nicholas Grimshaw. Dare anyone today say what is 'good'? Many have tried over the last fifty years and have been found wanting. Even so, we have – astonishingly – recently resurrected a Past Master of forty years back and reverently hung the Royal Gold Medal for Architecture around his neck and listened with bated breath to his pearls of wisdom. Is there no contemporary voice that we can trust today?

From such realms of high philosophy and abstraction it may seem a long leap down to the realities of economics, building and the use of a single material – such as concerns this journal. And yet it is all one subject in the end. For although we may need inspiration and romance – those two indispensable ingredients of good architecture – what we also need today is a good dose of old-fashioned common sense. We should know by now, after all we have gone through in the last decades, that there is no substitute for buildings designed, detailed and built with care; that in historic and traditional situations it is necessary to respect the past; that a pleasing surface finish is as essential to a building as a good skin is to the human form; that it is time we brought back the old-fashioned principles of proportion and *grace* (as Sir John Summerson was saying in the last issue of this journal); that human beings, with all their complex reactions, should be the yardstick in architectural design and not technology; and that if anyone thinks that computers can do it all better then he might as well be dead.

As the wide variety of building types illustrated in this issue of *Concrete Quarterly* demonstrate, the versatile material concrete has its own particular and useful contribution to make towards buildings which observe at least some of the above-mentioned principles.

FRONTISPIECE:

The Ben Nicholson wall at Sutton Place, Guildford (page 32).

FRONT COVER:

White-painted concrete blockwork used for the studios at Highgate (page 2).

BACK COVER:

The conservatory terrace at the Barbican Centre, London, with part of Zandra Rhodes' exhibition of Indian designs for the 'Aditi' exhibition (page 22).

HIGHGATE STUDIOS

Tile Kiln Lane, Highgate, London N6

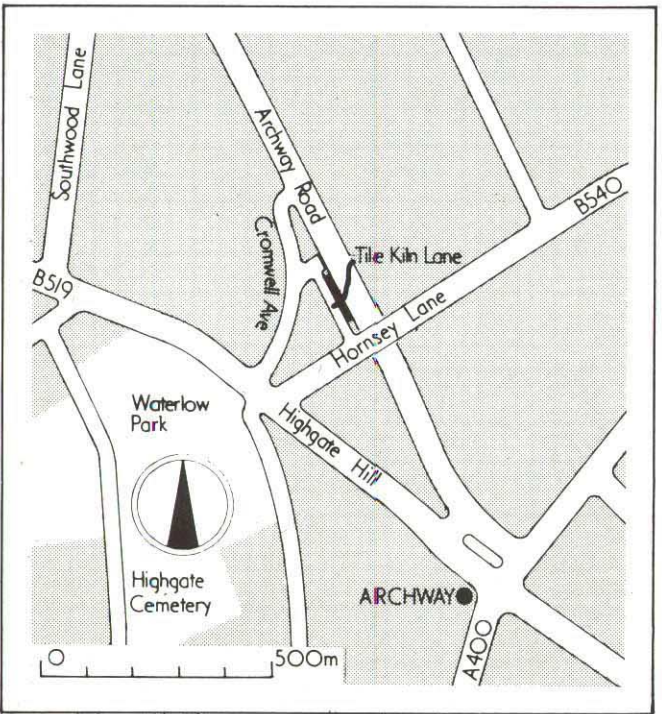
Client:	Highgate Building Group
Architect:	Peter Beaven
Structural engineer:	Bryan J. B. Gauld
Contractor:	Totara Construction Ltd
Concrete blocks:	Forticrete Ltd
Photographs:	Trevor Jones

Below: The new housing on its narrow left-over site on the edge of Archway Road.

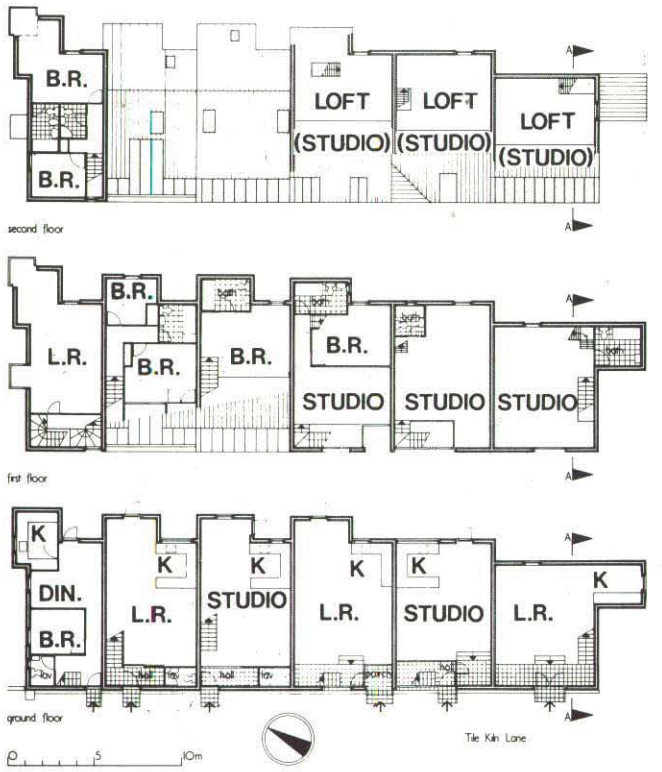


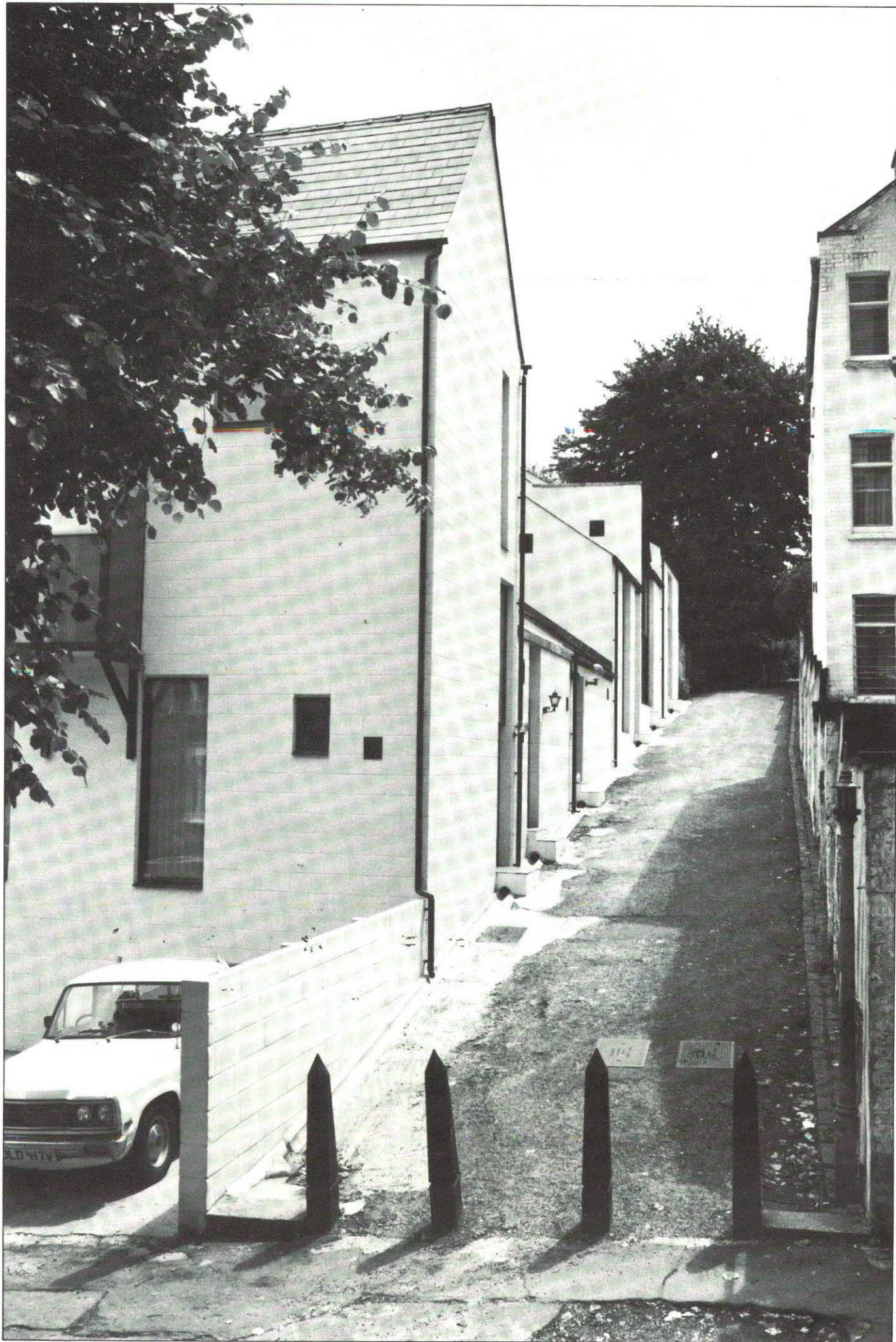
One of the main points that the New Zealand architect Peter Beaven has made so well in this group of studio houses in Highgate is how effectively white painted blockwork can achieve a sharp and satisfying clarity of modelling. The white blockwork, repeated inside and out, is built up into a series of intersecting vertical planes capped by gables and variously pitched roofs covered with dark blue-grey asbestos-cement slates. The effect – appropriate enough for studio houses – approaches an abstract composition of black and white sculpture. This is obviously a technique that the architect fully understands: he has used it before in New Zealand, notably in the Chateau Commodore Hotel and the 1974 Commonwealth Games Stadia, both in Christchurch. It is an attractive architectural medium and one that fits many contexts in Britain.

There are, of course, other interesting ideas behind this housing as well. It is, to begin with, a co-operative venture built by six people who bought the plots in the approved scheme and worked on the finishing themselves. And then the site itself could hardly have been called promising in the first place: a left-over strip of land perched high up overlooking the heavily trafficked Archway Road (by the bridge) in north London that nobody had thought about. Peter Beaven's idea was to increase the value of this otherwise superfluous piece of land and, with imaginative development, change the sense of place. Not the least interesting aspect of this housing, it might be mentioned, is the architect himself. Perhaps we might more often in this country take our cue from the east, where no artistic work can be judged without knowing something



Below: Floor plans (drawings by courtesy of 'Architects Journal').





HIGHGATE STUDIOS *continued*

about the artist: the two are considered inseparable for true understanding. In fact, it only takes a few sentences over the telephone to know that Peter Beaven is an individualist with a sense of humour and perspective. He must be, otherwise how could he have made the break with his own country New Zealand where he was one of the best-known architects in South Island, together with Miles Warren with whom he was a student, and set up on his own in the bewildering and highly competitive labyrinths of London in total obscurity. He lives very simply indeed in a small flat overlooking Hampstead Heath. As Alastair Best has said in the *Architect's Journal* "he has no secretary, no telephone answering service and no assistants – although someone may come in from time to time 'to do the drains' ...". Predictably, however, it is also said that this state of affairs may not last long, as Peter Beaven is by no means short of work. It soon becomes clear, even after a brief conversation, that the rarified and esoteric flights of intellectual fancy – such as one may discern in the philosophies of the Bauhaus, Le Corbusier, Lubetkin *et al* – are not for him. Clarity of form coupled with a sense of place are inter-related matters that rank high in his own philosophy of design. Not

surprisingly, the two schemes once featured in *Concrete Quarterly* that have been of special interest to him were the distillery at Auchroisk, Banffshire (No. 105) and Castlepark Village in County Cork (No. 104) – both schemes with a strong black-and-white sculptural form, very much rooted in the soil from which they grow.

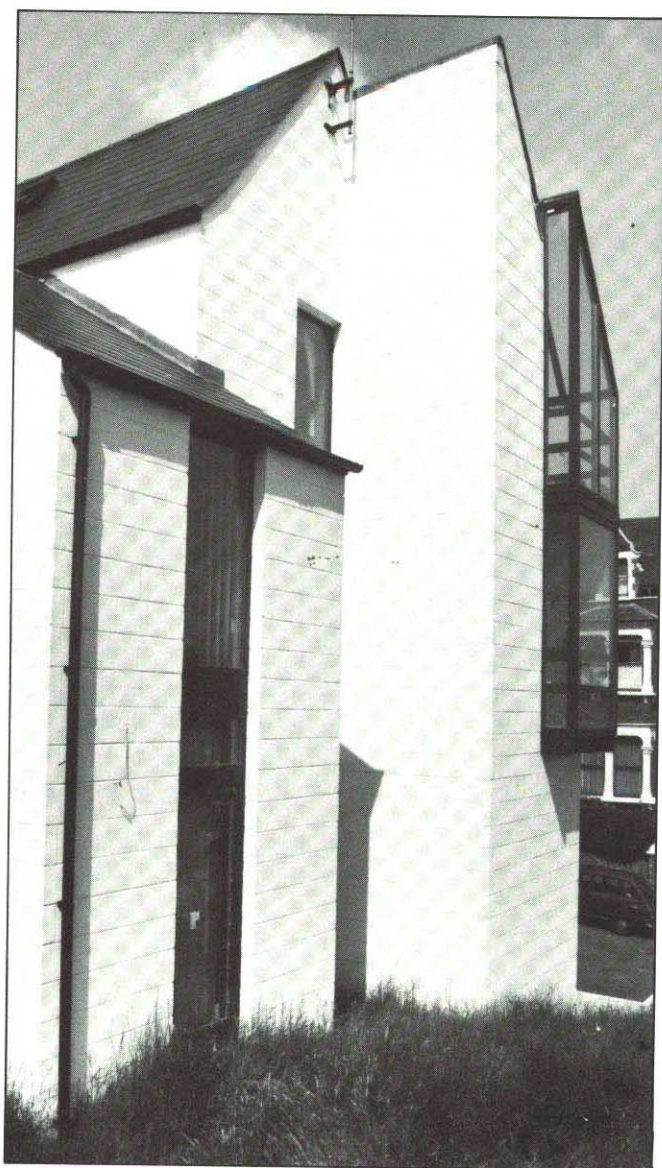
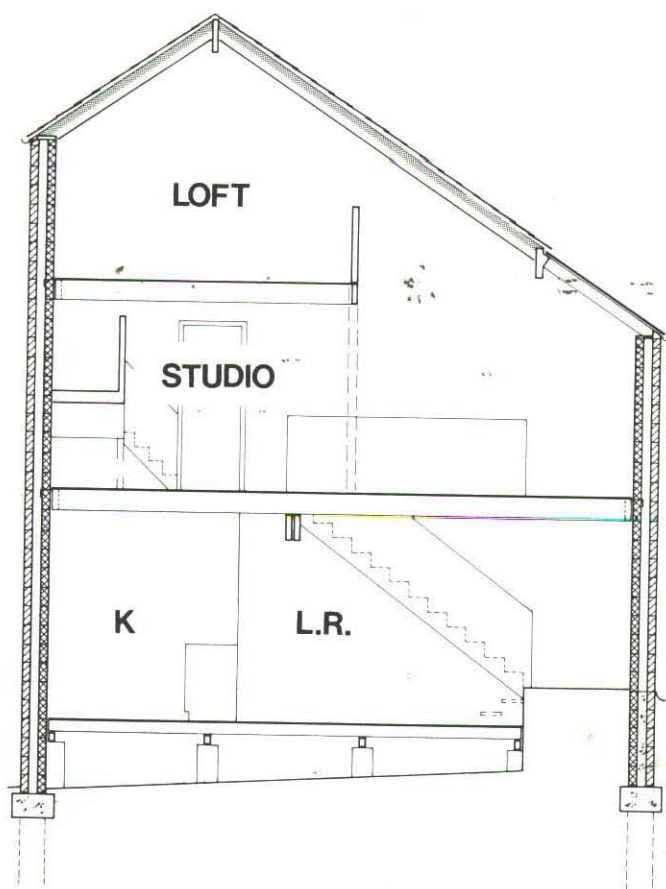
This housing scheme in Highgate, then, would seem to be a reflection of a strongly-held personal ideology, rather than of conformity to any fashionable mainstream of architectural thought. The simplicity and clarity of form displayed in these studio houses no doubt reflects to some extent the architect's preferred life style. The gables, variously pitched roofs and strong vertical rhythms are very much in the grain of local domestic building, although the site is in fact one of those where no special architectural character was dictated.

The site was acquired in 1978 for £36,000 with planning permission for six one-bedroom dwellings. The architect's plans for six studio houses, however, including one quite spacious three-bedroom house, so impressed the planners that they gave permission for the present scheme, particularly as it so enhanced the value of the site. The site

Left: The houses are entered from Tile Kiln Lane.

Right: Detail of white-painted block walls and studio windows.

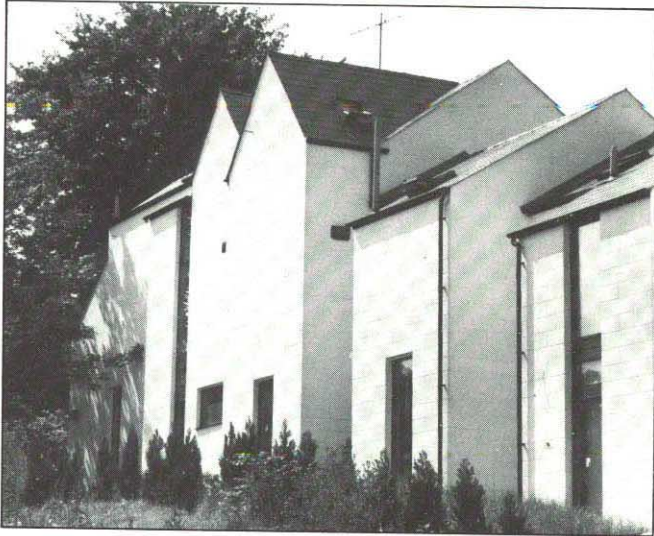
Below: Cross section



HIGHGATE STUDIOS *continued*

falls away sharply on one side to form the road cutting, and is bounded on the other by a steeply sloping alley leading to Winchester Road.

