

Michael Brown

Primarily recognised as an urban designer, with much of his best known work in the public realm, and in London. Using a limited range of materials and developing an idiosyncratic design style he created some highly distinctive landscapes reflecting his combined skills in architecture and landscape.

He applied for a scholarship at the University of Pennsylvania to study furniture design and was instead offered a place on McHarg's landscape architecture course. McHarg had a profound and enduring influence on Brown's analytical and design approach, and this is apparent from Brown's ecological strategy for Redditch New Town. Sequential site analysis drawings prepared for each project further reflect this influence.

Having worked in landscape architecture in the States, with Dan Kiley amongst others, and in the UK as an architect with Eric Lyons on Span housing, Brown set up on his own in the 1960s. He built up his practice employing up to 30 people at its peak in the 70s: it became one of the important training grounds for architects and landscape architects, and many have subsequently established their own successful practices.

During this period, Brown created a series of 'standard' design details on A4 sheets of tracing, modified as required for each project. Brick on slope, ramping sometimes from horizontal to 45 degrees was one of his hallmarks, his favourite being a dark blue engineering brick. He also demonstrated great skill in handling changes in level, whether for adventurous play, mostly designed in brick, or as coherent mounding for screening or planting. A sand tray in the office was used to help achieve the desired effect. After he closed his practice he became more interested in sustainability issues, before it became popular, and was co-ordinator for the Sustainable Villages Group in 1994, looking at first and third world rural settlements.

He kept almost a complete archive of his work at his house at Kingham in the Cotswolds after he retired and it was from there that we made our selection of material.

Michael Basil Brown
8.05.1923 – 20.02.1996

Architect, landscape architect, lecturer RIBA, FILA
RIBA 1953; AILA 1962; FLI 1994

Education:

Architecture Edinburgh College of Art 1940-41 1947-1951, [1952?]
Landscape Architecture University of Pennsylvania MLA 1955-1957

Married 1954 sculptor [worked as Joan Brown]; 1 daughter and 2 sons

Practice:

1951-54 LCC Architects Dept, comprehensive schools
1954-55 Pite Son and Fairweather (later renamed George Trew & Dunn), housing and multi storey flats
1955 Philadelphia Planning Commission and Henry Churchill, planning of Eastwick redevelopment
1956 Office of Grant Simon, architect, Philadelphia, Delaware Expressway study
1956-57 Office of Vincent Kling, architect, layout of Civic Centre, Norfolk, Virginia; landscape design for school, Long Island; Monsanto Chemical Co HQ, St Louis, Missouri.

- 1957-58 Office of Dan Kiley, landscape architect, Charlotte, Vermont; Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, New York City; landscape for houses by Eero Saarinen at Columbus, Indiana (Miller House), by Marcel Breuer at Massachusetts (Tanglewood) and Washington D.C., by Philip Johnson at Ohio; IBM by Eliot Noyes at Poughkeepsie New York; National Academy of Sciences, Washington DC; Filtration plant, Chicago; O'Hare field (airport), Chicago; IBM by Eero Saarinen at Rochester, Minnesota; Bell Telephone Laboratories by Eero Saarinen at New Jersey; Union Carbide and Carbon Co. HQ by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill at New York; housing redevelopment project, Washington D.C.
- 1958-59 Teaching under Ian McHarg at Dept of Landscape Architecture at University of Pennsylvania; research project 'light as a basic material of landscape' sponsored by Rockefeller Foundation
- 1959-60 Architect office of Peter Bosanquet, Oxford, schools near Kidderminster and Bath; Furze Platt junior school, Maidenhead, Berks; boarding houses for St Edward's School Oxford
- 1960-61 Worked with Eric Lyons, on Fieldend, Twickenham; Plantation, Blackheath; Connelmore Cheltenham, Southrow, Blackheath
- 1962 Set up own practice Michael Brown (Partnership) in a back room, then rented corner shop with drawing boards bolted onto salvaged doors, by mid 1970s becoming one of the larger landscape offices in UK with approximately 20 staff.
- 1981 Dissolved partnership, following reduction in public housing work, set up smaller practice involved with private sector work

Work:

Landscape planning:

Redditch New Town, Warrington; Graham Park, Hendon; Essex University, Colchester; Britannia Naval College, Dartmouth; Fulmer Grange, Bucks;

Housing:

Winstanley Road, Wandsworth; Greenland Estate, Redditch; Brunel Estate, Westminster; Mozart and Herries St, Westminster; Ashlone Wharf, Wandsworth; Grahame Park, Hendon; Somers Town and Elm Village, Camden; Clydesdale Rd, Notting Hill; Harmood Street, Camden; Ward House, Portsmouth; Berridge House, West Hampstead; Beavers Farm,

Offices, Industrial and retail:

Fire Research Station, Herts; Camden Town Hall extension garden; Bedford Station; Heathrow Airport; IBM Greenford, Middlesex; Shortlands, Hammersmith; Foundation Park, Cannon Lane, Maidenhead; Great West House, Brentford; J Sainsbury, Garratt Lane, Wandsworth and Norwich; Swan Hotel, Streatley; Broadbridge retail park Horsham; Ashdown business park, Maresfield

Public works – Services:

Queen Elizabeth Park, Guildford; Alexander Barracks, Pirbright, Surrey; Married Officers Quarters, Hendon.

Health, Education and Recreation:

Richmond Swimming Baths, Carmel College, Wallingford; Black Lion Sports Centre; Northern College of Music, Manchester; Gillingham, Kent; Stalybridge, Cheshire; Amersham Hospital; Furze Platt Junior School; West Middlesex Hospital redevelopment.

Parks and squares:

Cavendish Square, Westminster; St Mary's Churchyard and Paddington Green; Surrey Canal, Southwark; Grahame Park, Hendon; Euston Square, Westminster; Somers Town, Camden.

Roads:

Amersham Bypass, Bucks; Milton Keynes Grid Roads; South Perimeter Road, Heathrow Airport; Urban Highway project (with Robert Adam) London.

Miscellaneous:

Task Force Trees, Countryside Commission; Cheam Water works

Awards:

Civic Trust Awards:

Winstanley Road, 1967; Richmond swimming baths 1967; Guards depot, Pirbright 1971; Fitzroy Rd Camden, 1981; Harmood Rd Camden 1981

Civic Trust Commendation:

Clydesdale Rd, 1979, Herries St North, Westminster 1979; Fire Research Station, Herts 1980

RIBA Award:

Alexander Barracks Guards Depot, Pirbright, 1971

MOHLG Good Housing Awards:

Greenlands Redditch Town Centre, 1970; Winstanley Rd 1967; Mozart St 1974

Landscape Heritage Award, Special Commendation:

Brunel Estate 1975 Environmental Award, RB Kensington and Chelsea: Clydesdale Rd 1979

Brick Development Association Award: Brunel Estate 1977; Graylands, Horsham HQ for Redland bricks 1987

BALI Award:

Graylands, Horsham 1987

See main catalogue:

www.landscapeinstitute.org/library_and_information_services/catalogue

For drawings, books and articles on Michael Brown and his work held at Landscape Institute Library, and other links.