

***ST ANDREW'S HOUSE AND
SCOTTISH AMBULANCE SERVICE
HEADQUARTERS***



St Andrew's House and the St Andrew's Scottish Ambulance Service Headquarters were built between 1968–1970. Originally two interconnecting but now independent buildings, they are an exceptional example of British Brutalist architecture by architecture firm Skinner, Bailey & Lubetkin.

The Cowcaddens area of Glasgow where the St Andrew's House and the Scottish Ambulance Service Headquarters are located underwent significant redevelopment in the late 20th century. Designated one of several Comprehensive Development Areas in the early 1960's that remodelled old inner-city areas, Cowcaddens was occupied by some of the city's most deprived, where in the late 19th century child mortality rate had risen to the highest in the city. The area had not only high-density tenements but also a vibrant retail presence including Queens Arcade on Stow Street. To make way for the M8 motorway, the street layout

was radically altered and the majority of the buildings demolished. Few of Cowcaddens original tenements now survive but the Neoclassical Scottish Piping Centre, formerly the Cowcaddens Free Church, gives some indication of what existed in the area previously.

Prior to the construction of St Andrew's House, the St Andrew's Ambulance Association had been headquartered in the Charing Cross area of Glasgow since 1929. Charing Cross itself was to be radically interrupted by the M8 motorway infrastructure, with the headquarters on North Street identified for demolition. A substitute site was offered in the Cowcaddens area as part of the Comprehensive Development Area strategy by Glasgow Corporation in 1966. The relocated St Andrew's Scottish Ambulance Service would form part of a larger emergency service hub, accommodated alongside the police and fire services. Although the ambulance services are no longer located onsite, the fire and police services still operate from Cowcaddens today. In addition to the emergency service hub, new modern high-rise and low-rise living accommodation would replace the aging tenement stock in the area. The replacement housing development was arguably inspired by the Barbican in London, with large open public spaces covering underground parking, albeit without the distinctive aesthetic styling.

The architecture practice Skinner, Bailey & Lubetkin were commissioned in 1966 to design the new accommodation for St Andrew's Ambulance Association and St Andrew's Scottish Ambulance Service. The new building comprised three floors with a small attic storey, serviced by a passenger lift. The north block of the building facing onto Milton Street provided accommodation for the Association, and included offices, chairman and board rooms, with a lecture theatre and the Presidents Hall on the top floor. The south block facing onto Maitland Street had ambulance garages to the ground floor, with further support accommodation above. The principle entrance faced onto Milton Street with the stair enclosure behind, distinctively expressed on the external elevation with a large internally illuminated St Andrew's Cross. Externally, the upper floors modestly overhang over the ground floor. Characteristic concretes ribs are vertically expressed with aluminium framed glazing, and large planes of white tesserae articulate the upper floors, with a plinth of squared and snecked bull-faced stone to the ground floor. As statue of St Andrew, originally on the pediment of the North Street headquarters, is mounted on the west elevation of the north block. The interior of the Presidents Hall, the boardroom and lecture theatre were finished in vertical pine timber cladding, smooth in the hall and theatre but sandblasted in the boardroom. The National Headquarters for St Andrew's

Ambulance Association were formally opened by their Patron, HRH Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, on Friday 26th June 1970.

Today, the St Andrew's Ambulance Association (now referred to as St Andrew's First Aid) still occupies the accommodation to the north block, with the south block with the ambulance garages now redundant and unoccupied, and the two blocks, formerly interconnected, now managed separately. The Association has made minor alterations to the internal accommodation since opening, which includes some room subdivision, and the Presidents Hall now providing further training rooms. The building as a whole is subject to a Category A listing by Historic Scotland, with specific reference to the distinctive illuminated St Andrew's Cross and irregular triangular plan staircase.

Finally, it should be noted that while Skinner, Bailey & Lubetkin were initially commissioned for the building, Lubetkin's role in the design of the project was apparently limited to the illuminated cross and triangular plan staircase. Douglas Bailey, himself a Scotsman, was lead architect for the project, and the building was completed under the name of Bailey and Robb, with Bailey subsequently in partnership with architect Thomas Rainer Robb.

