

50TH ANNIVERSARY SPEECH- MAX FORDHAM

Welcome to our 50th anniversary celebration. I am glad you have all come along. By their nature, anniversaries are a look to the past. If you'll indulge me I'd like to talk briefly about how we got here.

I was introduced to Leslie Martin, the Professor of the Cambridge Faculty of Architecture, by a friend of mine. Leslie saw the link between architecture's modern movement and the science behind heating engineering design. He thought it was something I might like to explore. After a conversion course, and a marriage, my wife, Taddy met Philip Dowson, the first architect to join with Arup in the Building Group. He accepted me in his team. It was wonderful!

Peter Foggo showed me what to draw. I discovered that designing all of the individual services in a building would be difficult, but I thought it would be a good idea to try.

After leaving Arup I went off, almost exactly 50 years ago, and established my own Practice. I was lucky.

From Arup, Peter Dunican introduced me to several prodigious jobs. I worked with Neave Brown on his five houses in Highgate, designing the off-peak, fan-controlled, electric storage heaters that were installed as part of the building fabric. This led to me being selected for his job for Camden Council – the Alexandra and Ainsworth Estate in Rowley Way. It was a tremendously important project for me, and helped to consolidate the business.

By now, the Practice was growing. The advertisement for employment included a request for 'any numerate graduate interested in buildings, please to send a list of your A level grades and a chatty letter'. Those of you who work, or have worked at the Practice, will know that the request for a 'chatty letter' as part of the recruitment process has endured to this day.

Initially, I was hoping to attract science teachers disgruntled with their chosen profession, to make the leap to engineering. The emphasis on giving engineering experience to people with a good academic grounding is still very strong.

By the early-1970s, there was a growing group of people in the Practice learning how to draw the details of building services and apply the sciences of physics and chemistry to their design. It was a slow and expensive process, so the pay was discouraging.

In society at large, industrial unrest was rife at the time. I thought we had a better chance at success, and more rewarding lives, if we all worked as a collective. Our earnings would be pooled and shared. Everyone would be an agent of everyone else, working in each other's interests.

The structure of partnership agreements in those days had some serious drawbacks and it took our lawyer, Lennie Hoffman to incorporate a brilliant idea in ours – "every

member of the partnership gave a power of attorney to the remaining partners if they became a 'leaving partner'

Equity was paid out in full at the end of every year, with a small amount of capital retention for the Practice's progress. The model endures to this day.

So now we were truly ready to attract people with ability and talent, as well as all the work we could get.

By 1974, the importance of a more sustainable future was emphatically illuminated as OPEC held the world to ransom, raising the price of oil by 600%.

We had to get thinking to solve an economically difficult, almost impossible, problem.

Those challenges, and even more of their ilk, continue to confront us today. The solutions are becoming clear, but we are hindered by box-ticking bureaucracy. This in turn inhibits visionary design solutions.

There are now around 250 people working in the Practice across the five offices in Bristol, Manchester, Edinburgh, Cambridge and London.

Everyone is committed to designing solutions that ensure a sustainable future.

As a Practice we have always strived for a clear-eyed view of the future, which is one that we should meet with optimism and confidence. Based on the past successes.

The result of the recent referendum may have muddied that view of the future, but rational thought, and intellectual integrity will be necessary to negotiate our path. I know our Practice can show how this can be achieved.

We have much to be proud of over the course of the last 50 years. The portfolio of innovative architecture employing innovative environmental design is our main achievement. I won't name examples for fear of leaving anyone out. To-night I express our gratitude to all of our guests here for your collaboration and the part you have played in our success. I hope you continue to do so.

Those of you here tonight who once worked with us, equally I thank you for your contribution. I hope you enjoyed your time with the Practice, and carry its ideals forward.

For those of you who are partners and as employees, waiting for partnership, of the Practice, I congratulate you for your dedication, your hard work, your determination and your intellect.

The buildings we inhabit, the cities we live in, the environment we enjoy and the planet we share are all the better for your efforts.

I ask you to raise a toast with us all and wish you all very well for the next 50 years. To all at Max Fordham LLP.