



SEAHORSE



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Newsletter of the Friends of the Midland Hotel, Morecambe

10th ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Welcome to the tenth anniversary edition of *Seahorse*. Was it really all those years ago that a dozen or so of us met in the old sun-lounge of the Midland, all concerned about the deteriorating state of the hotel? But what could we do? The building didn't belong to us – in fact, nobody was quite sure who it belonged to following the death of Les Whittingham, the last owner, and the problems involved in settling his estate. We decided to start a group with the aims of letting people know what was happening to the building and publicising its architectural importance, both locally and nationally – and when it was sold we hoped we might work with the new owner to help the Midland have a successful future. A few days later we met again, drew up a constitution, appointed officers and advertised our existence locally. In July 1999 we issued our first newsletter to around 30 members and from then on the rest, as they say, is history.

It's been a long journey - often difficult, sometimes depressing and frequently frustrating – but in the end well worth it. To see the Midland restored and up and running once again is wonderful. Thank you all for your continued support, particularly in the difficult times. I pass the hotel most days and it is very gratifying to see the car park full and people going in and out. Under the management of Matt Redhead and his staff the Midland has been transformed over the last few months. The problems associated with its opening period have been sorted out and both residents and visitors are now assured of a warm welcome.

It was good to be able to hold our AGM in the hotel and my thanks to those of you who were able to attend. As it was our tenth anniversary the chef baked us a celebratory cake (complete with candles) which members enjoyed with their tea and coffee after the meeting.

Now, we have decided that you all need a night out and what better place than the Midland. Following the success of last year's Friends' Weekend (despite the weather!) we have decided to host another do. This will be on Friday 19th and Saturday 20th June, with a sit-down meal and entertainment on the Saturday evening. By then the hotel will have been open for just over a year and we thought it would be lovely to celebrate this. Numbers will be limited so book early (see details enclosed with this newsletter). There will be live music, a raffle, Deco walks and other events. We don't mind what you wear but we thought it would be nice if you could come in some sort of 1930's attire. Anything goes – from formal black tie/tails and evening gowns to striped blazers, bathing costumes or anything in between! I look forward to seeing you in June.

Sue Thompson

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Midland Hotel was held at the Midland Hotel, Morecambe on Friday 6th February 2009. 69 members attended.

Before the main business of the AGM took place, Sue introduced Matt Redhead, Manager of the Midland, who addressed the meeting and gave a brief account of some of the problems he had overcome since the hotel opened its doors in June 2008 and the situation to date. He said that the hotel was now running well and that he was very pleased with its progress. After a short talk Matt invited questions from the floor and an interesting question and answer session followed covering various aspects of the daily running of the Midland. Sue then thanked Matt for both his attendance at the meeting and his hard work at the hotel.

Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting had been included with the Newsletter which followed the AGM as well as being posted on the website. Copies were also available at this meeting if members wished to see them. The minutes were certified by the secretary as being a true and accurate record of the last meeting. Their acceptance was proposed by Ann Hutton and seconded by Peter Llewellyn.

Matters Arising from the Minutes

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

Chairperson's Report

Sue welcomed everyone to the meeting and pointed out that as well as it being the first AGM in the hotel since its refurbishment, it was also the 10th anniversary of the founding of the Friends of the Midland, making it a special occasion.

She said that someone had asked 'What was the role of the group now that the hotel was open?' In reply, Sue defined the word friend as follows: 'A person whom one knows well and likes, a supporter or ally'. She compared this definition with the activities of the group over the last ten years and said it was up to us to continue supporting the hotel over the coming years, promoting it to our own friends and colleagues and using its facilities whenever we could. The Friends had waited a long time for the Midland to return as a functioning hotel but we must remember that it is a business. The words 'Use it or lose it' came to mind. We need to encourage people to patronise the hotel long term. Some will pop in for a coffee with a view while others will plan all types of celebrations. Sue believed that there would be a Friends group for the foreseeable future. As individuals we spread the word to other people about the hotel and, if ever we were required as a group to assist in its future survival, we are here and ready. We were never going to fade away once the hotel opened.

