

Richard Feilden

Born 1950. Architect.

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1. Introduction

The following chapters (1 to 5) were archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the website of the Independent at www.independent.co.uk. The article was written by fellow architect Sunand Prasad, and was published in January 2005.

Richard Feilden: Champion of sustainable building design

Richard John Robert Feilden, architect: born Lincoln 29 March 1950; senior partner, Feilden Clegg Bradley (formerly Feilden Clegg), Architects 1995-2005; Chairman, Higher Education Design Quality Forum 1995-2000; OBE 1999; married 1975 Patricia Nelson (two sons, one daughter); died Warleigh, Wiltshire 3 January 2005.

Richard Feilden was an influential practitioner of architecture and a passionate and effective advocate of its value.

He was killed by a falling tree in his cherished patch of woodland while clearing a glade as a memorial for his father. If such a thing makes sense, he would have appreciated leaving the world in this way, though it happened at least 30 years too early: for a connection with the natural world was one of Feilden's great passions given direction by a strong consciousness of legacy. These drives have been central to the architecture of Feilden Clegg Bradley (FCB), the firm he co-founded and which has produced some of the best examples of "sustainable design" in Britain, dating from before the phrase became common currency.

2. Family and Education

Failed came from a distinguished family - his father, G.B.R. ("Bob") Feilden (right), was an eminent engineer, and author of the seminal Feilden Report on Engineering Design and Director General of the British Standards Institution, 1970-81. His uncle Sir Bernard Feilden is a world authority on the conservation of historic building and a well-known architect. Another uncle and his family made a significant contribution to ethical banking and started brie production in Somerset. Richard's grandmother, who single-handedly brought up these three and two other boys, was a lifelong inspiration to him.



Initially following his father into engineering, Feilden changed to Architecture at Cambridge University after a year. In this post-1968 era of enormous student self-confidence the world seemed ready for reshaping and Feilden took to the reshaping with relish - rewriting the architecture syllabus halfway through his first year, for example.

He completed his architectural studies at the Architectural Association in London. Then, after less than a year of assistantship, he set up practice in 1978 with Peter Clegg, operating from a shop-front in Bath. Feilden and Clegg not only designed but also built low-energy houses via building and development companies they set up.

3. Career

Feilden was an early champion of the involvement of building users and local communities in the design of buildings - what used to be specifically called "community architecture" but has now become part of accepted practice. In this, he was in the thick of the redirection of the architectural profession away from the "doctor always knows best" model towards valuing not only the rights of consumers but the deep knowledge they can bring to the complex processes of briefing and design.

In 1994 he played an important role in the Royal Institute of British Architects' pivotal "Strategic Study of the Profession", when clients were asked what they thought of the services architects were providing. The replies were a delicious mix of encouraging and sobering, perfectly reflecting what so often exercised Feilden: architects have much to contribute to society but are often their own worst enemies, not seeing the full picture of clients' needs and slow to influence change.

