



Robert Hanks

The Week in Radio

LAST WEEK, idling in rural Norfolk, I thought it would make a nice change to listen to some local radio – not the comparatively glibly high-rolling version of local you get in London, but really local. As a measure of how local things get in Norfolk, the top story on the 10am bulletin on BBC Radio Norfolk last Thursday,

above carnage in Iraq, was about a Norfolk woman who had been unable – for the second year running – to take a holiday in Bulgaria (apparently, the flight was cancelled because not enough people wanted to fly from Norwich Airport to Sofia). It is hard to see that this is an issue of even local interest, unless Norfolk has a large Bulgarian population I haven't noticed.

This was in the middle of Roy Waller's morning show, which is what I ended up listening to most days – a mixture of music, phone-in chat, expert comment and travel news, when the travel news presenter turns up, which he or she didn't one morning last week, leaving Roy floundering and, quite clearly, seething. Actually, Roy often seems to be on the verge of losing his rag: but in the end, what you notice is his patience – he might get a bit snippy with his listeners, but he doesn't hurry them. Last week's talking-points included:

beach-huts – are they a thing of the past? Great Yarmouth – should it follow Blackpool's example and

ban vulgarity? And Sunday shopping – is it right?

Listeners phone in and yawn on end – stories about how they used to have a beach-hut at Clacton back in the Twenties, questions about Roy's own position vis-a-vis the Sabbath given that he regularly does the commentary for Norwich City's Sunday fixtures.

A wine expert came in to recommend wines for Easter, including some thoughts on what you can safely give to elderly relatives who aren't really used to drinking wine. You never get that from Janis Robinson. In between, there were frequent trails for the holiday weekend "Legends of Country" event at Yarmouth, featuring John Denver and Roy Orbison lookalikes and competed by Roy himself. I'm not sure that this doesn't contravene BBC guidelines on advertising, but it added to the air of cosiness.

By normal – by which I suppose I mean metropolitan, London – standards, Roy's show is pretty rough around the edges and almost unbearably tame. But slickness and excitement aren't everything. Walking through London, seeing the gastro-pubs and self-consciously trendy bars that are replacing all the shabby old boozers, I sometimes worry about the old men you used to see sitting in pubs in the afternoons, nursing a pint

and a packet of Bensons through till teatime. Where do they go now? Waller's show is a radio equivalent of those old pubs, one of the last places where youth and fashion don't matter. It is all the better for it. No, more than that: society is all the better for it.

Back home, and hungering for something more cosmopolitan, I have been tuning in over the web to Air America, the new US station that has been conceived as an antidote to right-wing shock-jocks. Actually, much of the time it has left me panting for the Roy Waller's breadth of interests; however fervently you oppose war in Iraq, however sincerely you believe that George Bush is a liar and a crook, there is a limit to the number of times you can hear it said. But Al Franken's show, *The O'Franken Factor* (www.alfrankenradio.com, 5-8pm, repeated at weekends) intersperses serious conversation with some quickfire, genuinely funny lines ("asking whether the mainstream media has a liberal or conservative bias is like asking whether al-Qa'ida puts too much oil on their hummus"). It is customary to sneer at the fawning of American media; but at its best Air America's energy and intelligent partisanship make British political commentary – either clever or partisan, rarely both – seem very bland.

Straight to the top of the class

The Government wants to rebuild or refurbish all England's school buildings, but are there enough good architects to do the job properly? **Jay Merrick** finds inspiration in an unlikely corner of Essex

There are two Dagenhams. The clichéd version might be caricatured as a kind of post-industrial tundra. Asstride the A13, between the M25 and London's Docklands, it's here that the film-making Coen brothers would surely make a limey *Fargo*: Dagenham as the town of Brainerd, on marshland as flat and big-skied as Minnesota, with a used tyre depot, rather than a slick car dealers, as the doomed location of an absurd, and eventually murderous, money-making scheme.

