

20th Century Architecture: post war buildings in Jersey

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March 2013

Introduction

This brief report is an overview of post war architecture in Jersey and specifically covers the period from immediately after the war up to 1982. The report has been prepared in conjunction with a specific review of buildings of architectural and historic significance from this period with a view to listing them.

A broader report on and a review of twentieth century buildings in Jersey was undertaken by Peter Smith in 2000 also with a view on listing. In this report, Smith focuses on the inter-war period, which he describes as being 'particularly interesting on Jersey' (Smith, 2000).

Context: British architecture in the 1950s

The immediate post war period, the 1950s in England is marked by a diversity of architecture ranging from various interpretations of Modernism, to a continuation of the classical tradition especially by ecclesiastical architects and historic pastiche favoured by speculative builders.

The period immediately after the war was marked by material shortages and the 1950s licensing system meant that most construction work was in the public sector, mainly housing and schools. Internationally influenced modernism became known as the language of the Welfare State. Housing design influenced by Sweden, with freer planning, sensitive to the environment and using traditional materials is described as a vernacular modernist aesthetic (Elwall, 2000:15). School buildings on the other hand favoured prefabrication using light steel frames with panels. Especially in the 1950s the confluence of architecture and engineering and technology in building and prefabrication was an important aspect of the construction sector.

Stylistically, the 1951 Festival of Britain was seen to set the scene, though some have argued it was a conclusion to the era rather than a beginning in stylistic terms. This period was followed by a more purist modernist approach practiced by the younger generation of post war architects such as the Smithsons. While New Brutalism became a style choice for public buildings, a softer style of rural housing was also being developed.

A speculative boom at the end of the decade saw a growing number of office buildings being built, alongside larger scale building projects including new towns. By the 1960s housing had shifted to high-rise accommodation, though often of a poorer quality to housing schemes of the previous decade. Other common building typologies of the period included shopping precincts, show rooms, transport structures and garages.

Architecture in Jersey in the post war period

Having been occupied by German forces during the war, Jersey's immediate post-war architectural climate differs from that of Britain. It is likely that material shortages in Britain will have impacted on Jersey and building activity in the 1950s is limited and modest in scale. Two buildings from this period, Nos 9 and 48-64 (La Gallais) Bath Street, from 1949 and 1955 respectively are both heavily

influenced by historic styles and fitting into the townscape character of their central location in St Helier.

The development of the airport from the 1950s was a factor in increasing visitor numbers and a number of 19th century hotel buildings were developed and extended during this time. A number of new hotels were also constructed, though none of them capture the glamour of the 'seaside' typologies of the turn of the century and pre-war years. The frontage of the coach station on La Colomberie, provides some 1950s style. The 1952 Odeon Cinema is probably the most iconic and landmark building surviving from the 1950s in Jersey.

Arthur Grayson, best known for his Art Deco and modernist style pre-war houses continued to practice in Jersey after the war. One of the first of these projects undertaken as Grayson & Le Sueur is Charles Court of 1949 that is stylistically closer to his pre-war work, whereas the well published Nurses' Residence of 1950 is distinctively modernist in style. Both buildings have subsequently been altered, and the Nurses' Residence now re-clad.

The Festival of Britain style is best captured in the 1965 Romeril's showroom in St Helier. The work of Taylor Leapingwell Architects (John and Jane Taylor) first at 8 Hill Street in 1965 and then Church House in 1969 on the other hand are good examples of Brutalism in Jersey. Another building to combine exposed concrete elements, with brickwork infill panels, is St. Mary's and St. Peter's church on Wellington Road by Le Sueur & Baker (1974).

The growing use of brick in buildings is attributed to the to the quarries not adapting to generating new facing blocks and a predominance of mainland architects (Boots, 1986). From around 1950 a local quarry started producing concrete blocks faced with crushed pink granite that was popularly used as a facing for about 20 years. Where there was a more conscious effort to use local materials and to look to local influences, "the best examples introduced vitality and local feeling to what might have been dull housing estates, [but] the carefully applied principles have tended to deteriorate into design gimmicks of a Neo-Georgian character without leading to the Island creating a special architecture wholly of its own" (Boots, 1986: 133).

A specialist planning office was created for the first time in 1962 and was followed by the Island Planning (Jersey) Law coming into effect in 1964. This was a period of growth in office buildings, especially for the finance sector, followed by a growth in retail provision as mainland firms started establishing branches in Jersey. These often brought their own architects and designers with them from Britain. As part of the growing development boom a total of 6,000 dwellings were built in Jersey from 1964 to 1974. Housing had to be provided for a growing population, ranging from rich outsiders to immigrant workers. The States had to start providing mass housing.

The pressure to provide a considerable number of housing units on a small island resulted in a number of high rise housing schemes. The most architecturally notable of these is La Collette Flats on Green Street by Taylor, Hewitt and Leapingwell completed in 1965 (Perry, 2007). Several schemes that followed into the next decade including The Cedars, also on Green Street and system built examples such as Caeserea Court and Convent Court, and one of the largest schemes, Hue Court have little to distinguish them architecturally. Those on the Le Marais estate are notably poor examples of their type and in their relation to their surroundings and setting (Perry, 2007).

One of the first school buildings to be built in the post war period is the Quennevais School (1961) which adapted the mainland system of steel frame and concrete panels. The buildings have been much altered since then, starting from 1975. More schools were built, or existing ones extended in

the 1970s as the population grew. They were, however, often developer led schemes with little to distinguish them architecturally. More innovative school designs don't emerge in Jersey until the 1990s when buildings for schools, including D'Hautree School in Mont L'Abbe, additions to Jersey College for Girls and Haute Vallee School, started winning awards and commendations. One exception is the sixth form block at Victoria College opened in 1952, originally designed as the arts centre by Margaret Brodie, following a competition win.

Brick continued to be a favoured material into the 1980s and notable examples include Jersey Arts Centre by Malcolm Peck, Derek Mason & Partners (1982) and the Amy and Sons store on the corner of Queen Street and Halkett Place (1981), which is a rare example of a post modernist approach in Jersey. But for much of the 1980 high demand for office space often provided little opportunity for quality buildings. Many States buildings built during this period are also of limited architectural quality.

The 'Jersey Traditional Building, Character, Form and Materials Report' produced by the Islands Development Committee in 1981 is credited by one commentator as contributing to the protection of Gorey village and buildings that were in keeping with the traditional (Boots, 2000 interview) and as leading to more pastiche by another (Barlow, 2000 interview).

A few private houses of architectural distinction appear in each decade, such as Le Bas Fosse in Grouville (1970s) and Villa Devereux in St Brelade (1980s). Social housing projects of this period are of limited distinction. Several 1960s town houses with hung tiles on concrete frames such as those in Grosvenor Street still survive, and Soroptomist House on Pomona Road is a rare example of a system built house in Jersey.

There are few references to female architects during this period in Jersey, which is not dissimilar to the situation in England at the time. The most well known female architect in Jersey from post war period is probably, Jane Taylor who practiced with her husband as Taylor Leapingwell Architects, best known for their elegant Brutalist style buildings. Margaret Brodie who was the architect for the Victoria College art centre, was better known in her native Glasgow where she contributed to the 1938 Empire Exhibition.

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