



BUILDING ■ Culture wars: architecture, art and regenerating seaside towns

HAT Projects' Jerwood Gallery and civic buildings by Tim Ronalds Architects have emerged from a latter-day battle of Hastings on the Stade beach, reports Fred Gray. Photos: Ioana Marinescu.

Arts-led regeneration at the English seaside is as ubiquitous as screeching gulls and sticks of pink rock. Often there is an associated gleaming architectural edifice. The archetype, 20 years old next year, is Tate St Ives, built on the site of the town's gasworks. More recently, and despite a painfully long gestation, Margate's Turner Contemporary opened in April 2011 to critical acclaim. Now Hastings has the Jerwood Gallery. Designed by Tom Grieve and Hana Loftus of HAT Projects, the building provides a home for the collection of twentieth- and twenty-first-century British art gathered by the Jerwood Foundation, as well as temporary shows.

The building is sympathetic to its particularly sensitive location on the Stade. This landing place is the shingle shore that is home to Europe's largest beach-launched fishing fleet and its extraordinary vernacular tall and tar-painted net shops. The design of the new gallery doesn't parody the net shops. The exterior seems understated with plain surfaces and just two storeys. It is clad with large pewter-glazed tiles, a contemporary take on the eighteenth-century mathematical tiles seen on an adjacent building and, for example, in Brighton's Royal Crescent. The glaze does not jar with the net shops and yet reflects light and quavering



Above A rainscreen of black-glazed tiles envelops the gallery volumes.

Right Rooflights over central stairwell; the entrance faces north on Rock-a-Nore Road.

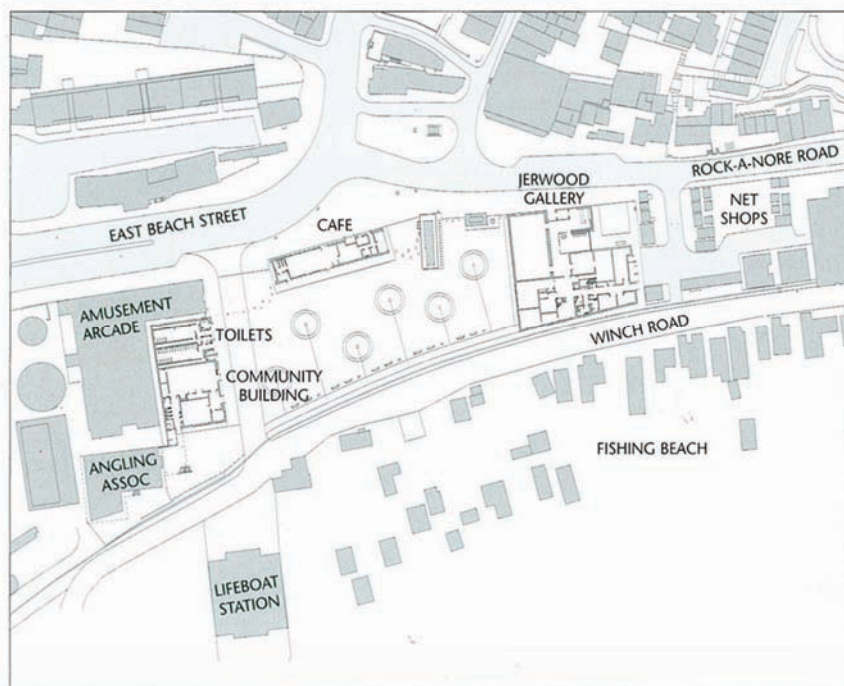


images of the surrounding structures. On a sunny evening the west flank of the gallery emits a warm, rich glow.

Inside, the Jerwood is made up of a series of rooms, almost domestic in scale, which provides for an intimate relationship between visitors and the art. Carefully-positioned windows offer glimpses of the Old Town to the north, and a large, south-facing window – unusual for a gallery – faces the beach. This view is of the dreamy horizon, the unfathomable sea, the beached fishing boats, the detritus of a working beach and, closer still, a soiled nappy nestling between the rails of the miniature railway that aligns the southern boundary of the gallery.