The second Dagenham may momentarily recall Brainerd, but it no longer carries a "nowhereville" taint. In parts of Dagenham and Barking, seminars which could have been snaffed for £100,000 three or four years ago are now worth three times that. Many Londoners who work in the City, in particular, have twigged that the A13 will get them to their job in about 40 minutes. Black cab drivers have known this for decades; so have ex-East-enders who want the suburban life and easy access to Southend and Stansted, too.

The demographics, and the median income levels, are changing fast. In a decade, provided other urban redevelopment projects in this patch of the vast Thames Gateway urban regeneration quilt pan out, Barking and Dagenham Council will be husbanding the resources of a rapidly evolving population. Schools, though, will be the least of their worries.

But, just off Aintree Avenue, there are no worries whatsoever. Just past the Tellytribby Field and the Monet Garden at John Perry Primary School, the government's recently announced £3bn Schools for the Future programme has been thoroughly pre-empted. Thoroughly as in a head teacher, Jeannette Harris, who had a vision and pursued it. And thoroughly as in the selection of relatively untried architects, DSDHA, whose ideas for the new nursery wing have given the school's toddlers not only a touch of Bauhaus modernism, but a glimpse of a certain sculpture garden in St Ives.

The school was built in 1951, one of dozens marking the Festival of Britain – a year of symbolic renewal that conventionally mirrors the government's current splash-all-over educational intentions. In its

brickly, steel-windowed way, the school is a notable piece of modernist architecture: layered, essentially horizontal, well-proportioned and, in places, striking in its details. Order without, order within: the atmosphere here is good; the degree of quiet calm in the school during classes is, frankly, unexpected.

But it is not as unexpected as the new nursery annexe, across the once open end of the school's central U-shaped courtyard. Deborah Saunt, one of DSDHA's two principals, describes the wing as a "studio for children", and the phrase gets right to the nub of its design. Art is the ghost in this little modernist teaching machine.

The nursery houses up to 40 infants in unusually – though not absurdly – stimulating conditions, and it has the distinct feel of an artist's studio. The garden and play area in front of the nursery, which contains two concrete sculptures (one mirrored), were the head teacher's idea. She had been inspired by Barbara Hepworth's sculpture garden in St Ives – an artistic inclination that had already given the school its own charming, fenced Monet garden: pond, bridge, daffodils, shrubs, long grass, and two compact mallards.

Inside the building, this studio feeling persists quite strongly. The polycarbonate wall facing the courtyard glows gently; windows, set asymmetrically along a low-ish horizontal steel beam, give the children snapshot views of the play area. An angular, new "dendritic" "landscape wall", faced with cork, divides the general activities area from demarcated zones such as the womb-like special needs nook. The colours may be a little too bright for hard-core modernists – but what a fine place to trigger learning-curves, and a comfortable sense of connection and possibility.

The architects stretched the £400,000 budget to the architectural limit, and have delivered a taut essay in modernism with some surprising and satisfying inflections. That was a given: the per-square-metre cost of the nursery was higher than usual for this kind of local authority building. Special costs demand special results.

Okay, it's a shoe-box. But Saunt has manipulated the form nicely in terms of materials, space and surface. The overall scale of the nursery building, the details of

Classified

Legal Notices

UNUSUALLY EUROPE LIMITED

Company Number 095514

THE INSOLVENCY ACT 1986

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN pursuant to section 86 of the Insolvency Act 1986 that a meeting of the creditors of the above named company will be held at the offices of the undersigned, 20, St George Street, Leicester Square, London on 30 April 2004 at 11.00am for the purposes mentioned in section 99 to 101 of the said Act.

Creators wishing to vote at the Meeting must lodge their proxy, together with a full and complete statement of their claims, in writing, at the undersigned, 20, St George Street, London WC2E 6BQ, on or before 29 April 2004, 12 noon on 29 April 2004.

