

ARCHITECTURE

November 2019: Architectural Oddities

Our last meeting before Christmas was on Architectural Oddities. The eclectic selection included buildings and other constructions that were unusual in some way, such as of unusual scale, ostentatious, quirky or disguised. The presentation was done as an A-Z and covered both local sites and sites further away. Below is just a flavour of the different types of oddity – if you take the first letter of each type you get ODDITIES! The A-Z list of places follows.

O - Ostentatious

Shops in Clapham High Street fit the bill for type of oddity. The addition of promotional objects on top of shops started appearing in the 1990s, around the same time as the market transformed from a haven of countercultures into a major tourist attraction. Shoe shops are to the fore and this area has been described as the spiritual home of Doc Martens.



D - Delightful

There are many places where there are quirky delightful buildings. The choice here is the Hotel Zaandam in Amsterdam which blends modern with classic. It is a 12-storey building of 160 rooms and has been described as “a cartoonesque structure giving the impression of traditional Dutch houses randomly stacked”. Completed in 2010 the architect claims he “didn’t set out to shock”. The Guardian described it as “a madcap hotel”.

D – Disguised

The obvious choice here is the Vodafone mast that looks like a tree on the M4. Other masts in Arizona have been disguised as cacti. But another more delightful one not far from Newbury is the Maharaja’s Well at Stoke Row near Nettlebed. Local person Edward Reade spent many year in India and helped sink avillage well in Benares. When he returned home he found local villagers had to alk miles for water. So the Maharajah paid for a well and also a cottage next door for the well keeper.



I – Incongruous

These are buildings that are out of keeping with their surroundings. Like Price Charles you may have felt that the National Gallery extension was “a monstrous carbuncle on the face of a much-loved and elegant friend.” Follies are very much incongruous and have been described as “costly ornaments with no particular purpose, such as ‘Jackdaw’s Castle on the Highclere estate.



T – Type



These are buildings or structures fulfilling an unusual function. Not far from here is the Diamond light source at Harwell. Seen from the top of Bury Down, there is this large doughnut-shaped building in the middle of the Oxfordshire countryside. Also locally we are used to seeing locks on canals. However, taking things to a new level (also literally) is the Anderton Lift in Cheshire, that can raise two narrow boats weighing 100 tons or more over a height of 50 feet.

I – Idiotic

These are buildings not fit for purpose and usually quirky in some way. There has been a trend in recent years to build upside-down houses. Although there are a few in Britain (e.g. Brighton) the trend was set in the Zakopane area of Poland where there are several in the area, such as this one. Whereas a right way up house like this would take 21 days to build, this one took 114 days since the workers had to take



frequent break due to disorientation. Such houses are really just tourist attractions – you wouldn’t want to live in one, would you?



E – Eccentric

Unlike the idiotic, eccentric buildings do fulfil a useful function. There is a concert hall in Huainan City in China that from the outside looks like a grand piano with a violin at its entrance (all scaled up at 50:1). What caught my eye – also in China – is this multi-storey car park.

S – Scale

As well as the Piano House the former headquarters office of the basket company Longaberger from the outside looked like one of their baskets, scaled up 150 times. It was 7-storeys high and housed 500 employees. True to its name the company became a ‘basket case’ and went bankrupt a few years ago. At the other end of the scale is the charming Little Chapel in Guernsey. As well as being small (16ft x 9ft) it is decorated with sea shells, pebbles and broken china.