The £4m Jerwood Gallery is the major feature of a broader £9m Stade scheme, which includes a new public space for events, festivals and fairs, and two buildings for community facilities, toilets and a cafe, all designed by Tim Ronalds Architects. When I visited, a week before the formal opening of the gallery, the larger site, including the beach-pebble landscaped square, seemed a grey parade ground rather than a vivid festive arena, but there will be many occasions throughout the year when it comes to life.

This being the English seaside, a bright new gallery has to contend with more than just salt water spray, rough weather and sea-gulls (for which deterrents are installed). In Hastings the 'No to Jerwood on the Stade' campaign was centred on the immediate grievance of the removal of the former coach, lorry and car park to provide the site



Left Viewed from East Hill, the gallery, cafe and community building take their places among the black-stained timber net shops; built for net storage, these structures were crammed together on the Stade when the shoreline was closer inland.

Below Ground and first-floor plans; the arrangement implies a meandering route through the galleries on both levels.



for the gallery and public space. The campaign argued that the vehicle park brought visitors, jobs and wealth to the town – in fact just what the Jerwood is supposed to do.

The more enduring storm is generated by the clash between the metropolitan and the local and between high and low cultures. In St Ives, landladies complained that the proposed extension to the Tate would further erode the character of the town. In Margate, traders on the desolate High Street argued the Turner was siphoning business from their shops. Behind such arguments are the feelings of some local people that they were being imposed upon, being done to, as well as the absence of power, nostalgia for the past, a wish to hold on to the present and a fear of the future.

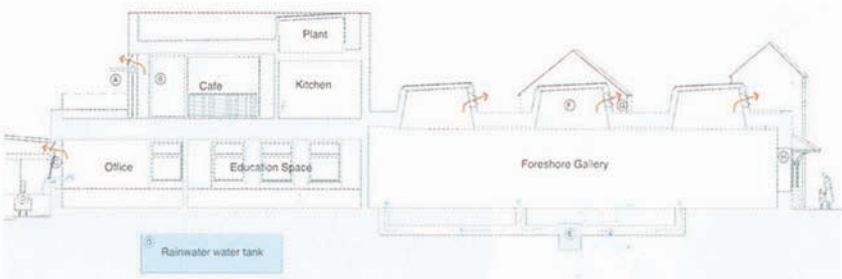
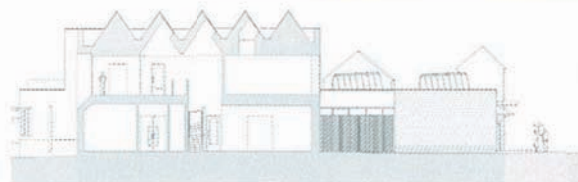
In most seaside resorts there is considerable historical evidence to back such suspicions. Over many generations Hastings fishing beach has been endlessly ordered, regulated and pushed to the edge. In 1858 the author of one visitor guide commented: 'The beach has been vastly improved by the removal of the quaint-looking old fishing huts that formerly so much obstructed the sea view.' Ironically, visitor sensibilities and tastes 150 years later now favour the authentic, natural and romantic character represented by artifacts of the surviving fishing industry.

The typical architectural manifestation of



Above/right Full-height windows frame views and facilitate orientation; south-north section through the two gallery levels.

Below The principal Foreshore Gallery accommodates temporary exhibitions; south-north section showing ventilation pathways, shading and rainwater tank.



contemporary seaside cultural wars is the bright – often white – and visually dominant art gallery. Think Tate St Ives, Turner Contemporary, the Towner in Eastbourne, the Exchange in Penzance and the restored De La Warr pavilion in Bexhill. These uncompromising buildings take no prisoners. Not so the Jerwood in Hastings. The gallery does not domineer architecturally. The design is wonderfully sympathetic to the location. This is why the project is such a potentially subversive Trojan horse. The gallery audaciously confronts and challenges not the architecture of the Stade but its culture and the culture of the town. The danger is that Jerwood will lead to a broader cultural gentrification of the Stade with negative consequences for both the fishing beach and fishing community.

The visitor's first impression of Hastings is of an ideal jolly seaside town. Funicular railways climb the cliffs that soar above the old town and fishing beach. The long-ruined Norman castle looks down from one hilltop to the fire-damaged pleasure pier. There are amusement arcades, world-standard miniature golf courses, a boating lake and seafront tearshops, cafes and pubs. Squawking, chip-thieving gulls add to the sights, sounds and smells of the English seaside.