BRUTALISM IN BRITAIN

The beginnings of Brutalist architecture in Britain is rooted in the development of Modernism in the first half of the 20th century. The pervading architectural style of Britain in the early 20th century was resolutely Victorian and decorative, with European Modernism and the 'International Style' gained only limited traction in the UK prior to the Second World War, its stripped-down aesthetic in antithesis to traditional English styles and desire for ornamentation. Modernism was progressive and aspirational, looking towards technology and the future, rather than repeating styles and conventions of what had gone before. It was a movement that eschewed ornamentation and embraced the machine age, using materials such as steel, glass and concrete in new ways. New methods of structural engineering were adopted that allowed for open plans without load-bearing walls, large expanses of glass and smooth blank elevations, cantilevered floors and flat roofs.

The early 20th century in Europe, and particularly France and Germany, was a hothouse of artistic avant-gardism in step with the progressive condition of Modernism. The avant-garde impetus was to reject "art for art's sake" and sought to bring life and art together to enrich everyday society. This socially conscious attitude to radically re-shape the way people live echoed through the forward-thinking spirit of Modernism and its architecture.

It was during the 1930s, with the influx of European émigré architects and following the translation into English of Le Corbusier's *Vers Une Architecture* (1923) in 1927, when Modernism began to make an impression on Britain. The collective Tecton, founded in 1932 by newly arrived Bernard Lubetkin, was one of first few to champion the introduction of European architectural thinking in Britain. The first commission Tecton received was for the gorilla enclosure in Regent's Park Zoo and was quickly followed by another to design the penguin pool. The latter subsequently became a ground breaking and famous landmark with its oval form and twin cantilevered intertwining ramps. Other buildings constructed during the inter-war years such as the De La Warr Pavilion at Bexhill (1935) by Erich Mendelsohn and Serge Chermayeff, and the Isokon Building (1934) in London by Welles Wintemute Coates, became shining examples of the International Style. But while the European continent embraced Modernism, the movement in Britain lacked any cohesive spirit and received indifference and apathy from British society in general. The death knell to a coherent International Style transpired with the outbreak of war in 1939.

Following the Second World War, the British government was tasked with rebuilding the ruined country, with housing awarded priority through

