

CAMBRIDGE ARCHITECTURE POST 1945

A pocket guide to buildings in the
City of Cambridge
and surrounding towns and villages



edited by
Bob Bowman David Emond & David Thurlow

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Key

- A building title
- B owner
- C designer
- D contractor
- E location
- F access
- G information

Introduction

The buildings of Cambridge constructed since 1945 have made a substantial contribution to the built environment of the city. There can be few cities of comparable size with such an array of work by nationally and internationally renowned designers.

Cambridge developed as a University town and remains so today with a population of over 100,000 with a further 100,000 living in a necklace of villages within five miles of the centre. It is famous for its historic college buildings, green open spaces and medieval street pattern (beware - it's easy to get lost).

At the beginning of the 21st century, the city and its environs have also become an important economic centre for new technology based industries, many of whom developed using spin outs from University research. Today the focus of economic activity lies as much in the independent research institutes and the ring of science parks that surround Cambridge as in the city itself.

The attractive green open spaces and the tree lined approach roads to the centre of the city mask a housing shortage and a legacy of small Victorian properties and uninspired post-war estates that is not immediately apparent to the tourist. There are also a surprisingly large number of modern individual architect designed houses in and around the city, many examples of which are included in this book.

Pressure is increasing to enlarge the city housing stock by densification of the urban structure with some expansion into the green belt. The development of Cambridge continues to generate lively debate and strong opinions.

This book is intended as a gazetteer of new or substantially altered buildings constructed since 1945. It covers a wide range of building types and styles from each decade. Almost all the properties are visible from a public place and guidance is provided where possible on how to obtain permission to visit the buildings. The inclusion of buildings in this guide does not infer that access is permitted to the building or its grounds.

The maps locate the buildings and indicate the routes for four walks that have been identified to allow you to explore different aspects of the city's architectural character outside the central area.

The designers listed in this publication show the extent to which Cambridge has been blessed with architectural riches in the second half of the 20th century. The buildings stand as testimony to all the members of the construction industry and client base who were instrumental in their creation.

Particular thanks are due to Stephen Sillery, Ed Coe and Alex Reeve for their support and assistance in the production of this guide.

Cambridge Forum for the Construction Industry

Foreword by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge
Professor Sir Alec Broers, FRS, FEng

In a memorable phrase my predecessor as Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir David Williams QC, DL, spoke a few years ago of the 'gathering of the cranes over Cambridge'. The scope and scale of present-day building for the University and Colleges can hardly have been surpassed in any previous period of our history. Looking back over nearly eight hundred years –the University's eighth centennial comes in 2009— it is clear that architectural innovation has always been characteristic. The traditional forms of ecclesiastical and monastic building gradually adapted themselves to the new needs of a secular teaching community. Science and technology made their demands, uncertain at first but of growing importance and visibility. Controversy, too, must never have been far away. The Wren Library at Trinity, the great gatehouses at St John's, Christ's and Trinity, King's and Clare Chapels, the Waterhouse buildings at Caius and Pembroke, the massive intrusion into the skyline represented by Scott's University Library tower: all these would have shocked when they were new and were statements of confidence and assurance which perhaps were lost for a time.

As someone who has, as research student, Professor, and now Vice-Chancellor, worked daily in buildings up to six centuries old, my personal experience of Cambridge academic architecture has indeed been varied, and not always comfortable. As a former Master of Churchill College, I had the good fortune to experience one of the first large-scale manifestations of modern collegiate architecture, working well as its designers intended. But it has always seemed to me an astonishing failure that the clarity of mind that produced the great scientific discoveries in Cambridge during the last century signally failed to produce, in the New Museums and Downing Sites at least, the excellence of architecture to house them. We still live with that failure today. For generations innovation in architecture and planning came from the Colleges, not from the University, and indeed it was not until 1962 that the University first produced a comprehensive plan for its future buildings. I hope and believe that this tardy and tentative history has been finally overcome.

We have been fortunate over the last decade or so to cooperate with generous external benefactors in financing the new buildings we need to deal with new subjects of study and larger numbers. Amongst the most remarkable new structures are the adaptation of the old Addenbrooke's Hospital to house the Judge Institute of Management Studies, and the striking new home of the Law Faculty. There are other new buildings on the Sidgwick Avenue Site, the mathematical campus west of the Backs, and above all the great project -- to be decades in realisation-- for West Cambridge. All these will thrill and delight us in the years ahead. I hope too that what Nikolaus Pevsner called the "the extraordinary slums" of some of the central science sites will receive attention in due course.

There are smaller triumphs too: Eric Gill's pupil, the late David Kindersley, has added to the beauty of Cambridge through the inspired lettering which is carried on to today by his widow. Gardens flourish and develop. Old buildings have been restored and maintained as never before.

In the years to come there are formidable challenges. If Cambridge is not to become another Venice, a magnificent museum, then the needs of residents and practical daily life and work need to be reconciled with the consequences of mass tourism. Traffic and access are major and continuing issues. The availability of new methods of teaching and learning may call into question the whole concept of the residential university. But if there is one thing that we can say of Cambridge, and of its architects and builders as we look back, it is that they have triumphantly adapted to the currents of each successive age whilst maintaining underlying traditions and excellences. What we see in this book is a fine record of the last fifty years and I am sure that we can maintain or exceed such standards in the future.

Professor Sir Alec Broers
September 2000

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