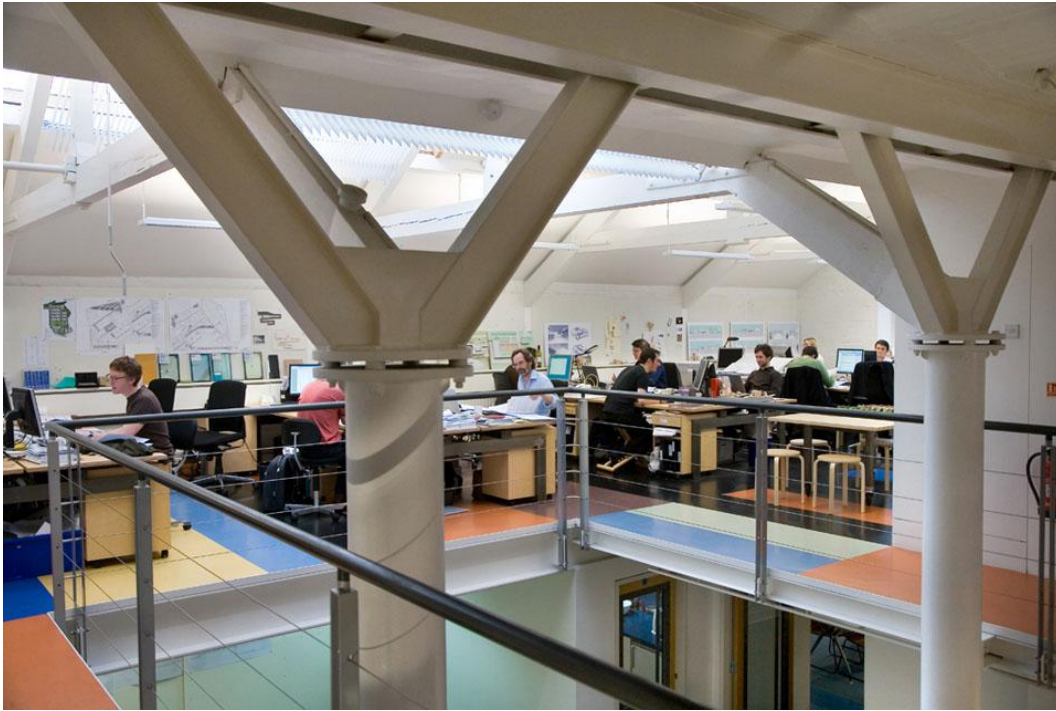


The Olivier Theatre, Bedales School.

When appointed to the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment in 2000, Feilden got the chance to influence public procurement on a wide scale. Through the design of a number of award-winning school projects, such as the John Cabot City Technology College, Bristol, and the Olivier Theatre at Bedales School in Hampshire, FCB had built a formidable reputation in the education sector. This, together with his detailed knowledge and his passionate advocacy gave Feilden unparalleled authority in the subject.

The commission was appalled by some of the schools built in the early days of the Private Finance Initiative; with Feilden's leadership, Cabe's schools programme ensured that the need for high-quality design for pupils and staff was recognised by the key players - from ministers and civil servants to those responsible for delivery. While we are still far from seeing every new school well designed, there is considerable evidence of a significant improvement and a healthy crop of exemplary designs. Much of the credit is due to Feilden.

4. Feilden Clegg Bradley



The Bath office of FCB Studios.

Richard Feilden's greatest achievement lies in the creation and direction of Feilden Clegg Bradley (now named FCB Studios) - a practice that has continually produced high-quality architecture, adhering to strong principles and with sustained idealism for over 25 years. His method of operation was not that of an individualist prima donna designer but of an inspirer and synthesiser of many contributions. The result is a modern form of practice that explicitly embraces the collaborative nature of producing architecture.

For a large practice with 100 staff, FCB has an unusually democratic structure with a strong shared ethic. Other than schools, the practice's well-regarded works include the Greenpeace HQ, in Islington, the Building Research Establishment's experimental low-energy office in Watford, buildings for Imperial College and UCL and the recently completed student housing for Queen Mary College in east London.

5. An Uplifting Effect



Whether advocating cycling or better procurement processes, Feilden had an ability to live the beliefs he preached earnestly, and sometimes at a considerable length, while enjoying every minute. The bond of his 32-year old marriage to Tish Feilden and of their close-knit family was a visibly solid base for his energetic

actions. He belongs to that radical tradition in which a respect for labour, a profound love of the natural world, a sense of social justice and unabashed entrepreneurship come together vigorously to have an uplifting, palpable effect on our lives.

6. Some FCB Projects

The architects' descriptions of the following FCB projects were archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the website of FCB Studios at www.fcbstudios.com.

