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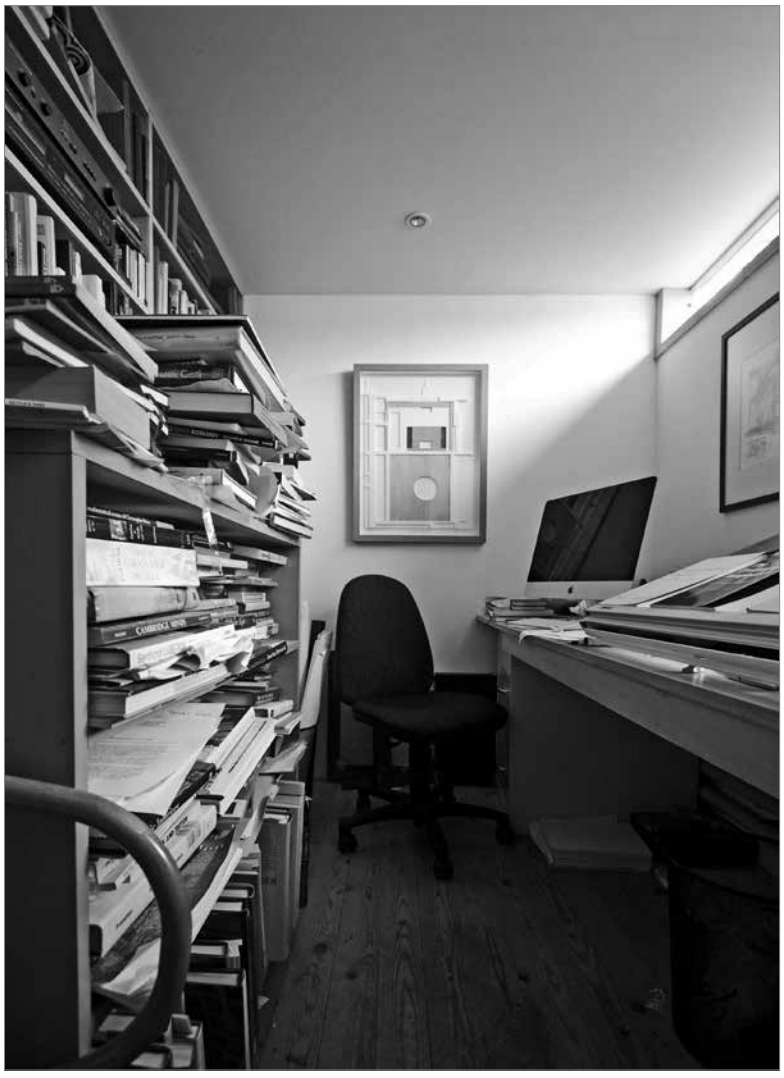
Thoughts from the garden shed

Dean Hawkes



1 Garden shed interior

When I wrote my article, 'The Centre and the Periphery: Reflections on the Nature and Conduct of Architectural Research', in the first issue of this journal,[1] I was at an important junction in my academic life. I was about to leave the Department of Architecture at Cambridge, after thirty years of research and teaching, to take up the chair of architectural design at the Welsh School of Architecture in Cardiff. To some degree the article was both a reflection on past events and an anticipation of future possibilities. Twenty-one years on, much has changed. The 'nature and conduct' of research in architecture has moved on in ways probably beyond what could nave been imagined at that now distant point and my own circumstances and experience have equally changed. In 2002, after seven years at the Welsh School, I retired and returned to Cambridge, where I was readmitted as a fellow of Darwin College. The college and the small building I built at the end of my garden, a garden shed, have been my academic base for the past fifteen years. From here I have continued to research, teach and, until 2008, to practise. It is from this perspective that I offer these further thoughts on the subject of research in architecture.

Retrospect

The starting point for the original article was the 1958 RIBA Oxford Conference on Architectural Education. In 1995 its resonances were still strongly felt by me and, I think, many others. It was at Oxford that eminent figures in the profession reviewed the then state of education. One of their aims was to enhance the status of the profession by raising requirements for entry to the schools to bring it into line with other professions, such as medicine and law. In other words, the aim was for architecture to become a graduate profession.

