

## DARTINGTON

Despite strenuous efforts to prevent it, Dartington College of the Arts faces a merger with University College Falmouth and a move of 90 miles from its present site in Devon to Cornwall. At a hearing on March 14, campaigners were faced with legal costs of up to £44,600 if they chose to proceed with their judicial review application. As a result they had no option but to withdraw. Campaigners feel strongly that this is a national issue. Despite the academic success and financial viability of this small, highly original and specialist institution, incentives have been made available for the merger that they feel have entirely distorted the arguments. The pursuit of university status, not necessarily of benefit to students but large in the eyes of senior management, is one driver; £15.6m of the funding for the merger being provided by the European Convergence Fund – in Cornwall – is another.

The legal route, at this stage, was to prevent the transfer of £3.5m from the South West Regional Development Agency, to put the merger on hold until the outcome of the review. The RDA now stands accused of preventing the review: 'They have plenty of public money. Public money to prevent the public getting at the truth.' This may not be an exaggeration: the RDA has been forced to admit taping campaigners at an earlier meeting, according to one member of the campaigning group, who also explained that, at the hearing, 'the pro bono lawyer said that the RDA were asking us to say that the case had no merit. The lawyer replied that the campaigners would be lying if they said that.' How the campaign can proceed is not clear, but it will. The principal of Dartington, Professor Andrew Brewerton, has talked about how the merger will provide for a 'sustainable future' for the Dartington ethos, but specific claims and counterclaims do need to be resolved: the strongest reason given for the move, that the landlord for the site, Dartington Hall trust, had given notice, has been denied by the Trust. See [www.savedartingtoncollege.org](http://www.savedartingtoncollege.org) and [www.dartington.org](http://www.dartington.org) for further details. ■

## PUBLIC BENEFIT

The 'why so many banal figurative sculptures and so much bad public art?' debate has been livening up. Steve Bell used his *IF...* cartoon strip to put forward a few proposals, including a fat penguin, for the Ebbsfleet Landmark Project. Tim Knox of Sir John Soane's Museum made it onto the *Today* programme to castigate *The Meeting Place*, the kissing couple at the refurbished St Pancras station. He also challenged



Charred wood pavilion in Potters Fields Park, London by dsdha architects 2008

the greatness of *The Building Worker*, commissioned by UCATT, the construction workers' union, in memory of building workers killed each year and in celebration of those currently rebuilding towns and cities in the UK. The sculpture is a focus for an annual memorial ceremony on April 28.

## Workers and generals

Artnotes eagerly sought out these works on foot. The St Pancras kissing couple is, not surprisingly, Gotham City-scale kitsch, out of sympathy with this great station. *The Building Worker* by Alan Wilson, near the Tower of London, is an uninteresting statue on a plinth, kitsch in its relationship to Michelangelo's *David*, but nearer human scale. What it does have going for it is an interesting and unresolved proximity to those vital public spaces, bus stops – specifically the Number 15 and the London tourist

buses, near which it feels hastily parked. The effect is not grandiose, and public sculpture is as much about the inscription as the artistic achievement. Awkwardly positioned on the pavement it may be, but this is expressive of the building worker's late arrival in the canon of civic celebration – some time after Arthur Travers Harris (aka Bomber Harris) outside the RAF church, St Clement Danes, which you can reach conveniently from Tower Hill on that 15 bus. That statue was unveiled by the Queen Mother in 1992, despite protests from mayors of the German cities destroyed by Harris's implementation of the area bombing policy in the Second World War.

Alight from the 15 bus a few stops further, at Trafalgar Square, and there is a certain Fourth Plinth, still host to Thomas Schütte's colourful feral pigeon hotel. The war is still being fought here too; but not the war the UK is actually

fighting in Iraq, which informs the thinking of three of the current candidates for the plinth, Jeremy Deller, Bob & Roberta Smith and Tracey Emin. Terry Smith, a city businessman, recently proposed paying for a permanent monument described as 'acceptable to ordinary Londoners', to Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park, who played a crucial role in defending Britain against the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain. According to the *Daily Telegraph*, Smith 'recognised that there would be opposition among London's art elite'; the art elite duly responded with a letter of protest to the *Guardian*. Did they bother to cc to it to Smith, Artnotes wonders? Ken Livingstone was also among the signatories of the letter. The mayor takes a strong interest in the Fourth Plinth commissions. He is, however, among those guilty of starting the 'sculpture acceptable to ordinary Londoners' debate a few years ago. He now seems fully on board for the idea that no permanent sculpture should be sited on the Fourth Plinth. Has he been nobbled by the 'art elite'?

### Sculpture, pavilion, kiosk

Go in the other direction, across Tower Bridge from *The Building Worker* to Potters Fields, and the public art debate now becomes more interesting, courtesy of two new buildings in stacked horizontal timber by Deborah Saunt and David Hills of dsdha architects. Potters Fields is a scruffy grass patch right next to Foster & Partners' City Hall building, perhaps best known as background for news footage of David Blaine's isolation in a transparent box on this site in 2003. The scrap of park has now been nicely tidied up, planted and landscaped (by Gross Max Landscape Architects). The two new wooden buildings are striking sculptures in their own right. One is a dramatic charred wood structure, a material used in the Japanese tradition of *yakisugi*, and combines the functions of café, public toilet, cashpoint and bay for the crane that cleans City Hall. The other, of light, calcified wood with a green (ie flowering) roof, nestles into the side of Tower Bridge, and is also a café which raises money for the legacy body to reinvest in the future management of the park. It does not compete with Tower Bridge but has a formal liveliness rather like a Tadashi Kawamata project.