Accordia Housing, Cambridge



Accordia was the first housing project to win the RIBA Stirling Prize and widely regarded as having set a whole new benchmark for large-scale housing in the UK. Our aim has been to produce an exemplary urban environment: a desirable place to live that balances usable private space within an overall structure of high-quality public space. The design includes a variety of innovative house and apartment types in the form of terraces, courtyard houses and 'set-piece' apartment buildings, composed within public landscaped gardens that extend to approximately three hectares.

Our approach reflects the changing aspirations of modern lifestyles and continues a strong tradition of domestic architecture in Cambridge, creatively blending built form with landscape.

The design replaces traditional gardens with a variety of private open spaces such as courtyards, roof terraces and large balconies. A mixture of house and apartment types weaves into the fabric of these spaces in the form of terraces, courtyard houses and set-piece apartment buildings. The scheme also adopts a holistic approach to environmental design, creating a well-rounded and sustainable complex.

The scheme is set in a mature landscape - previously occupied by 1940s low-rise government offices - and contains over 700 mature trees. These trees are integrated into landscape consultant, Grant Associates' designed landscape and communal gardens. Jamie Anderson's paper in 'Frontiers in Public Health' studied residents at Accordia, and found that living in a neighbourhood with a higher ratio of communal gardens is associated with higher levels of wellbeing and community.

The external materials for the housing comprises mostly of bricks selected to match closely the traditional Cambridge Gault clay bricks, with the apartments constructed from Copper and Green Oak.

Many elements of the buildings were fabricated off-site - increasing speed of construction, reducing waste, and improving environmental performance. As they age gracefully, the stock bricks, composite timber and aluminium windows, and all copper and untreated hardwood will require minimal maintenance.

Bedales School Art and Design Building

Bedales School is set in an area of outstanding natural beauty on the edge of the South Downs National Park in the village of Steep near Petersfield. Constructed around a substantial and beautiful oak tree within a new court and central lawn the new Art and Design building has a strong sense of place.



Bedales School Art and Design Building.

The design of the building draws references from traditional agricultural buildings with clipped gables and simple standing-seam metal roofs, defining a series of connected barn forms. Materials were used in their natural state throughout: a lattice timber screen shelters the entrance canopy and external walkway creating a welcoming gesture on approach to the building.

The layout on the upper floor is a series of carefully scaled open and interconnected north-lit art studios that enable teaching and independent study for a wide range of group sizes and activities. On the ground floor

heavier duty craft-based design subjects are taught alongside jewellery and fashion design.

A connection to the outdoors characterises much of Bedales life, and consequently all circulation is external, across covered decks on both sides of the building that double as places to draw, paint, sculpt or just relax and contemplate the environment.

Since its foundation by John Badley in 1893, creative arts education has been at the heart of this liberal and alternative independent school, within the South Downs National Park, in Hampshire.

The new Art & Design building sits in the shadow of a 300 year old oak tree, alongside a range of old barns in which ‘outdoor work’ is taught and students bake bread each week.

The form and east-west orientation of the five pitched roofs of the new Art and Design building define a series of carefully scaled, north-lit studio spaces. Natural light is maximised and the need for artificial lighting reduced.

In what is otherwise a lightweight building, the thermal mass of exposed concrete surfaces contributes to a stable internal temperature. Timber-slatted screens and the retained large oak tree both provide solar shading in the summer months. Renewable natural materials, including sustainably sourced timber for cladding and wood fibre acoustic panels, reduce the embodied carbon in the construction.

Building Research Establishment, Garston



This is a landmark building at the heart of the BRE campus, providing 1,350 square metres of office space plus seminar facilities combining high architectural standards with innovations in energy efficient environmental

design. The project received a BREEAM 'Excellent' rating, achieving the highest score recorded at the time. We designed the experimental structure to use approximately 30% less energy than current best practice. The specification, devised as part of the Energy Efficient Office of the Future project, set stringent targets for energy consumption and addressed wider environmental concerns such as recycling.