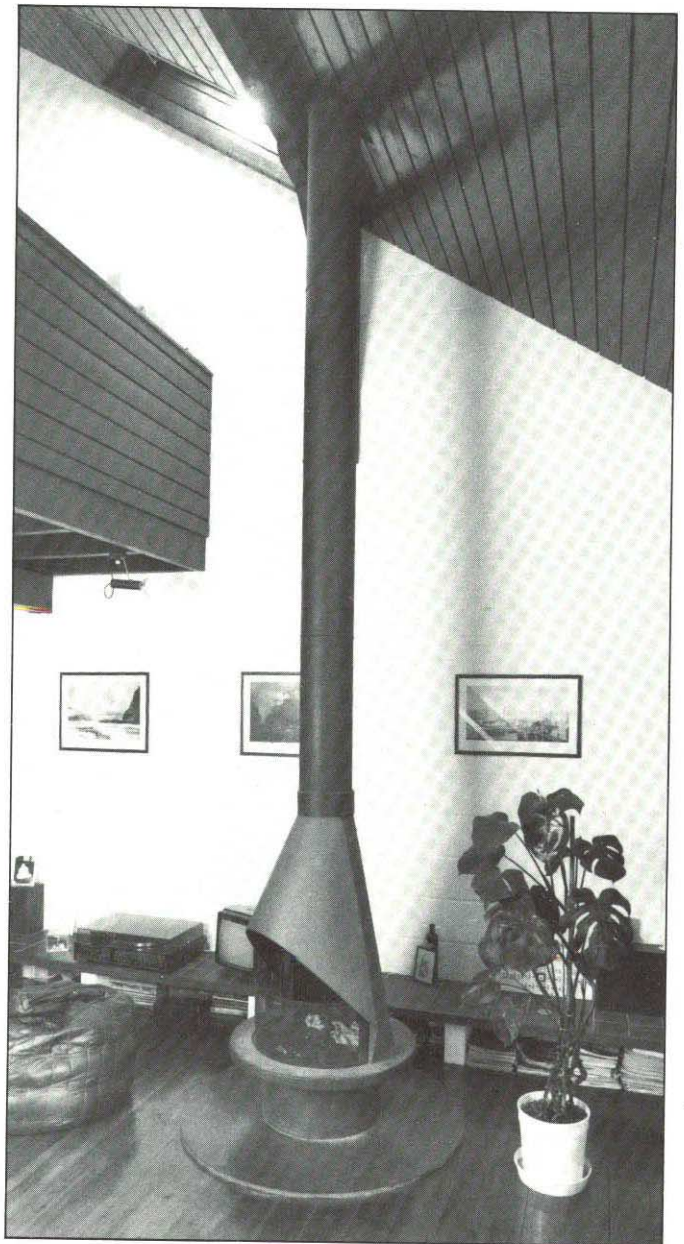
Construction is of loadbearing concrete blockwork in cavity walls with an outer leaf of dense blocks and an inner leaf of insulating blocks, painted white on both faces. Floors and roofs are of timber, the roofs covered with asbestos-cement slates. Foundations include reinforced concrete beams on concrete piles.



Above: Black-and-white modelling achieved with white-painted concrete blockwork and pitched roofs of asbestos-cement slates.

Right: The white-painted blockwork is used inside as well as outside.

Below: Living-room.



WELSH AWARDS

Housing: Hafan Elan, Llanrug and Trinity Court, Rhyl

Two Welsh housing schemes featured in *Concrete Quarterly* 131 have just won architectural awards – although not for the first time – both designed by the architects Bowen Dann Davies Partnership of Colwyn Bay, Bangor and Cardiff.

The first is the Eisteddfod Gold Medal for Architecture which went to the housing Hafan Elan at Llanrug, Gwynedd – a series of single-storey cottages with asymmetrically pitched roofs built of rendered block walls and slated roofs. The judges' report included the following remarks:

"The winner was considered to be outstanding both architecturally and as an example of local authority housing. The long, low form of the dwellings and the sensitive articulation of the layout... gives the development a feeling of intimacy and warmth that is all too rare in modern housing estates. The choice of materials is excellent and well handled and is entirely appropriate to the mountainous locality. Although these buildings are new and original in design, they are not in any way alien or obtrusive. They belong here as much as do the vernacular farmsteads (*tyddynnau*) and quarrymen's cottages of this part of Arfon". Hafan Elan also received a Commendation in the 1982 RIBA Architecture Awards, as well as a Welsh Office Housing Award and a Civic Trust Commendation in 1981.

The second is another Commendation in the 1982 RIBA Architecture Awards which went to Trinity Court, Rhyl.

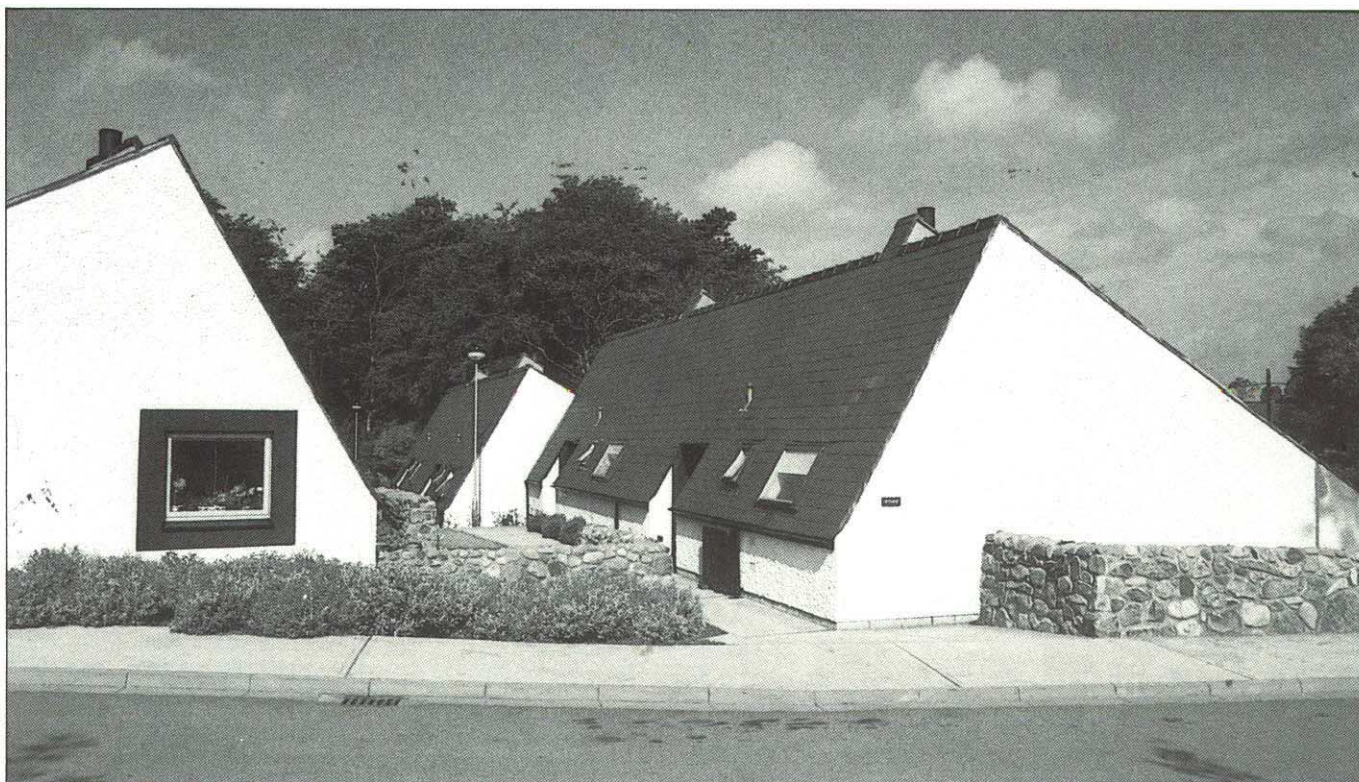
This scheme consists of flats for elderly people and is a studied attempt to regain the architectural unity of a group of existing buildings which includes a church by Sir Gilbert Scott. It is also an excellent example of the use of exposed concrete blockwork, relating closely to the surrounding stone buildings and boundary walls. This scheme won an award for Good Design in Housing in 1979.

These awards come at a time when the partnership sadly announces the death of the founder of the practice Stewart Powell Bowen in May this year. As an architect who was well known for his dedication to the visual arts in Wales, he will be very much missed. He had a great belief in the Welsh way of life and in the contribution that modern architecture could make both culturally and visually to its traditions.



Above: Trinity Court, Rhyl - Commendation in the 1982 RIBA Architecture Awards.

Below: Hafan Elan, Llanrug - Eisteddfod Gold Medal for Architecture and a Commendation in the 1982 RIBA Architecture Awards.

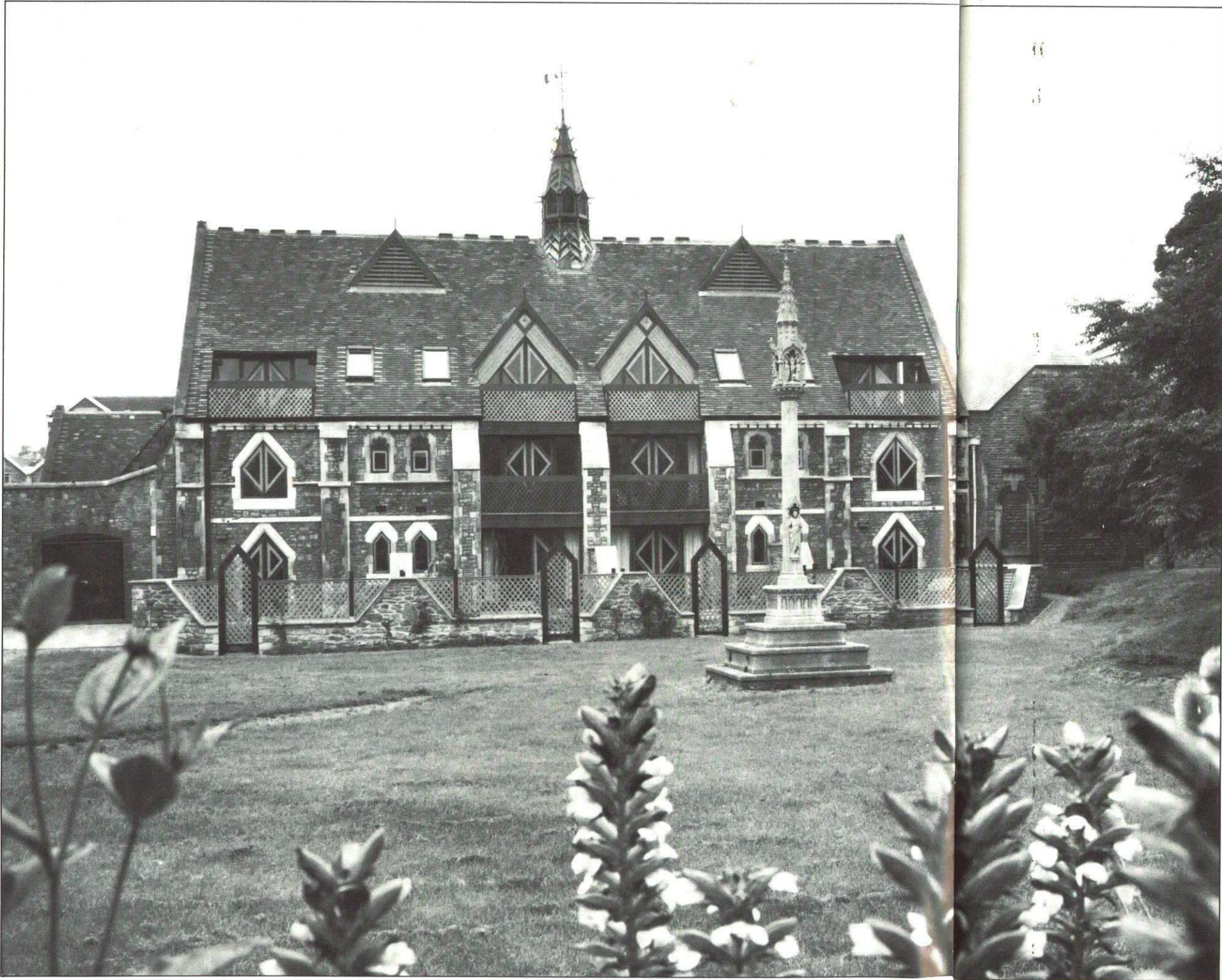


PARISH HALL CONVERSION

The 'Garden Court', Alma Vale Road,
Clifton, Bristol

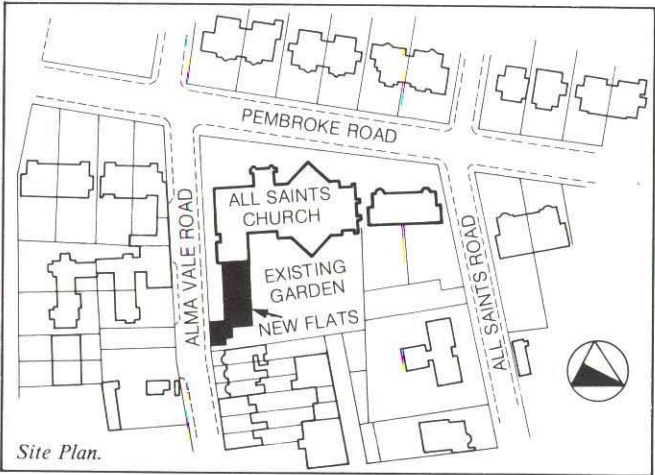
Client:	Colours Ltd
Architects:	Hubbard Ford Partnership, Bristol
Consulting engineers:	Clarke, Nicholls & Marcel, Bristol
Contractor:	R. W. Cox (Bristol) Ltd
'Omnibloc' concrete floors:	Tinsley Building Products Ltd (Omnia Concrete Floors)
Concrete blocks:	Sage & Down
Photographs:	Trevor Jones

Below: Rear view of the hall from existing garden of All Saints Church.

