

Frank Duffy

Architect, space planner, and author

Born 3.9.1940

Includes a transcript of a British Library National Life Stories interview carried out by Geraint Franklin on 31.1.13.

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1. Parents

This chapter was contributed in April 2020 by Frank Duffy's daughter Ella.



Gervase, Frank, Anna and Tony Duffy.

Frank was born a year after the start of the Second World War in England's northernmost town, Berwick-upon-Tweed, two and a half miles south of the Scottish border on the edge of the North Sea. His father, Austin Duffy, was headmaster at a local school and lived with his wife Annie Margaret (née Reed) and their children in a solid stone house at Palace Green within the embrace of the town's medieval and Elizabethan fortifications. Frank is the youngest of four children – Anna (1934–), Gervase (1937 –2014) and Anthony (1939–).

In 1942 Frank's father (right, photographed during the First World War) became ill and by April of that year he was no longer able to work. As a result the family was dispersed, with Austin and the eldest two children being taken in by two of his sisters at Chester-le-Street (they both worked as headmistresses as well as looking after their elderly parents). The two younger boys went with their mother to the house of her parents in South Shields.



Despite having made expensive trips to London for treatment at the Charterhouse Rheumatism Clinic and to Harrogate for gold injections, Austin died back at Chester-le-Street in July 1945 at the age of 48. By this time Frank's mother had moved to the Blackhill area of Consett – a working class steel town with a strong sectarian divide between its Catholic and Protestant populations. With a mortgage and the help of family she had bought a shop with living accommodation above and a house to rent out next door. To earn a living for the family she learnt to run a grocery shop in line with the

rationing system of the time (right). One of Frank's earliest memories is of his aunt Agnes arriving by bus at Blackhill to tell her sister in law: 'Austin is dead'.



Frank's elder siblings were eventually sent to boarding schools, funded either by scholarships or help from wider family. Both Frank's brothers later became priests – Gervase being ordained in Rome after Ratcliffe and Tony in England after Ushaw. Frank, however, had been diagnosed as a baby with a hole in the heart and also a mild form of spina bifida and for this reason was never sent away to school, remaining instead with his mother in Blackhill and travelling into Newcastle every day by bus to attend St Cuthbert's Grammar School – where his father and uncles on both sides of his family had also been educated. The diagnoses meant that Frank was forbidden by doctors from taking part in games lessons at school and he spent the time in the library instead.

The family context was strongly Roman Catholic on both sides and predominantly Irish – the exception being his maternal grandfather who was from a Northumberland family. Despite the fact that the Irish branches of the family had been settled in England for almost a century by the time Frank was born, the relative insularity of the community he grew up in combined with strong familial connections with the priesthood and education meant that Frank carried forward a sensibility often quietly at odds with the status quo in his country of his birth.

The Irish family background was distributed across the province of Connacht in the west of Ireland. Strong farming – the leasing of tracts of land from absentee English landlords often to sublet in small parcels – was a recurrent theme in the families before the exodus prompted by the Great Famine of 1845–49. To give just one example,

Frank's great grandfather Matthias Duffy (right) emigrated to England from the parish of Kilkeevin near Castelrea in the county of Roscommon. As a young man Matthias had ventured from far beyond the English Pale to study at Maynooth near Dublin.



He was the son of Thomas Duffy, a smallholder and hedge schoolmaster most likely teaching rudimentary Latin and Greek in the tradition of the secret, illegal schools that had originated in the Penal Laws, which banned education in Ireland except for those of Anglican faith. Towards the end of his life in England Matthias gave his place of origin as 'the British Colonies' in the 1881 Census – an indication of his political stance on 'the Irish question'.

A combined thread in the family background in England was mining, with both his grandfathers (and their fathers) working in collieries – the Irish grandfather at the coalface and the English one as a manager responsible for the safety of 1,000 men. In 1926 Frank’s Irish grandfather Johnnie Duffy (right) had taken part in the General Strike in protest against wage reductions and poor working conditions and as a consequence was never re-employed. He told his grandchildren this was because he had ‘the wrong name’: an allusion to the fact that two of his elder brothers were prominent union men, signing agreements on behalf of workforces at neighbouring collieries in the late 1880s.



The family context in mining undoubtedly influenced Frank’s perception of the world of work. I remember him explaining to me as a child that sophisticated systems of sharing risk in mining communities had emerged historically from the bottom up: because there would be no pay if a team failed to hit a seam, and because the work was dangerous and injuries and deaths commonplace, mining communities had been driven out of necessity and humanity, Frank said, to invent ways of uniting collectively against risk.

2. The Architectural Association

I was a scholarship boy. I went to school in Newcastle upon Tyne. Quite early on I got the notion that I wanted to be an architect. The school had quite a strong art department, but the thing I was mainly interested in at that time was writing. Somewhere along the line I got the notion, probably through the art master, that architecture would be an interesting career. There was no architect in the family, and I didn't know any architects. I did meet, on a bus, a few people a bit older than me who were studying architecture.

My sister had been to London University, and had heard about the Architectural Association. So in 1959 I went for an interview, and got something called a Leverhulme Scholarship. It paid my fees and gave me a decent student allowance. It was the only way I could have got into the AA. My local authority, Durham, didn't recognise the AA. That was a piece of really good fortune.

The alternative would have been to go to King's College, part of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, where two years ahead of me Terry Farrell had studied. Terry Farrell owes it my Uncle Joe, who taught French at the grammar school, who took an interest in Terry and helped him to get through O Level, without which he would not have got into King's. He was struggling a bit, and obviously took to architecture like a duck to water. He was a little bit ahead of me. I am still quite close to Terry.

There is another parallel. After I finished at the AA I worked for three years at something called the National Building Agency which I will tell you about later. Following the path of two of my contemporaries at the AA, John Worthington (right) and Peter Eley, I applied for and got a Harkness Fellowship, which in those days were absolutely fantastic.



You could go anywhere you wanted in the states. You had a substantial allowance. I married and had my first child at that time. You could take the family along, and you could just turn up at any place you wanted to, any university, and it was yours. Terry had had that same experience, two years earlier. After doing very well, he joined the LCC. I think he designed that ventilator for the Blackwall Tunnel.

