

Canon's House

Official list entry

Heritage Category: **Listed Building**

Grade: **II**

List Entry Number: **1479963**

Date first listed: **19-Apr-2022**

List Entry Name: **Canon's House**

Statutory Address 1: **Canons Way, Bristol, BS1 5LL**

This List entry helps identify the building designated at this address for its special architectural or historic interest.

Unless the List entry states otherwise, it includes both the structure itself and any object or structure fixed to it (whether inside or outside) as well as any object or structure within the curtilage of the building.

For these purposes, to be included within the curtilage of the building, the object or structure must have formed part of the land since before 1st July 1948.

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[Corrections and minor amendments](https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/minor-amendments/) (<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/minor-amendments/>)

Location

Statutory Address: **Canons Way, Bristol, BS1 5LL**

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

District: **City of Bristol (Unitary Authority)**

Parish: **Non Civil Parish**

National Grid Reference: **ST5835472349**

Summary

Offices for Lloyds Bank, designed 1986-1987; built in two phases, 1988-1991. Arup Associates as architects and engineers, with Donald Mackay Ferguson as lead; Peter Swann Associates landscape; Bovis Construction as management contractor.

Reasons for Designation

Canon's House, 1988-1991 by Arup Associates, is listed at Grade II, for the following principal reasons:

Architectural interest:

* a pivotal element within the post-industrial repurposing of Bristol's docks which, together with the integrated amphitheatre, forms a monumental and distinctive harbourside landmark; * an accomplished Post-Modern design which combines bold geometric forms and classical devices, while referencing local motifs and traditions, and which is of the highest quality in its construction and materials; * an inventive interpretation of the classical idiom to create a building with strong civic presence, dignity and playfulness; * skilful Beaux Arts planning, which creates a sequence of rational and orderly internal spaces, punctuated by distinctive, sometimes dramatic focal areas of great spatial sophistication; * simple, unfussy treatment of interiors with a limited palette of materials and high-quality fixtures, consistently treated and clearly articulated; * carefully integrated services, anticipating the need for flexibility and change, and with an innovative system of heating and cooling the building using the harbour water.

Historic interest:

* a beacon in the post-industrial redevelopment of Bristol's docks and the regeneration of the derelict harbourside as a thriving recreation and cultural centre; * the last in a series of major bespoke offices by Arup Associates, a pioneering interdisciplinary practice who set new standards for office design in their integration of structure, services and planning and attention to detail.

Group value:

* with the listed crane base, to which it is carefully aligned and which forms the centrepiece of the amphitheatre, and with numerous other listed structures with which it shares a strong visual relationship.

History

Canon's House was built as a regional headquarters for Lloyds Bank in 1988-1991. Lloyds took the decision to relocate its disparate retail banking functions onto a single site away from London in 1986. Arup Associates were engaged as architects, with Donald Ferguson leading the project.

The rapid decline of the Bristol's working docks in the post-war period set the scene for their redevelopment. The success of the arts venues the Watershed and Arnolfini demonstrated the potential of the docks for cultural and social activity, and the vision for the wider area was for a place of food and drink, public events and festivals, with a progression of public spaces forming a continuous harbourside walk. Canon's Marsh was a focal point of the harbour, located at the confluence of the Avon and the Frome and with the cathedral as its backdrop. It was a key site in the regeneration strategy, and had been earmarked for housing. Only after lengthy negotiations was outline planning permission for offices granted in 1987.

The brief for the building was to accommodate 1400 staff, with ancillary services and car parking. It was to be planned and delivered in two phases, with the first being able to stand alone in the event of delay or incompleteness of the second. The building was to have a civic presence, and would be used to create a major public assembly place. Various constraints governed the design; massing was informed by the city planners' desire to keep building heights low – the site was previously occupied by two seven-storey warehouses, and the opportunity was taken to reinstate views from across the water to the cathedral on higher ground to the north.