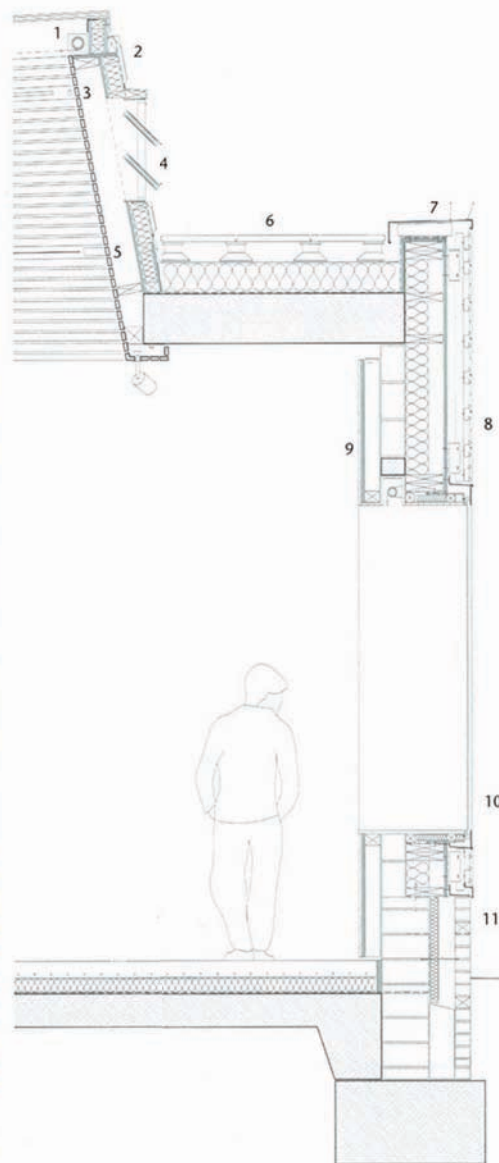
The other Hastings is one of the most disadvantaged towns in the south-east of England, as measured by official indices of poverty and worklessness. Low levels of formal educational attainment, lousy housing, ill-health and lack of opportunities contribute to the mix. In varied forms, these issues and proposed solutions go back a century or more.

In the great left-wing campaigning novel of the early-twentieth century, *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists*, Robert Tressell described Hastings (Mugsborough) as 'a vast whited sepulchre' in which people existed in a state of perpetual poverty. In the mid-1920s the resort's borough engineer, Sidney Little, saw Hastings 'like some beauty queen in decrepitude'. He was rewarded with the epithet 'Concrete King' for his wholesale redevelopment of the Hastings seafront in modernist form, including an innovative open-air bathing pool and a new seafront promenade and road roofing over England's first underground municipal car park. Modernism, though, did not provide an enduring solution for Hastings, nor indeed for nearby

Above A projecting canopy shelters the double entrance doors; lobby, reception desk and bookshop, and courtyard.

North facade section 1 Double-glazed aluminium-framed rooflight with black-out, 2 zinc roofing, 3 50x19mm s/w slats with luminaires, 4 insulated louvres, 5 diffuser blind, 6 paving slabs on polymeric sheet on insulation on vapour control layer on concrete plank, 7 aluminium coping with bird wires, 8 212x498mm ceramic rainscreen tiles on ply sheathing with breather membrane on studwork and 140mm insulation, 9 140mm blockwork with s/w studs and plasterboard/skim on 18mm OSB, 10 double-glazed unit, 11 65x490mm glazed terracotta blocks with 70mm insulation and 280mm blockwork.

Below Jerwood cafe and Winch Road.



Bexhill-on-Sea, despite its wondrous pavilion.

Fast-forward through decades of decline at many English seaside resorts to the present. Recent interventions aimed at regenerating Hastings have included an economic development company – Sea Space – with a familiar blend of roles: promoting an 'urban renaissance' through new architecture and public spaces, business support, a creative media centre and the expansion of higher education. Until the Jerwood Foundation came along, arts-led regeneration was the missing strand. Will it work, and if it does, over what timescale? And how should its success or failure be measured?

