



Anstey Hall Barns

Photo credit: J. Hill

The best sustainable
regeneration
schemes involve
renovation not removal;
imagination not imitation.
ROGER HUNT reports



Something old, something new

Old buildings have the potential to be valuable and sustainable assets and there are strong arguments for retaining them rather than demolishing and starting afresh, not least to prevent the loss of the embodied carbon locked within their fabric. Reusing old buildings creatively can act as a catalyst to the process of regeneration, with successful schemes harnessing history, stitching together communities and drawing outsiders in. Critical to this is the use of good, modern design that embraces an architectural style that is of today and gives new life to old buildings, rather than being some poor pastiche of a past era.

Attempting to blatantly copy or create a pastiche of an earlier age often feels uncomfortable and is rarely successful. To prevent confusion, new work should express modern needs in a modern language and add to, rather than detract from, the building's historic provenance. This is a theme that I explore in my latest book, *New Design for Old Buildings*. Published in association with the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), it encourages a more radical approach to design when working in the historic environment.

The SPAB has long embraced impressive and respectful new design that is clearly of its time and readable as such. "The SPAB approach encourages appreciation and maintenance of old buildings. Sometimes, to ensure continuing care and use, sensitive change is needed," explains Matthew Slocombe, SPAB director.

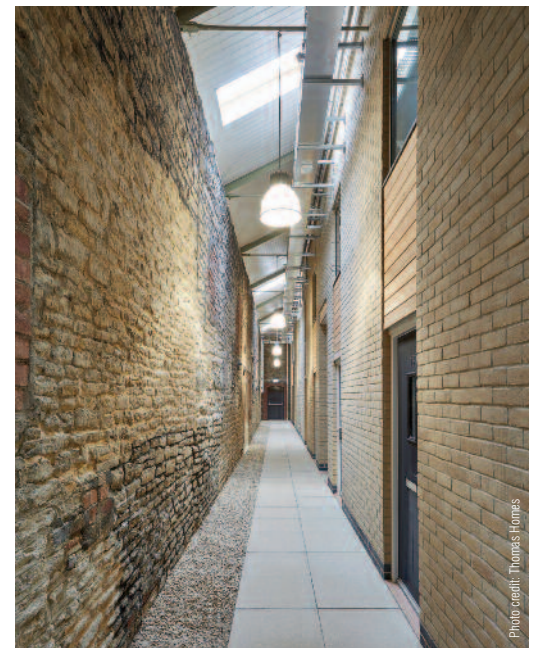
Among those to have embraced good, forward-looking design is Urban Splash. Tom Bloxham, the company's chairman and co-founder, asserts that buildings need to be allowed to breathe and express themselves. "It's a very simple language about taking old buildings and analysing what's good about them. What's good about them you keep and you preserve



and you respect, and what's not good about them you change. When you make that change it's unapologetically modern so it looks like it's been changed in the 21st century."

Urban Splash has been at the forefront of regeneration since the early 1990s with old, often listed, buildings at the heart of many of its schemes and the value of good design is clear. Typically, these schemes are mixed use – involving residential accommodation, office space and leisure facilities – encouraging people to come in, see and use them.

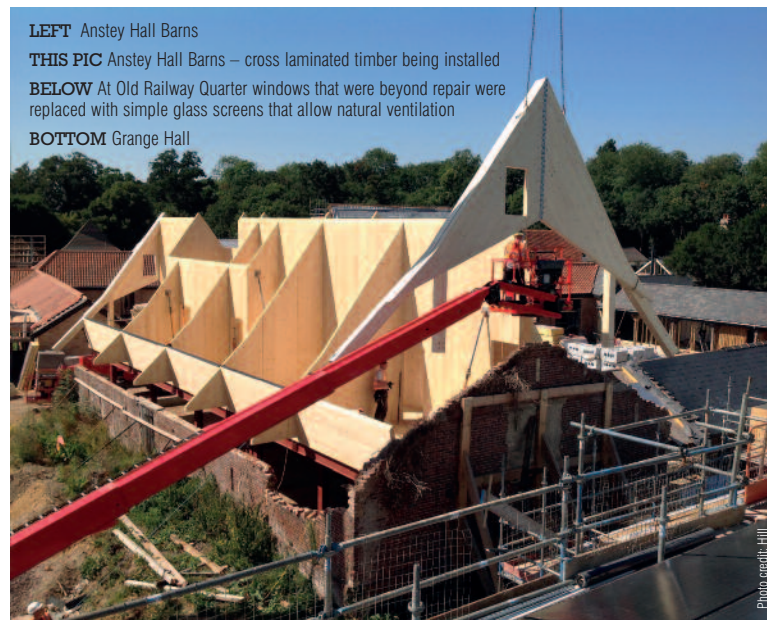
In Devon, Urban Splash realised that with its scheme for the Grade I listed Royal William Yard in Plymouth the real challenge was not so much the buildings themselves – although there were inevitably ▶



“What’s good about them [old buildings] you keep and you preserve and you respect, and what’s not good you change. When you make that change it’s unapologetically modern”



TOP Park Hill, Sheffield by Urban Splash
ABOVE The homes at Old Railway Quarter, Swindon, are accessed through shared 'streets' running through the building
THIS PIC PV panels and roof lights at Old Railway Quarter, Swindon



LEFT Anstey Hall Barns

THIS PIC Anstey Hall Barns – cross laminated timber being installed

BELOW At Old Railway Quarter windows that were beyond repair were replaced with simple glass screens that allow natural ventilation

BOTTOM Grange Hall

issues – but the location. The development was on the 'wrong side' of Plymouth and, having historically been a victualling yard, there were perceptions about the surroundings; for example, a red light district once existed nearby. For the scheme to succeed, the overall design quality had to be sufficiently high to bring in really good restaurateurs, businesses, residents and visitors to enjoy and use the buildings.

