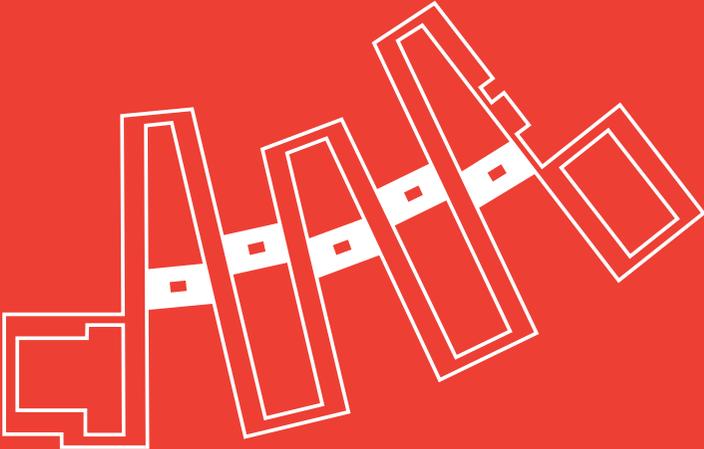


UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX VISION & REALITY



**SOME
MAY
FEEL
THE
RANGE
OF
GREAT**

INTRODUCTION & WELCOME

It is a great privilege to introduce this exhibition guide to 'Something Fierce', a celebration of the architecture and heritage of the University of Essex's Colchester campus. It was Sir Winston Churchill, an Essex MP and one of the original donors who helped establish the University of Essex who said 'We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us' and in no other university in the country is this more true than at the University of Essex.

This exhibition highlights the values and aspirations of those who founded the University 50 years ago and shows how our architecture set out to faithfully reflect the University's academic purpose to contribute to society through excellence in education and excellence in research; how it gives physical shape to our commitment to staff and students being members of a community in a university on a human scale; and how it creates special opportunities for partnership between students and staff that comes from their joint membership of an internationally diverse living and learning community.

The University's architect Kenneth Capon didn't want the architecture to be 'shaggy and soft' instead he wanted to create 'something fierce to let them work within.' Shaped by the place in which we live and work, the second part of this exhibition is about how our architecture has influenced the people who have lived and worked in the University. In particular it tells the story of how since the 1960s Essex has become home to the tenacious and the bold, home to those that don't just talk about a better world, but work together to create one - and why challenging convention is in our DNA.

*Cover image:
Diagram of the five
squares, the zig-zag
and the three lakes
from the cover of the
Foundation Fund ap-
peal. October 1963*

This exhibition has been expertly curated by leading art historian Professor Jules Lubbock, Emeritus Professor of Art History at Essex, and Jessica Kenny our Arts and Gallery Director, supported by designer David Hillman. I would like to thank them for presenting an outstanding exhibition which highlights how Essex has left its mark on those of us who have lived, worked or studied here. I hope you enjoy it and are encouraged to tell your story and share your Essex experience through the interactive online memory map of the Campus.

**Professor Anthony Forster
Vice-Chancellor**

THE FIFTIES AND THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

The University of Essex is perceived as a Sixties university, but it was first proposed in the Fifties, a quite different decade.

The Fifties is seen as dull in comparison with the Swinging Sixties. Unfairly so; there was great creativity in the arts and sciences and major political and social change: Pop Art, Elvis, Brigitte Bardot, DNA, commercial TV, Espresso bars, anti-colonial movements, American civil rights, the H bomb, the Cold War, the Space Race, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the Common Market, motorways, tailfin gas guzzlers, jet airliners, Brutalist architecture and more.

The University of Essex, one of the seven 'Shakespearean' New Universities was a product of this ferment, even though its first students graduated in the late Sixties. The story of Essex is that of a university planned to address the problems of the Fifties, that came into being in a very different decade – the Swinging Sixties.

Sputnik, the first orbital satellite, symbolises a key moment. Launched on 4 October 1957 by the Soviet Union, it overtook the West at a bound. Reflecting on this, Sir Winston Churchill, in his mid-eighties, expressed widespread anxiety about Britain's diminishing status, particularly after the 1956 Suez fiasco: 'We have fallen hopelessly behind in technical education. This is the mechanised age and where are we?' Since the 1940s he and his entourage had championed the foundation of a British equivalent to

the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MIT, but this ran into the sand because of the conservatism of scientists at existing universities and of the University Grants Committee, the UGC, which funded them. Instead, Churchill College, Cambridge was founded in 1957 as a less ambitious way to increase the number of scientists.

To stir up debate on this issue, C.P. Snow, a novelist and a scientist, published a pamphlet entitled The Two Cultures in 1959. He deplored the divide between science and the arts: 'If the scientists have the future in their bones, then the traditional culture responds by wishing the future did not exist.' But Snow also pinpointed a deep division within science itself, that between pure and applied. Universities must train technologists.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX

Essex, more perhaps than the other New Universities, was set up specifically to stop Britain falling further behind, by specialising narrowly in the production of professional experts in advanced technology and in management. Traditional arts subjects took a back seat. MIT was the model for Essex.