Now listed Grade II.

Is that right? Well there you are. So Terry was making his way in the world pretty fast.

Coming back to the AA then, you went in 1959?

Yes 1959.

Who was teaching there?

Just about everyone you have ever heard of! The most famous were the Smithsons. They of course had a Tyneside background as well. I don't think they would admit it. And Cedric Price was extremely important.

John Winter was the fourth year master. (He is shown right on the roof of his self-build house overlooking the Regent's Park zoo). There were also people still around from the German Jewish diaspora like Arthur Korn. He was a well known architect in Germany who had worked at the Bauhaus and was exiled and came to Britain in the late 1930s. It was later that I found out how well respected he had been in Germany. He helped me when I became interested in offices. I got a travel scholarship from the AA to study open plan offices in Germany. Korn was very helpful in introducing me to people in Germany, like Walter Henn. Yes, so the AA was probably at its peak.



What did it feel like being there?

Absolutely marvellous. It couldn't have been better. There were two major factors. There was something about the compactness of the accommodation in Bedford Square. There were no other departments and no other distractions, as it were.

And the fact that the AA was working at that time as a meeting place for construction industry professionals. Because the geography of the construction industry – quantity surveyors and engineers such as Arup – were very much concentrated in Bloomsbury. And that probably goes back to the beginning of the 19th century. That social geography was very important. It meant you were visible to and in touch with the elite of the professions. So it wasn't just the school, it was the school in its sociological and economic context. That is what mattered. And being cut off meant that you had a very sharp focus. So it was a terrific experience, and I flourished in it.

Could I ask who your contemporaries were?

The year above was probably the best year ever in the history of the AA. Ed Jones and Jeremy Dixon were there, and quite a lot of names that have become well known since. An extremely talented group doing very very good work. My exact contemporaries included Peter Eley and John Worthington. I need to wipe the spiders' webs from my brain!

Talk me through each year of the training.

The first year was about basic graphic skills and elements of buildings. The emphasis was on the graphic. We did quite small buildings, including a house. The second year was more sociological and welfare statish. A school, and institutional buildings, and I think a church. There was no doubt that God had put us on this world to design very large housing schemes on metropolitan sites!

The main thing that happened during the five year course was that the projects just got bigger. In the fourth year John Winter was the year master. He was a very

important person to me. We were told to design an office building. John had worked for Skidmores in San Francisco for a few years and had absorbed the idea of what the Americans thought an office building was at that time. Which was a bit like the Seagram building – tall and shiny and orthogonal, and smart.

Smart by European standards, and certainly by British standards. Because in Britain the scum of the profession design office buildings. They were commercial, and we didn't like commerce of course, because we were all left wing. Also they were not very good. The Centrepoint building, which I suppose is semi-respectable, was going up and you could see it over the rooftops from Bedford Square.

What reputation did that building have at that time?

Not very good. And I think it wasn't just the architecture, it was the socialist bias of disliking commerce. Both embodied in the person of Siefert, who was declassé, and wasn't talked about very much. I am being a bit unfair, because for example YRM were beginning to do some fairish buildings, much on the American model. And a few others.

There was no interior design, because that hadn't been invented yet. We thought interior design was all women and foolishness. John Winter set us a brief for an office building. Our briefs had tended to be rather sociological and serious. John's brief was a one-liner. Design an office building of 150,000 square feet in Chancery Lane. Dee-dum! I just didn't know what to do. I had been quite serious minded, involved with schools and the sociology of housing which was quite highly developed at that time. Health was taken very seriously.



But the office was not taken seriously, except as an object. I was saved, actually, by Reyner Banham (right), who I didn't know at that time. He as a journalist was writing in the *Architectural Review*. He wrote this little piece some time in the autumn of 1962, I think, about a new phenomenon in Germany called *burolandschaft* or office landscaping. This was a news piece, but it was accompanied by a photograph and a plan. Now the plan was of a non-orthogonal building, with desks arranged in an organic way. The idea was that the firm of management consultants who occupied the building studied patterns of communication within companies, and the *burolandschaft* wrapped itself around those patterns of communication.

What was your immediate reaction?

Beautiful. As an idea. And it had a process behind it. It was a way into understanding this phenomenon of the workplace. And there were other things. The photo accompanying the news piece was important. It showed an interior with various features such as a carpet. Carpet had not been invented at that time in the workplace. And plants. Plants inside!

And instead of the tea lady going rattle rattle round the office twice a day, there were these areas where you could take a relaxed break when you wanted to in these

areas which were domestic in furniture and feeling. There is a lot of politics in the burolandschaft ideology, which Banham was interested in and got hold of. That is what led me into this building type.

And having seen that piece, how did you follow it up?

Well, I attempted to mimic the ideas in the project, which resulted in a different type of design from the others, which were more American.

What did Winter think?

He was interested. And Cedric Price (right) was also an influence. There was also quite a lot of talk about cybernetics, believe it or not. The early stages of the computer world. There were lectures about communications, and discussions about the way the computer would change the world. Also discussion about design method – the importance of a detailed sociological background.



What were the sociological influences?

Michael Young's very important study of Bethnal Green, and the social impact of moving people from Bethnal Green to the new towns, and the problems that arose. It wasn't paradise. It all goes back to Mass Observation in the 1940s. There was in Britain at that time a very strong respect for sociology, which we absorbed without having any formal training in it. It was in the air.

So I applied for one of the AA travel scholarships between the fourth and fifth year. So with the help of Walter Henn I went to Germany to look at these interesting buildings. I went to a firm with an office just outside Hamburg, who were very impressive. Banham helped me track them down. The buildings I visited had an extremely high standard of internal environment – certainly by British and American standards.

Why do you think that happened in Germany?

I think it was the shock of the German defeat in the Second World War, the growing strength of the German Social Democratic Party. Protecting the rights of the individual, not imposing an order on them like the Americans do. Reacting against the American mechanical way of doing things. And searching for an aesthetic that was more homely, more amenable, and more malleable.

Were this thinking coming from architects?