96% of the material from demolition of the redundant workshops on site was recycled and this was the first UK use of recycled aggregate for concrete superstructure. Other recycled materials included brickwork, screeds, made from recycled power station gypsum and wood block floors recycled from County Hall in London.

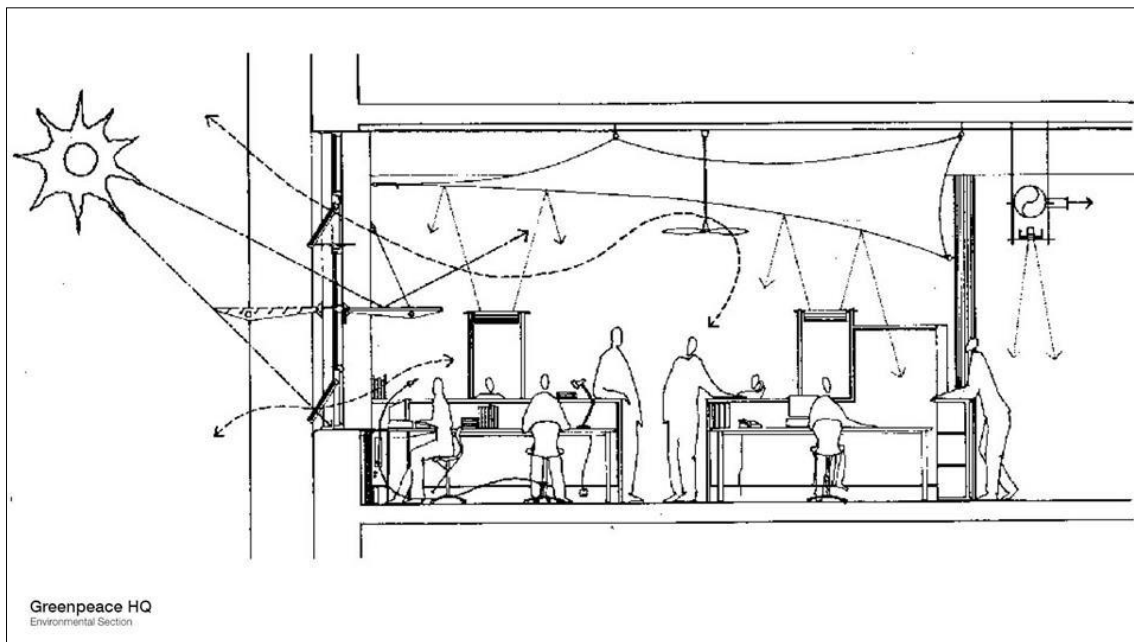
Greenpeace Headquarters, London



This conversion of a 1930's former laboratory building provides 2,000 square metres of accommodation for 80 Greenpeace staff in North London.

This was a pioneering environmental and ecological refurbishment which incorporates a variety of low energy design features in a fast track programme. Materials were carefully selected to minimise their impact on the environment in manufacture, how they are used and their ultimate disposal. The project maximises use of the substantial window areas in the

existing building to provide controlled and natural lighting and ventilation, and uses a combined heat and power plant to provide heat and electricity.



Daylight and ventilation at the Greenpeace headquarters building.

National Trust Headquarters, Swindon.



Heelis is the award-winning headquarters for the UK's largest charity, the National Trust. Sustainability is at the heart of the National Trust's mission and FCBStudios was briefed to develop the most sustainable building possible within the available budget.

Located in Swindon, the new Central Office we have created has satisfied that brief and gained two of the most prestigious sustainability awards in the UK from RIBA and the Civic Trust in the process. The project

demonstrates that it is possible to achieve significant improvements in the performance of typical commercial buildings built to similar budgets.



National Trust bases and its excellent public transport connections. The building, with 76,500 square feet of office space, is located on the site of Brunel's Great Western Railway works, to the north west of Swindon town centre where at the height of activity in the late 19th century 14,000 people were employed. Its "deep plan" form is a contemporary interpretation of the historic workshop buildings where natural light and ventilation were the only options in terms of environmental control.