The county of Essex had much industry, including Ford at Dagenham and Marconi in Chelmsford, and a fast-growing population. In 1959 the County Council set up a Promotion Committee to present their case for a new university to the UGC. Their 1960 Proposal, based upon the shortage of university places for sixth formers and the county's need for skilled manpower, got the go-ahead in 1961.



Noel Annan (1916-2000) by Cecil Beaton, 1962. National Portrait Gallery, Cecil Beaton Studio Archive, Sotheby's London

The UGC then appointed a committee to decide Essex's ethos and to choose a Vice-Chancellor. The Chair was Noel Annan, the young but influential Provost of King's College, Cambridge. A historian, he was nonetheless a moderniser, once described in Snow's phrase as a man with the future in his bones. A trustee of Churchill College, he had tried, without success, to introduce Sociology at Cambridge.

In The First Report of the Academic Planning Board of February 1962, Annan raised the ambitions for Essex

from the local to the national. Essex would specialise not only in the applied sciences but also in the social sciences, little taught in Britain, with a view to producing a technocratic elite of professional managers alongside experts in applied technology.

Essex provided a clean slate from which the traditionalists who had blocked the creation of a British MIT would be 'eliminated'. Annan conceived Essex as a New Cambridge of modernisers like himself. It would be very big by the standards of the time, with 10,000 students compared to the average 3,000. By limiting the science and social science departments to six, plus a department of Literature and a language teaching centre, those departments could be very large, providing critical mass and economies of scale. Each year Essex would turn out more than 3,000 recruits to join the 'officer class' for Snow's Scientific Revolution.

Another key UGC decision was to locate the university in the landscaped 18th century Wivenhoe Park outside Colchester instead of Chelmsford.

DESIGNING ESSEX

Academic policy

The founding Vice-Chancellor started work in September 1962. Albert Sloman was only 42 and Professor of Spanish at Liverpool University, which had invited him to be their Vice-Chancellor, but he chose the challenge of setting up a new university. Asked at interview about his scientific credentials to lead a technological university, Sloman replied: 'There are not many academics who can assemble an aircraft engine, put it in the plane and fly it.' He had been a wartime fighter pilot and had a strong interest in mathematics and economics.



*Albert Sloman and
Kenneth Capon
leaving Wivenhoe
House to survey the
park, November,
1962*

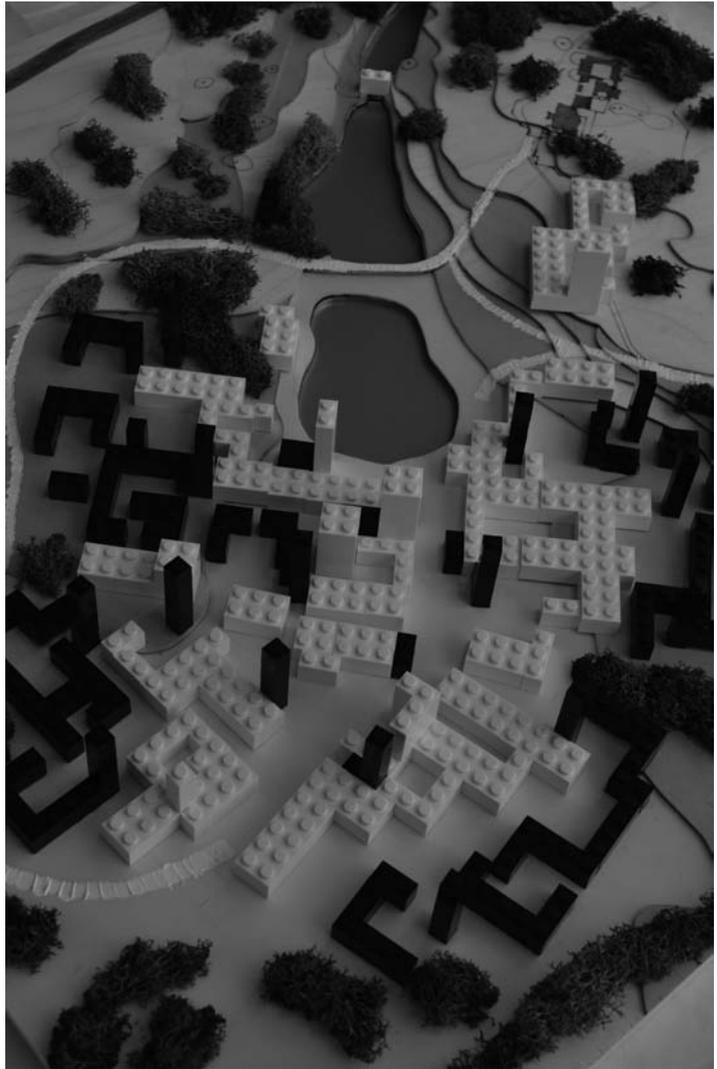
Joining him as architect and master-planner was Kenneth Capon of Architects Co-Partnership, AC-P, a radical firm specialising in educational buildings. Capon had caught the eye of Annan, on the jury of the 1959 architectural competition for Churchill College, with his scheme for four high rise towers. It did not win but in 1961 Annan commissioned a plan for King's College, once again with four high rise towers opposite the famous Chapel in the heart of Cambridge. It too was rejected. Annan enjoyed baiting traditionalists. He secured Capon's Essex appointment.