Arup's design saw a building of three distinct entities: two office ranges joined by a link block containing the main entrance, services and the staff canteen. The first office range was in the form of an arc, reflecting the curve of the harbour wall and creating a roughly semi-circular amphitheatre, enclosed by the concave colonnaded façade. Phase two was a rotunda, with a landscaped internal courtyard. Aligned on a series of axes, these converging convex forms give focus to the main entrance to the north, and frame the canteen courtyard to the south. Coupled with this Beaux Arts planning was a stripped-down classical architecture, with a formality befitting its civic status, while referencing Georgian Bristol and Bath, neo-classical C19 and early C20 banks, and Bristol's City Hall.

Arup Associates had been formed in 1963 with partners Philip Dowson, Ronald Hobbs, Derek Sugden and Ove

Arup, joined in 1969 by Peter Foggo. The Partnership developed the multi-disciplinary co-operation fostered by Ove Arup's consultant engineering practice; Arup having worked closely with architects since the 1930s. They brought an analytical, developmental and collaborative ethos to the design of buildings for commerce and industry, later applying their combination of rigour and design flair to the design of speculative and commissioned commercial and corporate offices. Canon's House has echoes of Arup's unbuilt scheme for Paternoster Square, and is a direct antecedent is the firm's Legal and General House, Tadworth, listed at Grade II*. Structural and stylistic parallels include the independent façade, the classical language with rusticated stone plinth, giant order paired columns, and Beaux Arts planning.

Canon's House has a place in the Post-Modern movement, prevalent in architecture between about 1975 and 1990. The style is defined in terms of its relationship with modern architecture, and is characterised by its plurality, engagement with context and setting, reference to older architectural traditions and use of metaphor and symbolism. As a formal language it has affinities with mannerism (unexpected exaggeration, distortions of classical scale and proportion) and the spatial sophistication of Baroque architecture. Post-Modernism accepts the technology of industrialised society but expresses it in more diverse ways than the machine imagery of the contemporary High-Tech style.

The origins of the style are found in the United States, notably in the work of Robert Venturi and Charles Moore which combined aspects of their country's traditions (ranging from the C19 Shingle Style to Las Vegas) with the knowing irony of pop art. A parallel European stream combined an abstracted classicism or a revival of 1930s rationalism with renewed interest in the continental city and its building types. In England, the American and European idioms converged in the late 1970s, to produce works by architects of international significance, including James Stirling, and distinctive voices unique to Britain such as John Outram. The 1980s revival of the British economy was manifested in major urban projects by Terry Farrell and others in London, while practices such as CZWG devised striking imagery for commercial and residential developments in Docklands and elsewhere.

Details

Offices for Lloyds Bank, designed 1986-1987; built in two phases, 1988-1991. Arup Associates as architects and engineers, with Donald Mackay Ferguson as lead; Peter Swann Associates landscape; Bovis Construction as management contractor.

STRUCTURE and MATERIALS: the buildings are concrete framed with glazed curtain walls. The characteristic colonnaded façades are independent of the structure, and incorporate precast concrete columns and components with tooled, acid-washed or bush-hammered finishes. The colonnade rises from wide piers of St

Maxim limestone. The building has a plinth of Euville limestone, and stands on a podium of split-faced reconstituted granite blockwork.

PLAN: the building is located on Canon's Marsh, at the confluence of the Frome and Avon. Planned on a series of axes, with the drum of the main entrance forming a centre point, from which the two office wings radiate. The axis bisects the east wing to align with the base of a crane on the harbour's edge (listed Grade II, National Heritage List for England entry 1204766), which in turn forms the centre of a 60m-radius amphitheatre

The office range of Phase 1, to the east, is crescent shaped on plan, enclosing the amphitheatre to the south-east. Phase 2 stands to the west, and is a circular drum, 80m in diameter, with a landscaped central courtyard. These two ranges are linked by the lower central entrance block, which has circular projections to the north, forming the main entrance, and south, containing the staff cafeteria.