No, they were management consultants. I think that helped them articulate an idea that no architect would have been able to do at that time. But it was picked up quickly by people like Walter Henn and others, and became a bit of a fad, a fashion. It wasn't the only thing that was happening in offices in Germany. There were other American influences in places like Cologne. But anyway it was an extraordinary experience.

Visiting Hamburg at that time was visiting a place that had fairly recently been bombed. Not like it is now. There were large empty spaces, with British soldiers in disarray wandering through. It was still an occupied country. So that was a very important part of the story. My thesis was on this concept. I found a photograph the other day of me with my model displayed. I did have a bit of initiative. I somehow got in touch with someone from BP who was very interested in burolandschaft. My thesis on burolandschaft was considered a success.

3. Early Career

The next thing that happened, when I had finished at the AA was that I took a job at the National Building Agency, which had just been set up by the Tories to help them construct 500,000 houses a year. There was a huge push for housing. And a big part of the profession, perhaps about half, were still working for Government at that time, in one form or another. So housing was smart; it was also socially responsible.

But I had this office sideline, and that manifested itself in two ways. I wrote an article for the *Architectural Review*, I think while I was still in my fifth year at the AA. This attracted the attention of a publishing house, Anbar, who got me to write a little book about this German phenomenon – my first book. Meanwhile I had two day jobs at the NBA. I was working on another publication called *Generic Plans*. It was a typology of house plans, derived from the architectural literature, with Parker Morris standards. It was a classification of plans in a systematic way, depending on the size of the house – two or three bedrooms – and the width between the party walls.

What influence did Parker Morris have on domestic planning?

Huge. Huge. That influence is still around, in default.

Who was in charge of the NBA?

A guy called Cleve Barr. A communist of the old school. A very nice man. A firm believer in socialism and in doing things properly for people. I spent my time drawing these plans up on graph paper. Party walls were done with this stuff you could peel off and stick on. A kind of early Letraset. I wasn't in charge of it, but I did most of the work for the book that came out – *Generic Plans*. It gives you a very interesting picture of the better side of the social housing programme at that time.

It was aimed at private builders?

No, we were still building the new towns. I don't think it was mandatory for private builders, but I think it was mandatory for state funded housing, which was at least half the output. There was a very fine piece of work – the Parker Morris Report – which provided the sociological background to the generic plans and to these standards. A very fine piece of work. There were similar publications for schools, which I am less clear about.

All this was quite good training about method and system and publication. I learned how to write and to put ideas in order. The other job I had – an evening job – was that I edited *Arena*, the AA journal. John Smith, who had been my tutor in the fifth year, had been editing it. I think he got fed up with it and handed it over to me. I had a very very good committee, including Pat Tindale (right). She was one of these wonderful well educated well trained women architects of that time. There were many of them. They



tended to be very good indeed, and took their jobs very seriously. She had a loom room in the house she built for herself down in Clapham. About twice the size of this room. It was for recreation. A lovely person, sadly dead now. She was on AA Council. Peter Ahrends was around. We were very friendly with ABK. There were people flitting around in the background.

Richard Rogers was only about five years out of the AA. He turned up from time to time looking extremely confident and smart. In an artistic way. The Smithsons did not run the fifth year in my time. Just as well. They were brutal. Not just brutalists but brutal. Very difficult people, especially Alison. One issue of the AA journal was on their work, which I managed to put together. The Economist building was coming up.

What was your view on that?

The Economist building was good. That was alright. It had chamfered corners, so it must be OK. Also it was very nicely built. A very nice bit of urban design.

I believe the servicing of the building was interesting?

I couldn't comment on that. It's not something I was aware of at all. We tended to look at plans and elevations. Servicing was something I learned about much later.

4. The USA

What happened next?

I got married, and had my first child. John Worthington had discovered this Harkness Fellowship two years earlier. He had also discovered Berkeley, which I did not know about at the time. Peter Eley followed him; he went to the University of Pennsylvania. Influenced by John Worthington I went to Berkeley. Unlike John, who enjoyed himself, the grammar school boy was programmed to work hard!

I threw myself into the American educational system, which I adored. It provided me with the opportunity to raid other disciplines related to architecture. I went to sit at the feet of Chris Alexander.

Tell me about him.

Mad as a hatter. He has got madder since. He has developed this method of oratory, which I would recommend if you want to keep an audience calm. You look very tense and nervous, show a slide, then say about three sentences. And then go silent for about three minutes. Then another slide and another three sentences. And another silence. It kept the audience glued to their chairs. Nobody dared interrupt. Of course it was completely fraudulent, and I saw through Chris. But he was at the absolute peak of his glory, with his influential book just published. He had invented something he called the Pattern Language, which he still bangs on about.

What was that about?

Funnily enough, it was not dissimilar to the work we had done at the National Building Agency on generic plans. It was justifying spatial arrangements in terms of sociology. Cities would be made out of patterns. Unlike Generic Plans, Chris had a burning belief in his own cleverness. He thought you could get a pattern right, then it would be replicated all over cities. It was messianic.

I was saved by someone you won't have heard of, called Horst Rittel. He was out of Ulm in Germany, and was very interested in computation logic and in the way in which complex systems were being described at that time in the defence industry and aerospace. Applying that sort of thinking, rigorously, to architecture. Unlike Chris, he did this in an open ended way. Very stimulating, very rigorous, with the best German philosophical background. Berkeley was a fantastically exciting school at that time. Another person was Ezra Ehrenkrantz.

He was teaching there at that time?

Yes, but given the course format, which would be impossible today, I was able to raid other disciplines. These included sociology, social psychology, and industrial engineering.

What effect did that have on you?

Well, it taught me scholarship. I didn't know anything about scholarship until I came across it, first at Berkeley and then at Princeton. Writing term papers became

a necessity – something we had never done at the AA. Having a proper academic research and reference system.

How could you weave this back into the architecture?

Oh, because I had a question to ask. The question was: what is wrong with office landscaping? I wanted to establish it or refute it in an intellectual way. Berkeley provided the basic tools. And Princeton perfected them. Princeton was a very different kind of elitist private university, but with a good school of architecture. There was an excellent head at that time, a man called Bob Geddes. Bob Maxwell was teaching there. Alan Colquhoun was around. Peter Eisenmann, Michael Graves, what a faculty! This was 1968 to 1971, where I did my PhD.