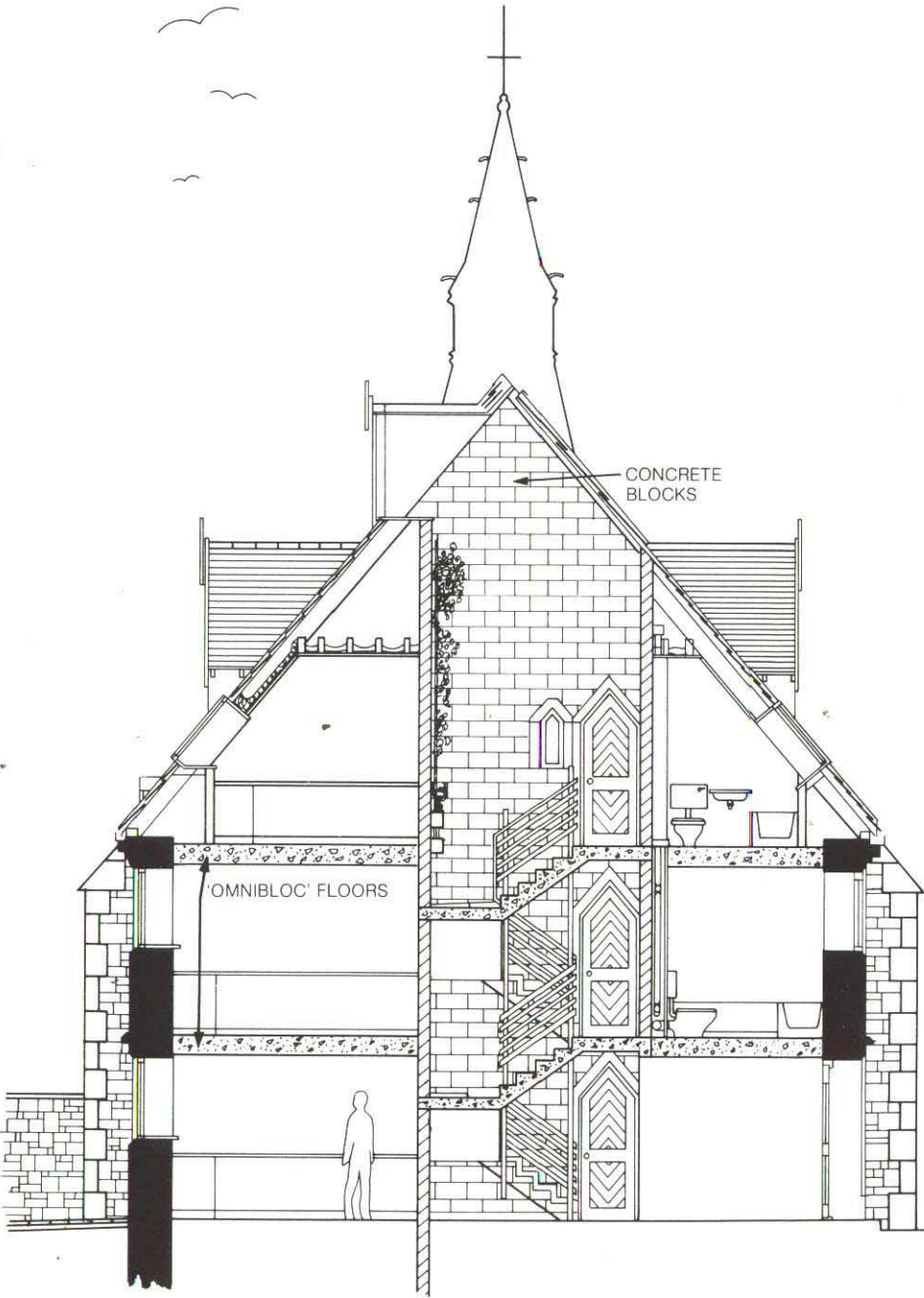


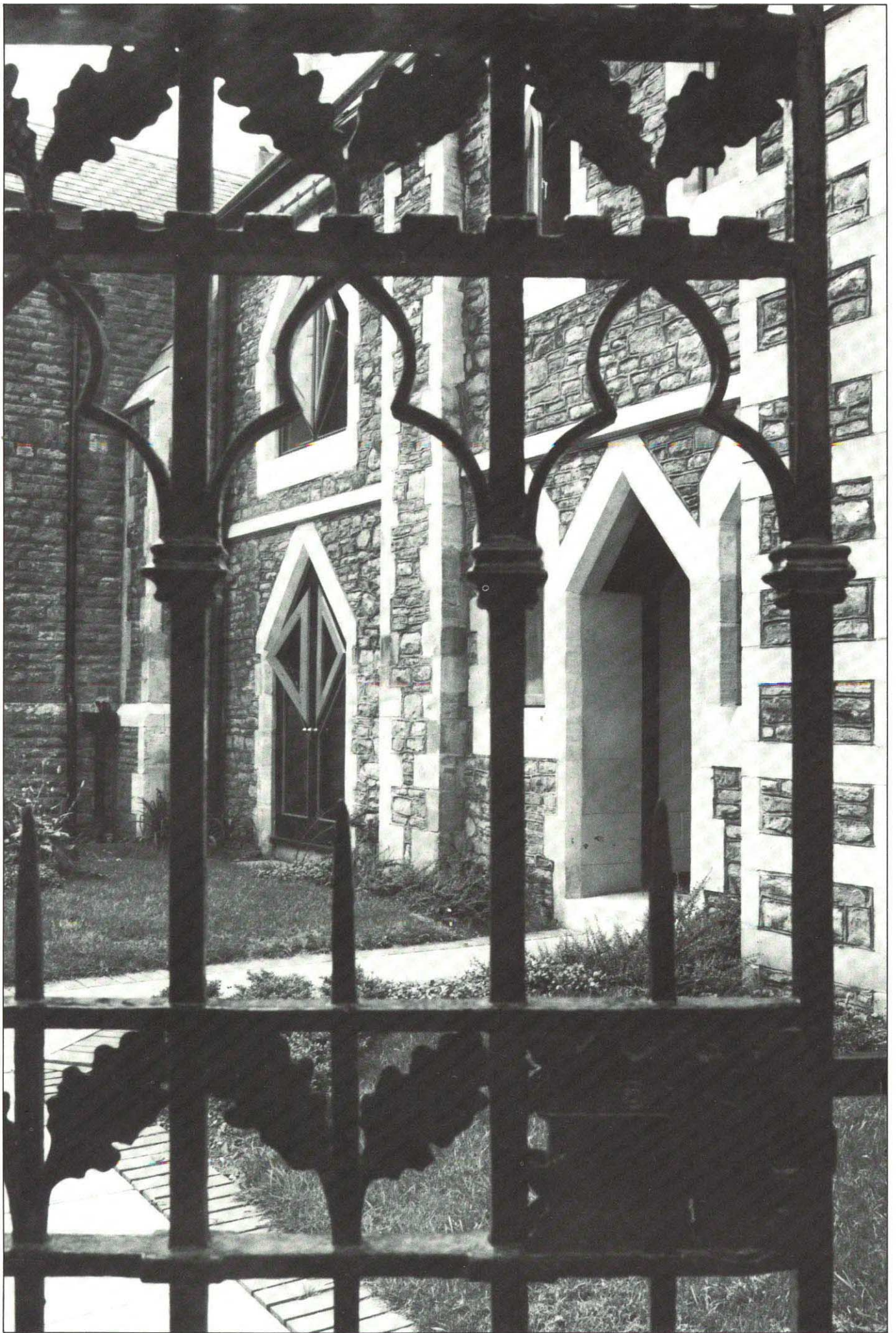
This skilful and imaginative conversion scheme – full of lively Gothic detail both Victorian and modern – includes twelve single-bedroom flats and one two-bedroom 'cottage' built within the shell of a Victorian parish hall. The original hall and its associated rooms were bought from the Trustees of All Saints Church, Clifton, by the developer Colours Ltd.

The front wing of the hall, facing Alma Vale Road, was demolished – apart from the entrance arch. A first and second floor were inserted inside the shell using the 'Omnibloc' lightweight flooring system spanning about

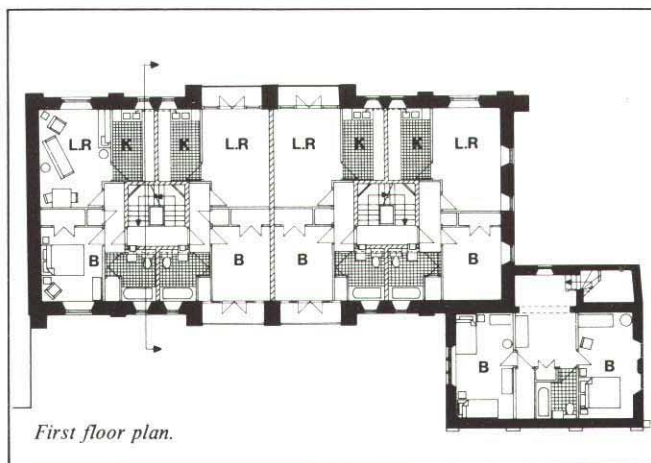


Cross section





PARISH HALL CONVERSION *continued*



5.5 m – a system chosen by the architect in consultation with the structural engineers because of the restricted access which required units to be manhandled into position.

New reconstructed stone lintels and jamb blocks were cast on the site using stone dust to match the existing stonework, although some of the original stone was salvaged and re-used.

New dormers have been constructed for bedrooms and living rooms in the roof, and 'Velux' rooflights have been inserted for kitchens and bathrooms. Two patent glazing rooflights have also been inserted to give a flood of light down the stairwells. These are constructed with exposed

Left: New reconstructed stone lintels and jambs to openings were cast on the site with stone dust matching the existing stonework.

Right: The retained entrance arch of the demolished front wing leads to a paved and planted front garden to the flats.

Below: The front of the hall from Alma Vale Road. The original entrance arch of the demolished front wing has been retained.

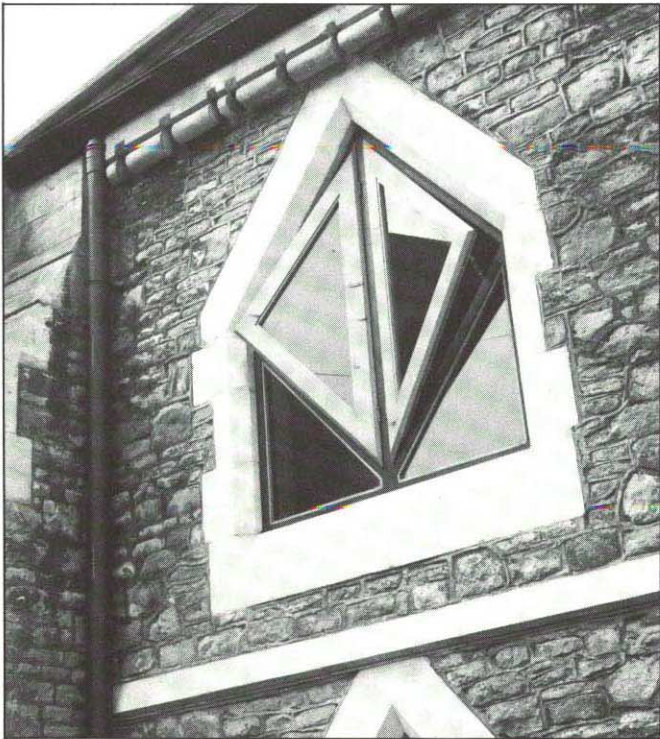
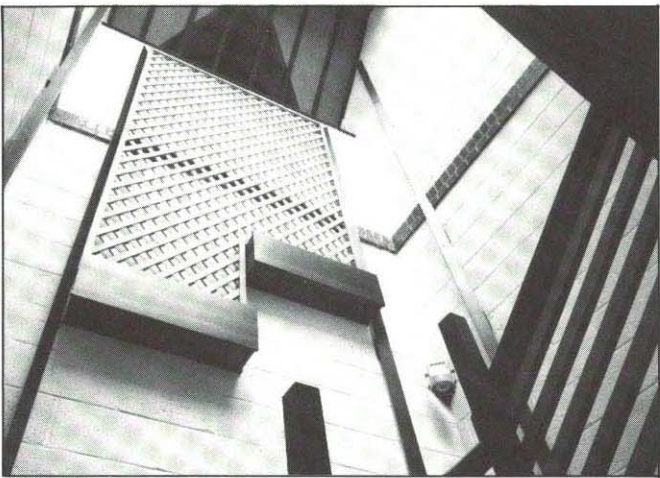


PARISH HALL CONVERSION *continued*

concrete block walls which have been painted white, with bands of smooth red brick at floor levels.

The flèche ventilator on the roof was removed by crane and extensively rebuilt with new leading. The weathervane was designed by the project architect Vic Love and shows a cherub, modelled on his young son Jesse, blowing a cloud.

In these days of heavy demand for single accommodation, it is not surprising that the flats have all sold extremely well and quickly.



Top right: Stair well, showing the use of white painted concrete blockwork.

Right: Upper window detail showing the new reconstructed stone lintel and jamb blocks.

Below: A living-room at ground floor level, opening onto a paved back garden.



HERMES COMES HOME

Fleet Maintenance Base Jetty, Portsmouth

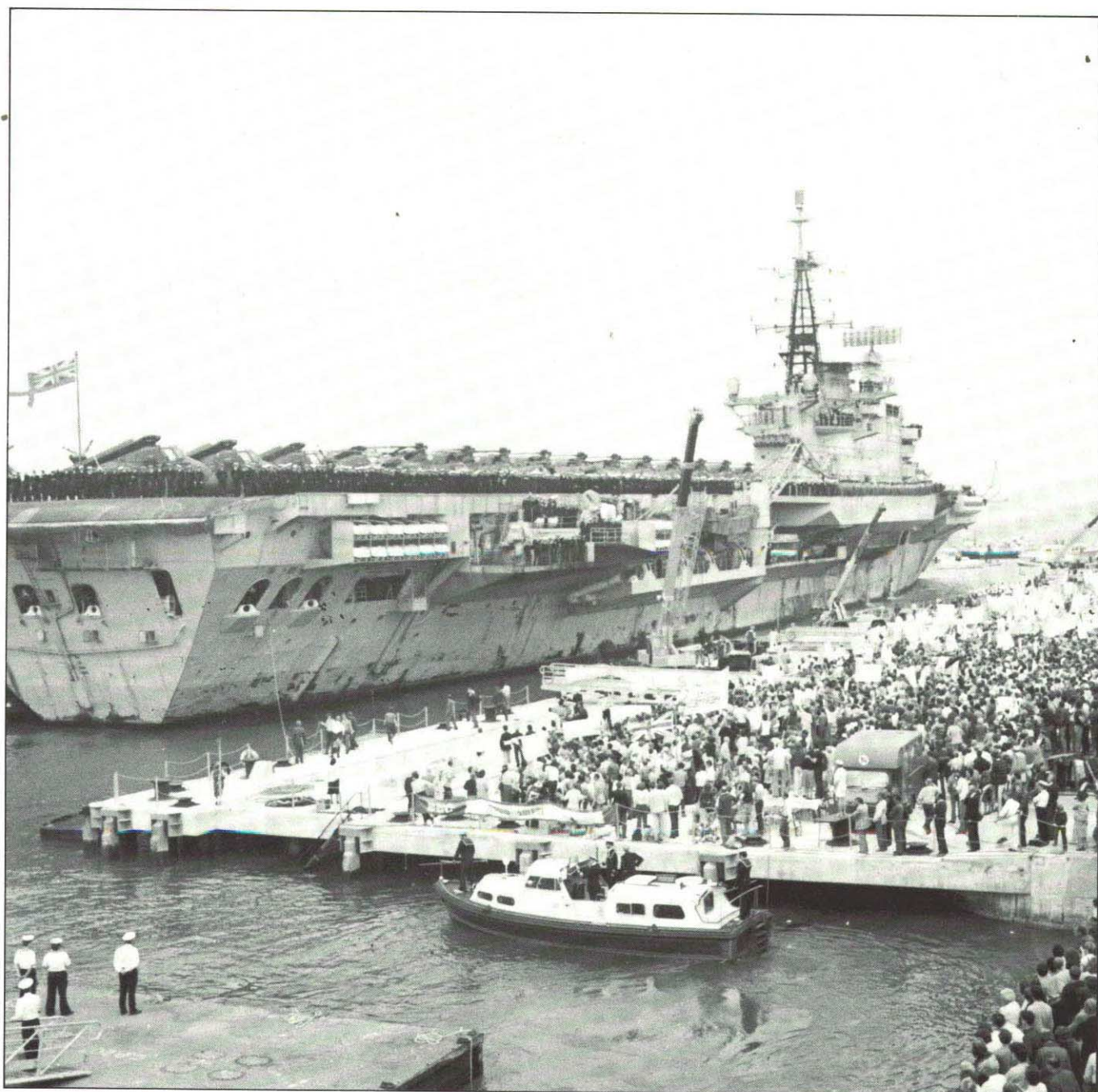
Client:	Property Services Agency for Ministry of Defence (Navy)
Design:	Property Services Agency
Construction:	Bovis Civil Engineering Ltd

The last thing that the crowds at Portsmouth welcoming HMS Hermes back from the Falklands last July would have thought of was what they were standing on. In fact, the new Fleet Maintenance Base Jetty was chosen for this emotional and dramatic event because it offered a 290 metre length and a 27 metre width of unencumbered reinforced concrete deck for the 8000 friends and families who turned up to

welcome the ship's company home. It also provided space for this huge crowd to be entertained by the Royal Marine Band.

The jetty was completed and handed over on time in May to the Ministry of Defence. Meanwhile work has been going ahead on the accommodation buildings, diesel tank complex, workshops and stores which will make this one of the most modern warship maintenance facilities in the world. The jetty consists of a reinforced concrete structural deck with a tough topping screed supported on piles driven through silt into clay. It incorporates a watertight underslung subway made up of precast concrete sections along its entire length to carry all main services.

This was a considerable feat of construction, including the blasting of holes through 4 m thick granite for the piles which support the jetty.

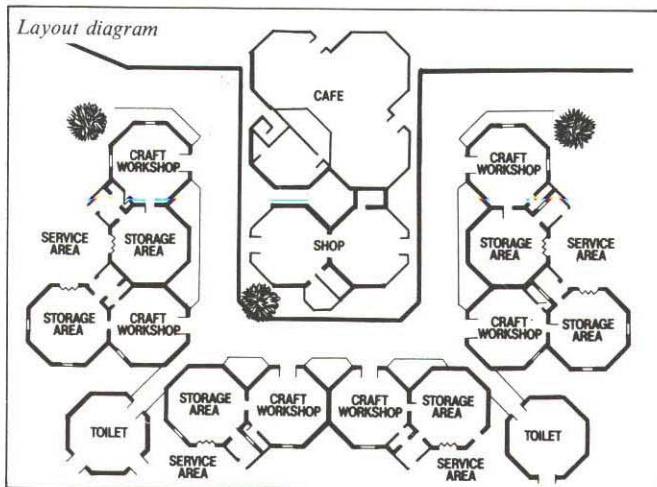
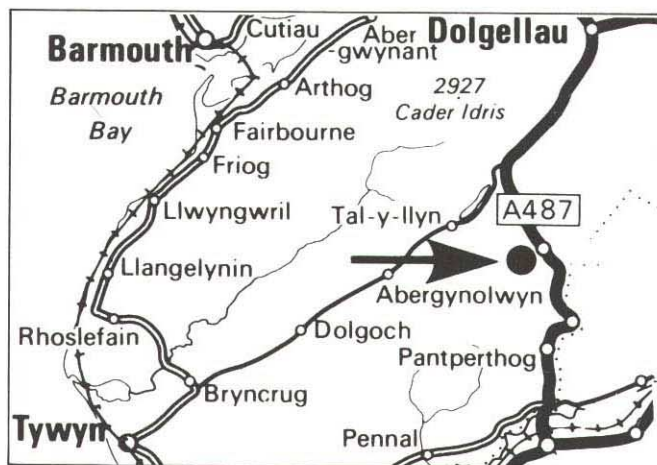


CORRIS CRAFT CENTRE

Corris, Gwynedd

Client:	Development Board for Rural Wales
Architects:	Gareth Evans (Head of Construction) Project team: Neville C. Williams Malcolm B. Barmer
Structural engineers:	Robinson Jones Partnership, Ruthin
Quantity surveyors:	Ivor Russell & Partners, Swansea
Landscape architects:	Ecoscape, Newtown
General contractor:	R. Bustin & Son, Llwyngwrl
Concrete bricks:	Danygraig Brick Co. Ltd, Risca

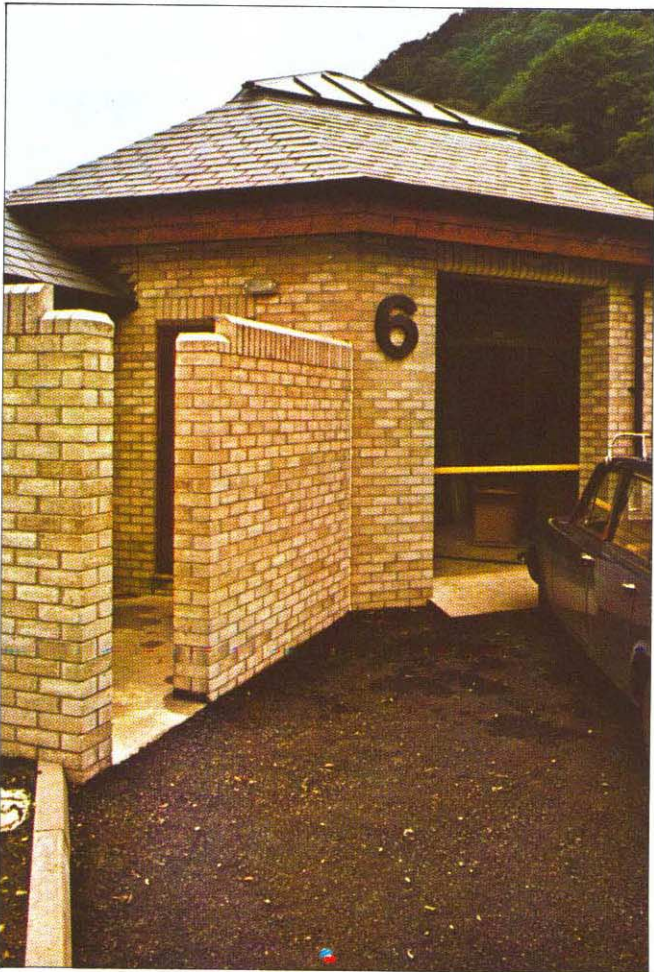
The Corris Craft Centre is set in fine Welsh mountain countryside on the A487 – the main tourist route from Machynlleth to Dolgellau – and close to the village of Corris on the southern boundary of the Snowdonia National Park. The Centre is a rewarding and convenient place for visitors



in cars and coaches to stop for refreshments and to wander through the workshops where crafts are plied and sold in the best Welsh traditions. Shops, an excellent café with home-made food and of course toilets are all provided. The complex is informal and the hexagonal single-storey pavilions are designed to a high standard with carefully modelled and detailed concrete brickwork capped with Welsh slate roofs. Landscaping consists of a combination of plain precast paving, plant beds, trees and large sculptural boulders of rock. The Centre was opened in May of this year.