Sue then described the special edition postcards and greetings cards that the committee had commissioned to commemorate the re-opening of the hotel, stating that they were available at the meeting and could be ordered by post or email at any time. Also on show were prints and cards of a new painting of the Midland by Patricia Haskey-Knowles, a well-respected local artist and member of the Friends.

Sue said it was the committee's intention to hold another 'Friends Weekend' sometime in June (depending on room availability). Details would be published in the next newsletter due out at the beginning of March.

She also mentioned that the hotel had a special '2 for 1' deal at the moment on cocktails served in the Rotunda between 3pm and 9pm on Fridays and urged members to take advantage of this facility if they could.

She concluded by thanking members for their attendance and for their continued support.

Treasurer's Report

Barry presented the end of year figures to the meeting which showed a balance of funds of £187.98. He pointed out that although the balance appeared small it did not include money from subscription renewals (just over £1,000) which had come in during the ten days since the date of the bank statement included with the report. Funds, therefore, were still healthy.

The main sources of income were membership fees and renewals and the sale of commemorative plates. Expenditure was made up of costs for the production and postage of the newsletters, special edition postcards/greetings cards and plates, website hosting and the room/refreshments for the AGM. The 'Friends Weekend' which was held in July had more or less been self-supporting with a small surplus left over.

Membership stood at 578 before renewal.

Barry then submitted the accounts which were proposed by John Hutton and seconded by Steve Swithin. Steve proposed a vote of thanks to Barry for all his efforts in connection with the Friends and everyone showed their appreciation with a round of applause.

Election of Officers

The serving officers were asked if they were willing to stand again for a further year and all indicated that they were. The Secretary asked if anyone else wished to be considered for any of the posts. No other names were forthcoming and it was therefore unanimously accepted that the existing officers stood in post for a further year.

The officers for 2009 are therefore as follows:

Chairperson	Sue Thompson
Vice Chairperson	Jane Wright
Secretary	Ian Thompson
Treasurer	Barry Guise
Membership Secretary	Lesley Guise

Committee members are Pam Brook, Neil Byers, Kate Drummond, Stephen Jones, Steve Swithin and Peter Wade.

Any Other Business

Howard Rogerson asked if it would be a good idea to fund raise to donate pieces of art to be displayed at the hotel.

Sue took the idea on board but mentioned that the hotel design team had in fact created their own works of art as well as displaying reproductions of early photographs on various walls within the hotel.

Ken Bolton asked Matt if the hotel intended to produce a brochure.

Matt replied that a brochure was already in production and to 'watch this space'.

Howard Landey asked what was happening in the area immediately adjacent to the hotel.

Sue replied that there was a tidying up operation in progress. The Harbour Bandstand had been demolished and the old go-kart track, which had become an eyesore, was being grassed over as an open space. On its seaward side a new RNLI station was under construction which will house the rescue hovercraft. The structure would not be intrusive to the views from the hotel and would provide a much needed home for a vital rescue craft. The proposed development of the rest of the promenade was still under discussion by Lancaster City Council and Urban Splash. Modifications were being made to the original planning application with public consultation being sought at a later date. Urban Splash had not escaped the effect of recent economic problems and their implications for the building industry but hope to weather the storm.

Ron Sands noted that the seahorses at the front of the building had been illuminated when the hotel re-opened in June but after a short period one had failed and now both were off. He asked if there was a plan to illuminate them again.

Matt replied that there had been a problem with the lighting but due to general opinion he had decided to switch them off permanently.

Steve Swithin asked if there was a possibility of introducing special rates for members and their guests when using the restaurant during week days and off-peak times, thus increasing usage of the food facilities.

Matt replied he was already considering something along those lines which he would soon publish.

Sue added that there were set menus in operation in the restaurant already at certain times. A phone call to the hotel would usually obtain information on what was available.

There being no further matters to discuss, Sue introduced Patricia Haskey-Knowles who gave a short talk to the meeting about the painting she had produced which depicted the hotel after refurbishment. Prints and cards were on show at special discounted prices for members.

Barry then asked Matt to draw out the winning ticket for the quiz competition included with the last newsletter. The winner was Sue Lovell.