After Christmas 1962 Capon presented Sloman with a draft layout made from his son's LEGO. It had 18 residential towers and 20 courtyards around a pedestrian street descending the valley. Its urban layout was concentrated in a small area so as to preserve the beauty of Wivenhoe Park and to create a unified community. Spaces for living and teaching were close together, as were buildings for different subjects.

The university was launched a year later at a fundraising luncheon in the City of London on 22 October 1963. Two months earlier, at the March on Washington, Martin Luther King gave his 'I have a dream' speech. The Sixties had arrived.

Churchill, still an Essex MP in his 89th year, was a founding donor and sent his warm good wishes noting: 'It is of the greatest importance to increase our resources of higher education, particularly in the technological and scientific fields.' The fundraising pamphlet expressed urgency about modernisation: leaders of a new kind were required - specialists but with a breadth of understanding, not amateur all-rounders. In his speech to potential donors Sloman emphasised that Essex had 'down-to-earth

*Draft model in LEGO
of University of Essex
master plan,
December, 1962.
Reconstructed by
Cliona O'Dunlaing in
2014 from a
photograph of the
lost original*



practical plans intended to meet the needs of the country and in particular of industry and commerce.' Research was also a top priority, both scientific and social.

The government's Robbins Report on the future of Higher Education was published the day after the Essex launch and its findings were immediately accepted. To coincide, the BBC invited Sloman to deliver the prestigious Reith Lectures starting in November 1963. A University in

Photograph of a cyclotron at MIT from The Listener publication of the second of Albert Sloman's 1963 Reith Lectures, A University in the Making

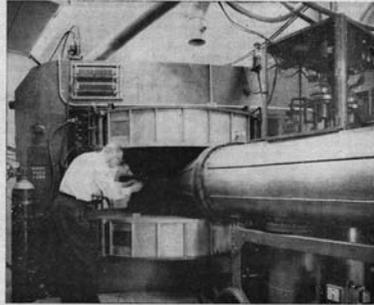
A University in the Making

The Pursuit of Learning

The second Reith Lecture by ALBERT E. SLOMAN

I CAN think of no decision of a new university that is more critical than its choice of what to study. When it has chosen a particular subject it must appoint staff, build up a library, perhaps erect a building and install equipment. And all this will probably commit it to the subject irrevocably. Appoint a professor, in whatever circumstances and for whatever reason, and you have probably accepted his subject for all time. The professor will die but his department may well live on for ever.

At Essex we have decided to reorient ourselves in the first few years to only three fields of study: the physical sciences, social studies, and comparative studies. There will be serious omissions: the biological sciences, for example, earth sciences like geology, and all the professional schools. These omissions are regrettable but they are not capricious. I did not lightly pass over classics in Roman Colchester, or exclude, with a French wife, the study of France. Last week I broached the case for big departments. Today I want to follow the argument farther to explain why at Essex we are concentrating on such a narrow range of studies. I shall then try to justify the particular choice we have made.



A cyclotron, which accelerates particles up to 31,000,000 electron volts, at the Institute of Technology, Massachusetts

one person can any longer know the whole of subjects like physics or chemistry or biology or even their major sub-divisions, and scientific inquiry in an increasing number of fields requires research teams. Only big departments can provide such teams with experts in all the different branches of a subject which a project may require. Only big departments too can carry the heavy costs involved. Just as the Faradays have given way to the research teams so the ice-bucket has been replaced by computers and cyclotrons. Research work today calls for the use of a wide range of equipment, and equipment which is becoming increasingly complex and accurate. For example, in less than fifty years instruments which measured one thousandth of a second have been developed to measure one thousandth of a milligram of a second. The increased sophistication of equipment of all kinds means enormously increased costs, both capital and maintenance, which small departments simply cannot afford. As a result, they have to make do with obsolete equipment which bears little resemblance to what is found in the laboratories of industry and research institutions, and so their experimental courses cannot be brought fully up to date. And only when university departments in this country

the Making publicised Sloman's ambitions. He adhered to Annan's blueprint, inevitably; Essex would be a vocational powerhouse to train a technocratic elite practically equipped to meet the challenges of the modern world, both the national need and that of the county of Essex's own industries. But Sloman introduced important modifications in substance and emphasis concerning academic policy, student life and community.

