

Reviews

The battle for the Square

The battle for Tolmers Square by Nick Wates. Routledge & Kegan Paul. 232pp. £2.95. CI/SfB 05.

The trouble is, Nick Wates' *The battle for Tolmers Square* is really two books. One (about property speculation) is as good as the other (about honest student planners in search of a real live urban village with which to identify) is embarrassingly awful. Taking the good part first, it is an excellent introduction into property speculation theory and practice of the late '60s and early '70s, using Tolmers Square as a case study, showing that the collusion between Camden Council and the speculators was more comprehensive, and started earlier than most people thought. This will obviously be required reading for Urban Studies for a long time to come.

And now for the awful part, 'Don't let them do it to us—the story of student intervention'. It starts predictably enough '... disenchanted with the remoteness of much theoretical academic work these students wanted to be involved with "reality". They wanted to break down the barrier that exists' ... etc. etc. That particular chapter ends: 'The students then left for their summer holidays, their role as catalysts completed'. Involvement soon becomes a tedious blow by blow account of the students-who-had-become-squatters' anti- eviction campaign: 'Defend the Tolmers 81'. This self-indulgent muddle is revealingly sanctified

with a quotation from Professor P. R. Banham, also of UCL, 'When our latter-day Shakers decide to bug out of modern civilisation they do it by ... rejecting the world of the unadorned business suit ... and setting up as instant peasants in New Mexico, the Cotswolds or Tolmers Village'.

Room for another book

Some day someone will write another version of the second book: about who got what out of Tolmers, about the limits of reformism, about how Camden Council, keeping steadfastly to its own vision of Labour Partyism, forced through a CPO which managed to give the speculators about five times the actual market value, about how the area became one of the main Indian centres in London (immigrants trying to bug in, and save up for their first unadorned business suit?). And what did those shopkeepers actually think when confronted with friendly but hairy student-squatters, balloons marked 'Tolmers Rules OK' in one hand, and petitions requesting participation in the other ... a rich vein to be mined there, could be used to break down the last flimsy fences between town planning and pure fiction. But is the present book worth reading? Certainly yes—the whole field of speculation studies would be much poorer without it.

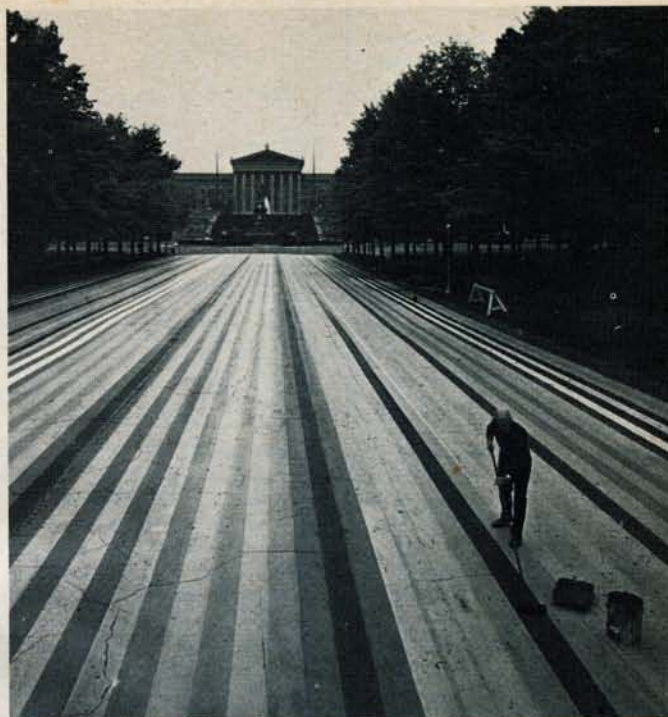
Richard Hobin

Richard Hobin taught at the AA for five years and carried out research into Camden's housing. He is now back in private practice.

Putting colours in the shade

Colour for architecture by Tom Porter and Byron Mikellides. Studio Vista. 150pp. Illus. £12.50. CI/SfB (G5).

I absolutely refuse to be conned into thinking that all this psychological stuff has anything to do with the actual business of colouring buildings. In fact as the book's meagre and rather predictable illustrations only too amply demonstrate, the choice of colours is much more the result of culture, tradition and fashion than the result of some pseudo-scientific considerations of its effect.



'Franklin's Footpath' being painted on the parkway approach to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, USA.

The first half of the book consists of a dozen or so platitudinous chapters on how dull modern architecture is, tossed together with fairly useless 'short notes on my approach' type stuff from various people. The second is taken up with oh-so-helpful 'definitions' of colours by some complicated systems (American and Swedish of course) one of which promises to plot 'isosemantic' lines of equal colour meaning in not only excitement, evaluation (?) and the inevitable temperature but also the intriguing potency factor! Only for single colours of course.

Q. If it takes 20 years to define all the different colours, how many grants will it take to plot all the combinations of those colours—the sort of thing one might actually have a use for in the real world?

A. Please don't.

Of course there are some interesting bits and pieces among the rubbish. An essay and illustrations by Jean-Phillippe Lendos whose deliciously subtle work is based (though not slavishly) on the indigenous colours of the locality. A sensible suggestion by Norman Foster for choosing the colours for artificially lit spaces from the peaks of the colour emission spectrum of that light and a lovely quote to damn the whole book from Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop*: 'A psychologist, hired from Cambridge, had planned the decorations—magenta and gamboge; colours which—it had been demonstrated by experiments on poultry and mice—conduce a mood of dignified gaiety'. Other gems include a full colour spread of a Rhesus monkey looking at a Vasarely painting.

Piers Gough

Piers Gough is an architect in private practice.

Universal history

Industrial design in Britain by Noel Carrington. George Allen & Unwin. £7.50. CI/SfB 2.

The book could equally have been titled *The history of the DIA*. There is no dubiety in this alternative as the development of design in Britain between 1915 and 1945 (the period which is Noel Carrington's concern) was the progeny of the passionate conviction of the founders of the Design and Industries Association who saw, in the critical self-questioning of British industry at the outbreak of the First World War, the opportunity to promote their pacific intention.

Their aim was clear and specific. If designers would return to the concept of simplicity this would be a harbinger for social improvement. Carrington quotes from William Morris: 'Simplicity of life, begetting simplicity of taste ... simplicity everywhere, in the palace as well as in the cottage. ...'

The DIA consciously broke their historical connection with the Arts and Crafts movement—or at least strove to do so. Art and handiwork were excluded from their manifestos. Industry could be tamed to provide 'good design' (a pseudonym for 'simple design') for the masses. But the middle class antecedents of the founders made contact with the working classes impossible. As Morris wryly complained 'I spend my life ministering to the swinish luxury of the rich', so Carrington laments the absence of trade union reaction to one of the earliest of the DIA publications *The worker's right to pleasure.*