A-Z of Architectural Oddities

A - Airport	Denver Airport: Fentress architects, 1995. \$4.8bn (\$2bn over budget and 16 months late!). The sculpted roof canopy evokes the majestic, snow-capped Rocky Mountains. Employed 11,000 workers during construction. Fabric roof saved \$115m worth of steel.
B - Bridge	Heatherwick Rolling Bridge, Merchants Square, Paddington. Part of 2004 development of Paddington basin. Uses hydraulic pistons. Bridge curls every Wednesday and Friday 12PM and Saturday at 2PM.
C - Cathedral	Sagrada Família, Barcelona. Antoni Gaudí – started in 1882. Combines Gothic and curvilinear Art Nouveau forms. On 7 November 2010, Pope Benedict XVI consecrated it and proclaimed it a minor basilica. Completion expected 2026??!
D – Diamond Light source	UK's national synchrotron facility, Harwell. Opened 2007 with 7 beam lines (cost £263m). Now 32. 3GeV. Covers e/m spectrum from infra-red to X-rays. Many applications – materials, forensic, archaeology etc. . Book for an Open Day!
E - Elevator	Santa Justa Elevator, Lisbon. Chosen instead of animal pulling carriage on rail lines up an inclined plane. Planned by Mesnier (influenced by Eiffel) 1882, opened 1902. Originally called Elevado do Carmo since upper deck leads to ruins of Carmo monastery destroyed in 1755 earthquake.
F - Folly	Costly ornamental building with no practical purpose, e.g. Jackdaw's Castle and Temple of Diana, Highclere. Sway tower (Peterson's Folly) 66m tall. A smaller 15m tower was the prototype. Main tower is 14 floors, bottom three converted to living quarters.
G – Grain Store	Or Galician Granary. NW Spain locally called hórreo. On raised pillars to keep out vermin. Note ventilation at sides. Around 20,000 survive. cf. locally Rushall Farm raised store on saddle stones.
H - Hotel	Hotel Zaandam, Amsterdam. Cartoonesque structure impression of traditional Dutch houses randomly stacked. "A madcap hotel, quirky, stupefying, funny and delightful"
I - Italianate	Area of Knutsford with buildings by Richard Harding Watt (originally a glove merchant). Pevsner described his buildings as "monstrous desecration of a small and pleasant country town", yet conceded that younger critics might call him the " <u>Gaudí</u> of England".
J – Jump (ski)	Bergisel Ski Jump, Innsbruck. Replaced earlier ski jumps in 2002 by Iraqi born London based Zaha Hadid. 47m high: "sweeping lines and minimalist aesthetic create a sense of graceful, high-speed motion."
K - Kiosk	Telephone kiosks in Gothland and Copenhagen where around 30 built with Art Nouveau features from 1896-1930. Most have intricate carved details.
L – Lift (Lock)	Anderton Lift Cheshire. A 15m link between River Weaver and Trent & Mersey Canal. Built in 175 by engineer Edward Williams, it was in use for over 100 years until it closed in 1983 due to corrosion. Now restored. Two caissons (75ft x 15ft 6in x 9ft 6in deep). Each weighs 90 tons empty, 200 tons full. Only other working lift is Falkirk Wheel.
M – multi-storey car park	The 'cheesegrater' in Sheffield. Part of the Heart of the City project which also includes the Peace Gardens, Winter Garden and Millennium Gallery. Made from pre-cast concrete with anodised aluminium panels painted green on inside. Light and reflection effects change throughout the day.
N - Newbury	Two buildings on opposite sides of Carnegie Road (near old library) – Clock House and Sundial House. Once offices, converted into 7 flats 2014. Now serviced apartments.

O - Offices	Longaberger Head Office, Newark, Ohio. 9,000 ton basket. 7 stories, 180,000 sq ft. \$30m. Steel interior, stucco exterior. Sold for \$1.5m in 2017 – a “basket case”
P - Palace	Pena Palace, Sintra, Portugal . On site of earlier monstary ruined in 1775 earthquake. Transformed by King Ferdinance in 1838. “. A hedonistic mix of vividly painted terraces, decorative battlements and mythological statues, all of which stand at stark contrast to the lush greens of the Parque de Pena forest.”
Q - Quirky	The Piano House, Built 2007 to showcase plans for newly created district of Shannan in Huainan City, China. Violin houses staircase and escalators. Bottom part of piano is two concert halls. The architects - students from the Hefei University of Technology. Scale 50:1.
R - Religious	The Little Chapel, Saint Andrew, Guernsey. Created in July 1914, by Brother Déodat. A miniature version of the grotto and basilica at Lourdes. 3 rd chapel on the site, bigger than first two now 16ft x 9ft. Brother went to France in 1939 never saw it finished. Decorated with seashells, pebbles, and broken china.
S - Shops	Camden High Street. These shop signs of Camden are a local landmark. They started appearing during the 1990s, around the same time as the market transformed from a haven of countercultures into a major tourist attraction.
T - Toilet	On the pavement just along from Christ Church, Spitalfields (opposite Spitalfields Market). 600 sq ft. Turned into a night club ‘Public Life’, early 2000s. Closed in 2016 due to complaints of noise from local residents. Went on the market for £1m in 2016.
U - Upside-Down	Upside-down house. Zakopane, Poland. Designed by businessman Daniel Czapiewski in 2007. Builder Danmar normally take 21 days to build a house. This one 114 days due to workers’ disorientation and strange wall angles. Upside-down houses in England – Brighton, Bournemouth, Trafford Centre etc.
V - Vodamast	Mobile phone mast camouflaged as a tree. Scottsdale Arizona. Photographer Robert Voigt has photoed these around the world. Supposed to fit in with surroundings but often do not. One is hidden behind the clockface at Hungerford Town Hall.
W - Well	Maharajahs Well, Stoke Row near Nettlebed. Local person Edward Reade spent years in India helped sink a well in a village in Benares, but found water shortages when back home. Maharajah paid £400 for this well. 368ft deep (2 x Nelson columns). 4ft diam dug by hand through chalk: 2 men/1 year. 1864.
X – Xmas Market	Christmas carousel (aka pyramid). This one at Hamburg. They have their roots in the Ore Mountains (border Germany, Czech Republic). Reminded miners of capstans used in the mines. Figures traditionally represent local mountain folklore. Big surge after discovery of kerosene in 1830, much cheaper to run.
Y - Yurt	Round tent covered with skins or felt, used by nomads in Steppes of central Asia for over 3,000 years. Roof can be self supporting but poles needed on larger ones. “Yurts are the quintessential glamping accommodation and whether you're after a Mongolian-style escape or a glitz and glamour getaway” (coolcamping.com)
Z - Zoo	The Lubetkin penguin pool at London Zoo completed in 1934. The first British building to demonstrate the expressive and structural potential of reinforced concrete. Structural engineers Ove Arup. Design was based on 'behaviourism' that claimed that all animal behaviours were a result of external environments.