There was a very important person, Robert Guttman, a sociologist. A very wonderful man. Properly trained, eloquent. What could justify spatial arrangements in complex organisations? Princeton was marvellous, but I learned most in New York.

Chris Alexander had got me to give a paper at a conference in Philadelphia. There was a phone call from a bloke in New York called Pete Beveridge. He was a space planner. He had heard my talk about systematic design, and wanted me to come to New York to give a talk to people in his group.

I couldn't have been luckier. I went to give my talk, and I am ashamed to say I was skeptical. There were women around – decorators – and what was this outfit? Picking carpets and wallpapers and things like that. Not serious. I went to mock, and I stayed to pray. They had the best operational programming for office design in the world. Rigorous and careful.

There were two axes of design – the developer and the architect one axis, and the corporate client and the space planner on the other. They hated each other and did not speak to each other. I went to see Philip Johnson. With a Harkness scholarship you could go anywhere. I made the mistake of saying to him that I was doing a bit of work for some space planners. He said 'They are all hacks'.

What was Johnson like?

He was extremely brisk with me. I don't think he thought I was up to much.

Coming back to the axes, what was the difference between them?

The answer is time. The developer and the architect worked on a thirty year cycle. You designed the building shell. Then you got the service engineers, and were beginning to get the computer people, who were designing on a fifteen year cycle. Then the space planners and the corporate clients working on a five year cycle. You don't have a lease much longer than five years, then you move on.

You are assuming that most of the office buildings were speculative and the space planner were working with the tenants?

Yes, they were in the USA. A few purpose built ones, for example by Frank Lloyd Wright. There was a very clever division of responsibilities. You never needed to talk to the other layer, because each layer had their job to do.

What were the consequences for the building?

The system is extremely efficient in terms of construction and space and occupation. It means that architects don't get themselves tied up in knots making furniture. That's left to the experts. And in the middle are the mechanical and electrical engineers doing their thing. A British architect would want to do everything. A German architect would as well. The idea had not crossed the Atlantic.

And if you walked into a British office interior, how would it differ?

About twice as expensive and half as good! Fidgety, fussy, very hierarchical in an exclusive way. Not hierarchical in an American way, which is very straightforward, in your face. There'd be more private zones and territories and layers to cross in the British system. And much more enclosure.

However not so much as in Germany, where a tremendous reaction against office landscaping had begun. The next step in the evolution of these sociological ideas was the idea of the workers' council. This very anti-Nazi, hyper democratic, idea was to involve the workers in decisions about their lives. In Germany there isn't interior design. It's all done by the architect, and the architects know everything.

Office landscaping was in effect rejected because of the necessity of the employer negotiating with the employees about their conditions of employment, including their space. And guess what people wanted? Doors. Windows you can open. Doors you can shut. Pictures you can put up on your own. That is what they wanted, and they got it. Highly cellular. And highly democratic, because all of the offices were the same size. This happened in pretty well every German office building after about 1965. Massive change.

Then there was a big expansion of the German economy?

Yes. And similar things were happening in Scandinavia. The big German cities were not really cities. They were relatively modest in scale, with lots of land around. Developers were not important at that time. Many companies were family owned, and they built their own buildings. They don't make money out of property. They build buildings for their own practical purpose. They take responsibility all the way. The North American system was quite different, particularly in relation to the differing life cycles of different parts of the building.

5. Back in London

So I was able to come back to the UK in 1971 having been a consultant part time in New York to a country and a continent that had heard nothing of all these ideas. The AA came into my life again. I went to a dinner there and sat next to Colin Boyne, who was a big cheese at the Architectural Press.

They were doing some series of supplements to the Architects Journal on various topics, such as housing and schools. He said why don't you do a series for us, which turned into Planning Office Space after two or three years. The work involved producing a supplement every month, getting other people involved. It was about as thorough a piece of work on the office and the working environment as could be achieved at that time. It was translated into Spanish. It remained useful for many years.

Having had to write the term papers at the American universities, and having had journalistic experience at the AA quarterly, I found it easy to think through writing and to put together this kind of material. At the same time I was establishing JFN in London in 1971. They had an office in Brussels, and they had just got a whole series of projects across Europe for IBM – in France, in Italy, in Helsinki and in Holland.

The computer had not yet escaped from the computer room, but they were selling lots of computers and they needed staff to help them do that and to run them. No British architectural practice would think of working across Europe in that way. To the Americans no problem working in an area 3,000 miles wide. But they didn't know anything about Europe, so this lesson from America learning about the division of responsibility between different design skills was totally new and different.

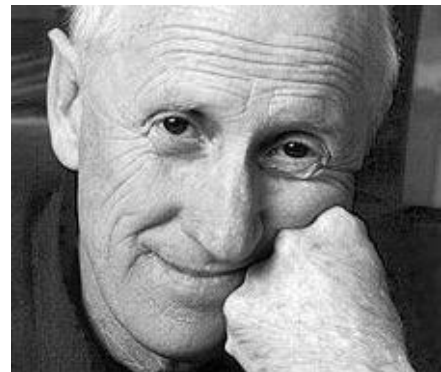
So that was the basis for our practice, in Amsterdam and in Helsinki. Doing the programming, as the Americans called it, for these IBM projects. And in Italy as well. Three years later, in the oil crisis, JFN went down the plughole. We were left on our own with a client base and a vision of a service – and a geographical and cultural grasp of office design which no-one else had at that time. It's called luck! It's called landing on your feet! That is the basis of what became DEGW.

6. DEGW

Who did you bring in?

Luigi Mangano who was in Brussels, and Luigi Giffone, who didn't want to come to London. We shared an office with Andrew Rabeneck, who was working with Ehrenkrantz doing something similar. He was another Harkness Fellow. A wonderful person. A very good writer, a very good thinker. So we had the basis of what turned into the smallest multinational! With eventually had offices in the USA, in San Francisco and New York, and throughout Europe. Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam. Also Australia and Singapore. It followed the expansion of the tertiary economy in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

A bit of luck was meeting Stewart Brand (right), the author of the Whole Earth Catalogue, and the book *How Buildings Learn*. A Californian eccentric par excellence. The *How Buildings Learn* book was based on the idea of the different longevity of the different elements of a building: shell, services, scenery and sets. That legitimised the lessons that we had been learning from our own experiences. Brand was a great pioneer and a very interesting person.