The preliminary evidence from the





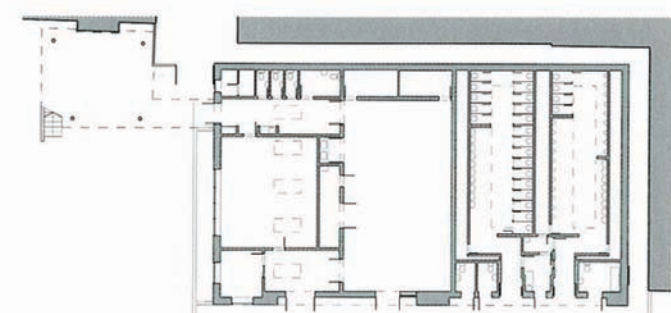
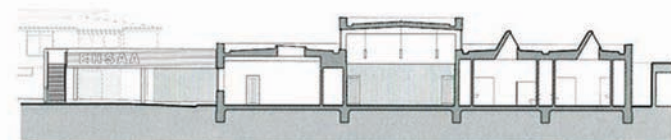
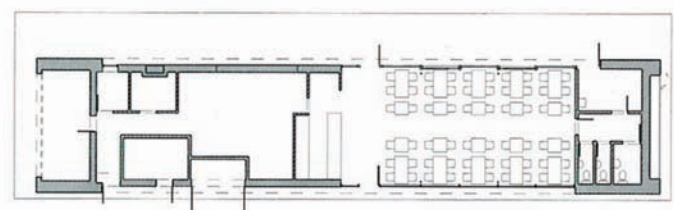
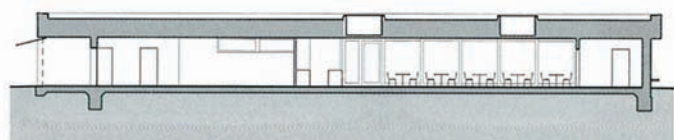
Tim Ronalds Architects

The new public space and buildings on the Stade, adjacent to the Jerwood Gallery, which together form the key public-funded elements of the regeneration project, were designed by Tim Ronalds Architects. The cafe and community building are configured in relation to the gallery, and the preliminary masterplan by HAT Projects, so as to embrace but not fully

enclose the square (above). Surfaced in graded beach pebbles, the space provides a forum for festivals and major events, including Stade Saturdays between May and October. Circular motifs echo the horse-drawn winches that used to haul trawlers onto the beach; now bulldozers do the job. On the west side, the new community building (bottom) contains a double-height multi-use hall, fish cookery

school and public toilets. The building links with a new external terrace and staircase to the adjacent angling association building, drawing it into the composition. To the north is the new cafe (opposite), arranged as a linear block with windows and doors allowing literal transparency between the Old Town and the Stade. Both cafe and community building are finished in black glazed brick and black-stained

timber, reflecting the blocky shapes of the fishermen's sheds on the beach, but enlarging their forms to a civic scale. A series of timber seats with hull-like windbreak backs, together with lighting 'masts' align Winch Road on the south side of the square. Artworks by David Ward, including a sound work intended to 'occupy' the space of the Stade between events, will soon be implemented (phs: Pamela Self/TRA).



Turner Contemporary in Margate – another ailing south-east seaside town – is fascinating and hopeful. Eleven months after the April 2011 opening, over 430,000 visits had been made against an initial annual target of 156,000. The visitors – 95 per cent of whom travel specifically to experience the Turner Contemporary – are associated with considerable tourist spend (£2m after just four months) and dozens of new businesses and jobs. The Margate gallery has immediately become a very successful visitor destination.

The privately-funded Jerwood, though, is half the size and cost one quarter that of the Turner. The latter offers free admission, the former has a £7 entrance fee (£2 for locals). Alan Grieve, chairman of the Jerwood Foundation, sees the Hastings gallery as 'the final link in a string of pearls... around the south-east coast'. The anticipation is of cultural tourists enjoying a latter-day mini-

grand-tour of seaside art galleries, spending and employing on their jaunt. If Grieve is correct, the Jerwood is that most unusual of pearls – black rather than the white of most other coastal galleries. A better analogy, suggested by the Concrete King nine decades ago, is that it may become a welcomed beauty spot on the face of contemporary Hastings.