There are six semi-detached workshop units of about 1000 sq ft, each made up of two hexagons of 500 sq ft – one a workshop area and the other storage area with a waste compound. The workshops are grouped around a paved court with the main shop and café at the centre of the complex. Visitors can go into the workshops to watch work in progress and they can buy craft products direct from a small shop within each unit.

The units are designed on traditional lines with walls of light creamish-grey concrete bricks exposed inside and out. As has been noted before in this journal (No. 126) concrete



Left: Model of the Craft Centre.

Right: Detail of service access to the workshops.

Below: The Corris Craft Centre in its fine mountain setting, as seen from the approach road.



brickwork is becoming increasingly common in Wales and is chosen as much on grounds of appearance as of cost: the range of colours and textures available is wide and attractive. The creamish-grey colour chosen for the bricks in the Craft Centre stands out against the wooded hillside and combines well with the dark grey Welsh slate roofs. The brickwork is carried up to a height of 9 ft 6 in at which point it supports exposed timber trusses for the roofs. A pyramid rooflight is provided at the apex of each roof. Floors throughout are of in situ concrete slabs with a power-floated finish sealed with 'Lithurin' to give a dust-free surface. The construction and finishes of the main shop and café are similar, with the addition of vinyl acoustic sheet flooring in parts.

The workshop units each have their own toilet accommodation and are served with mains drainage, water and a three-phase electricity supply; heating is by electric wall-mounted units.

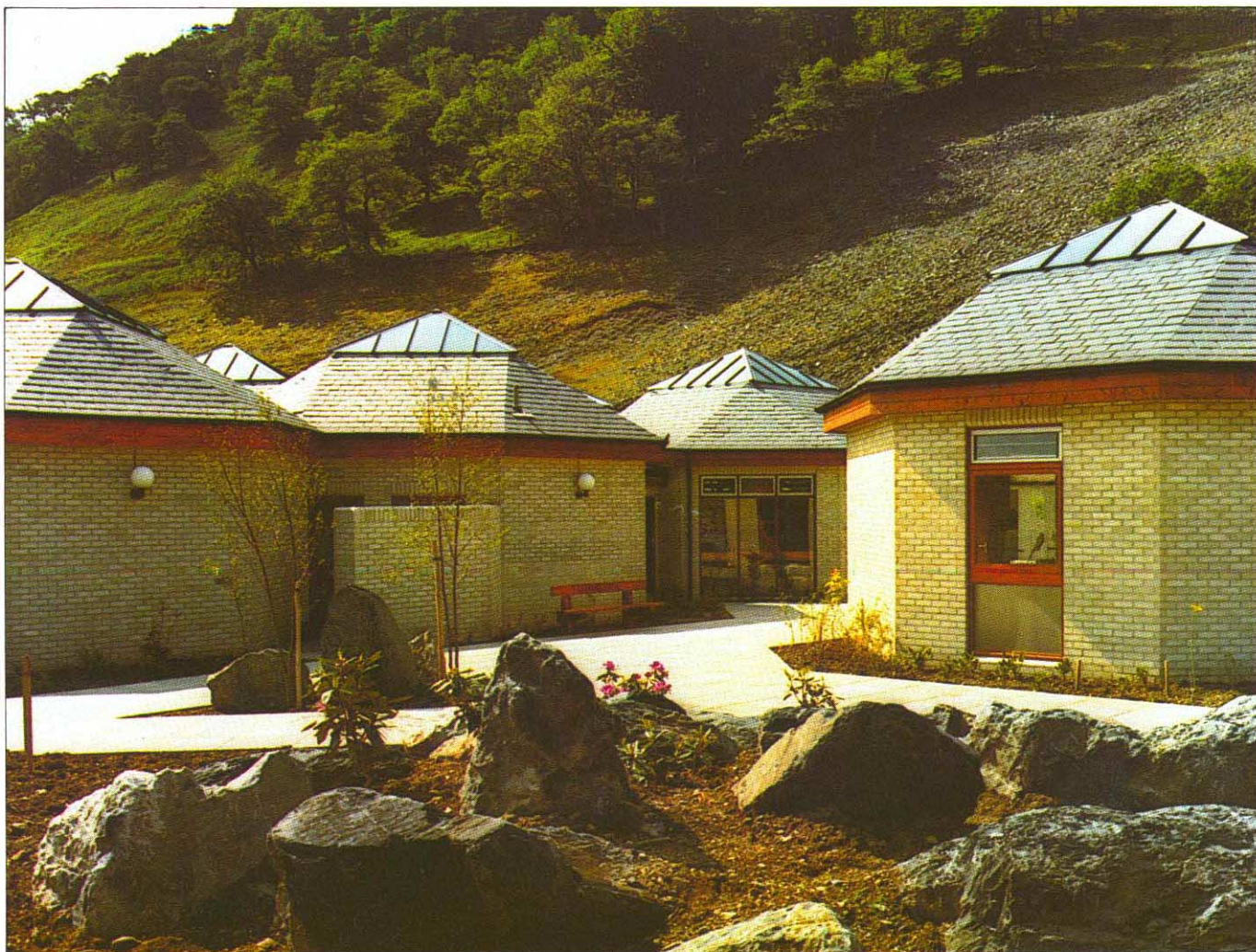
This is a highly creative and imaginative venture for which the Development Board for Rural Wales deserves full credit. One hopes that it will attract much attention and custom: it is well placed not only for the fine countryside around but also for a number of other individual craft

centres nearby where pottery, ceramics, slate crafts, leatherwork and weaving are carried out – not to mention the worthy and absorbing National Centre for Alternative Technology at Machynlleth which ought to be more in the public eye than it is at present. This part of Wales is good value.

Below: Large natural boulders are an integral part of the landscaping.

Right: The pavilions are of well-detailed concrete brickwork and are arranged around internal paved courts.

Bottom right: Workshop interior where well-designed wooden objects are made by a skilled craftsman and sold to the public.





HAUTE COUTURE IN CONCRETE

New Headquarters for the European
Investment Bank, Luxembourg

by George Perkin

Client:	European Investment Bank (EIB)
Architects:	Denys Lasdun Redhouse & Softley
Consulting engineers:	Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick & Partners in association with services sub-consultants: Scott Houghton & Co. Progeco SA (Belgium) HL Technik GmbH (West Germany)
Quantity surveyors:	Widnell & Trollope in association with Widnell & Trollope (Belgium)
Main contractor:	Phillip Holzmann AG (West Germany)
Precast concrete elements:	G.T.M. Bâtiment et Travaux Publics S.A. (France) in association with Marble Mosaic Co. Ltd.

The large luxurious office complex with immaculate concrete finishes is not the sort of building that easily captures the public imagination today. And yet the new headquarters for the European Investment Bank in Luxembourg must be one of the best of the 'genre' to be seen

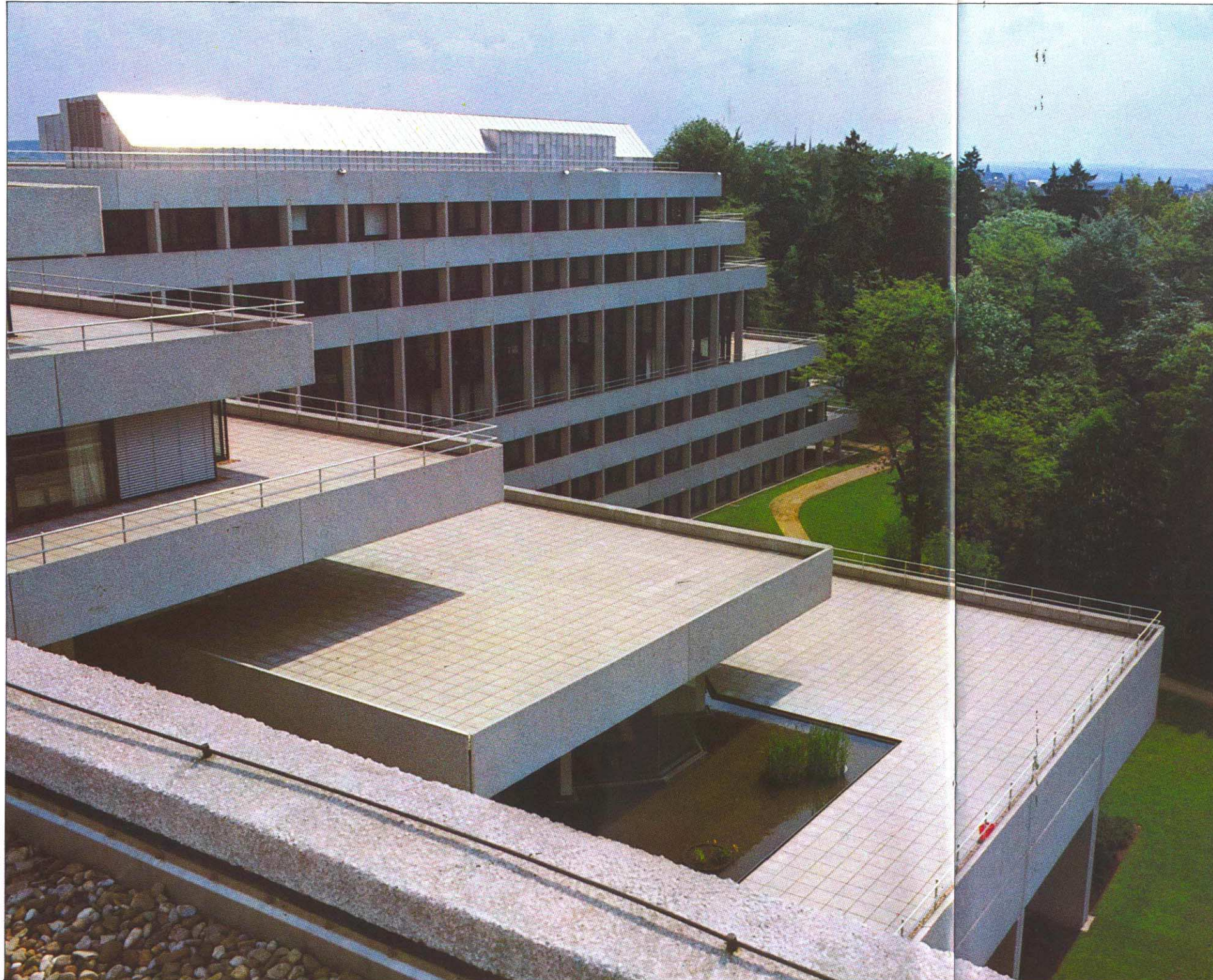
Below left: General view looking towards the wooded valley at the rear of the site. The main conference room is at the lowest level on the right with the pool on the roof which surrounds the meeting-room.

Below right: The staff restaurant, left, which extends onto the lawns in fine weather.

Bottom right: The meeting-room is partially sunk into a surrounding pool on the roof of the main conference room.

anywhere. As one might expect, it is only a combination of money, design skill, experience, good manufacturing and first class workmanship that can produce the particular kind of sophisticated simplicity apparent in this building. In fact it is the joint product of British architectural and engineering design (with Belgian associates), German contracting, and French precasting with British 'know-how' using Italian materials – a potent combination appropriate enough to the common European cause which the building serves.

From the entrance forecourt, with its fluttering flags and fan-shaped patterns of granite setts, the building proclaims in frame, slab and panel the austere and rational geometry of its structure. As such, it promises an intellectual rather



HAUTE COUTURE IN CONCRETE *continued*

than an emotional experience, as generally proves to be the case – with one or two poetic exceptions. However, the building does hint externally at luxuries within, which is why perhaps some visitors are said to have entered the imposing *porte-cochère* and asked if there were any rooms for the night.

But this is not so much a building to be admired from a distance as one to be scrutinized through a magnifying glass – something exceptional by today's standards. If you were sure that you never liked concrete surface finishes, then you are recommended to take a look at the faces of this building which will make you have second thoughts. As an example of high-class bespoke concrete tailoring, you will be lucky to find a suit of more stylish elegance, cut on simple – if severe

– classical lines. Moreover, all the seams are deftly sewn up and in the right places. In the writers' opinion, the building takes its place alongside the best two other works by Sir Denys Lasdun and his partners i.e. the Royal College of Physicians in London's Regents Park, and the inside of the National Theatre.

Architectural design

The building is cruciform on plan, its arms flung wide over the sloping site to contain four corners of differing character: the entrance and reception courtyard in one, the staff restaurant and amenity rooms in another, conference, dining and meeting rooms in a third, and physical recreation with a swimming pool in the fourth. Flexible open office space is provided on the upper floors, divided up into standard corridors and individual rooms which achieve such a high standard of finish and appointment that secretaries appear and behave more like fashion models than office employees. This is surely an example of an environment having a positive effect on the user. The clients particularly wanted natural ventilation in the offices, so the windows slide open.

The poetic and dramatic moments in the building come first with the luxurious and serenely panelled conference

Below: The swimming-pool – an immaculate interior with concrete elements clad in white tiles.

Right: Detail looking into an office window at ground floor level.

Far right: Close-up details of the beautifully made precast concrete elements.



room for 111 delegates, fully equipped with translation booths and diagonally approached through a calm blue-carpeted foyer with broad descending stairs in one corner. Then on the roof of this is a meeting-room partially sunk in a water garden with reeds, rushes and lilies. This is an inspired idea, putting the seated occupant only a little above eye level with the water outside. The third moment of impact comes undoubtedly in the classically simple swimming-pool set flush in a surround of immaculate white tiles which are carried up over benches and walls – clinically perfect perhaps but a masterpiece of restrained design and careful detail.

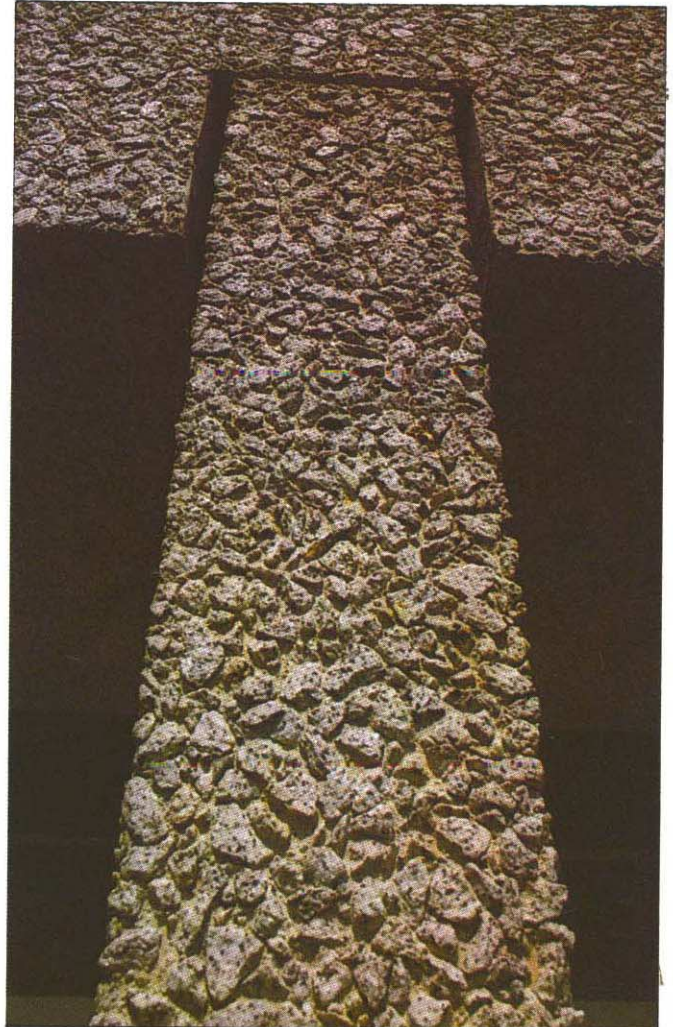
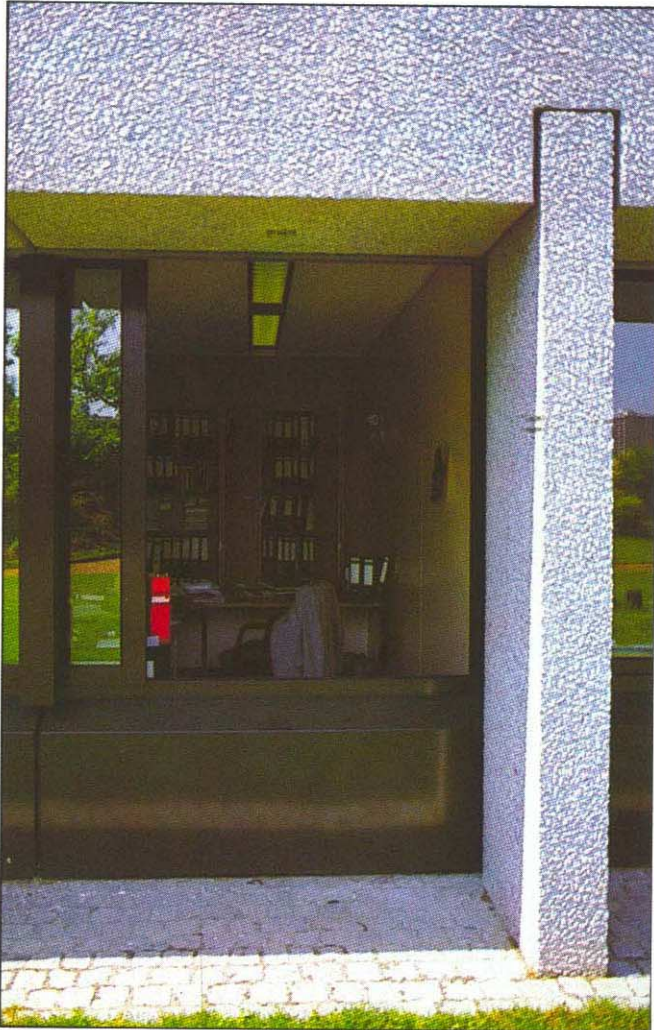
Structure, finishes and energy

The building is basically constructed with an in situ reinforced concrete frame faced with high-quality exposed aggregate panels of precast concrete. From the structural point of view, the panels form an integral part of the concrete elements and were used as permanent formwork. This combination of in situ and precast concrete is used throughout the building, inside and out. In the offices, the floors are of deep ribbed in situ slabs allowing services to be contained within their depth. In other more public parts, notably the entrance hall and foyer, ceilings are formed of in situ 'diagrid' coffered slabs cast against glass reinforced plastic formwork.

