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Listing postmodernism

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Historic England's 2017–18 listing project on postmodernist architecture demonstrates the value of national thematic programmes in identifying significance and managing change in the historic environment.

Like modernism, postmodernism was an international phenomenon with significant regional variants. Britain played an important role in mediating between the very different postmodernisms developing in North America and Continental Europe. It helped that London was at the centre of architectural discourse in the 1970s. The Architectural Association attracted international figures such as Charles Jencks, Léon Krier, and Rem Koolhaas,



1 Thematic House, London; Charles Jencks with Terry Farrell, 1979–85. Grade I. Of international significance as a built manifesto of postmodern architecture, Charles Jencks's house is of exceptional interest for its layered symbolism, fluid spatial plan, and freestyle classical elevations. In 2017, Jencks received planning permission to convert the residence to a house museum / archive.

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2 St Mark's Road housing, London; Jeremy and Fenella Dixon, 1977–9. Grade II. Designed in 1976 for the Kensington Housing Trust, St Mark's Road marked a cathartic moment for its designers, coming after the abandonment of their winning competition entry for Northamptonshire County Hall. A celebration of London street patterns and housing, the design freely combines Victorian eclecticism, De Stijl grids, and Dutch crowstep gables.



3 The Circle, London; CZWG, 1987–9. Grade II. Trained at the Architectural Association in the 1960s, CZWG came to prominence in the mid-1980s with a clutch of extrovert residential schemes within London's docklands. The Circle was commissioned by the developer Andrew Wadsworth, for whom CZWG designed several projects including New Concordia Wharf and China Wharf.

while publications such as *Architectural Design* and Andreas Papadakis's Academy Editions imprint combined coverage of new buildings with excursions into theory and history. James Stirling, John Outram, and Edward Jones won important overseas commissions, while the work of Terry Farrell, Jeremy Dixon, and others was exhibited at the seminal 1980 Venice Biennale.[1]

In the last decade postmodernism has returned to prominence. Two exhibitions – the V&A's 'Style and Subversion' (2011) and the Sir John Soane Museum's 'The Return of the Past' (2018) – bookend a reappraisal of this unique and often misinterpreted moment in architecture.[2] Recent practitioners such as Fashion Architecture Taste, DK-CM, and AOC have drawn from its rich body of architectural theory. At the same time, postmodern architecture, particularly within the commercial sphere, is vulnerable to change and loss. Given its short shelf life and minority status in the UK, intact examples of special interest are few. The need for a comprehensive reassessment was underscored by several high-profile losses, among them Terry Farrell's TV-am building, partly reclad in 2012–13, and John Outram's Harp Heating building in Swanley, demolished in 2016.



4 Isle of Dogs Pumping Station, London; John Outram, 1987. Grade II*. Outram's mythologising 'temple of the storms', commissioned by the London Docklands Development Corporation, returns to the Victorian tradition of idiosyncratic, ornamental water utilities. The listing includes the architect-designed boundary walls, paving, bollards, and this transformer station; a striking essay in primitive classicism.

The assessment of buildings erected within living memory is at the forefront of listing, and a vital activity if the National Heritage List for England (NHLE) is to be kept up to date. The bar is set high for buildings of the recent past: careful selection is required for postwar buildings, while buildings of less than thirty years of age are normally listed only if they are of outstanding quality and under threat. The 'thirty-year rule', instituted when postwar listing commenced in 1987, states that listing can be considered thirty years on from the start of construction. Buildings more than ten years old but less than thirty years old can only be considered if of outstanding quality and under demonstrable threat. On this basis we were unable to recommend Ian Pollard's Marco Polo House (1987–8) and the same architect's Egyptianate Homebase in Kensington (1988–90) for listing, and both were demolished in 2014. Younger still at the time of its Grade II* listing – but palpably of a different order of significance – was Stirling Wilford's 1 Poultry (1994–8). At the time of writing it remains the youngest building on the List.

Historic England's listing project on postmodern architecture was initiated in 2016 by the body's Twentieth Century Network.

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5 Hillingdon Civic Centre, London; (Sir) Andrew Derbyshire of RMJM, 1973–7. Grade II. A cubistic collage of brick and tile facets wrapped around a rational, split-level plan, Hillingdon Civic Centre is all the more remarkable coming from Derbyshire, who earlier designed the University of York in the CLASP prefabricated system. One of the most significant of the generation of civic centres occasioned by the Local Government Act 1972.



