Reconnecting Cambridge: retail by Panter Hudspith and Chapman Taylor
William JR Curtis on highs and lows at Zaragoza Expo
Stiff & Trevillion at Portobello Dock
Christoph Grafe on David Kohn
Books: China open, Rykwert closed
Brian Edwards on Sverre Fehn
Community and privacy in Brixton: Tony Fretton's Vassall Road housing
Jonathan Meades in Bordeaux

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Two new retail buildings opposite one another have profoundly altered the centre of Cambridge. Ivor Richards weighs up the merits of Chapman Taylor’s Grand Arcade and Panter Hudspith’s mixed-use Christ’s Lane, while Colen Lumley investigates their role in the 50 year renewal of the city’s historic core.

Cambridge University and its major colleges have been steadily building new architecture since the mid-1950s. Little of this vast expansion is particularly evident to the ordinary citizen within the town, with a few notable exceptions such as Bridge Street, the Quayside and the excellent buildings for both Magdalene and St John’s by David Roberts and Powell & Moya from the 1960s. The more dispersed faculties of the Arts and Humanities at Sidgwick Avenue and West Road, together with the new colleges of Robinson and Clare Hall nearby, signal the western shift. This policy is now particularly marked with the remote western expansion of Research & Development.

The commercial development of the medieval market town has consistently followed a more distinctly densified pattern, whether by policy, commercial pressure or both, beginning with Bradwell’s Court and later the Lion Yard in the 1950s and 70s. Two recent projects exemplify the continuity of this densification as well as the increasing sophistication of commercial and mixed-use architecture in Cambridge – the development known as Grand Arcade, designed by Chapman Taylor and incorporating the new John Lewis store designed by Colin Stansfield-Smith and John Pardey Architects and designed by Chapman Taylor, and Panter Hudspith’s mixed-use project across St Andrew’s Street which reinstates Christ’s Lane and provides two floors of retail with apartments above.

These truly significant urban renewals of the medieval and Georgian/Victorian town have a huge impact on both ordinary pedestrian users and shoppers alike, and they have been very quickly assimilated into the life of the inner city. Substantially complete and occupied, they are now ready for a critique that examines their contribution to urban...
The bright daylight diffused by the lofty glazed diagrid barrel roof.

But it is at night that the success of Panter Hudspith’s Christ’s Lane becomes most evident: not only is it a vital pedestrian artery to the city bus station, it is also enhanced and brought to life by the placement of a restaurant at the corner leading to the buses and to the route across the neighbouring green space of Christ’s Pieces. As well as its many pavement-level tables the restaurant has an upper level with large glass bays that overlook the urban park. While the gates of the Grand Arcade are closed after hours for security reasons, the burgeoning nightlife of Christ’s Lane is ongoing – it is, after all, just a side street lined with shops, but crucially the restaurant and bar are open to all-comers, late. A popular and natural success.

In the daytime the typologies of street and bar are well fused, the pedestrian armies flow and mingle and the buses pull in and out of the new sheltered stations. The enhancement of urban life in Cambridge is very much in evidence.

Both new retail interventions make an important contribution to the repair, conservation and enjoyment of the city centre as a lace of villages and fenland towns, but also for urban populations from Peterborough, Ely, King’s Lynn, Norwich and further afield. They are choosing the vibrant life of a town over the plastic ersatz environment of the ubiquitous drive-in retail experience.

Chapman Taylor’s Grand Arcade and Panter Hudspith’s Christ’s Lane provide different but parallel offerings and both are evidently popular. At Grand Arcade the John Lewis department store has integrated well as a through-route. The Silver Atrium leading from the Downing Street park and ride set-down is the most successful spatial event on entering the store, and demonstrates the need to expand the central atrium which is currently filled with escalators. The successful retention of a full blockwidth of restored

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**Above** The Grand Arcade includes 52 retail units on two levels in sizes suited to modern retailers (ph: KP).