John Worthington and Peter Eley had picked up on the idea of re-use through their urban design studies at the University of Pennsylvania. For example in Baltimore, and then in San Francisco, they picked up the idea, that was different from my expertise, of the re-use of redundant buildings. These American cities had big brick excellent structures, very centrally located, which could be converted into offices, with the tertiary economy growing very rapidly. And that message John and Peter brought back to Europe.

Was there an influence of Alex Gordon's Long Life, Loose Fit, Low Energy?

That was typical of architects getting it wrong. A deontic (ought to be) kind of statement rather than an analytical statement. It made Alex Gordon's career, but I don't think there's much depth in it. There was no science. What DEGW did was to introduce systematic social science into an architectural practice. Not least through an organisation we established quite quickly called Building Use Studies.

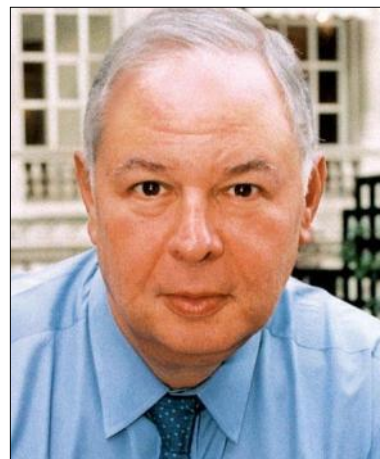
The development of DEGW was based on two very powerful theoretical and operational ideas that explained the nature of buildings over time. At an urban scale as well as at a building scale. The tools were extremely powerful. That is what I am most proud of – the articulation of those ideas.

And those two ideas were?

Firstly, layers of longevity within the parts of a building. Secondly, the re-use of the building stock for other purposes. The two were obviously closely related. One being operational at an organisational level, the other being operational at an urban scale.

Were people interested in these ideas?

Well, Stuart Lipton (right) was. It took him about five minutes to see there was more to an office building. This was at Stockley Park and at Broadgate.



When did you first come across him?

I am pretty sure it was at Claridges. It would have to be, wouldn't it! He would have heard about the book *Planning Office Space*. The economy picked up at the end of the 1970s, and there was this magic moment in about 1980 when the computer escaped from the computer room and distributed intelligence became real. It threw the fat on the fire. It was absolutely amazing. It meant re-building the City. They still haven't got to the end of that story. You began to notice these things about the size of a brick, with people talking into it.

What I would very much appreciate would be the bringing together of the books and publications we produced over time. They articulated ideas in a way that most architects don't bother to do. It just became a habit.

When did you and Stuart Lipton first work together?

Stockley Park. The early 1980s. The electronics companies were getting off the plane at Heathrow, and wanted space that didn't at that time exist, which was half way between an office and a factory. Not tin sheds, but on the other hand not developers' office buildings either. Big open spaces with space to take cables, and to provide spot cooling where necessary. A different specification.

In what we now call a business park?

Yes, that's right. But it took a long time for most developers to follow Stuart, who was clever and was quickly into this.

Some of the development corporations were building this sort of space for start ups?

Yes, and we worked quite a lot for development corporations, not so much me but John and Peter. Milton Keynes, and up in the north west – Warrington. Also in Birmingham and Glasgow.

So this was a new type of office building to accommodate a new demand?

Yes, new forms of organisation and new forms of technology, which unfolded about every five years with another big step forward. At Stockley the ideas migrated to Broadgate, near Liverpool Street Station, which is now being torn down.

How did the Stockley Park development come together, with a master plan?

Yes, we did the master plan, then architects were brought in later. There was another building we worked on with Arup, for Wiggins Teape – an intelligent client - in Basingstoke. The same thing was happening in Europe with IBM, at a different

scale. IBM's prototype building down in Portsmouth; we had some involvement in that. We were advising IBM not Norman Foster the architect. And let me tell you that is a much better position to be in! Architects know everything; they don't have to learn anything or be told anything, they just know it!

And yet you are having an influence, albeit indirectly, on the built form?

Yes, through developers and through corporate clients. We were working upstream from normal architecture.

Does that mean that you did not have regular contact with the architectural team?

We did have contact with the architectural team. I had an interesting experience working with Peter Foggo – an Old Testament prophet. About five feet high and square. He was not very talkative, to say the least. But I think he was content, because we made his life easier with the client. In that case a developer client.

When did you first work with him?

Probably early 1980s. On Wiggins Teape. And then on 1 Finsbury Square, a Lipton development that preceded Broadgate. We then had a very interesting experience being between Stuart Lipton and the letting agents. The letting agents were hugely influential, but no knowledgeable.

We had started an organisation called Building Use Studies, to bring in professional social scientists. They were invaluable, because they could research users. We also helped quite early on towards the creation of a new profession – facilities management. I don't think it has quite been achieved yet. I thought we could provide the software to the hardware of architecture. The monthly newsletter Facilities ran for ten years, for much of that time under my editorship.

Were there any other key architects who took these ideas on board?

Everyone, eventually! I knew Philip Dowson pretty well. And we were very close too Norman Foster and Richard Rogers in their early days. We provided some air cover for them. And those were good relationships. So as well as the entrée into the world of the client, we maintained discourse with the avant garde of the mainstream architectural profession. I am making it sound as though we had thought it out. Actually it was more like a series of happy accidents and learning on our feet.

Shall we talk about Broadgate. How did that start?

It started with the first building in Finsbury Avenue, immediately to the west of the Broadgate site. British Rail were releasing sites. There was a previously a station called Broad Street, which provided the site for Broadgate. Stuart's first project was the conversion of a factory building. It was a warehousy late 19th century building. I thought that was ten miles to the east of Liverpool Street Station; but it was actually only 400 metres. My map of the geography of London was very distorted!