The consistently good quality of the concrete finishes throughout this building is of course a factor of the highest importance from the architectural point of view. The high

standard derives from the careful manufacture of the precast concrete panels, some of them very large, which face the in situ structure. The panels were cast with Montefarno silver-grey granite, 20-30 mm in size, from Mergozzo in Italy, and with 80 per cent white cement and 20 per cent normal grey cement. The surface was deep-washed to expose the aggregate – a specialized technique developed in Britain. The panels were made under carefully controlled conditions in Metz, France. The result is an evenly textured silver-grey concrete which forms a splendid backcloth inside the building, and which has externally so far weathered perfectly without any noticeable blemishes of any importance. In fact, the external fabric of the building is designed with a built-in gutter system to collect rainwater for controlled discharge, floor by floor, to reduce the risk of staining.

As might be expected, the client asked for energy saving to be one of the prime considerations in design. Low-pressure hot water convectors under windows provide heating when required, individually controlled. Windows are double-glazed in aluminium frames. About 75 per cent of the heated air within the building is recirculated through the ventilation system which incorporates a heat exchange to warm the fresh air intake. The remaining 25 per cent is expelled through the underground garages providing sufficient warmth there to avoid the need for any other heating. Last, but by no means least, the heavy concrete structure is an important stabilizing factor in the seasonal temperature control of the building.



EVENING AT THE BARBICAN

Barbican Centre for Arts and
Conferences, Barbican, London EC2

by George Perkin

Client:	Corporation of the City of London
Architects:	Chamberlin Powell and Bon (Barbican)
Structural engineers:	Ove Arup and Partners
Contractors:	John Laing Construction Ltd
Photographs:	George Perkin Trevor Jones

Leaving aside the vexed question of whether the Barbican as a concept is your cup of tea or not, the first thing that the visitor will realize about the arts centre – once the entrance has been safely found – is that it is very large indeed. It is a 'complex' in more ways than one. Confronted by acres of

orange carpet on different levels, you will be at once impaled on the horns of several dilemmas. Should you go to a play, a concert, a film, an art exhibition, the restaurant, the bar, the café, the terrace...? Which lift button should you press and for what activity? You will need a sense of purpose and direction before you enter these lofty and somehow impersonal foyers. To go on spec. without a plan is merely to invite bewilderment. As one visitor was overheard to say "There seems an awful lot going on here Mildred".

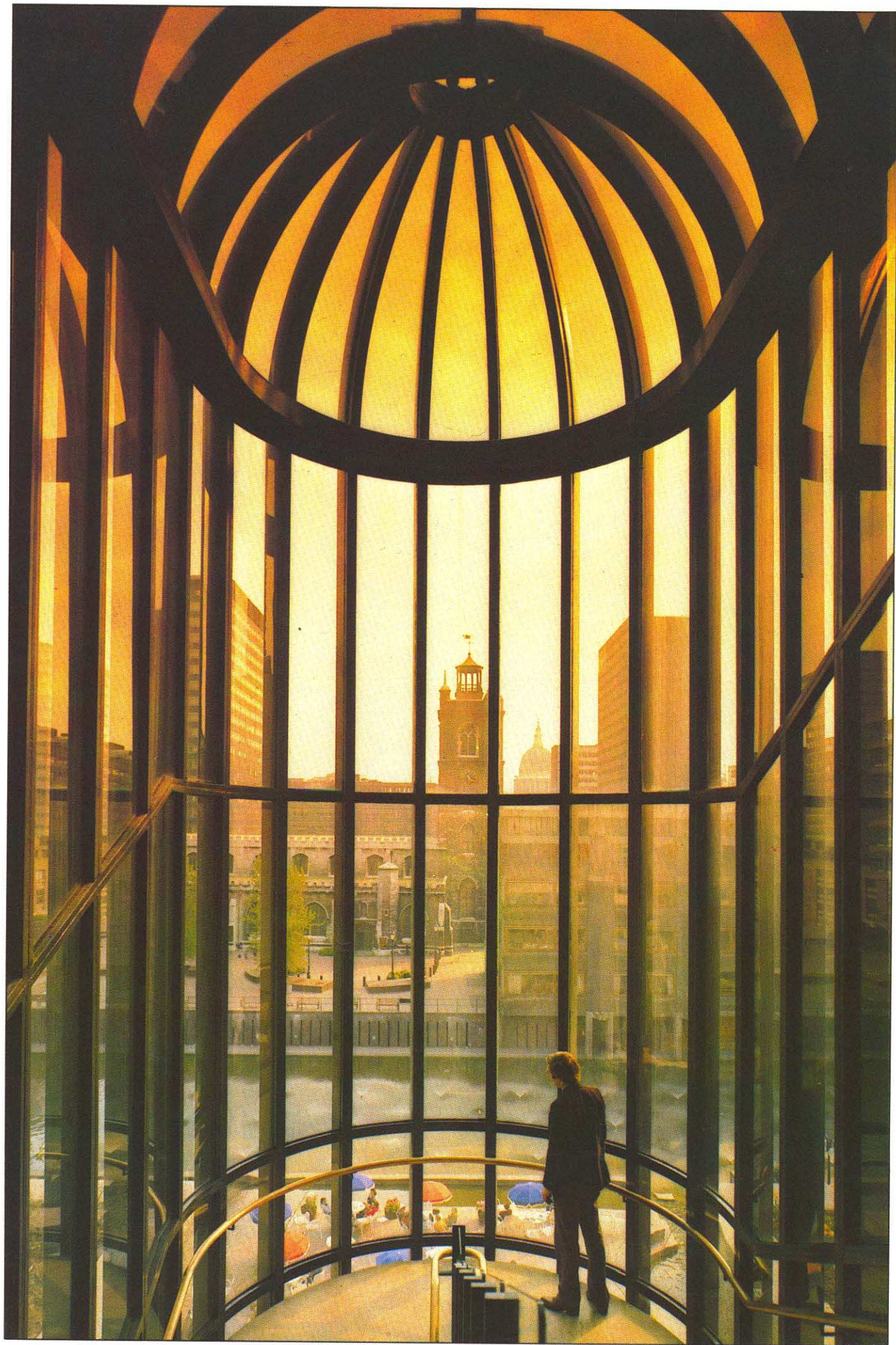
In fact, one of the easiest and most attractive courses of action – if the weather be fine – is simply to go straight out again, through the doors onto the lakeside terrace. Here, there is a real suggestion of metropolitan café life. City gents – the genuine article – are to be seen reading the *Financial Times* at café tables beside the fountains. Moreover, whilst you are settling yourself at a table and wondering whether it's self service or waitresses, you can really see what the Barbican is all about, with views over the landscaped water gardens of the surrounding blocks of flats. And you can make your mind up at your leisure about the merits of living in the City of London. Seen from this angle, the blocks have a certain dark and brooding majesty. But are they really for people? Beside you, a small tree struggles symbolically upwards in the first years of life. Is it not, you wonder, like hanging a daisy chain around the tiger's neck?

Back inside, life flows warmly up and down the carpeted stairways, between the sombre planes of bush-hammered

Right: Semi-circular staircase tower overlooking the café terrace, lake and city buildings in the distance with a glimpse of St. Paul's Cathedral.

Below: Open-air café on the terrace beside the lake and fountains.







EVENING AT THE BARBICAN *continued*

concrete – an extension of the technique used throughout the Barbican and carried out with single-minded devotion to the cause of consistency. Taken on their own, out of context, these dappled concrete surfaces might suggest – say – armouries rather than arts. Put back in their context, with the foil of luxury all around and the softening effect of carpets, they become more human, though seeming to remind us that the arts are, after all, a serious business. All the same, their tactile qualities are not what everyone would call attractive, and the vision persists of a lady – once glimpsed in similar surroundings in far off Montreal – dressed in a backless evening dress, leaning against just such a wall...

But if you carp at the concrete in the foyers and elsewhere in the Barbican, you really should not complain at much in the concert hall and theatre. For these are fine auditoria, the best to be found anywhere in the world and the crowning glories of the arts centre. Spacious, serene, comfortable (with room to stretch your legs), well ventilated, acoustically excellent with perfect vision – what else should

Left: The conservatory terrace – a fine garden interior, seen here in use for the Indian 'Aditi' exhibition last summer. (see also back cover).

Below: One of the well attended open-air concerts given last August by the London Symphony Orchestra in the Sculpture Court, sponsored by The Peter Stuyvesant Foundation.

we ask of an auditorium? The surfaces of warm wood and cool concrete are here perfectly matched and set off by the rich dark colours of the upholstery. In the theatre, there is the added bonus of your own individual door to your own individual gangway, lending a sense of occasion to the business of finding your seat. And then the concrete galleries are ingeniously dovetailed one above the other, saving on space without in any way impairing vision: on the contrary, players and audience are brought into much closer contact.

Not everyone who visits the Centre will realize that the bulk of it is underground: so it is that the fly tower of the theatre only partially projects above ground. If you climb the semi-circular glass stair tower overlooking the water gardens and St. Paul's, you will come eventually to a conservatory terrace which surrounds the fly tower, a spectacular glassed-in space abundantly planted around the central concrete tower. This is one of the moments of delight in the Centre and it should be more accessible to the public at all times, rather than shut off for private functions as often seems to be the case. At the time of my visit, there was the Indian 'Aditi' exhibition on, and this had fortunately overflowed into the conservatory terrace with a display by the British designer Zandra Rhodes of Indian fabrics, garments and room settings. As can be seen from the illustrations, the conservatory terrace makes a fine exhibition space in its own right. We should be able to make more use of it in future.

Returning to the bottom of the building, there is another moment of drama in Cinema 1 where everything is done by



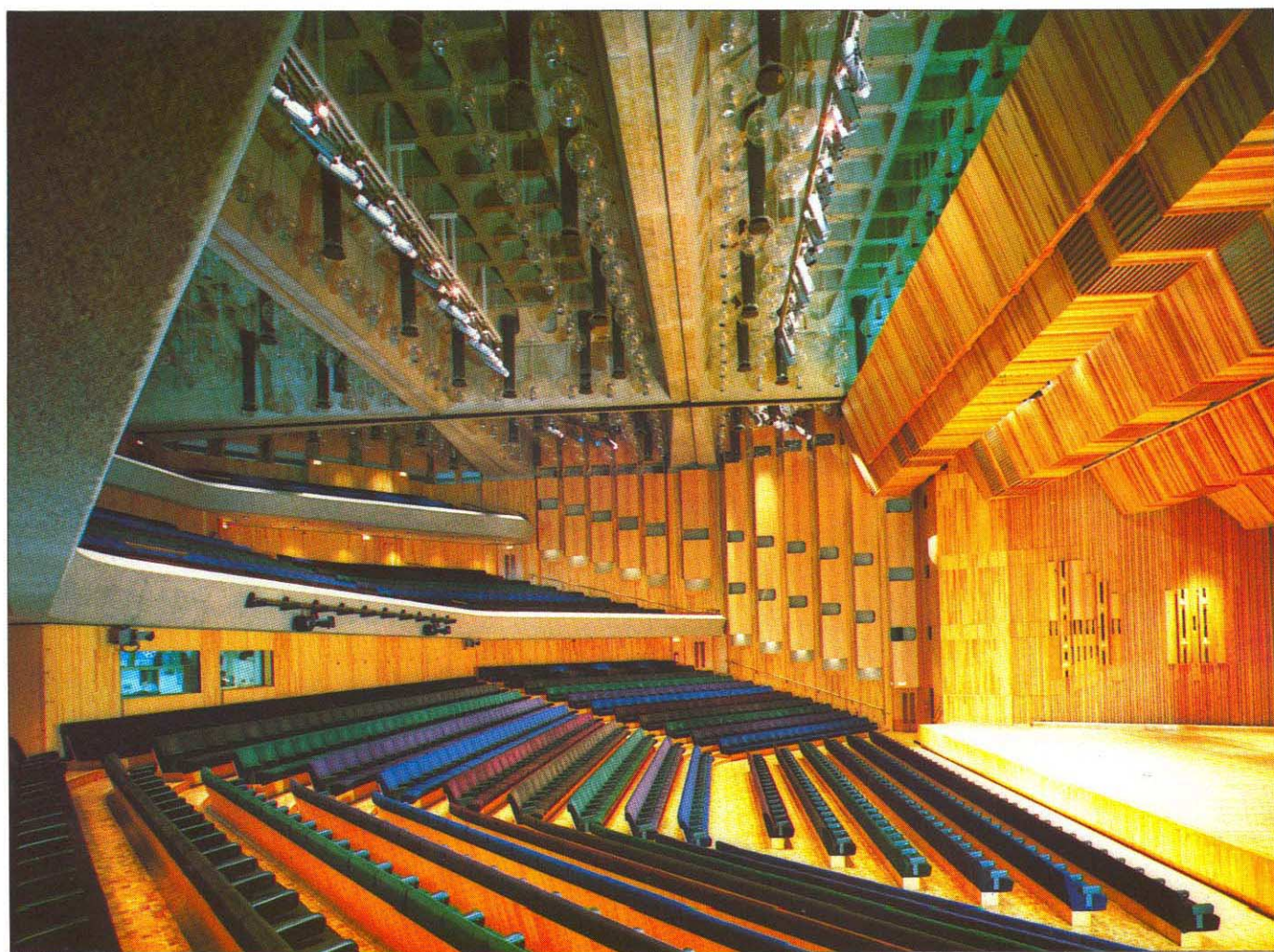
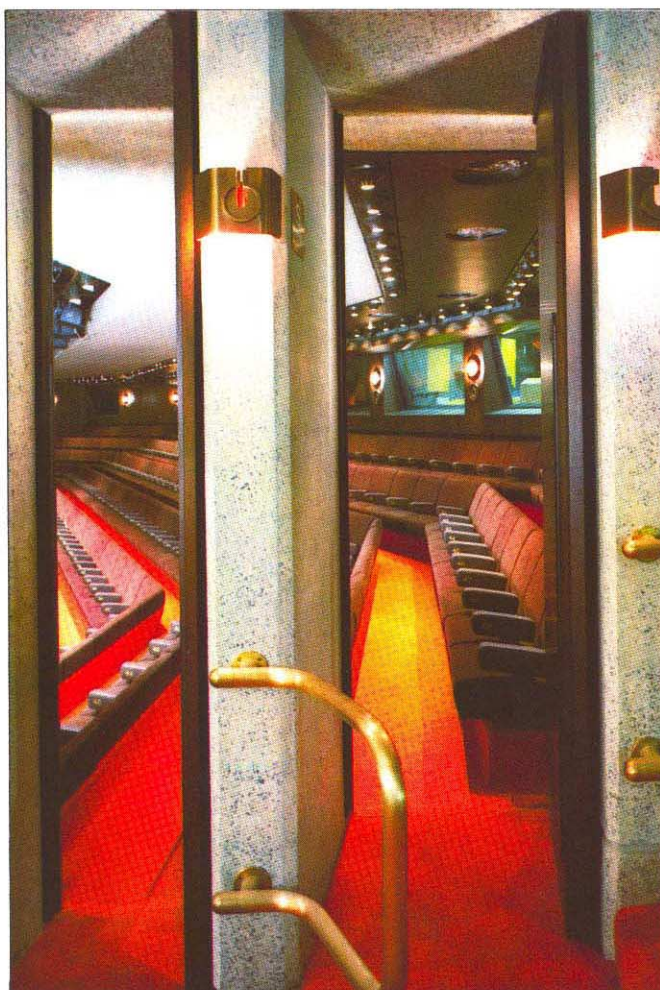
EVENING AT THE BARBICAN *continued*

mirrors. Descending the staircase into the cinema foyer, you may not be altogether sure whether you are going up or down – such are the reflections from bright lights in tilted planes of mirror glass, promising great excitements and psychedelic experiences within. In fact the cinema interior is reassuringly restful, its carpeted walls enclosing padded airline seats in blue, green and purple – a soft relaxing interior conducive to dozing off, one would think, if the film proved disappointing.