The trapezoidal plan form synthesises the geometry of the adjacent 19th century buildings, with north-south oriented roof pitches for solar energy collection and controlled natural light, and a "desire line" which traverses the site from the south east.

The building has been designed to provide a minimum daylight factor of 5% to all regularly occupied areas, minimising the use of artificial light by means of a fully dimmable lighting control system. We've designed the two-storey deep plan building to provide an exemplary working environment.

The new office has already achieved an 'excellent' BREEAM rating and is expected to generate less than 20Kg of CO₂/m² each year. The environmental design and minimised energy usage has put in place the possibility of approaching carbon neutrality.

It offers 76,500 square feet of office space, meeting rooms and workshops for 470 staff, plus a shop and café, and brings together a workforce previously dispersed over four locations.



The saw tooth roof form provides an even distribution of daylight and ventilation across the plan depth, while a series of atria connect the two storeys, creating a real sense of the whole organisation sharing a single volume.

The floor to ceiling height of 3.7metres at ground floor is unusually high, but designed to ensure that both natural light and ventilation work efficiently throughout the plan depth. Roof glazing to the central atrium allows sunlight to animate the ‘breakout’ space for much of the day.

Sandbag Igloo

This project supports the work of a remote research station monitoring the impact of global climate change on the fragile ecosystems and indigenous communities of the Namib Desert.

We are investigating ways of consolidating the existing building stock and proposing a series of new builds. After our initial site visit we are now

researching potential construction methods, including sandbag technology, for both the station and the local communities.

A trial construction of a sandbag "igloo" was completed near our Bath office in June 2009. We are now assessing its suitability as a replicable means of providing accommodation for the centre and for local communities.



7. The Richard Feilden Foundation

The following description of the work of the Richard Feilden Foundation, established in his memory, was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Richard Feilden Foundation website at www.feildenfoundation.org.uk.

Mission



Supporting communities in East Africa to deliver the educational aspirations they have for their people and to help with meeting those needs through the promotion of the design and construction of good, effective schools and other educational projects. We believe good buildings foster exemplary teacher/pupil relationships, and we work collaboratively with local communities, acknowledging and promoting local expertise and technologies.

We believe in providing opportunity for young architects to engage in projects which give them direct experience of working alongside other young people in Africa.

Objectives

1. To encourage and support educational projects in Africa, and especially those requiring architectural input.
2. Without prejudice to the generality of the above, to promote community involvement, and the use of African expertise and technologies in Africa's educational and architectural development.
3. To support other charitable organisations with similar objects to (1) and (2).

What we do



We use our network of professionals, with expertise of the built environment and education sectors to provide skills and transfer knowledge to enhance educational infrastructure across East Africa. We partner with like-minded organisations and individuals who share our values and aspirations to collaborate on projects. We are not a grant-making or donor organisation.



Our first major programme of action was the seven year development of Lake Bunyonyi Community School in Uganda into a self-sustainable institution. During this time, we worked closely with the school and surrounding community to enhance and expand their built infrastructure alongside income-generating activities to create financial stability.

Why we do it

Richard Feilden's three overriding passions were Architecture, Education and Africa. As Founder and Senior Partner of Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios, Richard was a tireless promoter of sustainable and innovative development. He was an enabler and had a passionate desire to make the world, and in particular Africa, a better place. He believed in the right to be educated and the value of better buildings and crucially the sharing of skills. This memorial foundation is determined to reflect these passions and uphold these values.

How we do it



We have professional volunteers who work with local partners on our projects. When a project is selected for collaboration using the mandate points below, we facilitate an appropriate project team who volunteer time and expertise towards the project. We have and continue to work with a range of architects, structural and environmental engineers, carpenters, builders, agriculturalists, teachers and other educationists to contribute to, develop and realise our projects.
