

Clipping Bulletin 42, January 1998

It has been encouraging that this year more buildings than usual merited consideration by Trustees in their review for the 1997 award. The most prominently located of the five considered is the replacement building on the former Archibald site. Clouston and Partners' design extends the original 19th century idiom along North Road. The detail of brickwork and first floor shows up the plainness of the part of the Milburngate Centre on the opposite side of the road. It is a pity that the groundfloor facades of the shop units have been left for the occupants to complete. It is also strange that the downpipes are designed to disgorge rainwater onto the pavement – a recipe for accidents, surely, on steep Crossgate in icy conditions.

The Elvet Guest House, occupying Pattison's former warehouse, is an excellent and robust conversion. It constitutes the final piece in a series of conversions and rebuilding along Elvet Waterside, which now presents a distinctive and agreeable comer in the Durham townscape. Another sensitive conversion is that of the former Harrison and Harrison organ factory in Hawthorne Terrace, as is the joint Ian Curry / SPCK conversion of the Prior's Kitchen off the Cathedral cloisters into a bookshop for SPCK. The quality of the lighting here dramatically reveals the genius of the original 14th century architect.

The commendation, however, was unanimously given to the new Harrison and Harrison organ factory on the Meadowfield Industrial Estate. Designed by Dennis Jones of Stringer & Jones of Stainton, and built to a high quality by Newton Moor Construction of Ushaw Moor, this unit is far from the normal industrial estate warehouse. The form of this large, specialised craft workshop was determined by a central organ-building room, where height was crucial. The building line, however, conceals the height; its twin-tiered roof with wide overhanging eaves of metal cladding at the same time hints at an oriental appearance. (The eaves protect the construction area from direct sunlight). The front elevation presents pleasing symmetry. The quality of the finish is set by the wooden-panelled entry doors. The car park is tucked away behind the building and landscaping is already completed, so that the building does not so much sit on, as in, the landscape. In summary, a famous Durham craft industry has been rehoused in an environment worthy of its international renown.

The certificate for the commendation will be handed over at a special open meeting on Saturday, 21st February at 2.15 pm, to be held in the Organ Factory itself, by kind permission of Mr Mark Venning, managing director of the company. There will be a tour of the workshop, as well as a brief outline of the history of organ building in Durham – and of the new workshop. Do come! The location is near St. John's church, Meadowfield, 100 metres along St John's Road from the main Willington / Crook road (A690). If you have transport difficulties, please contact a Trustee, and a lift will be arranged.