

# Editorial

## *Transatlantic lessons*

---

In June I spent three days in Rhode Island, USA, attending the Royal Society of Arts Symposium – *Transforming Urban Communities: lessons from Providence and Liverpool*. To be honest, I was attracted to this event more out of curiosity than expectation. How, I thought, could Providence, a modest city, currently around 180,000 souls, even with its exquisite architectural heritage of the colonial and post-revolutionary period, bear comparison with Liverpool's mighty architectural legacy, its one-time position as the first port of Empire and gateway to the Americas? Could Providence really have suffered decline as devastating as its Mersey cousin? And could it have a vision to compare with Liverpool's plans as European Capital of Culture 2008, or have boldness to compare with Liverpool's successful bid for the maritime quarter's inscription on the World Heritage List?

In all these aspects I found myself surprised. Comparisons between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British and American port cities, their trading heritage, and their architecture tend to focus upon the larger trading cities, most frequently New York, Chicago, and others compared with Liverpool, Glasgow, and London. But in this symposium the focus of attention was on the spirit of regeneration, the ambition to take bold steps, the commitment of political will, and the skills required of strong leaders in both cities, able to lift and sustain hearts in the long run-up to investment. Providence is now a much brighter place. Its historical architecture shines better for realignment of the river and relocation of the railway station and tracks. New public space in the heart of the city provides a venue for daytime leisure and evening entertainment. Providence still lacks contemporary architecture to challenge and inspire, but the scale and ambition of its political and financial leaders is truly impressive and applied in this manner in the UK could fashion huge opportunity for architectural heritage. Well done RSA United States office!

This issue of the *Journal* presents six papers selected to cover issues in the UK and abroad and provide a balance of research, practice, and

## Editorial

insightful commentary. *The Sandford Inventory of Earth Buildings as a Conservation Aid*, authored by Dr Margaret Ford, Dr Richard Griffiths, and Linda Watson, from the University of Plymouth School of Architecture, and *The Changing Façade of Magdalen College, Oxford* by Mary Thornbush and Dr Heather Viles, at the University of Oxford, provide us with the results of impressive and very carefully managed research projects which, in addition to their immediate value to practitioners, might stimulate further funded study.

*Restoring a Bosphorus Yalı: The Elusive Goal of Authenticity* is a meticulous study by Dorothy Dinsmoor of a waterside summer residence on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus strait, Istanbul. The building, one of a diminishing number built by high Ottoman officials during the 200 years of the empire's decline, is a fine example of Turkish interpretation of eighteenth-century baroque. *The Holnicote Thatching Project*, authored by National Trust building surveyor Bridget Litchfield, reviews a three-year programme of thatching works on this substantial historic estate in West Somerset where, from the outset, the intention was to develop an informed understanding of the performance of thatch and thatching techniques.

*The Sydney Opera House: An Evolving Icon* by Patricia Hale and Susan McDonald, both of the New South Wales Heritage Office, connects us with the management of one of the most appealing architectural structures of the twentieth century. The paper considers issues of integrity and authenticity, particularly in the context of architect Jørn Utzon's sudden departure as architect during construction (1965), his re-engagement as design adviser (1999), and the anticipated candidature of Sydney Opera House for inscription as a World Heritage Site. It was at Sydney Opera House in the 1990s that James Semple Kerr developed the conservation plan concept, and it is appropriate that our sixth paper, authored by Dr Chris Miele, *Conservation Plans and the Development Process*, reviews in a rigorous and scholarly manner recent employment of this device, questioning whether current guidelines for use should be reviewed.

Vincent Shacklock  
*University of Lincoln*