6 Epping Forest Civic Offices, Essex; Richard Reid, 1987–92. Grade II. Reid's design, won at competition in 1984, creates a sense of place through an assemblage of contrasting parts, which make up a distinctive spatial sequence. The listing was brought forward in response to a programme of alterations planned by the Council.



7 Truro Crown Courts, Cornwall; Evans & Shalev, 1986–8. Grade II*. Truro is a combined court centre, combining accommodation for the Crown Court and a smaller suite of rooms for the County Court. Evans & Shalev's design is a hybrid: postmodern in its allusions to the regional vernacular and abstracted classicism while possessing clear affinities with the Arts and Crafts and Scandinavian modernism. It anticipates the practice's Tate St Ives in Portmeor, St Ives, of 1989–93.



8 Katharine Stephen Rare Books Library, Newnham College, Cambridge; Joanna van Heyningen and Birkin Haward, 1981–2. Grade II. An early work of British postmodernism and of the noted practice of van Heyningen & Haward Architects. This small yet monumental 'treasure chest' relates to the College's vaulted library of 1896–8 by Basil Champneys, while the striped brickwork recalls the early work of the Swiss architect Mario Botta.

Whereas most thematic listing projects are based around building types, this was the first to examine an architectural style or movement. Postmodern architecture can be an elusive and contested subject, but due to the pressures of renewal and redevelopment we do not have the luxury of waiting for a critical consensus to emerge. For these reasons, it was especially important that our listing advice was underpinned by a rigorous and robust understanding. Scoping work by HE's Research Division identified the key practices and extant works of the period. An accessible guide in the 'Introduction to the Heritage Asset' series supplemented our Listing Selection Guides, which set out the selection criteria for different building types.[3] We could thus assess the significance of John Outram's Docklands pumping station as a late twentieth-century

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9 Judge Business School, Cambridge; John Outram, 1992–5. Grade II* Outram's winning competition scheme converted the listed Old Addenbrooke's Hospital, linking existing pavilions and making rear additions in a characteristically colourful and fabulous manner. The 1986 listing was upgraded to Grade II*, taking into account the special interest of Outram's contribution.



10 Sainsbury Wing at the National Gallery, London; Venturi and Scott Brown, 1988–9. Grade I. The Sainsbury Wing, which houses the National Gallery's early renaissance collections, is the only British work by the partnership of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, widely recognised as the progenitors of postmodern architecture. Each elevation is given a different treatment, while enfilade galleries are reached by a processional staircase, which widens as it rises.



11 Park Avenue, Aztec West, South Gloucestershire; CZWG, 1987–8. Grade II. For Aztec West, a pioneering business park, CZWG designed offices with round entrance courts based upon the turning circle of a car, thus celebrating the enablers of the out-of-town workplace. The window-columns, with their engaged pilasters and cills were influenced by Ricardo Bofill's Les Espaces d'Abraxas housing at Marne-la-Vallée of 1978-83.

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12 McKay Securities, Slough; John Outram, 1974–6. Grade II. This group of warehouses was Outram's first independent commission. McKay simultaneously reflects his modernist origins (the flat segmental arches recall Le Corbusier's Roq et Rob housing and Louis Kahn's Kimbell Art Gallery) while the polychromatic bricks and multi-function concrete capitals hint at his later work.