**Above right** St Andrews’ St entrance.

**Four listed buildings were incorporated into the project (ph: AG).**

**Plan** Ground and second floor: 1 St Andrew’s Street, 2 Christ’s Lane, 3 John Lewis, 4 covered shopping mall extension from Lion Yard.

**Bottom right** Atrium entrance to 25,000 square metre John Lewis store (ph: KP).

**Top, far right** Views down Christ’s Lane from St Andrew’s Street and from Christ’s Pieces (ph: PR).

**Model** View down Christ’s Lane towards Christ’s Pieces.

**Plans**

1. Ground and second floor: 1 St Andrew’s Street, 2 Christ’s Lane, 3 Christ’s College, 4 civic square, 5 Christ’s Pieces, 6 Drummer Street bus station, 7 Emmanuel College, 8 residential entrance, 9 loading bay, 10 A1 unit, 11 A3 unit, 12 plant/storage for retail units, 13 two-bed duplex, 14 two-bed flat, 15 communal courtyard.

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The crowds that flock to Cambridge, especially at weekends, demonstrate the fact that, with its much-improved public transport, the city has become a centre not just for its neck-
and the slab-column pilasters that line the arcaded spaces. These are infilled with prepatinated metal panels (in the case of John Lewis) and timber panels with fretting in the limestone-paved walls. The glazed diagrid barrel roof is detailed to a refined finish, as are the handrails, light fixtures, bridges and escalator flanks and details. The architects’ intention was to provide an intimately-lit arcaded interior that is comfortable and welcoming; the generous light-flooded daytime volumes contrast with the subtle downlighting in the evening.

The huge parking structure, sited to the rear of the development, is faced in suitably curvilinear brickwork, with one of the car ramp rotundas forming the circular enclosure for Carluccio’s shop, which faces its small piazza – a very welcome event. Its essentially commercial function notwithstanding, it should be very clearly affirmed that Chapman Taylor’s Grand Arcade establishes a new level of quality and commitment to a lasting urban fabric.

Over the road, the most important aspects of Panter Hudspith’s response to its own planning and design brief are the reinstatement of Christ’s Lane itself and the reintroduction of mixed-use occupancy to the city centre. The rooftop is pressed into service as the site for a magnificent, discrete landscape of courtyard penthouses and high-level pedestrian lanes, bicycle ways and storage.

Christ’s Lane adds to Panter Hudspith’s portfolio of mixed-use urban projects, that includes Princesshay in Exeter, Flaxengate in Lincoln and the Oxford Castle Heritage Project, developments that have given the practice a wealth of experience in this type. In turn a language of expressive, refined forms and associated material-fabric has emerged to provide a mature framework in which each project is both situated and differentiated, inflected and composed to find close integration with their context. Take, for example, the three distinctly different elevational forms of Christ’s Lane: first, the two-storey shop fronts to St Andrew’s Street are articulated and stepped in plan to form three distinct bays which accord with the general plot width of the street. This principle of three-dimensional set-backs also reveals views of Christ’s College, and sets up the framework of major materials: limestone facing (Ancaster Hard White), matching precast concrete units and powder-coated glazing frames. In contrast, Christ’s Lane is articulated by projecting vertical window bays outboard of a stratified yellow-ochre brick facade, capped by a planted rim which forms the deep edge of the pedestrian breezeway to the rooftop residences above. Finally, the form presented to Christ’s Pieces contains large panels at first floor to house the restaurant, together with stone cladding to the duplex residences overhead. The inevitable service yard has recessive linear grooved brickwork.