These buildings, commissioned by the developers More London, are 'Pavilions', the favoured self-conscious statements of both architects and artists (see Alex Coles, *AM308*), but their 'carved form' is derived from movement and view analysis'. They are not conceived as objects plonked down in the way of pedestri-an movement, but as protective 'grottoes'. The dark one in charred wood makes a good companion for and commentary on City Hall in its contrasting texture. When selecting charred timber, the architects also noted that much of this area was severely bombed, so there is a subtle backward glance here too, which differs from the way 'the war' is still being fought over the Fourth Plinth and elsewhere. But it is the deft urban

sense of these buildings and their modesty – they are not so far from the traditional park kiosk – that makes them such a well judged aesthetic and social benefit for this site. Architecture can be a successful art in its own right. Commissioners of bronze statues and landmarks might care to visit. ☺

### LIVINGSTONE'S ARTISTS

Ken Livingstone may get some reflected glory from such transformations of his City Hall back garden, but artists do not appear united behind him in the London mayoral contest to be held on May 1, in which he languishes a little in the polls. An auction held at the Aquarium Gallery, including works by Banksy, Mona Hatoum, Billy Childish, Jamie Reid and Richard Hamilton, raised £230,000 – the bulk of it being the sale of the Banksy. Other artists, among them many yBas, have sent a letter of protest, specifically against the further creep of tall glass towers up Bishopsgate and into Shoreditch (the Bishops Place development by Foster & Partners, also responsible for the less than satisfactory redevelopment of Spitalfields Market). The letter was organised by Brad Lochore, and states: 'This historic area and its communities deserve an enlightened and creative approach to development, not a corporate, sterile monoculture.' A new website, <http://openshoreditch.blogspot.com>, joins [www.saveshoreditch.com](http://www.saveshoreditch.com) as a source on these issues, and there are usefully detailed comments by CABE, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, at [www.cabe.org.uk](http://www.cabe.org.uk). CABE does not support this difficult 'edge of city' development in its present form. William Shakespeare is documented as owning a house in precisely this area, known as Norton Folgate, though his views on the development and voting intentions on May 1 are not known. ☺

### WEST COUNTRY

Knowle West Media Centre, Bristol, reopens this month, after several years of being housed in a building, partly a prefab, on a 1930s housing estate. The centre, which organises and creates opportunities for more than 5,500 people on the nearby estate, invites projects to be made and set up by local residents. The new facilities include performance, exhibition and theatre space, alongside video and audio equipment, editing facilities and a new cinema space. White Design, which kept environmental considerations central to the construction, fabricated the building entirely from straw bales. The opening exhibition reflects similar concerns by featuring works by Helen & Newton Harrison. The duo have created stories around the drastic effect of the rise in sea levels around Britain, which include a film showing Bristol underwater (see [www.greenhousebritain.greenmuseum.org](http://www.greenhousebritain.greenmuseum.org)). The centre also has commissioned new writing from the director of Arnolfini, Tom Trevor, Simon

Poulter, who completed a commission at Knowle West in 2005, and cultural broker Peter Jenkinson OBE. The essays are published online and tackle subjects such as the denigration and use of public space, the 'show and display' aspects of government funding and the role of the artist in regional and depressed economic contexts. [www.kwmc.org.uk](http://www.kwmc.org.uk) ☺

### HOTEL LIFE

Situated in tropical botanical gardens, the Masterworks Museum of Bermuda Art opened last month. The collection of around 1,000 works includes artists such as Henry Moore and Georgia O'Keeffe, who visited the island and made works in response to their time there. The museum has been seven years in development, and is the first public art gallery in this British colony of 399 years. The Henry Moore Foundation has loaned a series of Moore's drawings of shells he picked up in Bermuda, which has never previously been exhibited. The museum also houses a new research and conservation room, classroom and members' lounge. Unfortunately, Artnotes didn't manage to get a press trip to the island to give further inside reports. [www.bermudamasterworks.com](http://www.bermudamasterworks.com)

Jeffrey Charles and Henry Peacock have moved from their PO Box in London N1 to the Hotel Acropole in Khartoum, Sudan. For the past two years the gallery has been run from a postal box address (see *AM296*); the gallery now, in typical JCHP style, is announced in the following way: 'Re-sited in the horn of Africa it will act as beacon to those whose hearts burn with a passion pure and righteous.' The Hotel Acropole is the oldest hotel in Khartoum, and is still run by the same three Greek brothers who opened it in 1955. Dramatic events that have happened at the Acropole include its destruction by a Hamas bomb in 1988; and former occupants include Leni Riefenstahl – when her helicopter crashed in the Nuba mountains, staff were able to find her a plane and crew to take her home. [www.jchpsudan.com](http://www.jchpsudan.com) ☺

### TERMINALLY YOURS

Terminal 5 opened on March 27, shifting all BA routes from Terminal 1 with immediate effect. Additional routes are to be relocated a month later on April 30. It would be a good idea not to travel on these dates. Aboard the minibus to T5, Amanda, guide for the day, in BA uniform, entertained the bewildered but cheerful crowd. She was breathtakingly informed with endless facts and figures. Had she been practising with an empty bus for the previous week? In addition, she wore a small microphone that curled from her ear, and what appeared to be her bum-bag was in fact an ingenious speaker system. BAA commissioned Langlands & Bell to create a new installation situated on the plaza which will be the only new artwork on show to the general public (see *AM314*). Onwards from there is the Rogers Partnership-designed T5 A (T5 B will