Research, the humanities and the unity of knowledge

'A primary function of a university must be to engage in research.' The County Council and Annan had envisaged a teaching-only university, but for Sloman teaching 'cannot be divorced from research'. This was revolutionary; few university staff in Britain did research, then considered somewhat ungentlemanly. And Sloman, moreover, actually wanted to collaborate with industry.

Annan had almost 'eliminated' the traditional humanities, although MIT itself had actually introduced them in 1949. Sloman included them, albeit in a modernised form, as Com-

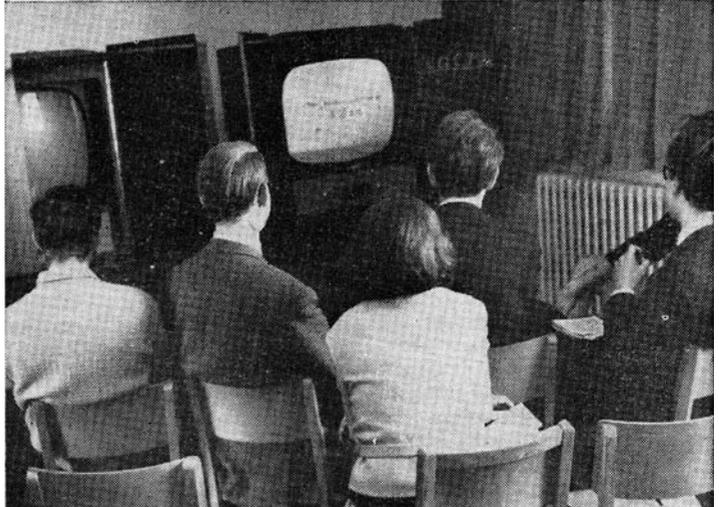


Students in kitchen-living room of first accommodation tower, Rayleigh, c. 1966

parative Studies. Literature and Government would focus on the modern world, particularly the cultures of the USA, Soviet Russia, Latin America and Britain, to be studied in comparison with one another. There would not be separate departments of History, Philosophy or Modern Languages.

Sloman considered human knowledge to be a unity within an undivided continuum and thought that the traditional boundaries between subjects were artificial and intellectually damaging. Physics overlapped with mathematics, maths with economics, economics with political science, and political science with literature. Whereas the traditional university was a federation of separate departments, Essex would be a federation of overlapping schools of study which were to be the primary academic groups. This concept encouraged new subjects to emerge between the boundaries of the old and discouraged the departmental empire-building that had killed off the project to establish

*Students watching
lecture on closed
circuit television from
The Listener publica-
tion of the third 1963
Reith Lecture*

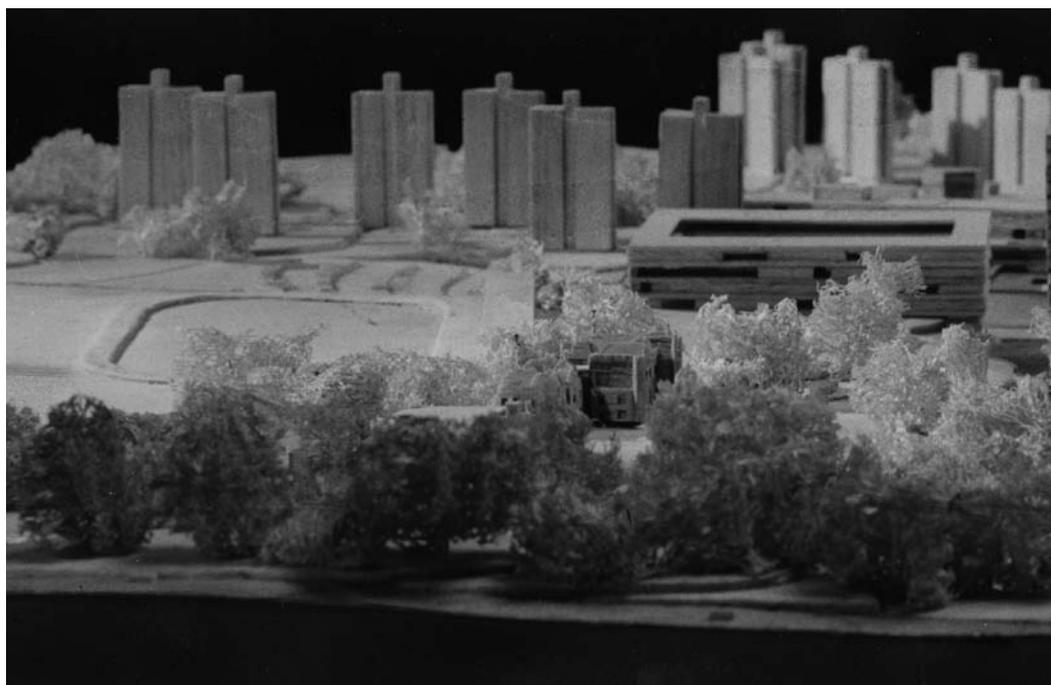


a British MIT at Birmingham. Sloman also hoped that his approach would heal the rift between Snow's Two Cultures.

