



for the record

The idea to preserve and catalogue landscape architects' working drawings, plans and other materials has taken hold. Archivist **Annabel Downs** charts the progress of the UK Landscape Architecture Paper Preservation Project

We've received information about drawings for Telford and Cumbernauld New Towns, a botanical garden in Adelaide, work in Sri Lanka, a new town in Hong Kong, the recreation of a baroque water garden with 92m gravity fountain in Gloucestershire, we've been given a copy of 'Pickering's Principle' and we've had offers from people to contribute to oral histories on Mawson and Frank Clark. We think we are in clover.

This information – and there is lots more coming through – is the result of a questionnaire we sent out this July to members who have been in practice prior to 1990. We've been acquiring drawings at the Landscape Institute library for the past ten years largely in a responsive way. And not just drawings, but

sketchbooks, job files, slides, photos and other ephemera, including spectacles, pens, medals, city keys and tree stamps.

And then, in September 2004, Kate Lander and I attended the launch of the Scottish Architects' Papers Preservation Project in Edinburgh. This project involved 100 architectural practices being approached and

25 raided (by consent) for their papers. Not only have those architectural drawings and papers been saved, but they are also effectively in the public domain via a catalogue and internet access. Some of the most fragile plans have been digitised and an illustrated book has been produced which both describes the process and provides a succinct account of each practice within the collection. The interest from local and family history groups has been phenomenal.

As soon as we properly grasped what the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS) and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) between them had pulled off, we realised we had to do something similar for landscape architecture.

This sort of collection not only has enormous potential for use in learning and publication – as interest in our existing collection has already demonstrated – but also for communicating ideas about why landscape is so critical to man. These drawings and papers hold the cultural memory of 20th-century UK. This includes the new towns movement, the industrial landscapes of roads, reservoirs and power, the creation of country parks and garden festivals, for example – the area of influence is almost endless. And we can use this to enhance the profile of landscape architects and landscape architecture to a national and international audience.

By this stage in our thinking, the enormity of the project was beginning to sink in, and we wanted the urge to pursue these ideas to fade, for there to be ten good reasons why not to do it. But the more folk we consulted – Prof Charles McKean (who initiated the collection on behalf of RIAS), Rebecca Bailey (from

PHOTOGRAPHS AND DRAWINGS: TELFORD: ALAN SIMISON; EURODISNEY: LOVEJOY; POLAND: COUVIN&MCGRIDGE

perspective



RCAHMS), heads of practices, retired and practising landscape architects, landscape academics, the international group of landscape architects we met at the LI/IFLA conference at Edinburgh this year – the more we realised we couldn't just ignore it. There has been a lot of encouragement. We couldn't pretend the idea didn't exist.

The questionnaire we are sending out is just the beginning. In fact, it's not even that: it's a feeler for interest and to find out what is still available. We decided to approach members directly rather than going through practices (which was the approach taken by the Scottish papers project), so that we could better reflect the diverse range of workplaces of landscape architects. But we know we haven't caught everyone's attention yet, nor yet knocked at all the right doors. If you haven't yet completed the questionnaire please do so and send it

back to us as soon as you can. Or if you have not received a copy of the questionnaire but would like to be involved, either download a copy from the website or contact us at the library (annabeld@l-i.org.uk). Your information is a potential resource for everyone. Too often we hear about archives being binned when offices close down or relocate or need more space. We need to act now before more valuable sources are lost.

With the oral history there is a wealth of material available about people, places, projects and training, creating another huge resource with potential use in education, research etc. For example, having been taught by someone who was in turn taught by Frank Clark, I want to know what Frank was like as a teacher. I want to know what Mawson was like to work for. Having recently visited a Mawson garden in the Lake District (and teeming it was with volunteers), I want

to know how much time he spent on site, planning regrading of gradients. What can you add to this potentially vast fund of experience?

The response will also help determine the form of this beast as we pull together as a team to formulate a robust strategy. We will be looking for more and continued involvement and support from practices and, in due course, for volunteers in all sorts of areas. This will be an enormous undertaking that could revolutionise knowledge and understanding about landscape architecture – and we need you to be a part of it.

The next few months will be spent analysing, planning and responding to contributors. We plan to publish a progress report in February 2006.

Annabel Downs is archivist at the Landscape Institute Library



Be a part of UKLAPPP

Download a copy of the questionnaire from www.l-i.org.uk/uklappp/index.php
Contact the library on 020 7299 4502
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