Arts-led regeneration and outstanding architecture alone cannot be the panacea for historic and enduring coastal disadvantage. But architecture and arts together can help make the seaside more appealing and fashionable. The Jerwood, however, suggests that another alluring prize in the seaside cultural wars may be within reach: if not peace exactly, then perhaps a truce may break out. Will rough and smooth, metropolitan and local, high and low get along together in a mutually supportive and beneficial fashion? Time, place and politics will surely tell.

Fred Gray is emeritus professor at the University of Sussex. A director of the West Pier Trust and Fishing Museum in Brighton, he is author of Designing the Seaside (2006) and, with David Powell, a report on cultural regeneration in Margate, Bognor Regis, Folkestone and Portsmouth (2009).



HAT Projects (Jerwood Gallery)

Founded in 2008 by Tom Grieve and Hana Loftus (ph: Corinna Dean), HAT Projects is based near Colchester. Its projects range across arts and residential sectors, brief setting, policy and masterplanning. Grieve previously worked with Haworth Tompkins and Tony Fretton, and Loftus with General Public Agency.

Project team

Architect: HAT Projects; design team: Tom Grieve, Hana Loftus, Thomas Goodey; structural engineer: Momentum; services: Skelly & Couch; qs: Pierce Hill; access: People Friendly Design; client: Jerwood Foundation.

Selected suppliers and subcontractors

Main contractor: Coniston; cladding: Agrob Buchtal Keratwin; tile glazing: Robus Ceramics; tile installation: ICS; glazed brick (plinth): GIMA Feletto; buff brick: Wienerberger; brickwork: Dixon Brickwork; curtain-wall glazing, aluminium windows, doors: Schueco; Senior Systems sliding doors, frameless glazing: Prima Systems; frameless rooflights (lower roof): ESB Services; aluminium-framed rooflights (upper roof): Vitral, installed by ESB Services; roofing: Sarnafil; roof pavers: Eurodec Bauhaus (lower roof), Marshalls (terrace, granite courtyard); roof installation: ICS; Rheinzink roofing: T&P Roofing; rubber floor: Dalsouple; acoustic timber lining: Topakustik; insulation: Kingspan; terrazzo: Surtech; stairs: Ebor Concretes; concrete planks: Millbank; oak floors: Reeve Flooring; balustrades, steel screen: Iron Designs; bespoke doors: DFC Joinery; doorsets: Leaderflush; paint: Papers & Paints (galleries), Dulux; tiles: Johnson Prismatics; Altro resin floor: Surtech; polished concrete floor: Contech; ironmongery: Yannedis; joinery: Canterbury Joinery; lighting: Deltalight; Erco; iGuzzini; Nimbus; Modular; Etap; Bega; graphic identity: Rose Design; signage: HAT Projects, Bull Signs.

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Tim Ronalds Architects (public space, cafe and community building)

Established in 1982, the practice specialises in arts, education and public projects, which have included award-winning buildings for Hackney Empire, Sevenoaks School, and the Landmark Theatre in Ilfracombe. Current schemes include a concert hall at the University of Kent and refurbishment of Ironmonger Row Baths in London.

Project team

Architect: Tim Ronalds Architects; project team: Pamela Self (pictured), Kate Biro, Tim Ronalds (pictured); structural engineer: Cambridge Architectural Research; civil/services: URS Infrastructure & Environment; qs: Pierce Hill; project manager: Sea Space; artist: David Ward; landscape (to stage D): J&L Gibbons; client: Hastings Borough Council; funding: Sea Change, HBC, SE England Development Agency, East Sussex CC.

Selected suppliers and subcontractors

Main contractor: Westridge Construction; joinery: Icklesham Joinery; brick supplier: Roy Geddes Bricks; Hardicrete paving: Miles Macadam; ironmongery: Dorplan; access controls: ATG; paving polisher: Castle & Pryor; roofing: VM Zinc; brickwork: Anthony Brickwork; roofing subcontractor: T&P Lead Roofing; electrical: Chris Bartholomew; lighting: We-el Lighting; lighting columns: Woodhouse; soffit support: Ancon.