Student independence, self-education and recreation

While existing universities still acted in loco parentis – in the role of parents – through single-sex colleges and halls of residence, Essex would treat its students as adults. Sloman accepted that modern students demanded the same independence as their wage-earning contemporaries. But above all he wanted to prepare the future technocrats for corporate life. This 'new man' would be a social animal, an 'outward-looking expert' nurtured in self-governing flats in towers with men and women living together, albeit on alternate floors. The 'no rules' regime was adopted not for the sake of liberalism as an end in itself, but to ensure that the Essex graduate would be quite unlike the stereotype of the scientific expert as a boffin or geek.

Self education was as important as formal teaching. In the University Library, with the books on open access, students could study their own subject and serendipitously discover related topics shelved nearby. Modern technology would enhance the use of the Library just as audio-



Panoramic photograph of the final master plan of the University of Essex, October 1963

visual aids and closed circuit television would be used in teaching. Students would explore the arts and culture as well as engaging in sports after teaching ended, creating a 24/7 university. Sloman endorsed Annan's plans for an Art School, believing that art could be a highly effective way to humanise fledgling experts.

Community

Sloman's ultimate target size was 20,000, double Annan's, to allow for even larger departments where scientists could invest in cutting-edge equipment such as cyclotrons. This bigness, unparalleled in Britain though commonplace in the USA, would be reconciled with intimacy through small groups for teaching and living and through the architecture, as we shall see.

Sloman's big idea was that everything was interrelated: industry with the university, research with teaching, one subject with another, learning with living, teachers and students. He was convinced that it was possible to have



both/and rather than either/or. Essex could be big, but also a community; it could train technocrats, who would also be cultivated and sociable; one could have both the arts and the sciences and thereby reconcile the Two Cultures. He also wanted Essex to be experimental; military metaphors conveyed the exhilaration of a new university breaking down the boundaries: 'Attack on a narrow front, and where there is a breakthrough go hell bent ahead.'

ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING

The final master plan was unveiled at the 22 October launch and exhibited throughout Essex. It was a great advance upon the LEGO model in the ingenuity with which it expressed Sloman's lofty ambitions and catered for his academic and social requirements.

Fostering community

A campus of 20,000 must be big. A key innovation was the high street of five pedestrian squares connected by broad flights of steps to form a linear town centre. In part this derived from recent plans for Hook New Town and for Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. As the university expanded courtyards could be added behind the squares. The 28 accommodation towers resemble an Italian hill town like Montepulciano. Everything is close together, no more than five minutes' walk from the centre.

Unifying knowledge

There are no freestanding buildings for autonomous departments or even schools. Instead these are distributed along corridors in a continuous zig-zag around the five squares. Thus sociologists encounter economists and mathematicians physicists. New subjects can be housed without adding free-standing buildings.

Accommodating students

There was one flat on each floor of the towers with bedsits, and studies for students living in digs off-campus as well, so that they too would be socially integrated. All would share a kitchen and common room to create a social group of students from different subjects, as on an Oxbridge staircase. Even when the university reached its ultimate size students would not feel isolated. The towers are clustered between the zig-zag so that accommodation is close to seminar rooms, to be used for clubs and societies after teaching. Around the squares are shops, restaurants and places for indoor sports. Neither a Senior Common Room nor a Students' Union was initially envisaged. 'The Students' Union of Paris is the Boulevard St Michel,' said Capon.

The importance of the Library as a place of learning

and self-education is emphasised by its dominant location at the head of the valley by the highest square overlooking the new lake.

Interrelationships

Capon's plan ensures that everything is interrelated and mixed together, living as well as learning, symbolised by the zig-zag which was also used as an emblem for publicity as on the cover of this guide. The 28 towers express Essex's academic ambitions and modernity. Newspapers called it a space age university. The Architects' Journal wrote that AC-P's plan related to 'the most adventurous academic and social ideas to have emerged from the new universities. Nowhere does the layout of the buildings so closely trace the shape of the idea they serve.' Capon summed up its character: 'The English love making things shaggy and softening everything up. We decided to do something fierce to let them work within.'

NEW BRUTALISM: MODERN ARCHITECTURE IN THE 1950s

As well as responding to a new concept of higher education, the University of Essex was determined by a major change of direction in contemporary architecture. This was called New Brutalism. It had been initiated by young British architects in the early Fifties. Unlike the first wave of Modern Architecture in the 1920s with its sleekly rational combination of steel and glass in a graph paper grid, condemned by the Brutalists as banal, they used powerful sculptural forms and raw concrete. The French call this material *béton brut*, hence Brutalism. In town planning



Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 1961

Brutalists favoured the compact layouts of traditional cities with their streets and squares. The appearance of Brutalist buildings often echoed palaces, baptisteries and towers. Brutalism aimed to create powerful and memorable images rather than beautiful ones.