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As a corollary it was argued that a path should be opened for, 'developments in advanced training and research'. From this emerged the first coherent case for the development of organised research in the schools of architecture.[2] Two key participants in the conference were Leslie Martin, recently arrived to head the Cambridge school and Richard Llewelyn Davies, soon to become head of the Bartlett. In the mid-1960s, Cambridge, the Bartlett, and a number of other schools embarked on programmes of research, often attracting external funding, and the first steps were taken to realise the Oxford agenda.[3]

By 1995 most schools were engaged in research on a broad front, adopting the methods of both the *humanities* – in history and theory – and the *applied sciences* – in structures, construction, and environment – and the agenda, the 'Oxford Model', might be said to have been achieved. In light of this my purpose in the article was to move the research debate on by making the case for the development of design as research in a 'Post-Oxford' model. My title, 'The Centre and the Periphery', expressed my view that for 'architectural research' to be complete the model should include design as a key mode of enquiry. All of the substantial achievements of research on the models of the humanities and the applied sciences should be complemented by the development of research at the centre of the discipline, of *research by design*.[4] I hesitate to suggest that my article had a direct influence on the wider field, I was probably expressing a view that was gaining currency elsewhere, the *Zeitgeist* perhaps. Nonetheless, I am pleased to note the number of British schools that in 2017 offer postgraduate degrees, MPhil and PhD, in *Research by Design*, *Research by Practice*, *Creative Practice*, and other such terms.[5]

Prospect

From the garden shed I continue to keep in touch with the state of the research 'game'. I pursue my personal research, participate in conferences, contribute to and read the journals. I maintain contact with teaching. I teach at schools, both home and abroad and act as an external examiner. I have frequent conversations with my many friends and colleagues in the field. From this viewpoint I gaze across the landscape.

2 Garden shed from the west

One of the most striking features I see is the international scope and interconnectedness of architectural research. Schools across the globe have extensive programmes of research that range across an immense variety of subjects and apply impressively diverse research methods. They have externally-funded research projects, personal projects by 'lone scholars', full-time research assistants, and ever-increasing numbers of postgraduate students.[6] Everyone is instantly connected through the Internet, allowing collaborations between institutions and individuals that were previously undreamed of. Digital technology is, of course, commonplace. In all aspects of research, everyone has a laptop and a smartphone. Contrast this to the 1960s in Cambridge, when we were 'pioneers' of computer applications in architecture. That meant that we wrote our own computer code, typed it painstakingly onto punched paper tape, and submitted it to the university's mainframe computer, usually to receive an error message the next day. We typed our early papers, one-fingered, on much-loved Olivetti portable typewriters – with no spellcheck.

Another dimension that has changed beyond recognition is the nature and extent of the dissemination of research. When we began there were no refereed journals in architecture. In Cambridge we addressed the problem of publication by producing *LUBFS Working Papers* in which we 'wrote up' our work as it developed and circulated the papers to the sponsors of the research, colleagues, and collaborators in other universities. At the same time the Bartlett published the *Transactions of the Bartlett Society* that ran from 1964–73 and was a distinguished and much admired outlet for writing by staff and associates of the school. These were the model for Cambridge's *Transactions of the Martin Centre* that appeared between 1976–80.[7] The Martin Centre was also quick to organise conferences at which the work could be presented and to which growing numbers of researchers in

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other schools at home and abroad could be invited.[8] How different from the position today when refereed journals exist in numbers and academic book publishing in architecture is a thriving business, both in traditional paper and digital formats. Conferences take place in all corners of the globe and on all aspects of architectural studies, most with rigorous refereeing procedures.[9]

As a final point, I should comment on the *demographic* evolution of the architectural research community. When we began half a century ago the researchers were young graduates, encouraged and guided by inspirational senior figures.[10] This is exemplified by events at Cambridge and the Bartlett, where recently appointed heads, both distinguished practitioners in their middle years, defined research agendas and the work began, often tentatively.[11] It was a collaboration between experience and enthusiasm, with none having deep experience of research. In most schools there was just one professor, who was head of department and who, it was implied, embodied the entire scope of the subject. Outside the fledgling research groups many staff had little or no involvement in research. Also, as a consequence of the demographic of architectural education at the time, the majority of the early researchers were male. Contrast this with the picture in 2017. In most schools the gender balance of both staff and undergraduates is greatly improved and this is reflected at postgraduate level. The majority of staff now hold higher degrees and develop their research interests through supervision of graduate students and in most schools there are multiple professorships that represent the rich diversity of the research and teaching. The ages of active researchers range from eager postgrads in their twenties to a growing number of *emeritus* figures, still active beyond the official retirement age.[12] In every sense of the term this is a *mature* research community.