Urban Splash took a similarly robust approach to design at its Park Hill scheme. The former council housing block is Grade II* listed and a landmark on the Sheffield skyline. When it opened in 1961, it was the most ambitious inner-city development of its time but, by the 1980s, the area was so rundown and the perceptions so poor that it was on the brink of demolition.

For the regeneration to succeed, Urban Splash had to take a radical approach and created a place for nearly 2,000 people to live, with offices, shops, a nursery, bars and restaurants below. The bold design strategy transformed the modernist concrete



landmark through the creation of new openings, the introduction of daylight and the use of colour.

"We see buildings as living organisms with a series of layers and inevitably adaptations over a course of life, there to be celebrated and to be physical," explains Bloxham.

Despite the far-reaching nature of schemes such as Park Hill, conservation must remain a key objective if the all-important heritage of the buildings and the site is to be maintained. In the foreword to *New Design for Old Buildings*, Kevin McCloud, the author, broadcaster and designer, makes it clear that good conservation demands a clear and rigorous contemporary approach for new work, just as much as it requires delicacy and respect in dealing with the past: "We muddle the two at our peril because it leads to rootless, confusing and ineffectual architecture that does not speak of its time, or value its own past. Doing both these things well and clearly, however, is a mark of a civilised culture and we have come to recognise that those cities in which the historical fabric is conserved and celebrated alongside confident, contemporary architecture are places that score most highly for liveability. Making sense of the past, after all, helps us understand where we are and where we're going."

This philosophy was embraced at Anstey Hall Barns by Hill Residential and the collaborative team of David Miller Architects and Hill Bespoke. The scheme involved the conversion and renovation of eight historic barns, two of which are Grade II listed, and the creation of four new builds on a site in Trumpington, Cambridge.

In a derelict state, the 17th- and 18th-century barns presented a challenge, so BIM, drone and laser-point scanning technologies were employed to enable the buildings to be renovated efficiently and precisely. Importantly, the use of these digital design techniques helped ensure the maximum amount of historic fabric was retained, cut waste and allowed the old and the new to be integrated with a high degree of architectural precision.

Using the digital model of the existing building, the new floors and walls within the conversions were formed of cross laminated timber, which was cut offsite to fit exactly into the uneven structure and simply craned into place within a matter of a few days. The careful use of materials plays a big part in the scheme's success. Traditional and modern ▶





Photo credit: Hill



LEFT & THIS PIC Anstey Hall Barns
BELOW Old Railway Quarter, Swindon, with the apartments' front doors on the right

Photo credit: Hill



Photo credit: Thomas Homes

apartments into the vast interiors of two large 1840s' workshops with cast iron trussed roofs. The homes are accessed via shared 'streets' running within the old buildings. This maintains a sense of the original volume and industrial past which is helped by the visibility of the original trusses and the use of appropriate new materials that provide a tactile and honest feel. Considerable thought was also given to the incorporation of 177 photovoltaic (PV) panels. While they are visible, their impact has been minimised by positioning them in line with the newly inserted rooflights to provide a unified appearance that suits the industrial nature of the buildings.

A more conventional but nonetheless challenging scheme is Grange Hall in Stoke Newington, London, where nine homes have been created within a former school dating from 1837. The conversion was undertaken by Cubitt Greystock working with architects Nissen Richards Studio and, while historic fabric is respected and retained wherever possible, the new work is celebrated so the building is still readable, despite the vertical division of the internal volumes to create three floors of flexible and contemporary living space.

Notable is the window treatment, in particular the dormer windows. High performance windows have been introduced throughout but, despite their modern design, the dormers reflect the form of the derelict originals and are introduced into sloping ceilings lined with the surviving timber boarding to create dramatic top floor living areas. Elsewhere technology, new and traditional styling and materials combine to create homes that have a firm foot in the past but are very much of today. [sh](#)

CONTACTS

David Miller Architects www.david-miller.co.uk
Nissen Richards Studio
www.nissenrichardsstudio.com
SPAB www.spab.org.uk
Woodfield Brady Architects
www.woodfieldbrady.co.uk

Read Roger Hunt's blog www.huntwriter.com
and follow him on Twitter @huntwriter

SPECIAL OFFER

New Design for Old Buildings by Roger Hunt and Iain Boyd, with a foreword by Kevin McCloud, is available to Show House readers at a £5 discount off the normal price of £40 by quoting NDFOB5 at www.ribabookshops.com. Offer valid until 31 March 2018.



complement one another with some of the barns expressing their original beams while timber, bricks, pantiles, slates and lime mortars are combined with large glazed screens, grey zinc roofing and aluminium rainwater goods. The resultant mix of old and new is clearly readable. In the largest of the barns, a double-sided log burner and a contemporary kitchen with a mezzanine study platform above have been introduced in the form of pods, ensuring the internal volume and understanding of the building is maintained.

Another housebuilder to have successfully used good new design in the conversion of historic buildings is Thomas Homes. At Old Railway Quarter, a mixed-use development at the heart of a conservation area in Swindon, Wiltshire, it has created a successful scheme based on buildings rooted in the history of the Great Western Railway.

Working with Woodfield Brady Architects, Thomas Homes has carefully slotted 56 mezzanine and loft