We produced a book called The Changing City, which studied the different sectors within the financial services industry, analysing their space requirements. It analysed their patterns of behaviour, and their patterns of space use. And articulated

this in a way that enabled these requirements to be translated into architectural form.

There was a thrust towards developing near major transport hubs. In Glasgow and Birmingham our work was mainly on the periphery of those cities, where there were redundant industrial buildings which could be turned to beneficial use. Those projects were stimulated by and led by the development corporations. And quite right. They knew they had to do something fast to make sure they weren't outcompeted by cities in the south. The Finsbury Avenue building was about 300,000 to 400,000 square feet. And then Broadgate, which must be well over a million. It was erected pretty quickly.

What were the main innovations of the Finsbury Avenue building?

Raised access floor. Atrium. Perhaps the earliest commercial atrium in the UK. Continuous simple floor plates. Potential for a high degree of cellurisation, as well as open plan. And capacity to be wired up.

What effect did this have on the slab to slab height?

I think we probably fought quite hard for volume. The older developers, of the Centrepoint period, were mean on services, mean on height, and mean on depth. They didn't like spending money. So the idea that you could get better rents from new global tenants, and buildings adapted to the new ways of working was very important.

If you have an atrium, what about the positioning of the core?

There's a right way and a wrong way of positioning a core. It's all about circulation. The core doesn't have to be in the middle. In fact there is a lot to be said for a peripheral core.

What did you think of the architectural expression of these buildings?

Excellent. We were also involved with the Corporation of Lloyds at the same time. We helped them fit out their existing building, and then transition to the lovely building by Richard Rogers.

Were you involved with the Richard Rogers building?

Not very much, but the Corporation of Lloyds had learned from their previous building.

Shall we then talk about the later phase of Broadgate?

I don't know what the story is. But I don't think it was a good decision to use that pink granite. I think an important role we played was as a bridge between the architects and the clients in respect of the impact of information technology on office buildings.

We were involved in producing two Orbit studies on the impact of information technology. They included lots of interviews with clients. They became the yardstick for such matters. They were carried out by us as multi-client studies, with the cost shared between a group of perhaps a dozen clients.

For us they were a very important learning exercise. This was the way these ideas found their way quite quickly into the bloodstream of the British real estate industry. Orbit 1 dealt with the UK, Orbit 2 with the USA. On Orbit 2 we worked with Frank Becker, a social scientist from Cornell University. That connection helped us to establish our office in New York in 2000 and in San Francisco a little bit later.

Were the same things happening in the USA?

Yes, but they had already thought it out, by separating the layers of design.

And those two phases could be overlapped?

Yes, fast tracking as they call it.

Did the architect end up as a sort of cladding man?

That would be a coarse, and unfair, description of the American process. Johnson and Skidmore had a view that the architect's job was to get the size and shape of the building right, get the columns in the right place, and choose an elegant cladding. Skidmores came over to the UK with that approach, and had a very successful practice here.

There was also a building for Penguin in Harmondsworth?

Yes, that's right. I hope I am not being unfair to Arup. In the Philip Dowson days in his lordly manner they were very innovative. And Arup was an organisation that had a capacity to think. They were multi-disciplinary and the disciplines talked to each other. Arup was a very thinking company that could think across disciplines and organised their teams in that way.

It's ironic that big factory buildings of the 19th century were being converted to new uses in Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow at the same time as new buildings were being built for long term flexible use. It's all about time. Seeing architecture through the perspective of longevity and time. That is all that really matters.

What made you realise that?

It was that phone call in New York. And JFN. And recognising obsolescence. Premature obsolescence. I don't know who coined that phrase, but it was certainly around in the early 1980s. It may have come from Alex Gordon. I must give him his due.

Is the weight of a building important?

I think weight in a building is quite a useful thing. They don't walk about. They are not liners or aircraft.

The Victorian Board Schools will last?

Yes, because they have got warmth. And they have got solidity. In the right places. Many of the 19th century warehouse buildings have much more adaptability than the lighter weight structures that followed them in the mid 20th century. Those are often being torn down and replaced.

Why is it that so many of these post-war offices were so highly glazed?

Fashion, I think. Let's go to North America first. There was the amazing, astonishing success of the early glazed office buildings. The Seagram Building (right) was a remarkable and beautiful building. And Lever House, also a very beautiful building. Those buildings, when I first saw them, were streets ahead of anything in Europe. They had self confidence and scale.



What are they like inside?

Not too bad. Their cores are generally in the right place. The curse was that they were awfully boring in terms of their interior layout. It relied on the so called cube, a working space with a shoulder height screen around three sides of it. It was much promoted by people like Miller and Steelcase.

Was that like Action Office?

I'll tell you about the birth of Action Office, because it is a tragedy. When I was doing my Harkness travelling about in a golden Chevrolet Bel Air, which I was strictly instructed to do in order to get to know the United States, I went to call on a man called Robert Probst.



He was a furniture designer in Ann Arbor. He had just invented something called the Action Office (above) which was a panel based system that could be arranged in different ways for different kinds of task. For a lawyer, or a doctor, or anyone. Very beautiful and very well crafted like the best American furniture. That was the germ of the cube – of which there are now tens of millions in the USA.

But that approach is a complete disaster beyond a certain scale. You don't get privacy, and it gives a pretty strong image of a top down controlled management

system which the Americans have a penchant for. It was exaggerated by the cube, which I deeply hate. Poor old Probst. It was a lovingly crafted sensitive idea which took about five minutes to transform itself into the horrible cube. A big big tragedy.

But of course you could with that kit have made burolandschaft?

Yes, you probably could, and I think I did some exercises of that kind. But the Europeans, without having the space planner skill, used the architect to do the interior. Most office buildings in Germany are owned by the occupier, who crafts it from first principles to meet their needs.

There was an emphasis in Germany on cellular offices all round the perimeter. Because Germany was a social democratic country all these rooms were the same size. No evidence of hierarchy or separation, because that is not the way a social democratic country works. These are very broad generalisations, but they are roughly true.

And in the UK we took on the American approach?