If you are without a car, you may well leave the Centre by way of the Barbican underground station, where there is a notice telling you that the station is closed after 10.00 pm on Saturdays and all day Sundays. There's charity for you. But then Londoners are used to battling their way to the arts – struggling along windswept walkways on the South Bank, and now negotiating the whims of London Transport to reach the nether regions of the City. It all goes to prove, as the Barbican Centre certainly does, that the spirit of human endeavour and enterprise in the face of great obstacles hasn't deserted us yet. Those who got it all going deserve medals.

Right: The main theatre. Each gangway has its own entrance door.

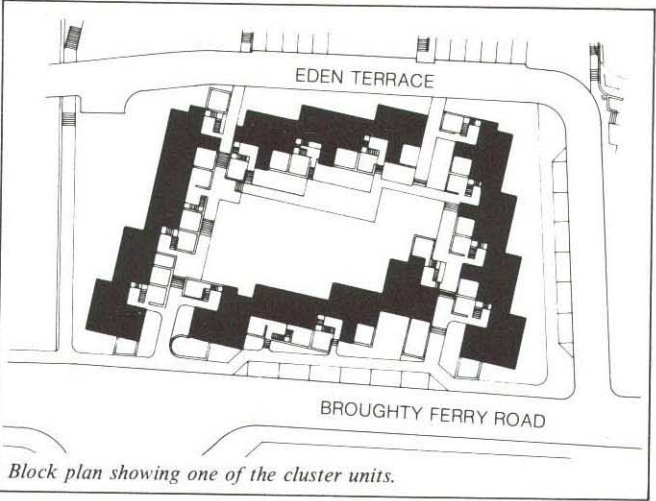
Below: The concert hall: cool concrete and warm wood finishes give a serene and spacious interior.



DUNDEE CENTRAL

Watson Street Central Development Area,
Dundee

Client:	City of Dundee District Council
Architects:	City of Dundee District Council, Technical Services Division Chief Architect/Quantity Surveyor: Ian M. Dunsire
Quantity surveyors:	D. I. Burchell and Partners
Structural engineers:	W. A. Fairhurst and Partners
Contractors:	Bett Brothers Ltd
Concrete bricks and blocks:	John Fyffe, Aberdeen
Concrete roof tiles:	Redland Roof Tiles Ltd
Photographs:	Colin F. Wishart



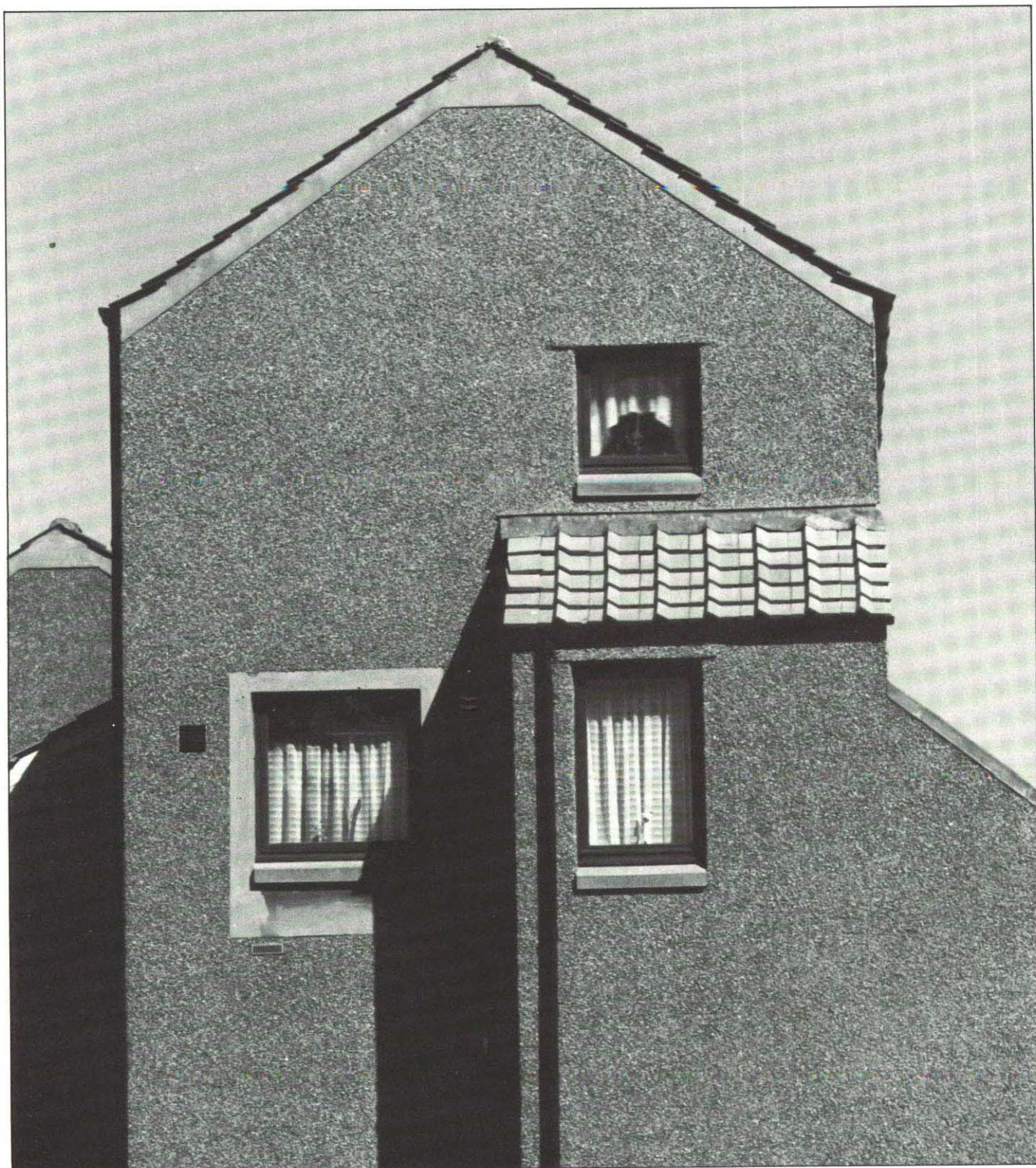
Below: General view of the housing against the Dundee skyline.



This high-density central development scheme in Dundee won a Saltire Award in 1981. The principle on which it is designed is based on the earlier award-winning Wellgate central scheme in Dundee which used clusters of houses grouped around courtyards, allowing occupants a sense of individuality in their dwellings. As at Wellgate, the prime concern has been to provide each tenant with an individual house, his own front door and his own private area, whilst allowing the benefits of close neighbourliness. The houses

have a good deal of local character with relatively small windows and roughcast rendered walls of different colours.

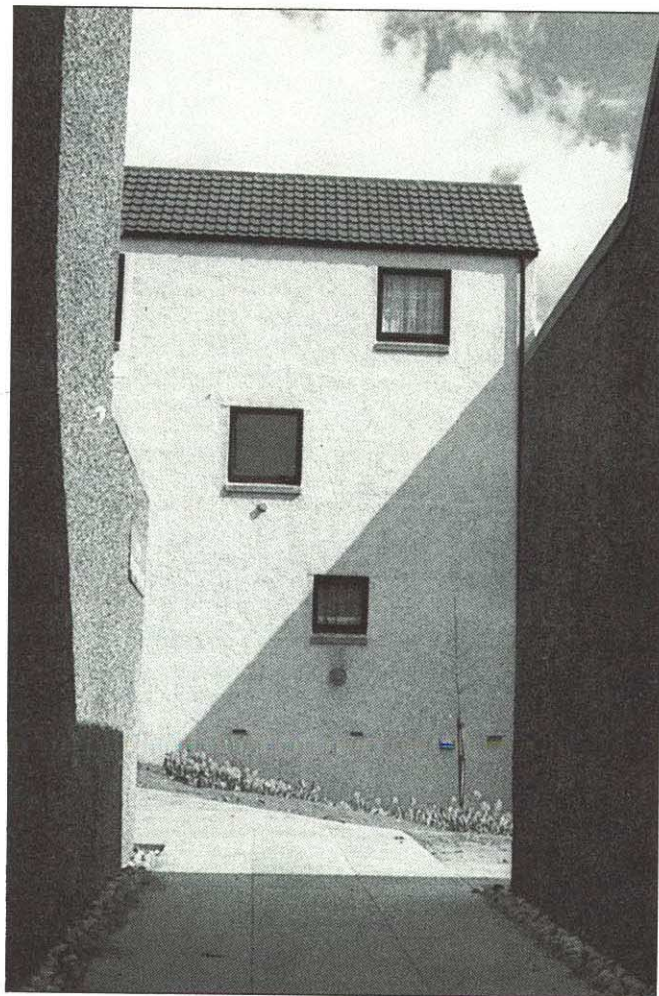
The site slopes sharply to the south and is in certain areas precipitous. The gradients vary between 1 in 20 to 1 in 3 and there is a maximum rise of 75 ft across the site. Several mature trees have been retained from the grounds of Springhill House which originally stood on the site and has been demolished.



There are 235 dwellings in all at a density of 240.07 persons per hectare. The basic 'cluster' unit consists of a two- or three-person house at ground level, with either a flat or spacious two-storey house above. Each house has its own entrance and drying/sitting area, and each 'cluster' unit has a common entrance courtyard with access to bin storage. Larger families are catered for with three-storey houses, some with extra bedrooms built over ponds which pass through the blocks.

These basic units have been grouped to create landscaped courtyards with sitting areas and 'tot-lots' for children under seven. The three-storey houses for six and eight people are placed mainly at the back of the layout to form a backdrop effect. A comprehensive system of paths links the courtyards with parking areas, surrounding streets and bus stops.

The houses are of traditional construction with cavity walls of concrete bricks and blocks which have an external roughcast rendering in four different colours to accentuate the individuality of the houses. Pitched roofs have timber trusses and are covered with concrete tiles. Separating floors between flats are of concrete.



Left: Gable-end detail.

Right: Part elevation of one of the houses, seen from an internal alley.

Below: Houses are closely grouped together with access through to communal courtyards. Construction is of concrete bricks and blocks with an external roughcast rendering in four different colours.



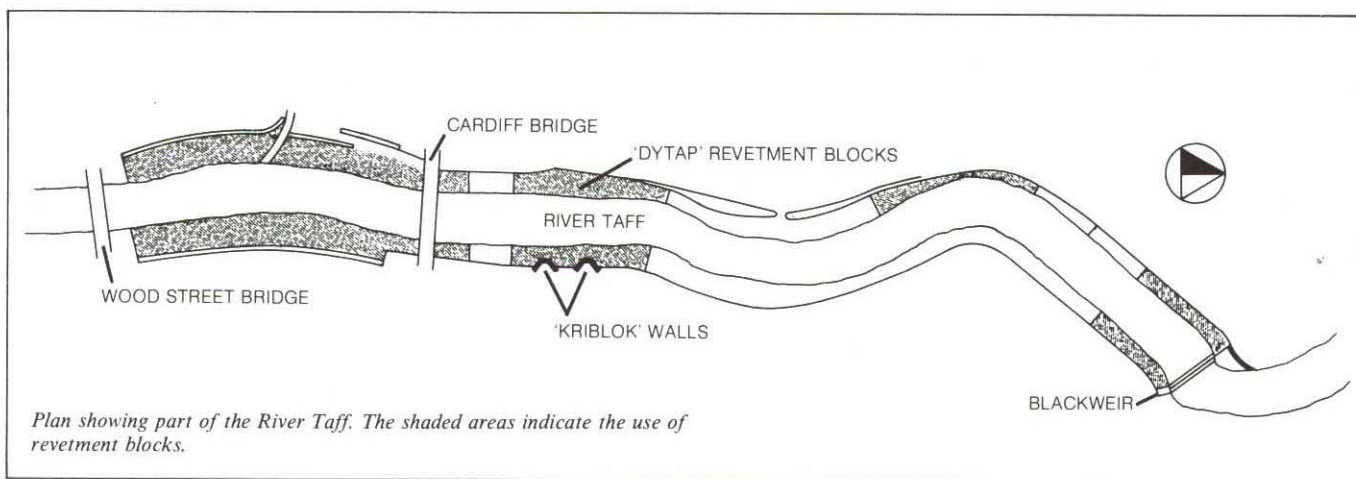
FLOOD PROTECTION

River Taff, Cardiff

Client:	Welsh Water Authority
Consulting engineers:	Sir William Halcrow and Partners
Main contractors:	A. Monk & Co. Ltd
Ready-mixed concrete:	RMC (Wales) Ltd

Precast interlocking blocks and crib walling:	RBS Brooklyns Ltd
Grout-filled mattress fixing:	Keliston Marine Ltd





This flood protection scheme involved the widening and deepening of the River Taff channel over a length of some 3 km through parklands to the north of the City of Cardiff and through the city itself. This has been very skilfully done without spoiling the rural and urban qualities of the river banks and the views across the river.

One of the most successful elements of design is without doubt the 'Dytap' rock-faced precast concrete interlocking revetment block which has been extensively used along the

Left: A section of the River Taff showing the use of precast concrete revetment blocks for flood protection, preserving the rural character of the banks and also many of the trees.

Below: The close-up part of the bank on the right shows the rugged character of the revetment blocks. The precast crib walling on the far bank in the distance helped to retain some fine trees.

banks, providing a suitably rugged yet durable and gently-shelving surface. The same technique with similar blocks was illustrated in *Concrete Quarterly* 128 for preservation schemes at Totnes and Ashburton/Buckfastleigh in Devonshire, where it was equally important to enhance the character of the river banks.

The construction of the scheme also included grout-filled flexible mattresses to line the river bed, deeply fluted in situ concrete flood walls and precast concrete 'Kriblok' walling – the latter used to preserve some fine trees on the river banks which would otherwise have had to be felled. In fact many of the trees along these banks would have been destroyed without the use of the revetment blocks.

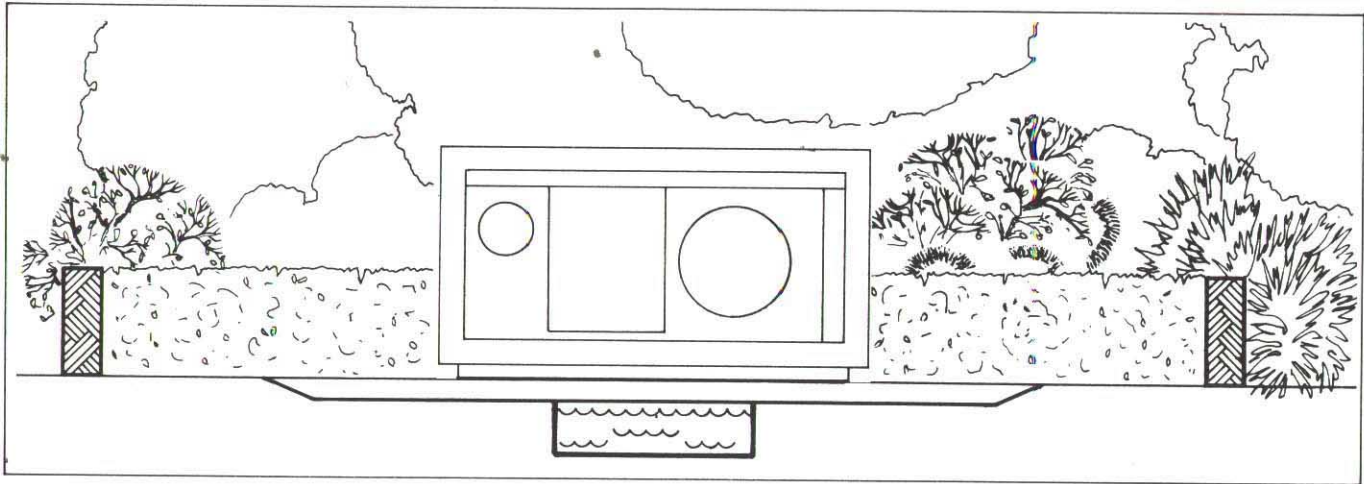
The scheme received a mention in the Concrete Society 1982 Award (Civil Engineering Category).