Postscript

In 2017 most schools of architecture, in Britain and around the world, have extensive programmes of research that range across both the architectural humanities and the applied sciences of architecture and, increasingly, explore the possibilities of research by design. The products of research reach out through a flood of academic books, journal articles, and conferences. Some schools also have collaborations with aspects of practice through which their work finds its way into application. Perhaps most significantly, teaching in all aspects of the curriculum is now informed by research. In all these ways I think academic architecture may now be thought a mature discipline. The view from the garden shed is promising.

Notes

1. Dean Hawkes, 'The Centre and the Periphery: Thoughts on the Nature and Conduct of Architectural Research', **arq**: *Architectural Research Quarterly* 1:1 (autumn 1995), 8–11.
2. See Leslie Martin, 'Oxford Conference on Architectural Education', *Journal of the Royal Institute of Architects* 65 (1958), 279–82.
3. For accounts of the early work at the centre for Land Use and Built Form Studies (LUBFS) at Cambridge, see: Philip Steadman, 'Research in Architecture and Urban Studies in Cambridge in the 1960s and 1970s: What Really Happened', *The Journal of Architecture* 21, No. 2 (2016), 291–306, and Dean Hawkes, 'Bridging the Cultures: Architecture, Models and Computers in 1960s Cambridge', *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 42:1–2 (2017), 144–57.
4. I returned to this question later. See Dean Hawkes, 'The Architect and the Academy', **arq**: *Architectural Research Quarterly* 4:1 (2000), 35–9.
5. This information is from a brief Internet search of school websites made on 8 November 2017.
6. As an example, the Martin Centre for Architectural and Urban Studies in the Cambridge school now has seventy researchers of whom over thirty are PhD students. They work on projects across 10 defined research themes. See: <http://www.martincentre.arct.cam.ac.uk> [accessed 24 November 2017].
7. A total of seventy-seven *LUBFS Working Papers* were produced between 1967 and 1974. The *Transactions of the Bartlett Society* ran for nine volumes between 1964 and 1973. Four volumes of the *Transactions of the Martin Centre* were published between 1976 and 1980.
8. The subjects of the conferences were, *Urban Development Models* (1972), *Models and Systems in Architecture and Building* (1973), and *Models, Evaluations and Information Systems for Planners* (1974).
9. As just one example of these, the 2017 PLEA (Passive Low Energy Architecture) Conference in Edinburgh that I attended attracted 700 delegates from every continent.
10. Philip Steadman in, 'Research in Architecture and Urban Studies in Cambridge in the 1960s and 1970s', points out that the first researchers under Leslie Martin at LUBFS were all graduates of conventional architecture courses.
11. Although, before his move to Cambridge, Martin was best known for his work at the London County Council, he unusually for an architect of his generation held a PhD, which he received at Manchester University in 1936. An authoritative outline of the relationship between the Cambridge and Bartlett approaches to research may be found at, Robert Maxwell, 'Education for the Creative Act', **arq**: *Architectural Research Quarterly* 4:1 (2000), 55–65.
12. 2017 is the 50th anniversary of the founding of the centre for Land Use and Urban Studies at Cambridge, now the Martin Centre. All seven of the founding members are still, in various ways, 'research active'.

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Author's biography

Dean Hawkes is Emeritus Professor of Architectural Design at the Welsh School of Architecture, Cardiff University and an Emeritus Fellow of Darwin College, University of Cambridge. He researched and taught at Cambridge from 1965 to 1995 and in 1967 was a founder member of the centre for Land Use and Built Form Studies (now the Martin Centre). His books include *The Environmental Tradition* (1996); *The Environmental Imagination* (2008); and *Architecture and Climate* (2014). He is currently working on the 2nd edition of *The Environmental Imagination*. In 2010 the RIBA presented him with the Annie Spink Award in recognition of his contribution to architectural education.

Author's address

Dean Hawkes
duh21@cam.ac.uk

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