Yes, as we usually half do. But I should at this point mention one of my heroes as an architect. Neils Torp, a Norwegian. His SAS building in Stockholm (right) is one of my favourites. It has a central street, which is beautiful with trees. There is even a boardroom in the street with a sort of cocktail umbrella on top of it. The Swedes certainly have a sense of humour.



He has also done a very beautiful building in Oslo for one of the business schools.

This is the most superb internal environment I have ever come across. It is a street building which is a lot about eating and moving about, and quite a lot of pleasure. It is theatre. Torp was a bit of an actor in his student days, and I think he's got a scenographic understanding of what interior architecture can be.

Drama?

Yes, drama.

Are there UK examples similar to the SAS building?

No, I don't think so. There is the British Airways headquarters, also by Torp, which I was involved in. It wasn't quite carried through. It was a bit of a British compromise. It doesn't have cubes. Cubes don't work well in big spaces, which is why holes – atria – are important. And that's why circulation is so important in an office building.

We talk about layers of longevity; vertical and horizontal circulation is just as important. You must celebrate vertical circulation. Make it visible, so everyone can see it. And put it in the right place so there are always people going up and down it.

It is easy to get circulation in the wrong place. But if you get it right you enliven the building for its lifetime.

What sort of buildings are sociable, encouraging chance meetings and so on?

I think that is a lot to do with circulation. Getting it in the right place. In the last ten years of DEGW we became more and more interested in measuring where people were at which time in offices. We used observers going round recording where people actually were. Measuring the use of space. It is a general law that more than half of office space is unused for more than half the time. Think about it.

Is that a bad thing?

It terms of ecology and the use of the planet it is completely barmy! Because all the lights are blazing, everything is ticking over. Which raises the key question – how do we justify place in an increasingly virtual world. If we can communicate with each other from our bungalow or our bed, we have re-designed time. We should begin to think of temporal conventions in a very different way, given the ubiquity of information technology and its power.

That truly is distributed, isn't it?

Yes, but I don't think we will all end up working at home in the bedroom. I think there are certain features of urban structures and architectural structures that are socially beneficial. There is the serendipity of non-programmed but beneficial encounters with people. These are extremely important, not only socially but architecturally. Chance favours the prepared mind. We need to think about all this, and not go on doing things because that is the way we have always done them.

When people came down from the hills and the moors into the valleys of Manchester and learned to work by the beat of a mechanical drum in the early part of the 19th century, that found its way into the office. You had to go into work to work. You no longer need to go into work to work. The machinists couldn't talk to one another because of the noise of the machines. A lot of intellectual work is about discourse, and that can take place in a variety of settings. And if you are mobile and can carry your information around with you, then we are talking about re-designing the city. It's an amazing and wonderful challenge.

When was it that you started to look beyond buildings to the spaces between buildings?

John Worthington and Peter Eley were always more interested in the urban scale than me. I have tended to come from the inside. I think to give credit to the Europeans, I learned a lot from the purpose built and custom built German and Scandinavian buildings in the 1980s and the 1990s and into this decade. They show a non-Taylorist ethic of respecting the individual. Architecture can be very good or bad at that. A bad example is making the corridors of schools narrower – an approach that completely fails to understand the social dimension of education.

The role of architecture is to provide settings for a range of activities, which are evolving as technology evolves. We have to be sparing of space in an increasingly environmentally challenged world.

Do you see parallels between your work and some of the earlier public sector work?

Yes, I have enormous respect for the work of the Ministry of Education in the 1960s. They were talking to educationalists in the process of design. Not pulling it off the shelf. That will miss the enormous amount we have learned about the process of socialisation in both education and work.

Those groups had the time and resources to undertake studies before the design work started. They were able easily to talk to educationalists and teachers. How is it possible to do that in the private sector?

One of my disappointments in life is the failure of the facilities management profession to influence anything beyond its own boundaries. I thought that facilities management would provide continuous feedback on the use of space over time. And that this feedback would influence the layout within buildings and the patterns of circulation.

Why do you think it didn't take off?

They saw themselves as part of the supply chain. They didn't see themselves as defenders of the users. It's an ethical problem.

On the continent an important role was played by workers' councils in social democratic northern Europe. They have social systems in place that responds to these kinds of challenges.

The unions did not pick up on this?

No. No clue. In any case the white collar sector is not highly unionised, and never was.

Can we pick up on civic and governmental offices? There was that Leslie Martin plan for Whitehall?

Thank God that didn't happen. There have been some good government reports on this. We had a good experience working with the Treasury. We also did work with the Ministry of Defence in the west country. There are some very intelligent people in government who have worked on refurbishing old buildings or building new ones on a rational basis.

7. Family

This chapter was contributed in April 2020 by Frank Duffy's daughter Ellie.



Jessica and Frank in 1964.

Frank married Jessica Bear at St Patrick's Church in Soho Square, London in 1965. After spending four years in the United States they returned to England and settled in Islington in London where they brought up their three daughters.

Sibylla was born in London in 1966 and studied art at Camberwell and Goldsmiths and illustration at The Royal College of Art. She has two daughters, Ana and Lucy Duffy Markovic. Eleanor (Ellie) was born in Princeton, New Jersey in 1968 and studied architecture at the University of Manchester and the University of Westminster. Katya was born in 1970 in Princeton and studied graphic design at Bath College and Yale University. She has one son, Samuel Leighton.

8. Learning from Life

This chapter was contributed in April 2020 by John Worthington, who was a lifelong friend and colleague of Frank Duffy. Worthington is pictured below (right) with Duffy (left).

At any stage of life there is much to be learnt, either reflecting back over memorable actions and insightful words or looking forward to the legacy left for future generations.

For over half a century Frank and I have been professional colleagues and family friends: first as students; then as founders making the book ends of DEGW. Frank the thinker; focussed, insightful, determined and a brilliant communicator, whilst I was inquisitive, energetic, optimistic and when faced with pursuing an opportunity would pose the question “why not?”. Since 2013, when Frank’s dementia was apparent, we saw each other regularly, establishing the DEGW Living Archive at the University of Reading Centre for Records and special collections with Frank’s writings in the Special Collection of works and papers of the founding partners.