Name	Architect	Date built	Date listed	Grade
Richmond House, Whitehall, City of Westminster	Whitfield Associates	1982–4	21.12.2015	II*
Comyn Ching, Seven Dials, London Borough of Camden	Terry Farrell Partnership	1983–7	8.11.2016	II
No 1 Poultry, City of London	James Stirling, Michael Wilford & Associates	1994–8	28.11.2016	II*
Isle of Dogs Pumping Station, Stewart Street, London Borough of Tower Hamlets	John Outram Associates	1986–8	19.6.2017	II*
Legal and General House, Tadworth, Surrey	Arup Associates	1986–91	14.12.2017	II*
Epping Forest Civic Offices, High Street, Epping, Essex	Richard Reid	1987–92	18.12.2017	II
44 Britton Street, Clerkenwell, London Borough of Islington	CZWG	1986–8	2.2.2018	II
The Circle, Queen Elizabeth Street, London Borough of Southwark	CZWG	1987–9	12.2.2018	II
Swedish Quays, London Borough of Tower Hamlets	David Price and Gordon Cullen	1986–90	18.4.2018	II
Shadwell Basin Housing, London Borough of Tower Hamlets	MacCormac Jamieson Prichard & Wright	1986–8	18.4.2018	II
Belvoir Estate, London Borough of Islington	Islington Architect's Department	1983–7	18.4.2018	II
Cascades, Westferry Road, London Borough of Tower Hamlets	CZWG	1987–8	18.4.2018	II
Henley Royal Regatta Headquarters	Terry Farrell Partnership	1984–6	18.4.2018	II
210, 220, 240, 250, 260 and 290 Park Avenue, Aztec West, South Gloucestershire	CZWG	1987–8	18.4.2018	II
McKay Trading Estate, Blackthorne Road, Slough	John Outram Associates	1976–8	18.4.2018	II
Truro Crown Courts, Edward Street, Truro, Cornwall	Eldred Evans and David Shalev	1986–8	18.4.2018	II*
Hillingdon Civic Centre, High Street, Uxbridge, London Borough of Hillingdon	Robert Matthew Johnson-Marshall (RMJM)	1973–7	18.4.2018	II
Katharine Stephen Rare Books Library, Newnham College, Cambridge	Joanna van Heyningen and Birkin Haward	1981–2	18.4.2018	II
Judge Business School, Trumpington Street, Cambridge	John Outram Associates	1993–5	18.4.2018	II*
Thematic House, Lansdowne Walk, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea	Charles Jencks with Terry Farrell Partnership	1979–85	4.5.2018	I
105–123 St Mark's Road and 1-3 Cowper Terrace, Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea	Jeremy and Fenella Dixon	1977–79	8.5.2018	II
Founders' Hall, Cloth Fair, City of London	Green, Lloyd and Adams	1984–90	8.5.2018	II
Gough Building, Bryanston School, Dorset	CZWG	1986–8	8.5.2018	II
China Wharf, London Borough of Southwark	CZWG	1986–8	8.5.2018	II
Sainsbury Wing at the National Gallery, City of Westminster	Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Associates	1988–91	9.5.2018	I
23, 23A, 24 and 25 Church Crescent, London Borough of Hackney	Colquhoun and Miller	1981–4	9.5.2018	II
2 Bessborough Street and 33 Vauxhall Bridge Road, City of Westminster	Whitfield and Partners	1980–3	24.5.2018	II

13 Postmodern buildings on the National Heritage List for England (NHLE).

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waterworks as well as an exemplar of postmodernism.

Out of a long list of 33 potential candidates, 28 were taken to full assessment, of which twenty-four were listed by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport (see Fig. 13). A third were listed at the higher grades of II* and I, taking their place among England's finest works of architecture. The geographical spread of the selection reflects the prevalence of the style in the south and east of England, while the inclusion of a court house, civic centres, educational facilities, and housing shows that there's more to 'po-mo' than bankers' pink granite.

Among the listings were works by postmodernists of international standing such as Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, and Charles Jencks, while the designation of three works by John Outram represents a significant proportion of a small yet singular body of work. The detailed list entries were able to capture the contribution of women architects such as Denise Scott Brown, Eldred Evans, Joanna van Heyningen, and Fenella Dixon. We sought to widen the reach of the project with new images by HE's in-house photographers, a short online film[4] and a seminar for heritage and conservation professionals.

Postmodernism is an important strand of late twentieth-century architecture, but much more remains to be done.[5] The 2017–18 project shows how innovative approaches to strategic listing can help to understand and protect the very best architecture of our recent past.

Notes

1. Léa-Catherine Szacka, *Exhibiting the Postmodern: the 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2017).
2. Glenn Adamson and Jane Pavitt, *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970–90* (London: V & A Publishing, 2011). See also Terry Farrell and Adam Nathaniel Furman, *Revisiting Postmodernism* (London: RIBA Publishing, 2017).
3. Geraint Franklin, *Post-Modern Architecture: Introductions to Heritage Assets* (London: Historic England, 2017). See also <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/iha-post-modern-architecture/> [accessed 15 July 2018].
4. <https://youtu.be/9BKiaUACzDM> [accessed 15 July 2018].
5. Geraint Franklin and Elain Harwood, *Post-Modern Buildings in Britain* (London: Pavilion Books, 2017).

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Author's biography

Geraint Franklin is a historian for Historic England, specialising in architecture after 1945. In addition to the project profiled here, he has contributed research to thematic listing programmes on post-war schools, commercial offices and public sculpture. He is a trustee of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain and author of *Howell Killick Partridge & Amis* (2017) and, with Elain Harwood, *Post-Modern Buildings in Britain* (2017).

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