After the war Le Corbusier, the most influential architect of the 20th century, blazed the trail, having earlier been a pioneer of the rationalist modern style. His convent of La Tourette near Lyons was completed in 1960. Every stage of its construction was followed avidly by young Brutalists. There is no mistaking the source of the windows of the teaching buildings at Essex.

Another favoured architect was Louis Kahn, whose Yale Art Gallery of 1954 is grid-like on the outside; inside, heavy concrete coffers form the ceilings. A triangular staircase is hidden within a top-lit concrete drum. It inspired the hexagonal entry staircase, 'The Cloisters', of Essex Library, demolished in 2012. Kahn's Richards Laboratories of 1960 at the University of Pennsylvania also has a sculptural exterior. The lifts and stairs are enclosed within tall brick windowless towers, whose silhouette is stark, particularly in black and white reproductions, as architects would have seen them. They suggested the Essex Towers.

Japanese architects were also attracted by Corbusier. Kenzo Tange's Kagawa Prefecture of 1958 has projecting cantilevers to support the floors, a form of construction which originates in traditional Japanese wooden buildings. Widely illustrated, this building suggested features of the Essex Library.

Writers and photographers contributed. Crucially important was Jane Jacobs whose 1961 classic, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, has influenced city planning ever since. It is a polemic against Modernist

Louis Kahn, triangular staircase within concrete drum, Yale University Art Gallery, 1954



comprehensive redevelopment. Jacobs favoured traditional cities, their communities and the theatre of street life to be found within them. English photographers of street life, Nigel Henderson and Roger Mayne, were associated with the Brutalists. The squares at Essex were designed to foster social intercourse. When Sloman asked about the absence of architectural ornament, Capon replied that the students would be the ornament.

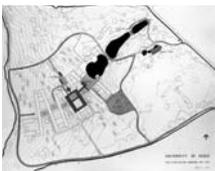
Architects' Co-Partnership in the Fifties

The firm which Kenneth Capon helped to found just before World War II was based on the conviction that architecture should serve a social purpose and change so-

ciety instead of merely looking beautiful. They made their post-war reputation with the Brynmawr Rubber Factory of 1951 in South Wales which brought work to an area of high unemployment. But far from purely functional, it was formed of nine adjacent halls roofed with saucer-shaped domes derived from the Bank of England designed by Sir John Soane around 1800. Capon was one of three partners involved. Aesthetics, he believed, could not be ignored. He was one of the boldest architects in AC-P and designed an insect-like theatre for Bryanston School that was impossible to construct within budget.

Capon's competition entry for Churchill College had traditional college courtyards, although not fully enclosed, and four towers the same height as those at Essex. Capon wanted compactness and the contrast of low-rise with 'a spiky verticality of pinnacles against an open sky.' His development plan for student accommodation on King's College's city centre site also combined four twelve-storey towers with the traditional Cambridge courtyard. Both schemes were the starting point for the 1962 LEGO model.

THE BUILDINGS



*Master plan of
University of Essex
showing first stage of
building programme
shaded in, 1963*

The buildings at Essex are notable for their powerful and memorable image as well as the ingenuity of their layout. The following description will focus upon the first stage of construction, completed in 1966-7. This was a microcosm of the whole, consisting of a pedestrian route that connected the courtyard of buildings for teaching, the Physics Courtyard, the enclosed Square 4, the Hexagon Restaurant and the first two residential towers. Its axis ran from Physics in the south to the Towers in the north. The Library was on the adjacent lakeside Square 5. Also constructed in Stage 1 were all five concrete podia for the squares, running at right angles from east to west.

Square 4
c. 1966



The Physics Courtyard and Square 4

These buildings are constructed according to a standardised system of smoothly surfaced concrete posts and lintels, or beams. The repetitiveness of this pattern is relieved by the irregular non-repeating pattern of the mullions, the vertical divisions between the windows, borrowed from Corbusier's La Tourette. Two dramatic spiral staircases, sadly demolished, provided access to the Physics Courtyard, which was stepped in grass to make an outdoor theatre. The stage with a loggia behind faced south to catch the sun. The loggia has since been enclosed for offices. The courtyard was also intended as a quiet place in contrast to the bustle