Looking back over our professional careers, the AA provided the experience of working collaboratively, with a strong social purpose and imbued a sense that the architect was the unquestioned head of the team with, as Bill Allen Principal of the AA suggested, the “the power to reach the highest level of national decisions about policy for building and planning”.

It was no surprise that Frank’s first appointment was at the National Building Agency (NBA). The outcome of his work was Generic Plans: two and three storey houses (NBA 1965), a manual for volume house builders, rigorously thought through, with a clarity of presentation aimed to encourage mutual understanding between the designers of the houses and those designing the prefabricated systems and components.

Research based design practice

Frank’s time in America on a Harkness fellowship deepened his understanding of scholarship and broadened his awareness of other cultures and places. He returned to London with the tools and culture of research, which he viewed from the perspective of global practice. The AA may have lacked the rigour of a world class research university but it was an incubator for lateral thinking, innovative design and leadership. Located in London’s University Quarter and surrounded by the offices of many of the leading architects, planners and engineers we saw the best of academia and practice, in an institution founded and supported by practitioners.

Research based design practice was central to Frank’s perspective of the professions and the culture of our practice. In 1974 soon after the founding of DEGW Frank

returned to Princeton to complete his dissertation, which was to become the foundation of DEGW's thinking. Understanding time and scale were the two critical factors "Firstly, layers of longevity within parts of the building. Secondly, the re-use of the building stock for other purposes". In later years this conceptual framework allowed us to work confidently from the scale of the "chair to the city" and recognise the need for appropriate solutions that reflect an organisation's or individual's changing values and expectations as they mature over time.

Forging connections

The early years of practice were defined by collaborative working, a diversity of interests and a client base that spread from local community groups to global corporations, knitted together by a shared way of thinking. Practice, research and teaching were entwined.

A visiting professorship at the University of Cincinnati in the name of DEGW allowed a range of members of the practice to contribute and savour the experience we had had from Harkness days. Building Use Studies (BUS) established in 1976 by Frank with Richard Burton (ABK) as an independent research company working within DEGW later provided a springboard and the confidence to develop a multi-client twenty year research programme on the impact of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the workplace, that spanned over three continents.

By the mid 1980's DEGW in London were engaged with many of the major international companies and leading innovative developers. Two transformative developments: Stockley Park, near Heathrow and Broadgate in the City of London redefined the workplace and questioned traditional property market thinking.

We were forging a new model of practice, placing demand, an organisation's interests through time, before supply, the design, construction and delivery of the building.

The culture of the practice was never driven solely by a desire for financial gain or institutional power. We were focused on intellectual excellence, integrity and a willingness to share. Frank in that period frowned on sub optimising and was disparaging at the management consultant's creed that "good is good enough".

By the beginning of the 1990's DEGW had established its values, concepts and credentials, survived a harsh recession and was in the vanguard supporting new business models and ways of working. Frank became President of the RIBA (1993-5) whilst I was appointed as a full time Professor at the University of York and Director of the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies (1992-97). The value of research and design was now represented across the built environment in both the institutions and academia.

Global practice

By the millennium we had merged with the Dutch management consultancy Twijnstra and DEGW had matured to a global consultancy represented by offices across Europe, New York and Sydney. In 2002 DEGW International was formed chaired by Despina Katsikakis who had joined DEGW in the early 80's from Roy

Landau's influential and inspiring Masters programme at the AA. The challenge for the next generation was to absorb the values, concepts and experience of the last twenty years to respond to a digital era.



In the early 2000's Frank stood back from chairing the practice and lived in Manhattan, supporting the growing North American practice, and teaching at MIT and Princeton. On returning to London he chose to work on projects of interest to him and contributed to the debate on professional futures. Increasingly his interest lay in urbanism and the cultural institutions that shape a city's character. Our interests were coming together - mine as a collaborative urbanist focused on the role of civil society, and Frank through his role as advisor or consultant to some of London's most dynamic cultural institutions.

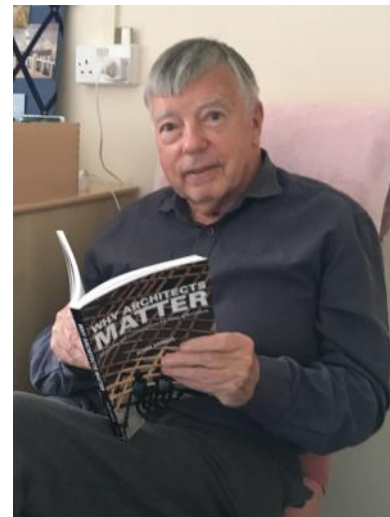
Work and the City (2008) a contribution to the Edge Futures series, in no more than eighty pages of a pocket-sized book brought together his thinking from the last 50 years through the lens of the city and it's users. His last written contribution, before

his dementia was confirmed, ends on an ambitious, socially generous, inclusive command:

Trust the users, abandon supply -side thinking, prioritise sustainability, take advantage of technology. Then we will have a fighting chance of getting the cities we can enjoy, building the knowledge-based culture our economy needs and, let's hope, saving the planet at the same time.

Legacy

DEGW and Frank's legacy is not lost. In 2016 the firm's archives up to 1997, the pre the digital era, along with a comprehensive collection of Frank's life long writings, were brought to the University of Reading, coinciding with the foundation of a new School of Architecture. Housed amongst the records of publishers, professional and campaigning institutions, and Samuel Beckett's writing, it will continue as a Living Archive to reflect on the past, debate the outcomes and embrace what others are doing in the spirit of the values DEGW propounded. Frank now in a care home is in good health, welcoming to visitors and continues to draw. On my fortnightly visits, sadly curtailed by Covid-19, the conversation normally starts with "how's the firm? "



To close with a recent vivid memory of Frank. When I told him that over the last fifteen years I had become a "collaborative urbanist" his polite response was "that's interesting". To which I replied "but I'm thinking of calling myself a disruptive urbanist". Frank sharply responded "Isn't that a little harsh, John, what about an inquisitive urbanist". Spot on.

I'm sometimes despondent after conversations with Frank to think what a brilliant, perceptive mind we have lost. But then I remember it is still there in his writings, for all to see, to reflect on and move forward.