For the purposes of voting, a second creditor is required to lodge a statement in writing, in support of his claim, together with a copy of the account of the creditor's claim, at the undersigned, 20, St George Street, London WC2E 6BQ, on or before 29 April 2004, 12 noon on 29 April 2004.



ROGER BATHMAN Director

CARPET EXPRESS GROUP LIMITED

Bath in Administration (Receivership)

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, pursuant to section 87(2) of the Insolvency Act 1986, that meetings of the unsecured creditors of the above named companies will be held at the offices of the undersigned, 10 Fleet Place, London EC4A 7DF, at 2.00 pm on 27th April 2004, for the purposes of voting and before the undersigned, 10 Fleet Place, London EC4A 7DF, at 11.00 am on 29th April 2004, in accordance with section 99 of the said Act. The meeting may, if they think fit, establish committees to receive the creditors' claims or to order the Act.

Creditors whose claims are wholly secured are not entitled to vote at the meetings. Other creditors are entitled to vote if:-
1. They have delivered to Koell at 10 Fleet Place, London EC4A 7DF, no later than 12.00 noon on the business day before the day fixed for the meetings, written details of the debts they claim to be due to them from the companies, and the claim has been duly admitted under the provisions of the Rule 3.11 of the Insolvency Rules 1986; and
2. There has been lodged with us any proxy which the creditor intends to be used on his behalf.

ALISTAR BEVERIDGE Joint Administrative Receiver

WEATHERLY HOLDINGS LIMITED

WEATHERLY INVESTMENTS LIMITED

WEATHERLY LIMITED

WEATHERLY HOMES LIMITED

EJ WEATHERLY LIMITED

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT Richard Anthony Gray and David Andrew Smith of One Dock, Darnley Accounts, Hereford, Shire, 58 Heolch Street, South, Hereford, Shire, Hereford, Shire, are appointed Joint Liquidators of the above named companies on 5 April 2004, in accordance with section 87(2) of the Insolvency Act 1986. The undersigned, who are being voluntarily appointed, are required on or before the 21st May 2004, to send in their full names and addresses, full particulars of their claims or debts, and their names and addresses of their Solicitors (if any) to the undersigned, Richard Anthony Gray and David Andrew Smith, One Dock, Darnley Accounts, Hereford, Shire, 58 Heolch Street, South, Hereford, Shire, Hereford, Shire, on or before 21 May 2004, at 12 noon on 21 May 2004.

Liquidator of the said companies, and in respect of the said companies, and to place a copy of the account of the creditor's claim, at the undersigned, Richard Anthony Gray and David Andrew Smith, One Dock, Darnley Accounts, Hereford, Shire, 58 Heolch Street, South, Hereford, Shire, on or before 21 May 2004, 12 noon on 21 May 2004.

AQUATIC & MARINE ASSOCIATES

(INCORPORATED LIMITED)

The Insolvency Act and Rules 1986

In accordance with Rule 4.106, I, David Bence of Fisher Partners, One Frigate, 11-15 William Road, London NW1 3ER, give notice that on 30 April 2004 I was appointed Joint Liquidator of Aquatic & Marine Associates (the "Company") by resolution of members and creditors. Notice is hereby given that the creditors of the above named company, which is being voluntarily wound up, are required, on or before 5 July 2004 to send in their full names and addresses, full particulars of their claims or debts, and their names and addresses of their Solicitors (if any) to the undersigned, David Bence, One Frigate, 11-15 William Road, London NW1 3ER, the Joint Liquidator of the said company, and to place a copy of the account of the creditor's claim, at the undersigned, David Bence, One Frigate, 11-15 William Road, London NW1 3ER, on or before 5 April 2004, 12 noon on 5 April 2004.