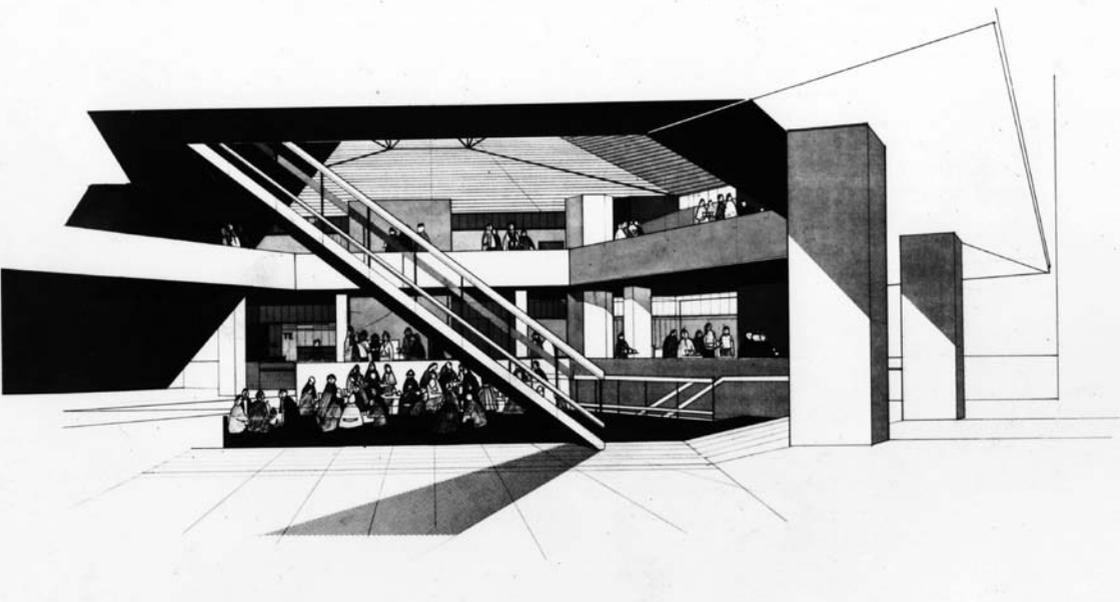
*Hexagon Restaurant
from the north,
c. 1966*

of Square 4 with its shops, bars and entrances to the teaching buildings.

Square 4 and Physics were meant to be somewhat functional, ‘to create,’ as Capon put it, ‘something analogous to the repose and absence of straining after incident’ of eighteenth century London squares. But within this understated urban fabric Capon allowed room for some monuments which could be ‘individual and nonconformist,’ as he put it; ‘if they can be jewels, so much the better.’

The Hexagon Restaurant

The first monument was the Hexagon, designed not by Capon but by Alexander Saunders, his talented assistant, only 25 at the time. The outside looks like a spaceship raised upon fin-like concrete piers and cantilevered out from a central core. Its glories lie within. It is a substantial undivided space 24 metres wide and about 8 metres high resembling a medieval baptistery, with a gallery on the upper level. The original tables were also hexagonal. There are



*Drawing of interior of
Hexagon Restaurant
by Alexander Saunders
of AC-P who
designed it*

few windows evoking the Pantheon in Rome. The lighting comes almost entirely from a central skylight with just six pairs of narrow slits on each storey. They were not included in the original design but Sloman insisted upon them. There is a sense of enclosure and of dramatic light which throws ever-changing patterns as the sun moves round. The Hexagon's magnificence arises from its dome encompassing the entire space - a shallow hexagonal pyramid supported by thin steel rods. At their centre six more rods form a downward pointing hexagonal pyramid which mirrors the upward pointing pyramid of the central skylight in the form of a quartz crystal. The whole Hexagon indeed is the shape of a flattened but otherwise regular quartz crystal. It is, quite literally, a jewel.

North Towers

The towers anchor the university to the skyline. They are built of solid structural brickwork without a steel frame, and were at the time amongst the tallest examples of their kind

*North Towers and
Library at sunset*



in the world. A grey-blue engineering brick is used for its load-bearing strength and to create a powerful silhouette. At first Capon wanted them to be cylindrical. They are designed with great subtlety to present an infinite variety of groupings from different viewpoints around the campus and beyond. Sometimes they cluster together like a castle, they line up in futuristic skyscraper canyons, they mass together like cliffs, from some angles they even look like spires. They are majestic rather than beautiful, awe-inspiring and even fearsome. To use the words of John Ruskin, they possess a 'severe and mysterious majesty, an undiminished awe like that felt at the presence and operation of some great spiritual power.'

While they derive from Kahn's Richards Laboratories they also resemble Gilbert Scott's great library tower at Cambridge, particularly the windows which form uninterrupted vertical lines separated by brick piers. Like that tower they may also have been intended to possess the solemn resonance of a War Memorial, for which towers and obelisks have traditionally been used. Capon also



*Chipped concrete
fluting of the ground
and first floor pillars of
Library*

*Library by third lake
and Wivenhoe Park,
c. 1966*



wanted the towers to be a symbol proclaiming ‘this is the University of Essex and it is important.’

The Library

This was the most prominent free-standing building, the nerve-centre of the University, set beside a new lake. Capon explained that ‘architecturally, its position is as significant as that of Magdalen Tower in the curving High Street of Oxford. It symbolises what the University stands for – the conservation and discovery of knowledge, the importance of self-education, and the inter-relationship of subjects.’ In its location by water and parkland it alludes to Wren’s Library



*The Cloisters,
entrance vestibule to
Library, after 1967.
Demolished June
2012*

at Trinity College, Cambridge. It is a Temple of Scholarship.