The meeting was then brought to a close. Coffee and tea was served and Sue cut a celebratory cake, complete with lit candles, which the hotel chef had baked to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Friends of the Midland.

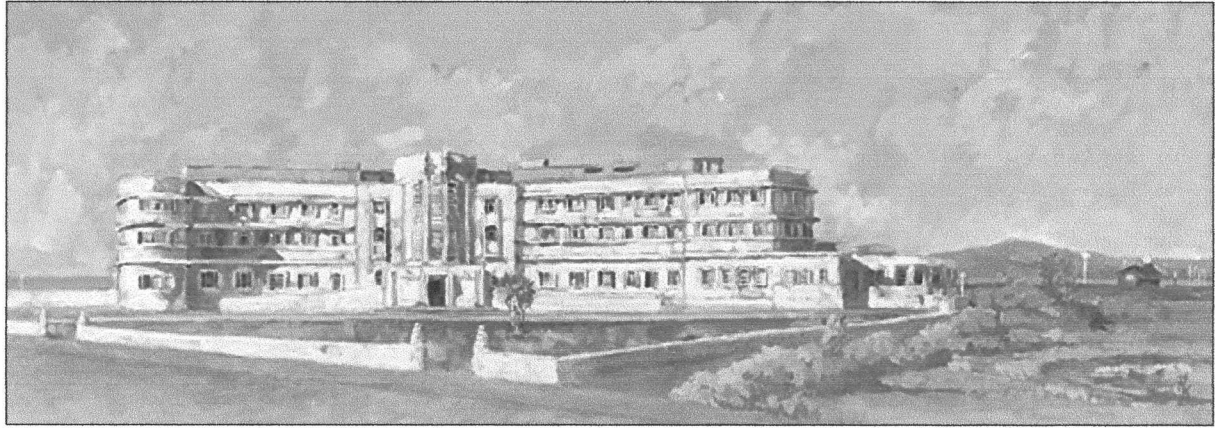
Ian Thompson



Sue cutting the Friends' 10th anniversary cake

MIDLAND HOTEL ORIGINAL PAINTING, PRINTS AND CARDS

Those of you who attended the Friends' AGM will have seen the new painting of the Midland Hotel by local artist Patricia Haskey-Knowles. The black and white reproduction below hardly does it justice, so if you have access to the Friends' website click on Members Area to see a colour version of the original. Pat says 'As a member of the Friends of the Midland Hotel I was very excited to be asked by the committee to paint this magnificent Art Deco building and wanted to convey the brilliance of the architecture and the beauty of the backdrop.'



The Midland Hotel by Pat Haskey-Knowles

Pat has produced a series of prints and cards of the image which she is offering to members at a reduced rate – see below for details.

Original Painting £1,495.00

The painting is double mounted and framed in an elegant bevelled elder-wood moulding with a limed insert. The image size is 28" x 9.5" and the outer dimensions are 21" x 39".

Giclée Prints are available on paper and canvas in the following sizes:

Mounted Prints on Somerset Velvet fine art paper

11.5" x 4" £25.00 + £2.50 p&p

28" X 9.5" £85.00 + £10.00 p&p

Giclée Prints on museum grade canvas stretched on a box frame

40" x 14" £150.00 + £15 p&p

56" x 20" £200.00 + £20 p&p

Bespoke sizes are also available – contact Pat for details and prices.

(Giclée Printing is a method of reproducing fine art images. All prints are produced using the latest professional pigment inks on the highest quality paper. Each print conforms to the Fine Art Trade Guild Specification and should be light fast for a minimum of 100 years. However, it is advisable not to hang prints or any artwork in strong direct sunlight.)

Greeting Cards £1.50

Postcards 80p

The prices listed above are at a special discounted rate exclusively for Friends of the Midland Hotel and a percentage of each sale will be donated to the Friends.

For sales and/or questions about the painting, prints and cards please contact...