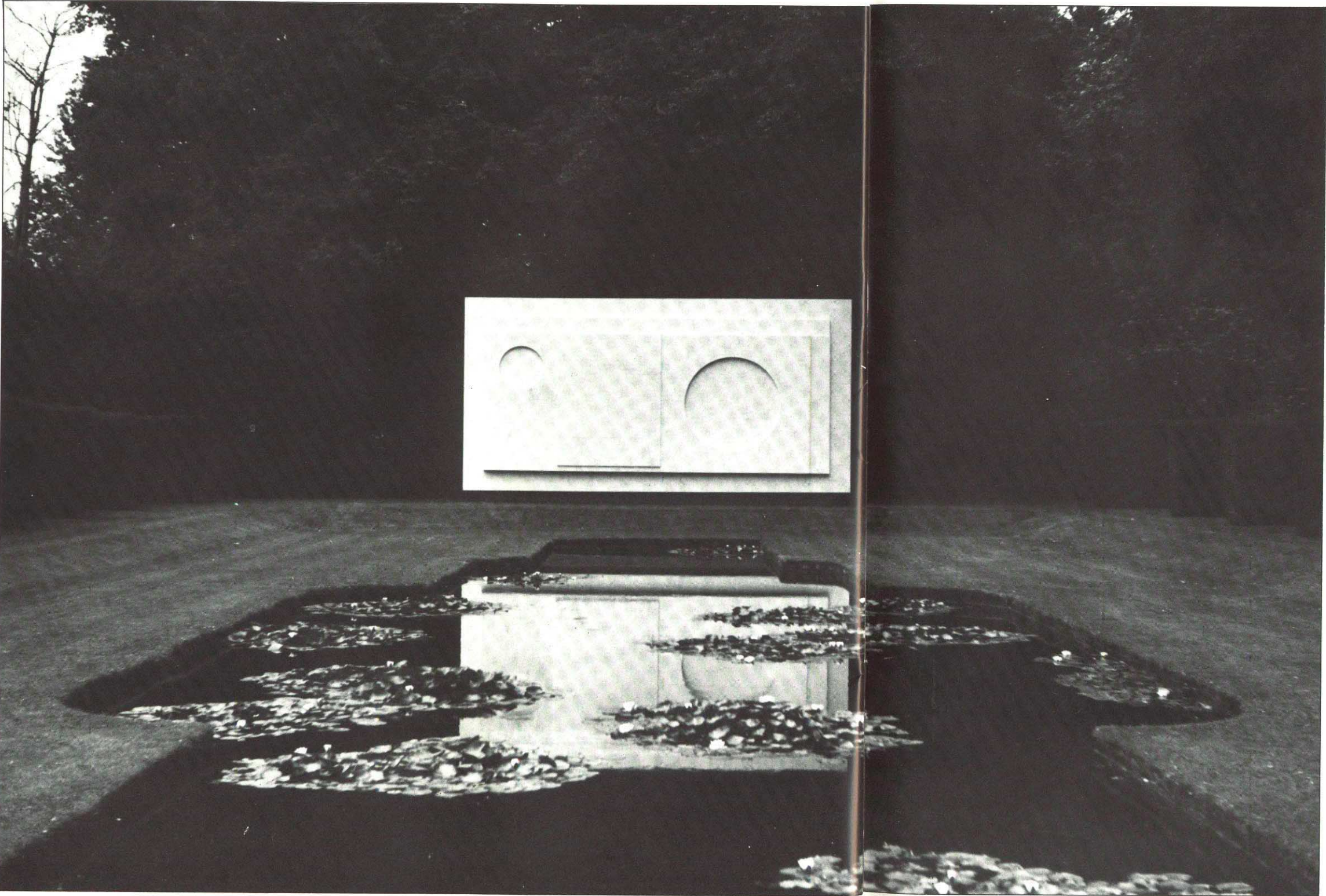
BEN NICHOLSON WALL

Sutton Place, Guildford

Client:	Sutton Place Heritage Trust
Designer:	Ben Nicholson
Landscape architect:	Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe
Executive architects:	Ledward & McDonald
Consultant for Nicholson wall:	June Harrison
Structural engineers:	Price & Myers
Contractors:	Diespecker Concrete Co. Ltd (concrete core) J. Whitehead & Sons Ltd (marble)



Left: The Ben Nicholson wall seen on an overcast day at the end of the lily-pool enclosed garden (see also frontispiece).

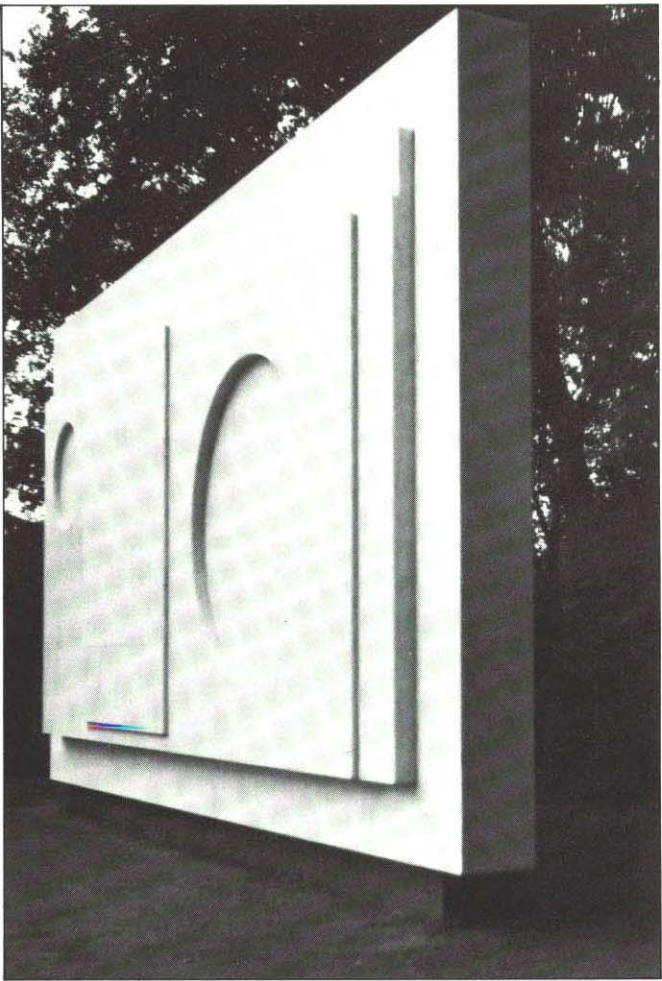
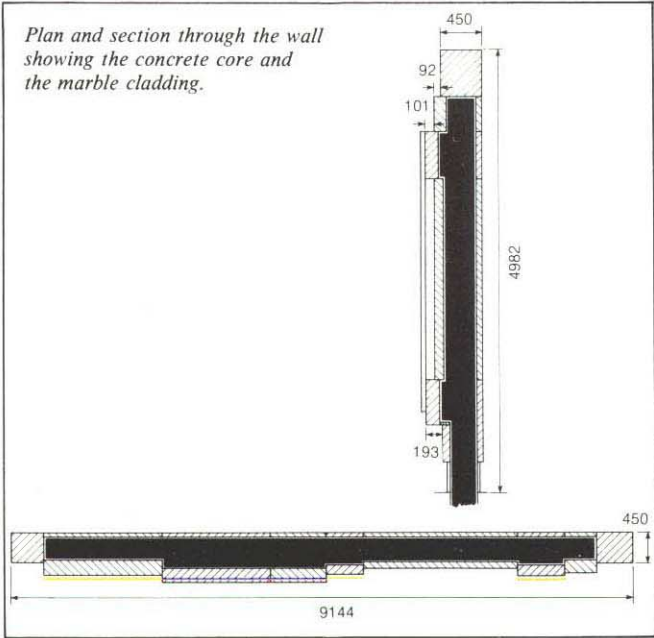


Sutton Place is a manor house near Guildford dating from the 1520's set in magnificent grounds. It formerly belonged to the wealthy recluse Paul Getty and was acquired in 1980 by an overseas investment company and leased to Mr Stanley J. Seeger, who is a collector and patron of the arts, and who has established the Sutton Place Heritage Trust to maintain and develop the house and its gardens. Sir Hugh Casson is advising on the interiors of the house, and Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe is landscaping the gardens which promise to be very splendid indeed – work is now in progress. One of the recently completed features in the gardens is the sculptural wall by Ben Nicholson who died in February this year (sadly before he was able to see it finished), which is illustrated here.

The wall stands in a garden enclosed by high yew hedges at the end of a lily pool. Reflections in the water are therefore an important aspect of the design. Its surfaces are of cool, white marble, gently veined and in light relief. The purity and simplicity of design, based on circles and rectangles, are perfectly set off by the background of dark foliage against which the wall is seen.

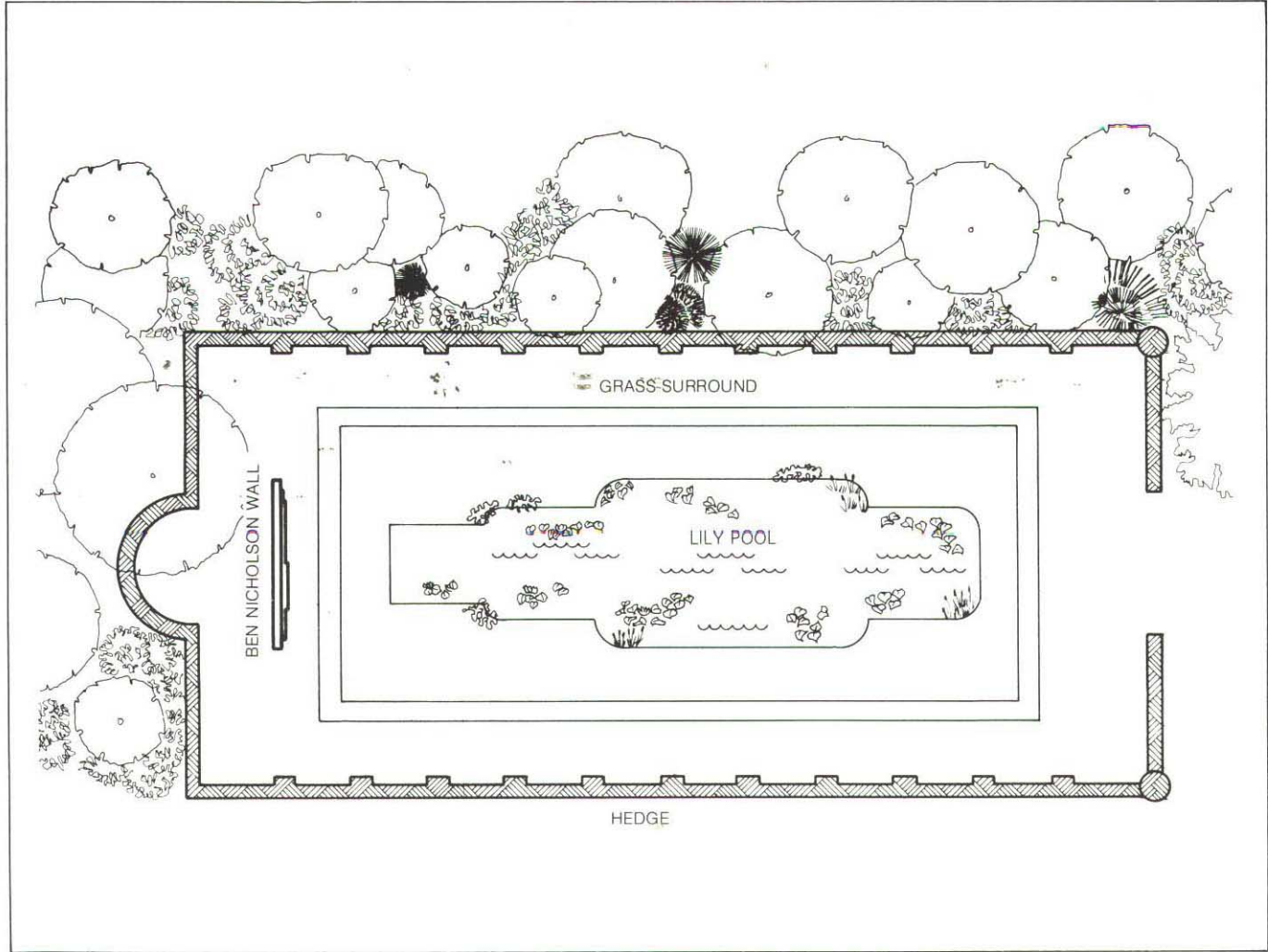
The wall is, in fact, one of Ben Nicholson's quite early works dating from 1937-8, in the form of a maquette which

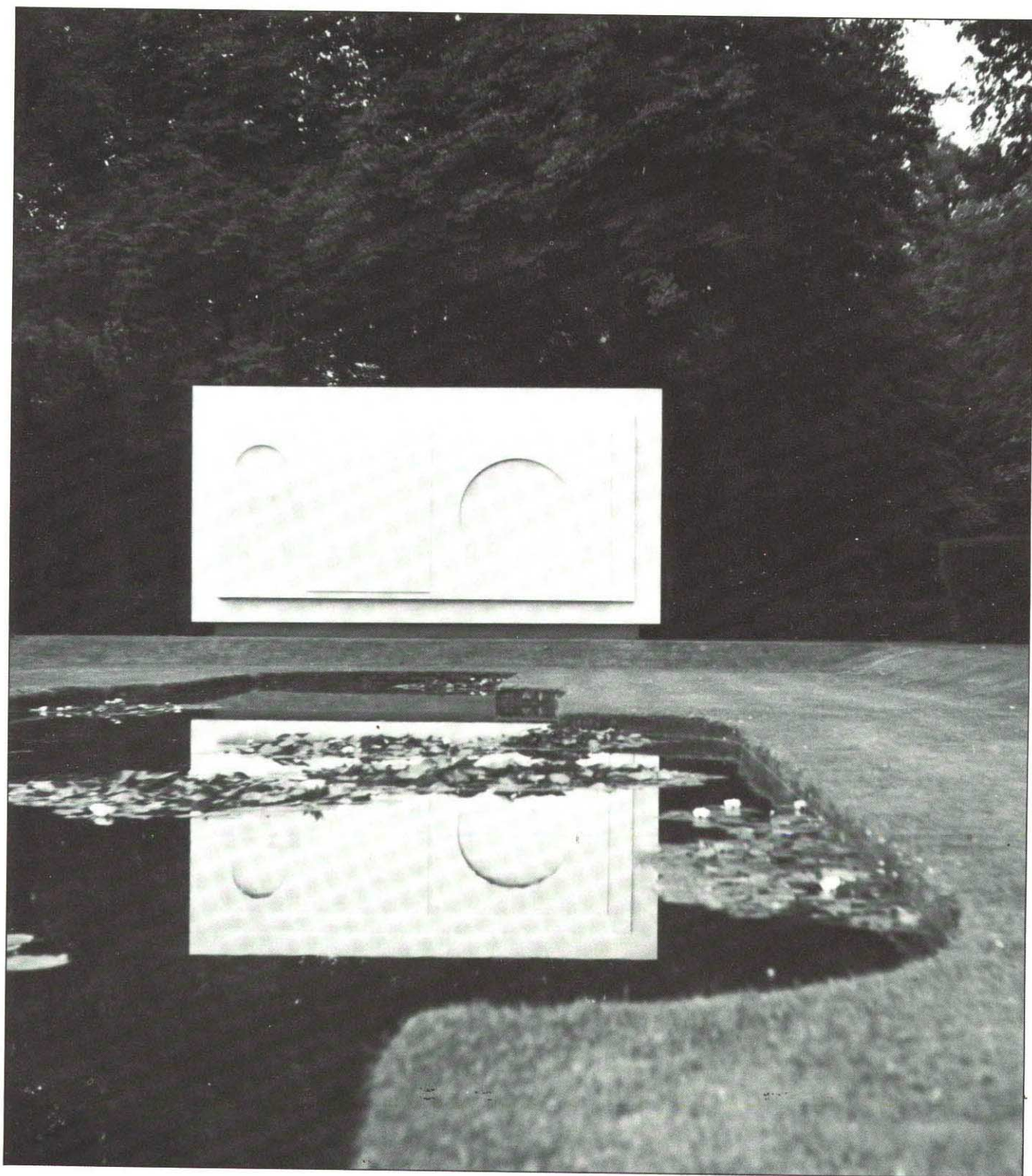
BEN NICHOLSON WALL *continued*



Right: Close-up showing the marble projections. The wall has a concrete core to which the marble pieces were cramped.

Below: Plan through the lily-pool garden.





Above: Reflections in the water become an integral part of the design.

measured some 2 ft by 4 ft. The completed wall measures about 16 ft by 30 ft with a thickness at the ends of nearly 18 in.

It was originally intended to build the wall in solid marble but this was then thought to be too difficult with the large pieces and minimum jointing that the design required. In addition, it was found that the wall could be slimmer if it was built with a concrete core. So this was finally constructed, with great precision, accuracy and careful formwork to accommodate exactly the various cut pieces of marble which were then cramped to the concrete.

A lot of trouble was taken over finding the right kind of marble to suit the subtlety of the design, without too strong veining. Eventually a white Carrara marble was selected, of the *Statuari Michelangelo* type. The pieces were cut to size partly in Italy and partly in England and then delivered to the site. Some of the pieces are very big – there is, for instance, no jointing in the larger circle on the wall which is 7 ft 6 in in diameter.

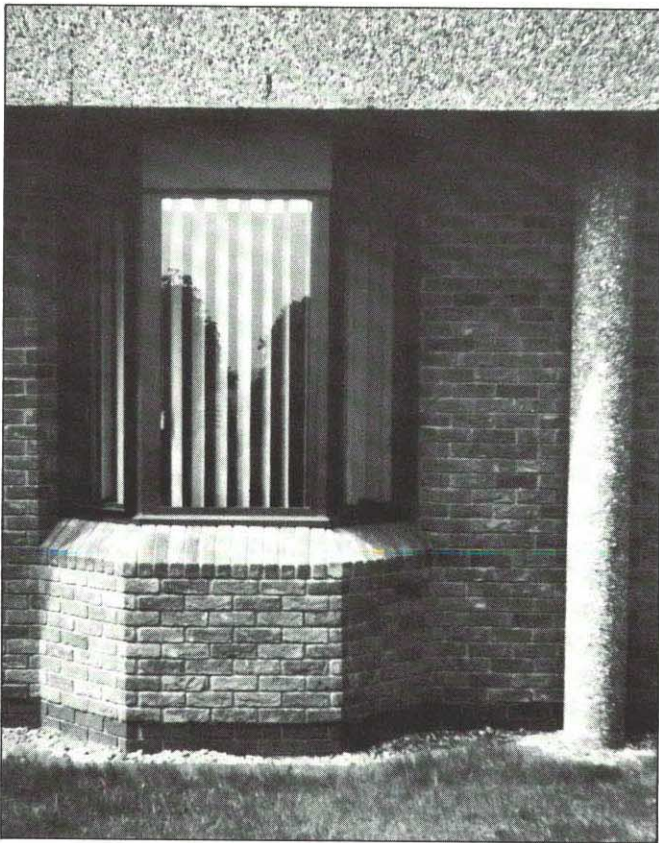
It had long been Ben Nicholson's ambition to build a wall of this type somewhere, but he had very strong views about where it should be sited: he did, in fact, turn down one or two alternative suggestions elsewhere. This particular site, however, at Sutton Place he very much liked, and one can see why. It is a great pity that he didn't live to see his wall in place.