Its overall impression is one of power in its undorned post and lintel construction, its massive concrete piers with their chipped concrete fluting supporting the coupled cantilevered beams, which carry the four storeys of book stacks and reading space. It has been described as a 'book palace'. While not directly imitative

of a classical palace, it adheres to classical principles of composition: the giant rectangular box is separated into parts with a rusticated base, the upper storeys are separated by cornices, with a repeating pattern of projecting beam-ends. It is surmounted by a balustrade. Like an English country house it commands the view of park and lakes.

Originally one entered under the imposing colonnade formed of the overhanging beams and was channelled into the book stacks through a small architectural gem, the jewel in the crown both of the Library and the campus: an entrance vestibule. This had three sections. First was a ground floor corridor; this led to a hexagonal staircase enclosed in a top lit hexagonal pavilion with a pyramidal roof like the Hexagon Restaurant; one finally entered the library through the third element, the circulation desk.

A staircase enables an architect to control the user's experience. The ground floor passageway was lit on both sides by narrow floor-to-ceiling windows separated by wide mullions. This created a penumbra while providing glimpses of the park. The stripes of light and shade in the windows and in the patterns they threw upon floor and ceiling suggested steps, framing the staircase itself. Apart from a single window in its ceiling, the stairwell was windowless, so that one left behind the outside world of sensory experience and was drawn into a chapel-like enclosure, austere in character, almost Romanesque, a domain of thought and reflection, Sloman's haven for self-education. Capon explained his intention 'to create a cloistral feeling that would put the reader in the right emotional frame of mind' for entering the library. The librarians always called it The Cloisters.

CONCLUSION

The buildings of the University of Essex embody the ambitions of its founders to establish a British MIT, serving the 'military-industrial-political complex', even though liberal in ethos. Capon employed the heroic style and the planning concepts of New Brutalism. Both academic ambitions and architectural style were the products of unrepeatably historical circumstances.

Those ambitions, however, were soon derailed. In the immediate aftermath of the Robbins Report the UGC actually asked Sloman to accelerate his targets so as to reach 1,800 students by 1967, 3,000 by 1970 and 6,000 by 1975. Then, only three years later, the UGC's 1967 financial settlement for the following five years sharply cut the anticipated number of students in 1972 to 1,800, thereby pushing the target of 10,000, let alone 20,000 far into the future. This was seen as the revenge of the academic establishment for Essex's ungentlemanly emphasis on research, and for what they correctly perceived as the intellectual arrogance of the academic staff who undiplomatically challenged the Committee's assumptions at their Visitation in March 1966.

In May 1968 it was the students' turn. They prevented Dr Thomas Inch from lecturing to the Chemistry Society. Inch was a researcher from Porton Down, the government's research establishment for chemical and biological weapons. In the Vietnam War the US was using napalm, a chemical weapon. Sloman, backed by his Founding Professors, more by some than by others, summarily suspended three students. A Free University was declared. Even though there were student revolutions almost everywhere, it was Essex that became the national symbol of student protest in the 1960s and 70s. School heads advised their pupils



*Drawing of Rayleigh,
the first residential
tower by Conrad
Schevenels of AC-P,
1964*

against applying, government funding fell off, closure was threatened and for several decades the size of the University did not rise above 3,000.

Departmentalism soon asserted itself. Departments of Art History and even History and Philosophy were founded within the first decade. This undermined the original experiment of the multi-disciplinary comparative study of international cultures. One cause was a lack of demand for such an innovative course and a slump in student demand also led to the closure of Physics and Chemistry by the turn of the 21st century. Maths narrowly escaped. Essex's high academic reputation came to be based on its social science and humanities departments. Nonetheless the university remains a radical institution, even if not quite in the way its founders intended. The buildings, disliked by some and admired by others, did indeed help to foster a sense of community and inter-departmental camaraderie

while preserving the integrity of Wivenhoe Park.

But there was little need for many new buildings. What was built was timid and traditional rather than fierce - more at home in the suburbs of Colchester. Brutalism fell out of fashion and Capon's buildings were little respected. Important features were demolished, such as The Cloisters and the spiral stairs; internal light wells and external loggias were filled in, and some of the carefully crafted concrete surfaces were painted. The interior of the Hexagon was covered in post-modern decoration.

Today, after 50 years, the University finally has 11,000 students and the central squares are buzzing with activity. Essex has expanded to new campuses at Southend and Loughton. There has been a massive building programme over the past 15 years with the new Library extension and Student Centre, the Ivor Crewe Lecture Theatre, the new building to house the Business School and the Gateway building at the Southend Campus sharing the boldness of Capon's architecture. Brutalism itself has returned to fashion architecturally and this anniversary exhibition, housed in the refurbished Hexagon, exemplifies the University's new-found respect for its original architecture.

**Jules Lubbock
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University of Essex

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years