Patricia-Haskey Knowles

Telephone: (01524) 853425 Mobile: 07718020568

E-mail: pat@phk-art.co.uk

Website: www.phk-art.co.uk

GILL, HILL, MODERNISM AND THE MIDLAND

Eric Gill's two sculpted seahorses on the façade of the Midland Hotel give it a focal point of interest, an appropriate contrasting decorative feature for a seaside hotel on an otherwise very plain elevation. Although he took the Midland commission and completed many other famous pieces of work on public buildings such as the BBC headquarters and the offices of the London Underground, Gill never really approved of this use of sculpture. While working on the latter he wrote to a friend 'I am at present doing some big but unimportant sculptures on a building in London – architectural fat-lals merely but valuable experience. The building is good and plain - iron with plain stone facing - we are quite out of place.' Gill's biographer Fiona MacCarthy described him as having many doubts, both moral and artistic, about the whole idea of surface decoration on a building. However, Gill was willing to compromise as big public commissions paid generously and he needed the money. Despite his misgivings, Gill's sculptures often possess a graceful simplicity and directness of line and form that seem to fit well with modernist buildings.

This raises the question 'How modernist was Gill?' – or, for that matter, Oliver Hill for whom Gill worked at the Midland Hotel and who had been brought up under the influence of Lutyens and the Arts and Crafts movement. While he enthusiastically embraced modernism during the Thirties, Hill was by no means averse to designing buildings in other styles. Gill made no claims to be a modernist and yet he is linked to modernism through his association with others such as Hill. Both came close to something that could be called modernism but somehow their work is perceived as not quite the genuine article. Perhaps they were too English.

So what was this modernism that Gill and Hill so nearly attained but not quite at the Midland Hotel? Clearly the building has some of the relevant components with its steel frame, flat roof, plain almost austere white exterior and extensive use of glass on the seaward side. However, questions arise about the brick infill, the rendered exterior finish and the almost symmetrical plan. In his book *Twentieth Century Houses* (1935) Raymond McGrath discussed the new possibilities for the design and construction of buildings opened up by steel, concrete and plate glass. A steel frame offered the opportunity for new forms of building as walls lost their support function and could be clad in lightweight materials suspended from the frame, like plate glass, which in turn meant considerably lighter interiors. The spans made possible by steel girders could give larger rooms and enable space to be more flexibly utilised. But McGrath believed that however much the right components were apparent in a building, what was required for true modernism was a different way of thinking about the possibilities of the new materials and then following this through to conclusions about their rational use in design and construction. To achieve this aim McGrath thought that England needed a new breed of architect – the architect/engineer – who could merge the two disciplines which, by the mid-Thirties, had experienced very little crossover. In his view, English architects who had adopted the new materials and construction techniques but compromised them by mixing old and new fell short of true modernism. In comparison he cited the work of differently trained architect/engineers from continental Europe exiled in England such as Eric Mendelsohn and Serge Chermayeff whose buildings made a significant impact on the architectural scene of the Thirties.