ENERGY-SAVING HOSPITAL

Three Shires Hospital, Northampton

Client:	Trustees of the Three Shires Hospital
Architects and quantity surveyors:	Gotch, Saunders & Surridge
Structural engineers:	James Carrington & Partners
Main contractor:	Robert Marriott Ltd
Precast concrete columns:	Sindall Concrete Products Ltd
Concrete blocks:	Celcon Ltd

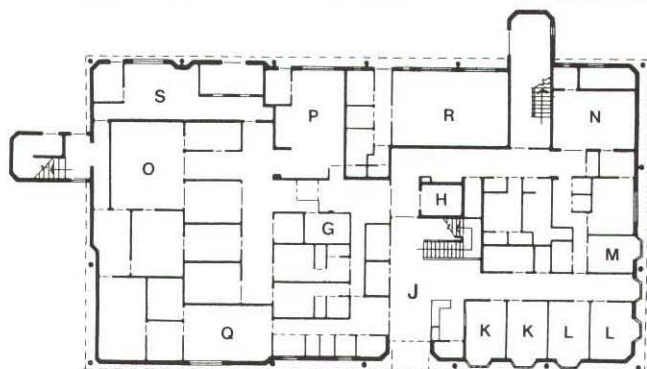
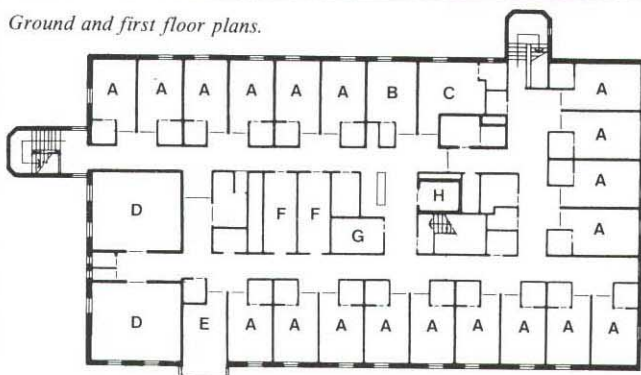
The Three Shires Hospital in Northampton is one of the first examples of a 'deep plan' energy-efficient private hospital in Britain. Its compact plan and cross section not only enabled significant savings to be made in capital expenditure but will also result in lower maintenance costs and reduced energy consumption in the long term. Although the design is extremely cost effective, this has not been achieved by reducing standards. The final building has been described as one of the most attractive private



Above: Ground floor window detail.



Ground and first floor plans.



- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| A single bed ward with en-suite shower & w.c. | F utility |
| B critical care unit with en-suite w.c. | G sister's office |
| C mother & child unit with en-suite bathroom | H lift |
| D four bed ward | J reception |
| E day room | |

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| K administration office | P post-anaesthetic recovery |
| L consulting room | Q physiotherapy |
| M radiologist | R kitchen |
| N x-ray | S sterile supply unit |
| O operating theatre | |

hospitals in the country. Accommodation includes 21 single-bed wards, 19 with a w.c. and shower en suite, and 2 four-bed wards – all on the first floor. Wards and public areas are planned around the perimeter of the building with views over the hospital grounds. Ancillary accommodation is contained in a central-service core enclosed by a 'race-track' plan serving the wards.

The building has a reinforced concrete frame to first floor level to allow for possible internal replanning of the ground floor. The first floor is built of loadbearing concrete

blockwork which supports a timber roof clad in aluminium. The concrete frame is continued to second floor level in the centre of the building to support a high-level plant room.

The external walls of the building are of cavity construction with a 100 mm concrete block inner skin, 25 mm of 'Jablite' insulation, a 35 mm cavity and an outer skin of Leicestershire hand-made bricks. The exterior concrete work was all cast in situ except for the circular columns which were precast. Particular care was taken with the exposed concrete which has an exposed aggregate finish of a golden brown colour to harmonize with the brickwork.

The passive design of the building envelope was carefully considered at design stage, resulting in a very efficient wall-to-floor ratio and the adoption of modestly-sized windows. The simple building envelope not only reduced building costs and construction time but also made a significant contribution towards energy saving, hence reducing the cost and size of mechanical plant. The building has a traditional gas-fired, low-pressure radiator heating system to all areas except the operating department which is fully air-conditioned.

Left: The front of the hospital showing the combination of brick and exposed-aggregate concrete which is of a harmonizing golden-brown colour.

Below: The hospital is set in parkland with an approach drive of chestnut trees.



AUDITORIUM RAMP

Harrogate Centre

Client:	Harrogate Borough Council
Architects:	Morgan Bentley Ferguson Cale
Consulting engineers:	Robert T. Horne and Partners
Contractors:	John Laing Construction Ltd

Below: View down into the centre of the ramp from an upper level, showing the reception desk.

This ramp links the entrance and upper foyers in the auditorium building for the Harrogate Centre – a new centre for conferences and entertainment. It is an interesting



piece of in situ reinforced concrete design based on sweeping curves, demonstrating very nicely the sculptural properties of the medium. The ramp was commended in the 1982 Concrete Society Award (Building Structure Category).

The foyers of the auditorium buildings are visible to the passing public through suspended glass walls and a dramatic centrepiece is the spiral concrete ramp. The ramp was designed to provide an exciting and practical access route to and from the auditorium for an audience of up to two thousand people. The ramp springs from the main entrance foyer and spirals gently upwards at an average gradient of 1:13 to the upper foyer and then on to a viewing platform, prior to entering directly into the auditorium. The inner wall of the ramp is the main structural beam which also serves as a continuous balustrade. The outer edge of the

ramp is enclosed by a clear toughened glass balustrade. The ramp is well made of high-quality concrete. The soffit of the ramp and the faces of the ramp beam are of exposed smooth concrete cast with Derbyshire white limestone aggregate and white cement against factory-made glass reinforced plastic and plywood forms. The inner face of the beam is lightly bush-hammered.

The main spiral ring beam rises through four supporting columns to which it is connected by concrete collars, and is further supported by a cantilever at the upper level.

The structural design was computer aided using the LEAP version 4 Programme, supplemented by a finite-element run to check the ramp slab and ring beam sizes, initially determined by traditional simplified methods.

Last but by no means least, it should be mentioned that the winner of the Concrete Society Site Practice Award in 1980 (the purpose of which is 'to recognize those directly responsible for excellence in the execution of in situ concrete work') was Stephen Hammond of John Laing Construction Limited who received the award for his efforts on the construction of the ramp.

Below: The design of the ramp is based on sweeping curves and executed in high-quality white concrete.



NEWS IN BRIEF

MEETINGS

Informal talks on design and construction are given by specialist members of the Association's staff around the country each year. Among those in the coming months are:

Right first time – mortars and renderings by William Monks, Principal Building Advisor. The Cement and Concrete Association receives over 35,000 technical enquiries a year, but all too often advice is sought only after problems have occurred. Two such problem areas currently demanding much attention are the related topics of mortars for walling and external renderings. Mr Monks will attempt to offer solutions to prevent some of these problems. The talk will include a review of the materials and give guidance on rendering practice and design details. Dates already arranged are:

- 11 November – Edinburgh
- 29 November – Truro
- 30 November – Exeter
- 8 December – Manchester

Dates for the New Year, which will be announced shortly, include the venues of Belfast, Cardiff, Nottingham, Carlisle, Luton, Birmingham, London, Harrogate, Winchester and Gatwick.

Traditional masonry housebuilding

Following the successful series held earlier this year, a further five meetings on traditional masonry housebuilding have been organized. Speakers are Ernie Anderson, lately Senior Architect from the National Building Agency, Scotland and Dr John Roberts, Principal Research Engineer of the Cement and Concrete Association. Meetings will be held on the following dates:

- 12 October – Mold, Clwyd
- 2 November – Preston
- 23 November – Norwich
- 29 November – Maidstone

A further meeting will be held in Swindon in early 1983 – date to be confirmed.

Paving Ahead

A further four meetings in this successful series are to be held, in which Brian Walker, Head of Paving and Transportation of the Association's Advisory Division reviews the current role of concrete and cement-bound materials for all types of paving. The meetings will be held on the following dates:

- 27 October – Portsmouth
- 8 November – Leeds
- 11 November – Ipswich
- 8 December – Bristol

Further details from Miss Jackie Morris, Planning and Liaison Department, Cement and Concrete Association, 52 Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0AQ. (Tel: 01-235 6661)

AWARDS

The Concrete Society 1983 Award

Entries are invited for The Concrete Society 1983 Award. The Award is divided into three categories: Building Structures, Civil Engineering, and the Landscape and Townscape category (which is included every three years).

Further details and entry forms are available from Mrs Anthea Wright, The

Concrete Society, Terminal House, Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0AJ. The closing date for receipt of applications is 17 January 1983.

Cembureau European 1982 Award

Cembureau, the European Cement Association, has chosen a UK housing development as the joint winner of one category of its 1982 European Award for the outstanding use of concrete in low rise housing. Commercial Street Development, Perth is winner of Category 1 for one-family housing jointly with a private house in Kayserberg, France. Architects for the Commercial Street Development, on behalf of Perth and Kinross District Council, were James Parr and Partners, consulting engineers were Sir M. MacDonald & Partners. Contractors for civil works were John McAdam & Sons and the builder and joiner, P. Graham & Sons. Winner of Category 2 for flats and maisonettes not exceeding four storeys, is a housing estate in Marolles, Belgium.

The aim of this, the third award scheme to be organized by Cembureau, is to recognize excellence in the use of concrete in the design and construction of houses. Fifty-seven entries from twelve countries were submitted for the Award and winners were selected by an international jury.

COURSES

The Association's programme of courses, up-dating events and seminars covers many aspects of design and construction. Details are given in the booklet *C&CA courses at Fulmer Grange 1982-3*. In addition, the following may be of specific interest:

Renderings and mortars, 28 October

A repeat of a successful seminar held earlier in the year, this event will cover the use of renderings and mortars as protective and decorative facings to buildings.

Energy-efficient housing, 16 November

This up-dating meeting, on similar lines to one held last year, will review energy-efficient housing design, with information on cost and the practical implications of recent research.

For further details or a copy of the booklet *Courses at Fulmer Grange* please contact the Registrar, Cement and Concrete Association, Conference and Training Centre, Fulmer Grange, Fulmer, Slough SL2 4QS. Telephone Fulmer (028 16) 2727.

NEW SLIDE SETS

Two more titles have been added to the

Association's 'Concrete Practice' series of slide sets. Set S33, *Transporting* and Set S34, *Placing and Compacting*, bring the number of 'Concrete Practice' sets to five. Those previously published are S30, *Testing concrete*, S31, *Formwork* and S32, *Batching and Mixing*. Each set contains 20 colour slides, presented in an A4 wallet with lecture notes and costs £5.50 (in the UK), plus VAT. Further details are available from Publications Distribution, Cement and Concrete Association, Wexham Springs, Slough SL3 6PL.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Appearance Matters – 2: External rendering.

A new amended edition is now available. (Ref. 47.102 Price £3.00).

Thermal insulation of masonry walling to meet Part F of the Building Regulations. This new Design Guide describes types of masonry wall construction to meet the new requirements introduced in April this year (Ref. 48.052. Price 75p).

Heat losses from an unoccupied house. A new Technical Report which gives the findings of part of the Association's programme of research into the thermal performance of housing. (Ref. 42.549. Price £2.75).

Three new publications on concrete in farm construction are available:

Farm Note 4: Concrete slats for cattle (Ref. 47.604 – new edition).

Farm Note 12: Concrete in cow cubicles (Ref. 47.612).

Farm Construction – Pocket Guide 1: Laying concrete (Ref. 47.518). The latter is an 8-page booklet in A6 format printed on plastic. Each of the three publications is 75p.

The above publications and details of the full range of C&CA titles can be obtained from Publications Distribution, Cement and Concrete Association, Wexham Springs, Slough SL3 6PL.

OVERSEAS VISITS

The Cement and Concrete Association/Concrete Society visit to South America planned for October this year has been postponed until Autumn 1983. Provisional plans are also being made for a visit to South Africa in February 1983. For further information, contact Gerald Wooldridge, Operations Department, Cement and Concrete Association, 52 Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0AQ. Telephone: 01-235 6661



Above: The Commercial Street development in Perth, joint winner of the one-family housing category of the Cembureau European 1982 Award (see above). The scheme was featured in *Concrete Quarterly* 120.

Casting around

a quarterly column of
notes and comments

Too late for toast

An American friend of mine says that you can't "light a fire under the British". They won't get up off the ground. He says that he tried to light fires, but they wouldn't catch on. So he went away. The other day, I was approaching Paddington in the train and I saw that someone had written on the walls under the elevated Westway that they were "trapped screaming in the mediocrity of our society". I wondered about this. While I was still wondering, I arrived at Paddington Station and went into the buffet where I ordered beans on toast, which were advertised. "No" the man said "beans is off". "Off?" I said. "That's right" he said. "Too late for toast". "Too late for toast?" I said, looking at my watch. "But it's only 6 o'clock in the evening". "That's right" he said "no bread". "No bread?" I said, on a rising note. "But this is the main buffet in one of the largest railway termini in one of the largest capital cities in the world. And you say that there's no bread..." The young man, whose appearance did not lift my heart, turned his back to attend to a plastic bag of white limp, uncooked chips – horrible etiolated looking objects – which he tipped into a pan of hot grease. I would like to have lit a fire under him. It all reminded me of when I was changing trains at Clapham Junction one dark cold evening last winter (Clapham Junction is my favourite place in life: as a fellow commuter never fails to remark when the train is approaching the platform "Clap hands, here's C.J."). Well on this particularly cold night, my heart was warmed to discover that British Rail had done something wildly enterprising and sensible: it was offering hot soup in the buffet. Just the thing, I thought, to cheer us up on Platform 5. "How nice" I remarked to the jolly smiling Momma behind the counter with whom I sometimes have long heart-to-heart talks and whose radiant face shines like polished coal. "I'll have some lovely hot oxtail soup". "No dear" she remarked philosophically, adjusting her overall across her ample bosom. "No?" I said, "but the tins are all there on the counter". "That's right darling, but there's no opener". "No opener?" I cried, aghast. "Like I said, dear. No opener. We lent it to Platform 14 at dinner time and they never brought it back". "So there's no soup?" I asked rather lamely. "That's right darling. No soup".

And then one night I was trapped in Waterloo Station – all night. I was sitting in the last train home at the platform, and it never left. The driver didn't turn up. They drew the gates across the station exits, all the taxis drove off and the Underground shut down. And there we were. Trapped. No announcements were made. Nobody in authority presented themselves. I ran up and down the platform, opening carriage doors and remarking on the situation to my fellow travellers who were mostly asleep. "What are we going to do?" I said. "The train should have gone an hour ago and the station's all shut down". "British Rail again" one man said, half opening his eyes and shutting them again. "Yes I know" I

said "but don't you think we ought to do something?" "Well what can you do?" a woman said, arranging her cardigan into a pillow and settling down. Beside her, an elegant lady in a long dress with a cello was staring fixedly ahead. "Well I'm going to find the station manager" I said, shutting the door. "Good luck to you" a man said, putting his feet up on the cushions. Eventually I found a staircase which led to room in which there were a lot of winking red lights and a distraught man trying to speak into several telephones at once. "Excuse me" I said "but we're all sitting in the train on Platform 18. Could you please do something?" "You know what?" the man said, putting all the telephones down simultaneously. "It's not my day". It wasn't ours either, and we all went home in a bus at 5 in the morning.

A few nights later the boathouse caught fire. I was in my riverside local pub on a hot summer's night when suddenly I looked out of the window across the river and saw flames shooting up from the old empty wooden boathouse on the opposite bank, sending showers of sparks into the violet August sky. The river was a skein of gold from end to end. It was the most spectacular fire I have ever seen and I went out onto the balcony to watch it. "Look everyone" I cried, rushing back into the saloon bar. "Look Fred, Bill, Jim, Tiny, Lofty, Chalky, Sooty, Mrs O'Donahue, come out onto the balcony and look – the boathouse is on fire!" "Is that so?" Bill said reaching for his fags and turning half an eye away from his pint. "Well good riddance, now what was I saying Fred..." And the fire of the boathouse raged on, warming the backs of the drinkers in the saloon bar. You certainly couldn't light a fire under them.

But on quite a few evenings this fine warm summer, I have sat out on the lakeside terrace by the fountains in the new Barbican

Centre (see page 22) and thought how splendid it was that life was proliferating in a spontaneous fashion with impromptu music, the odd busker, people creating live sculpture by blowing air through polythene tubes – all the inconsequential exuberances of the human spirit imposing themselves on the austere and rigid framework of the architecture. This is exactly what is needed and, in fact, what we have all been saying is needed on the windswept loveless walkways of the South Bank. One evening I went to one of the Peter Stuyvesant open-air concerts that the London Symphony Orchestra gave last August in the sculpture court, and there again what a splendid foil all these untidy crowds of people provided to the tidy and orderly backcloth of the framed buildings. But of course the truly British can't be doing with all that sort of nonsense. It disturbs the peace – particularly if you happen to live in one of the Barbican flats, as letters to the *Standard* have recently made clear. "How outrageous", one Barbican dweller wrote "that we should have to put up with all this din in our back garden. That isn't what we bargained for when we came here. It ought to be stopped at once". And perhaps that's just what the trouble is. When we British do actually get around to lighting a fire under ourselves, someone rushes in to put it out. And from there, it is but a short step to discovering that in the lakeside cafeteria it is too late for toast.

George Perkin



An open-air concert in the sculpture court, Barbican Centre –packed with people on all levels.