David Bence, Joint Liquidator

For Legal Notice Enquiries

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A beacon school for architects: the exterior of the new nursery wing at John Perry Primary in Dagenham (above), and the general activities area inside (below)

its fenestration, the depth of its plinth, its rakish horizontality mesh satisfyingly with the existing wings of the school. And the striking jut of the canopy is not, after all, show-off architecture. Saunt says the cantilever "imbues the building with a monumental scale reminiscent of the industrial structures in and around Dagenham". This connection is probably irrelevant: the existing school and the local housing are the operative context. It's enough to think of the deep overhang as functional, and something that makes clear sense in terms of stratified scale, by sliding smoothly and almost weightlessly into the courtyard's visual grids.

And then there are the bricks. Make that two or three thousand bricks. Make them Dutch, and give them fascinating glazes whose colours vary in different lights: grey to violet, violet to charcoal, charcoal to blue. And arrange everything - bricks, polycarbonate, steel, aluminium, glass - so that the shoe-box has a syncretised, slightly arrhythmic vibe. Result: a small, but very arresting, building.

Saunt and her practice were working in ideal conditions. Schools such as John Perry Primary are established educational beacons, and beacon schools are much more likely to demand beacon architecture. The government wants to create hundreds more via its new Schools for the Future programme, whose remit is to rebuild or refurbish all the secondary schools in England in 15 years; the biggest such programme since the 19th century.

The spectacular cash commitment is being presented as something radically decisive and groovy. But the impressive numbers mask the complexity of the task. About £2bn will be spent in the first push, delivering 180 secondary "city academies" in England. Another £3bn will be fed into primary school development. But what kind of schools? Designed by whom? And how well managed and maintained?

The track record is discouraging. Six out of seven state schools are more than 25 years old, and 60 per cent of them have been in use for more than 60 years. Even if schools are better designed, what about their upkeep, their ability to meet change? The government's predictable answer is to

fund these new schools via a mix of state money and Private Finance Initiatives. This suggests a significant percentage of new schools will be bolted on to non-educational, commercial developments.

Perhaps this can work. But it won't if the designs for new schools are less than excellent. Jon Rouse, the outgoing chief executive of the government's Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, says every school building project will require a high-quality design team, and that the DEFS are taking the issue of good quality design "very seriously".

But not every school project will benefit from a high-quality design team. And even those that do might still be fudged into mediocrity unless local planners - and teachers - are prepared to risk architectural solutions whose intelligence is anchored in 21st-century realities.

In an attempt to cover this angle, the DEFS has activated 11 big-name architects, asking them to work with specific schools to develop theoretical "exemplar" versions of them. The stellar cast includes Lord Rogers, Will Alsop and Wilkinson Eyre.

The ideas and building forms thrown up by the magnificent 11 are often riveting. One practice, the increasingly trendy de Rijke Marsh Morgan, propose a school dominated by a multi-purpose plaza surrounded by a vast, translucent quilt. Marks Barfield, designers of the London Eye, are in the mix, too. But how can they set useful examples unless their visions are put to the test? How, exactly, would these five architects trans-

late their unusual architectural ideas into affordable, maintainable buildings that not only stand a chance of making the cover of *Architects' Journal*, but which demonstrably encourage learning and community spirit?

There are not enough really good architects available to the Schools of the Future programme. Nothing new there. In the past, a few local authority architects' departments have made extraordinary contributions to school design - Essex and Hampshire are two examples. It's equally true that great architects such as Walter Gropius and Maxwell Fry have produced brilliant buildings for state schools. But these exemplary big bangs have dissolved into a general whimpering. Cash constraints, local political wrinkles, architecturally nimby-ish councils, and a swingeing fear of creativity have formed a fairly implacable bottom line. The DEFS faces a huge task, tactically and strategically.

The parents of the children edging outwards from folding glass doors into the play area at John Perry School in Dagenham need not worry about these machinations because Barking and Dagenham Council have a handle on their educational resource. It isn't perfect, but the desire for improvement in this borough is not merely theoretical: nor does it require major-dude architects. Chances are being taken, money spent. And bright, committed architects are not being treated like dangerous kryptonite. The Coen brothers wouldn't like it at all.