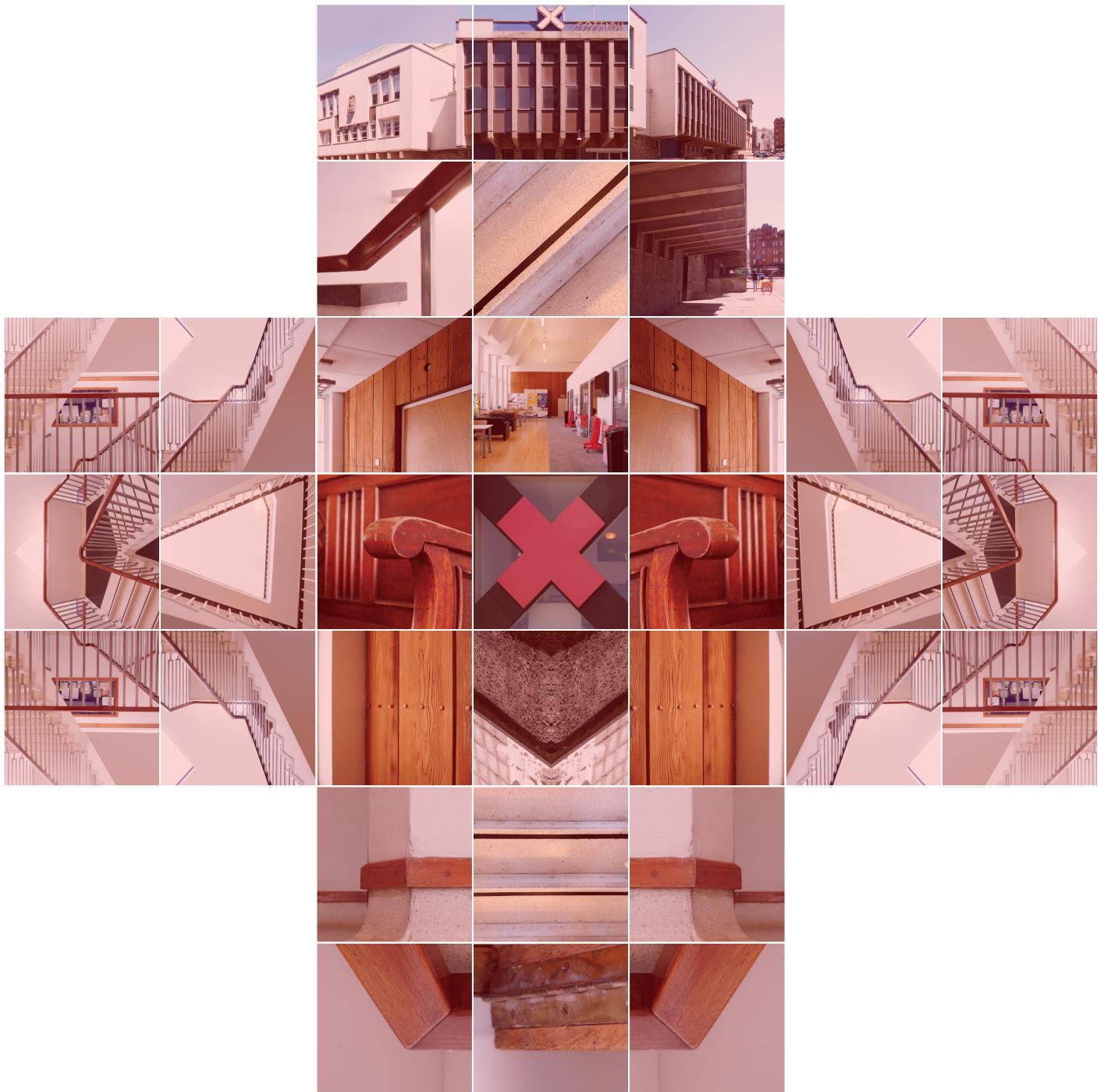
programs such as 'New Towns'. Post-war Britain embraced an outward-looking optimism and, now acknowledging the socialist ideals that underpinned Modernism, embarked on an undertaking to redefine its status on an international stage. The 1951 Festival of Britain showcased not only the cultural and technological prowess of the post-war nation, but provided a preview of urban regeneration promoted by a new contemporary vision.

The lightweight and gravity defying architecture of the International Style gave way to the heavy and more monumental form of heavy, grounded volumes. Absent were the pristine smooth surfaces and planes of rendered concrete, replaced with rough-cast concrete forms that exuded a stability and defiant permanence that seemed appropriate to the cultural climate. Moreover, concrete was a cheap material with abundant supply in the post-war period of depleted resources. Nonetheless, other more traditional materials such as brick, stone and marble were also employed with a convincingly modern aesthetic.

The term 'New Brutalism' was first published by architect duo Alison and Peter Smithson in reference to their designs for a house at Colville Place in Soho, London, describing the approach to the materials, which were intended to be unfinished and unadorned wherever possible. But eminent design theorist Reyner Banham seized the term as emblematic of a new direction in architecture (although disputed the original instigators of the term), and the new rising stars of British architecture adopted the label to make their own.

Brutalism as a movement developed apace into the 1950s and 60s as part of a wider cultural movement in art, in design and in politics, and is considered a natural evolution of Modernism. The spirit of socialism and progressive optimism promised a culture revolution to improve the way people lived. But by the mid 1960s Banham was already claiming the ideals of Brutalism had evaporated, with only aesthetic style remaining. By the late 1970s Brutalism, and Modernism in general, was in decline and vilified by the public as 'ugly architecture'. Culturally, Brutalism became associated with all the ills that it was meant to address.

Now in the 21st century, Brutalism has regained some popularity. As an architectural style, it has been recycled and adapted, and has a definitive impact on today's architectural practice. It is viewed as emblematic of its era, and while not to everyone's taste, Brutalism continues to leave examples for all to learn from.



The above collage image is credited to students from the Singapore Institute of Technology taking part in the 2018 Overseas Immersion Program at the Glasgow School of Art.

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The information in this document has been compiled by Dr Dave Loder, Interior Design Lecturer, Glasgow School of Art.
For further information on Interior Design at the Glasgow School of Art, go online at www.idgsa.co.uk

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