The ground level of the amphitheatre was lowered by 1.2m. This rises in a semi-circular series of steps to meet the concave façade of the building.

EXTERIOR: a Post-Modernist design using classical vocabulary. The three-storey offices have abstracted classical facades, with rusticated stone ground floors surmounted by paired columns forming double-height colonnades. Detailing is stripped back, with a notional capital linking the columns, and with a void entablature: instead, steel members rise to support a leaded canopy. Windows are full height; those on the ground floor have iroko timber frames; the upper floors are fully glazed curtain walls with slender aluminium frames. There are low parapets to the flat roofs. The offices are effectively raised from the external ground level, and direct public view, on a podium.

The concave elevation of the eastern block forms the principal elevation, facing onto the amphitheatre. It is symmetrical, with a bowed, slightly projecting centrepiece. The ground floor of this has a recessed doorway with timber double doors with slender glazing bars. Above, the paired piers of the colonnade shift to become a series of six single columns. The parapet steps up and is surmounted by a pyramidal lantern. The return walls are blind, clad in limestone, and have a central projecting stair tower with double doors to the ground floor, glazing to the upper floors, and a turret. The western rotunda is similarly detailed, with a continuous colonnade with occasional blind bays.

The central entrance is recessed between the convex forms of the two office ranges. It is a low circular drum, blind, with a wide doorway and a conical lantern. On an axis to the south is the staff canteen, also a circular drum, with full-height windows and a conical leaded roof. This has an external courtyard enclosed by a low wall and railings with adjoining corner turrets.

INTERIOR: the main entrance is a circular, top-lit hall containing the waiting area, with the reception counter and visitor's bathrooms on the periphery. The floor is terrazzo tiling laid in a radiating geometric pattern. Circulation routes beyond are tiled with marginal detailing.

Central to the eastern office range is a full-height atrium with conical lantern. The floor replicates the radiating pattern of the main entrance in shades of white with marginal detailing. The atrium provides access to the north and south wings, which are arranged over three floors, with a central top-lit galleria with walkways supported on paired steel columns, with steel balustrades with timber handrails. The ground floor has various enclosed offices containing support services: telephone exchange, post rooms, printing services. Parallel office floors are 9m deep. Ceilings have deep ribs with grooves for demountable partitions; various lightweight partitioning encloses some areas. Floors have 459m voids to accommodate cabling and air conditioning equipment. Within the stair towers at either end of the range are cantilevering spiral stairs with steel balustrades and timber handrails.

Within the western office rotunda, the office floors line the outer perimeter, with walkways facing onto the internal courtyard. The floor plan projects into the courtyard at the entrance to the rotunda, and contains an elliptical steel dogleg stair. The internal elevation is a fully glazed curtain wall.

The staff canteen is a circular space with a raised circular seating platform enclosed by a timber balustrade, with further seating space around the edges. Pillars support a ceiling around the periphery, above which is a glazed clerestory. The conical roof is supported on a series of timber posts and rafters which rest on a suspended steel framework with tension cables.

There is a war memorial with a dedicatory plaque and panels inscribed with the names of those who fell in the First and Second World Wars. An adjacent panel notes that it was moved from the Lloyds TSB Head Office at 71 Lombard Street, London, when that building closed in 2004.

A service void beneath the building contains heat pumps which use the harbour water to provide heating in the winter and cooling in the summer.

SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: the building stands on a podium of rusticated granite, with steel railings, integrated steps and ventilation shafts. On the central projection of the principal elevation is a plaque inscribed '1990 / THE SURROUNDING PUBLIC AMPHITHEATRE / WAS CONSTRUCTED BY LLOYDS BANK WITH THE / ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE CITY COUNCIL FOR / THE BENEFIT OF THE PEOPLE OF BRISTOL'. A second small plaque on the north return elevation records the architectural firm's name.

A series of granite blocks and steps form tiered seating along the building line beneath the podium, stepping down to the lower amphitheatre.

Sources

Books and journals

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Legal

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.



Map

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End of official list entry



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