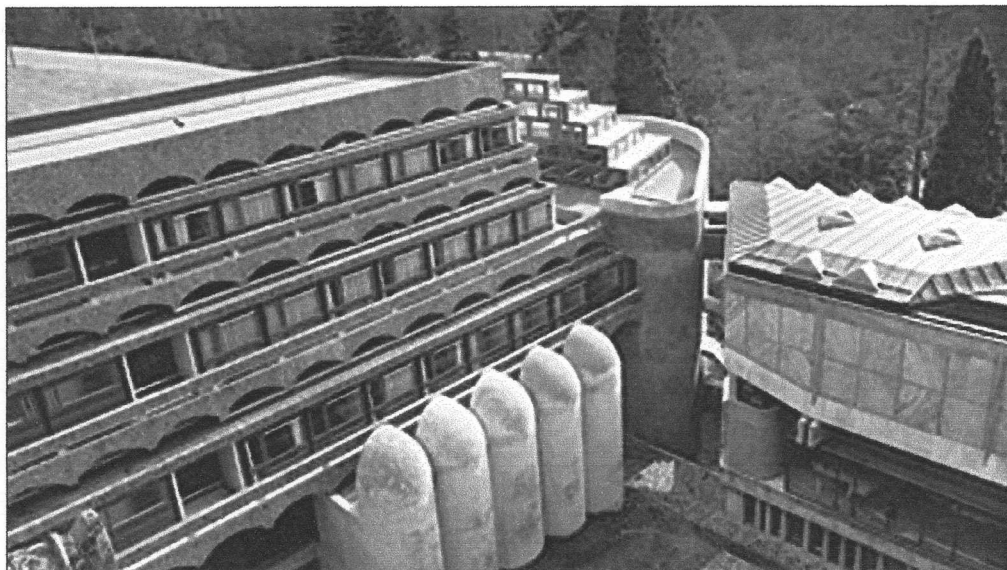
We tend to be a nation of pragmatists rather than theoreticians and so when a theory doesn't quite fit what we expect or want, then it's usually too bad for the theory – it gets reshaped to fit. Some writers, such as Alan Powers, do not believe there was a monolithic modernist approach to architecture that can be used as a template against which aspirant buildings can be assessed, stating that the notion of an undivided modern movement is nowadays universally accepted as a myth. It is all too easy to think of the architect as the authoritative powerful expert who tells his clients what it is they need and brooks no argument but that is rarely the case. Often a client has specific requirements to which the architect must adapt. In his discussion of Oliver Hill's varied work, Powers acknowledges the influence of the client on the buildings Hill designed and constructed. However, Hill's willingness to take on board his clients' wishes, switching from modern to traditional if necessary, was not simply a reflection of this influence but also a reluctance on his part to turn down profitable commissions solely on the grounds that they didn't match someone's theoretical ideal.

There is no doubt that many modernist architects were prepared to compromise, to listen to clients and adapt their designs and construction methods accordingly. But does this affect the integrity of their buildings and how they are regarded? Powers suggests that we need to adjust our views of the period to include such eclectic figures as Hill and Goodhart-Rendel and to do this requires a fundamental revision of the concept of modernity. He believes that 'a superficial analysis of style is too easy, and only the experience of the actual buildings begins to reveal the thread binding them together.' So it's alright to like the Midland, compromised or not, modernist or not. Many of us will happily go along with that.

Mike Stone

Mike Stone lives near Glasgow and writes to say that Urban Splash has crossed the border into Scotland. The company is interested in saving St Peter's College, a dilapidated Catholic seminary erected on the banks of the River Clyde in the 1960s. While not *Art Deco* in style, it is regarded as an iconic building in Scottish architectural circles (it is A-listed) and certainly one which offers Urban Splash quite a challenge.

Located in woods near the village of Cardross, the seminary - a three-storey concrete ziggurat flanked by silo-like chapels - is in a sorry state and while the exterior still looks impressive the inside was gutted many years ago. It was designed by two young architects Isi Metzstein and Andrew MacMillan, both admirers of Le Corbusier, and has echoes of the Swiss architect's Ronchamp Chapel and his monastery at La Tourette, while the towering side chapels, five on each side, resemble the cowls of cruise ships. The interiors were panelled in solid wood or veneer, harking back to the style of Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and leading the critic Brian Dillon to the view that 'In sum, St Peter's was both of its time architecturally and sufficiently eclectic and traditional not to startle the diocesan authorities too much - although students at the seminary were apt to refer to it as "the spaceship".'



Part of St Peter's seminary showing five of the chapels.

Commissioned by the Archbishop of Glasgow in 1958 and completed in 1966, St Peter's only functioned as a teaching college for 14 years, a victim of declining numbers and a Vatican decree that trainee priests should be schooled in the community. Since it closed in 1980 the seminary has gradually become derelict, subject to the effects of the weather and vandalism. In June 2007 the World Monuments Fund placed St Peter's on its register of buildings at risk although this did little to slow its decay. Following a survey by Avanti Architects, the Church said it would be willing to sell the seminary to Urban Splash for 'a nominal sum' so that it can be saved and redeveloped for commercial purposes. A spokeswoman for Urban Splash said the company wanted to bring the building 'back to life' possibly as a health or sports centre with additional residential buildings in its grounds and was working with leading Scottish architect Gareth Hoskins on a development plan for the site.