The overall complex is very simple with two levels of different-sized shop units and two floors of apartments above – duplexes to north and south, the latter set within a stepped metal roof with deep overhangs. A similar roof shields the high-level breezeway giving access to some rather special courtyard penthouses which stretch across the full width of the upper roof landscape at their entrance level, with first floor bedrooms over this western end. At entrance level the living spaces address a private patio garden with further studio accommodation and bicycle access beyond. Conversely the kitchen spaces afford splendid views westward over the city rooftops and Christ’s College. Within these recessed forms the materials change to white-painted render and timber-clad patio walls, with grey metal glazing and cladding elements. The inclusion of the patios and garden studios to seven of the fifteen apartments makes for a very particular home – overlooking the historic city with its spire-
inflected skyline, while at the same time looking inward to a full private outdoor space.

In considering these plans, Chermayeff and Alexander’s Community and Privacy (1963) comes to mind, especially for its inclusion of Philip Johnson’s Rockefeller Guest House in New York (1950). Panter Hudspith’s interpretation of a similar idea at road level, is an appropriate response to this bustling urban setting, providing full cross-ventilation and daylight in a dense plan-form.

The consistency of the stepped geometry, immaculately crafted building forms and careful material assembly within a clear spatial hierarchy deliver a building of significance.

To the credit of both architect and developer, a collegiate class architecture has been achieved within commercial constraints and demands.

Christ’s Lane and Grand Arcade together form a new pedestrian route for all to enjoy, a great contribution to urbanity. They are a welcome addition to the particular strain of modern architecture that is now synonymous with Cambridge, drawing on its legacy to establish a new city quality within the historic core.

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The Grand Arcade together with the adjacent Christ’s Lane are the principal objects of the most recent rejuvenation of retail in the city centre. Grand Arcade is an enlargement of the Lion Yard development of the 1960s – the first shopping mall in the city. Christ’s Lane is a redevelopment of Bradwell’s Court. Both emanate from the strategic position of the 1996/2004 Local Plan which required the raising of the quality of shopping and ease of access. The sites are located in a contained urban matrix, still reflecting medieval street patterns, on the southern margin of the historic core. Transport and the expansion of central retail facilities developed into a masterplan for the central area by city architect Gordon Logie. The Grand Arcade is the final piece in the jigsaw of the piecemeal redevelopment envisaged by Logie nearly 60 years earlier, with virtually the same combination of elements.

The Grand Arcade provides the final set of components to Logie’s masterstructure. It extends the Lion Yard mall, creating new access points from the surrounding street network. Key to the scheme was the redevelopment of the 160-year-old Robert Sayles/ John Lewis store. The Grand Arcade mall-built bridges from the court of Lion Yard and dog-legs (on St Andrew’s Arcade) to an entrance on St Andrew’s Street. The red architect divided the three blocks into individual structural grids. Although complete since Spring, the logistics on many retail units are still to be taken up, while the attraction of the new venue has drawn traders from other parts of the city, with consequent impacts on the locations vacated. It will be some time before the full impact can be assessed.

The Holford Plan envisaged the re-development of a block of mainly nineteenth century buildings formerly surrounding Bradwell’s Yard, between Christ’s and Emmanuel College on St Andrew’s Street for retail. This was implemented in the early 1970s with a small shopping arcade which led to the central bus station on Christ’s Pieces. The scheme involved the building-over of Milton Walk/ Christ’s Lane. Panter Hudspith’s project replaces part of this development and renews Christ’s Lane after 50 years of closure, replacing the arcade which had become a pinch-point in circulation in the growing city. The emergence of new independent pedestrian routes traversing the city is a much-enhancing attribute that has its corollary in the historic passages and passageways of Cambridge. The promenade that has evolved from the site of Market Square, through the shopping malls and arcades, and across Christ’s Pieces and New Square to the Centre and its East Road retail hinterland is a new urban social feature. The Grand Arcade and Christ’s Lane developments reinforce and enhance the urbanism of the primary urban circulation pattern, drawing the visitor more sympathetically from architecturally and academically delightful into the commercial and cultural everyday heart of Cambridge.

Cabinet Land is a former partner of Leslie Martin and founder member of the Cambridge Urban Design Partnership.